

**INCORRECT PUNCTUATION, AS A CAUSE OF AMBIGUITY
AND MISUNDERSTANDING IN WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.**

(A CASE STUDY OF SOME SELECTED ESSAYS OF UG 111 STUDENTS)

BY

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CERTIFICATION

This project has been supervised and approved as having partially fulfilled the requirements for the award of a Bachelor of Arts Degree (B.A. Hons) in English Language in the Department of Modern European Languages, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

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DEDICATION

This piece of work is dedicated to my beloved parents Alhaji Muhammad Gidado Musa (sarkin kaya) and HajiyaZara'uGidado for always being there for me.

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Alhamdulillah, all praise be to Allah for giving me the strength, guide and protection. Peace and blessing of Allah be upon prophet Muhammad (SAW). Amen

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ABSTRACT

Ambiguity is a linguistic phenomenon in which more than one meaning, or deep structure, may be represented by the same expression, or surface structure; the same word or similar sounding words forexample can have multiple meaning. It arises from different sources; phonology, syntax and punctuation. In this task, ambiguity is the preoccupation of this task. It is a point where two sentence overlap with respect to their syntactic category.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Punctuation is one of the major aspects that contribute to meaning of any written discourse. This implies that correct the use of punctuation in written communication enhances meaning and fluency which facilitates comprehension and effective communication.

However, when punctuation marks are used incorrectly, it generally alters meaning and creates ambiguity in written discourse which leads to ineffective communication.

This research is taken to investigate how incorrect punctuation creates ambiguity and misunderstanding in written communication. This will be achieved by examining selected scripts of UG III students of Modern European Languages and Linguistics of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, thereby evaluating the causes of ambiguity in the essays with regards to the incorrect use of punctuation.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Punctuation is the use of punctuation marks within a written text to enhance its meaning or fluency or to indicate aspect of pronunciation. Punctuation is one of the most important aspects of written communications. In fact, it is the basic features of any written discourse that gives meaning to the written words. Hence, an error in punctuation can convey a completely different meaning as against the intended one, thereby, making communication incomprehensible and ambiguous. Therefore, it is important in any written discourse for one to know the functions of punctuation marks, their meaning and when to use them in order to provide a good piece of comprehensible written discourse, and more importantly to convey the correct message.

Over the years, writing system was mostly logographic and syllabic (such as Chinese and Maya scripts) which had no capitalization or punctuation. Nevertheless, some its purposes as long as the writing was restricted or limited to business transactions e.g. writings used for recording business transactions.

However, with the introduction of standard system of punctuation, written discourse came to be seen from a new dimension where rules of punctuation are strictly considered as the basic part of meaning of any written discourse.

The introduction of standard system of punctuation is generally attributed to Aldus Manutius and his grandson who popularized the practice of ending sentences with full stop, colon and occasional use of comma and parenthesis. However, the use of punctuation marks was not standardized until after the invention of printing which indicated the rules of punctuation in writing. Shortly after the invention of printing, punctuation thus, served as a guide in ascribing meaning in written discourse which aids and facilitates comprehension.

Following this invention, punctuation marks over the years have been developed (such as full stop, comma, colon, semi-colon, hyphen, Apostrophe, question marks, exclamation mark, bracket among others) to provide proper expression of meaning in writing and to convey a well comprehensible written discourse. However, up to date, these punctuation marks came to be seen as an aspect that contributed to the

meaning of written communication. Hence, incorrect punctuation may distort or affect meaning in written discourse which creates ambiguity that hinders effective communication in written discourse. Thus, this reveals that punctuation is a basic part of meaning in written communication and its incorrect use will no doubt create ambiguity.

Therefore, from this theoretical framework, this study examines selected scripts of UG III Students of Modern European Languages and Linguistics of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto in order to explicate how incorrect punctuation creates ambiguity and misunderstanding in written discourse which hinder effective communication.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The research is carried out as a result of many inconsistencies of meaning in some selected scripts and writings on the notice boards of the students (UG III in particular) Many at times words and phrases carry double meaning as a result of inappropriate use of punctuation marks. The study therefore selects some scripts to investigate the problem and proffer solution:

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims at examining some documented scripts to provide a comprehensive word list showing how words should be broken according to the most widely held practice, and to depict how it is used in written communication effectively. It also seeks to examine how it has made communication easier among students. The following are the objectives the study sets to achieve:

1. To find out how punctuation makes communication effective.
2. To examine how incorrect use of punctuation causes ambiguity
3. And to examine the effect of ambiguity on written communication.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research work is designed for everyone who writes or is connected, however remotely, with the business of putting words on paper. For example, somebody writing a letter to a friend or to the bank manager, or an author of a novel or technical manual. This research will appeal particularly to those with only a sketchy knowledge of the guidelines on punctuation,. And it will also be of value to a busy editor/typesetter who

might need a reminder on some of the less common aspects of their subject, and particularly to students to punctuate properly in their written communication without tempering with the meaning of the original sentence.

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATION

This research examines the punctuation in the writings of undergraduate students of English, particularly UG III. However, the research faces a lot of challenges regarding accessibility of the students' examination scripts and those of test because most at times the papers are not given out. At times students misplace the papers and some do not give out the papers due to their poor performance. The research being an academic assignment has a time limit and lack of enough time for the researchers.

1.6 DEFINITION OF THE TERMS

AMBIGUITY: A Statement that may likely take two meanings.

TAUTOLOGY: Unnecessary repetition of words or phrases

INSERTION: Use of punctuation mark inappropriately

PERIOD: Another term from full stop.

CAPITALIZATION: Use of appropriate capital letters in appropriate words

HYPHENATION: Use of Hyphen

OMISSION: Act of omitting punctuation in a written discourse.

1.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, general introduction of the research is given. It has been indicated that the research examines the problem in the students' essays. This is to show that improper use of punctuation marks can hinder effective comprehension and communication in a written discourse. The purpose and significance of the study have been highlighted for easy understanding. All necessary terms used in this research are also defined. In the subsequent chapter, a review of related literature is given.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is essentially dedicated to the review of related literature. The contributions of various scholars in the areas of ambiguity and communication in English language are highlighted.

Despite the fact that this research chose to limit itself to only written ambiguity, the oral part of ambiguity however will not be left out in this review as well as punctuation.

2.1 DEFINITION OF AMBIGUITY

Most of the books reviewed tried in many respects to define or rather explain ambiguity in its simplest nature. According to Wallace (1962:467) among many obstacles in the path of successful communication, ambiguity is undoubtedly the worst offender. To them, an ambiguous word is one that may be understood in more than one sense. Therefore, a symbol may be interpreted differently by speaker and hearer. Also, in Kent (1995:114) ambiguity is the property of words, terms, notions and concepts (within a particular context) as being

undefinable, or without an obvious definition and thus having an unclear meaning.

To him, a word, phrase, sentence, or other communication is called ambiguous if it can be interpreted in more than one way.

He further expatiated that ambiguity is distinct from vagueness, which arises when the boundaries of meaning are indistinct.

Kent (ibid) summarized that ambiguity is in contrast with definition, and typically refers to an unclear choice between standard definitions, as given by a dictionary or else understood as common knowledge.

Furthermore, in Falk (1973: 202) ambiguity is the converse of paraphrase, because in paraphrase, there are two or more same deep structures. In ambiguity, a single surface form with several meanings must have several different deep structures. Examples:

1. John is too far away to see
2. John is too far away for anyone to see him.
3. John is too far away to see anything.

We could say that sentence (2) is a paraphrase of one (1) and similarly, sentence (3) is another interpretation of sentence (1) Paraphrase must have the same deep structure that (2) in a single deep structure and (1) and (3) is another deep structure. Furthermore, successful communication according to Wallace (1962:473):

Occurs only when the reader correctly interprets the symbols used by the writer.....when the communication is successful then the communication and the communicator have their minds referred to the same referents; they have the same terms” in mind. They have “come to terms” . But ambiguous words are obstacles to such happy communications, communication is frustrated.....when such failures of communication occur; the speaker and the hearer have different referents in mind.

But they are of the view that ambiguity is an evil only when it results in these frustrations of communication. Also in scientific discourse, where the aim is to achieve clear and precise reference, ambiguity is an unmitigated evil. But there are other fields of thought in which ambiguity may have certain desirable effects. This is the case in poetry,

where ambiguity may sometimes contribute to the poetic effect by suggesting a rich aura of implied meanings:

Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing
faith is the substance of things not seen. In this manner, poetry approximates the effects produced by music, which among all of the arts is certainly the most expressly ambiguous. One of the greatest charms of music lies in the ambiguity with which it expresses moods, so that each hearer may interpret the musical score in his own way. Ambiguity also had more mundane uses.

Diplomatic language has developed the art of saying things ambiguously so that failure to agree will be marked by “face saving” language. Also the ambiguous aspects of words are exploited as a rich source of humor.

Ambiguous words refer to several referents; a single referent is referred to by several different words. Spade refers to at least two referents, a playing card and a garden implement. Fool, simpleton ninny, nincompoop, addle, pate and dope, all refer to the same referent, or to substantially the same referent, since few synonymous words are absolutely identical in meaning. Lionel (1960:19)

2.2 TYPES OF AMBIGUITY

Many scholars have identified types of ambiguity, giving them different names, but these are essentially structural and lexical; in nature.

However, the types are to be examined. In Kent (1995:116), although people are sometimes said to be ambiguous in how they use language, ambiguity is, strictly speaking, a property of linguistic expression. A Word, phrase, or sentence is ambiguous if it has more than one meaning area or what is for an expression to have one (or more than one). For a particular language, this information is provided by a grammar, which systematically pairs forms with meanings, ambiguous forms with more than one meaning.

To Kent, “lexical ambiguity” arises when content is insufficient to determine the sense of a single word that has more than one meaning. It may also be in the process of lack of punctuation marks in a sentence. For example: (4) I have a good daughter is not clear about which sense is intended.

Lionel! (1960:475) refers to Kent's lexical ambiguity as simple ambiguity”

Thus, by simple ambiguity we mean that the fact that single words or phrases may refer to more than one referent, even after we have examined their contexts. Verbal disagreements are based this type of ambiguity. Any statement continuing a word which is ambiguous in its context, exemplifies this vice.

(5) The early Christians were communists. Since the word “Communist” has more than referent in this context, ambiguity exists. Communist means one who favors of social organization in which goods are held in common, communists means advocates of the dictatorship of the proletariat’. Lionel (Ibid) affirms; “before we affirm or deny the truth of a statement, we should find out what its writer means”. To her, questions may also involve simple ambiguity as in: do you believe in God?

“God” means different things to defferent persons, and yes or no answer is inappropriate until we learn what referent the questioner hasin mind. For instance, Spinoza was deeply religious with devotion to God. The

Catholic Church however, has condemned his pantheism as equivalent to atheism.

In Conclusion of lexical or simple ambiguity writes Wallace and Norman (ibid) thus, “simple ambiguity lies at the basis of much humor, especially in poems, as in wordsworth’s remark, if I had a mind to, I could write like Shakespeare”.

2.3 DEFINITION OF PUNCTUATION

Punctuation is used to mark off units of grammar and clarify a writer’s meaning. In speech, emphasis and pauses are used to help get the spoken message across. In written English, punctuation has to serve the same purpose. Also, punctuation indicates specific points of grammar. For instance, an apostrophe, indicates the possessive or the omission of a letter.

Punctuation and hyphenation are not all powerful but they are both a good deal more important than some people think. In relation, to punctuation, the late Eric Partridge, whose book “You Have a Point

There:” is one of the few classic value studies of the pure art of using punctuation marks, was not far wide off the target when he wrote:

The ability to write a letter is extremely important, and if one thinks that he/she can write an even passable letter without knowing how to use (apart from the full point) one is now and preferably two other stops (comma and semi colon) One is now making a grave mistake. To go further: If you think you can write a good business report or an essay or an article without also knowing how to employ at least two of the remaining stops, the colon, the dash, and the parenthesis- then you are probably over estimating your own abilities as a writer and the intelligence of your readers.

2.4 THE PURPOSE OF PUNCTUATION

Punctuation is an essential part of good writing that we all have a duty to master: without it, we cannot make our meanings clear, with it; we can enhance our use of language. Hyphenation is a branch of punctuation, but it is almost a subject in itself. It is idiosyncratic in operation, but its underlying principles can be learned. The term means not only the

insertion of hyphen into a word or the joining up of two or more words with a hyphen or hyphens, typed or typeset. (Lynne 2003)

2.5 TYPES OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

2.5.1. FULL STOP (.)

The full point or stop or period (in American English) is the first and the basic punctuation mark. It ends calls sentences and sentence fragments that are not direct questions or exclamations:

We arrived home late; very late we had just got into bed when we heard the Milkman on his rounds. I Love you. Honestly. Truly.

2.5.2 FULL POINT AT HE END OF THE SENTENCE

Three main types of sentences end in full points. They are direct statements. Indirect questions and polite or formal requests. In direct statements, the full point is the mark that rounds off a sentence. Pure and simple. These examples illustrate its use. Anna arrived at his office early.

She took off her rain coat and sat down at her desk Tom will be in town again on Thursday (J.Morison 2001: 11)

2.5.3 HISTORY OF FULL POINT

The word period, the regular term for the full point in the United States, looks back over more than 2,000 years to the punctuation system attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium. Aristophanes used a simple point to mark the end of the periodios, the longest and most complete division of rhetorical discourse (Chaucer 1986)

2.5.4 FULL POINT AND QUOTATION MARKS

Writers And editors in the United States generally place a full point inside quotation marks regardless of whether the full point belongs to the quoted material or not. British writers and editors place the full point inside the quotation marks, if it ends the quotation and outside if not-

The following example illustrates he idea.

2.5.1.4. AMERICAN USGAE

Tom’s ideas were not crazy. He liked to think of them as “Modern”

2.5.1.5. BRITISH USAGE

Tom's ideas were not crazy. He liked to think them as "modern:

The only difference between this pair of examples is the placing of the full point.

2.5.2 COMMA (‘)

After the full stop, the comma is the second key punctuation mark. It is the commonest and most versatile mark inside the sentences. It may be used to separate words. Phrases and some clauses.

In line with a modern tendency to reduce all punctuation to minimum, experienced writers today use far fewer commas than their predecessors ever did. Their practice is governed by a desire not to slow down the pace of the text and a belief that the reader will be distracted even irritated to brought up short too many times by too many commas. The role of the comma was emphasized as a way of marking out the syntax o grammatical structure of a sentence rather than as a pure stop. (J. Morison 2001: 22)

2.5.2.1 HISTORY OF THE COMMA

The word comma itself came through Latin from the Greek word Komma, a noun formed from the verb koptain, to cut. Komma meant, in effect, a part cut off, the ancient Greek grammarians used this word to denote the shortest section of a piece of rhetorical text and by transference, the symbol signals the end of such a section. Thinking of the present day comma as a mark that, cuts off, section of text is till a valid guide to its modern punctuation usage.(J. Morison 2001: 22)

2.5.2.2 COMMAS QUOTATIONS

Among British writers, commas are included quotation marks if they form part of the original quotation or if they mark a significant pauses within it. United States usage requires that the comma be placed inside the quotation marks as a matter of course.Well, Jane, said Tom, here we are; (Tom’s actual words were ‘well, Jane, here we are)

Come in, said Dick, and have a drink, (What Dick said was, “ come in and have a drink, because there is no pause in the original quotation the comma is placed outside it) (J. Morison 2001: 37)

2.5.3 SEMI COLON (;)

The semicolon has two main punctuations uses within the sentence. It is used in complex lists, and it is used as alternatives to the over use of conjunctions. Especially, in long or complex sentences, some lists may already use lot of commas, so the semicolon brought into use as a refine element,

She sent a fax to their branches in Toronto, Canada, Tokyo, Japan, and Wiesbaden, Germany.

Sometimes, but by no means invariably phrase such as however, nevertheless hence, furthermore moreover, also that is to say, are preceded by a semicolon.

The Japanese are an ingenious and industrious people, hence the rapid development of their economy”

It is certainly possible to over mark the semicolon, and some experts on English. Notably H.W. Fowler, were perhaps over found of it. The semi colon is now no longer seen principally as a weak from of colon. In it's strictly punctuations uses; it occasionally duplicates the duties of the

colon, which has itself become much more important as a non punctuation device. (Quirk and Randolph 1973)

2.5.4 COLON (:)

The Colon as a punctuation mark within the sentence is used to explain interpret or amplify what has preceded it. It is also used to introduce lists or series and lengthy quotations. And thirdly it is used to separate elements such as numerals in ratios and time references. And the subtitles from the titles of books.

2.5.4.1.COLONS INTRODUCING LISTS, SERIES QUOTATIONS

The competition was between three countries: Holland, Belgium and Denmark.The following items are required: minced beef, onions, garlic, mushrooms, tomatoes and seasoning. Please send the items listed: (1) Passport, (ii) Visa application (iii) The correct fee.

The poet Poe expressed it nicely: “To err is human, to forgive divine .Only the last example here takes a capital letter after the colon in order to make the quotation stand out. The first clause is regards as a preface or introduction to the explanation contained in the second:

He gave good reason for his lateness: signal failure had delayed the arrival of his train at water low, and there was a tube and bus strike that day too.

In a celebrated and much-quoted phrase, Fowler (2002) said that the colon in its introductory use had acquired a special function, that of delivering the goods that have been invoiced in preceding words. (J. Morison 2001: 54)

2.5.5. BRACKETS AND PARENTHESIS { }

Brackets always come in pairs there are several kinds, including round brackets { } angle bracket $\langle \rangle$ and brace bracket { } for, normal purpose of punctuation in UK English, only round brackets need concern us in any detail. In US English they are called Parentheses.

2.5.5.1 ROUND BRACKETS (PARENTHESES)

These are used to cordon off and enclose supplementary or explanatory information which would otherwise interrupt, the basic drift of a sentence or of a longer piece of writing (the Greek word parenthesis means an insertion beside)

2.5.5.2 SQUARE BRACKETS { }

These have two functions, firstly they are sometimes used for parentheses within parentheses, Secondly, they indicate an additional comment.

Steven's Stepson (Lloyd Osburne (1868-1947) collaborated in some of the master's later work.

2.5.5.3 ANGLE BRACKETS <>

In Scholssarly work, these indicate that a piece of text is missing or defective

2.5.5.4 BRACE BRACKETS { }

These are sometimes also called clearly brackets, and they are used in mathematics and in tabular materials. A Piece of parenthetical materials, which we may k now form now on refer to as a parentheses, is a word or group of words that stand outside the main grammatical structure of a sentence. A Parenthesis can be a single word, a phrase, or even a whole sentence. The word parenthesis is Greek in origin and means literally an insertion beside” The notion of a parenthesis being a kind of insertion is

a very helpful one, in fact, a parenthesis is an insertion that disrupts but does not break the logic of a sentence you could remove a parenthesis.

And the sentence would remain basically intact. (J. Morison 2001: 68)

2.5.5. PARENTHESIS

The Parenthesis { } were part of the punctuation scene by the start of the Sixteenth century. In 1566 Manutius the younger, who was one of the earliest people to advocate a syntactical approach to punctuation, wrote them in his orthographies Ratio (spelling method) As follows: Those words ought to be enclosed in a parentheses, which is not a part of the sentence, and do not depend upon any word either preceding or following: Words whose absence cause no loss to the sentences.

Manutius sensible point seems incredibly modern, even if his punctuation is not. (J. Morison 2001: 69-70)

A Dash is used to indicate break in the continuity of a sentence, often informally, generally it is better to avoid a dash in formal or academic writing, where commas or brackets are usually more appropriate.

2.5.6.1 THE DASH FOR PARENTHESIS REPETITION OR EMPHASIS

It was on balance- successful operation. Ket, Sir-everybody knows Kent-apples, Cherries, hops and women. (Dickens, dashes for Emphasis) She is come at last-at-last and all is gas and gaiters (Dickens, dashes for repetition)

The Parenthetic use of dashes in pairs marks a breath in very much the same way as bracket. Brackets, however, would look rather strong in the above,

2.5.6.2 DASHES AND COMMAS:

In an extended parenthesis, that contains words or phrases linked by commas, it can be often be clear to mark the beginning and end of the parenthesis by dashes. Even here, however, care as should be taken to avoid overdoing the dashes. It is worth nothing, that dashes and commas are not combined in the same positions in the sentences. Compound punctuation marks made up of dashes and other stops used at one time and are described at length by Eric Patridge (J. Morison 2001; 82-87)

2.5.7 ELLIPSIS

Ellipses (plural) are series of full stops. (Usually three or four) and sometimes referred to as omission marks. An Ellipsis is used to suggest that something is missing or omitted or withheld from a text, within or at the end of a sentence.

An ellipsis is also often used to indicate an incomplete quotation:

How does it go? Cowards die many times before their seats.....”I
‘M afraid I forget the next line.

Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
.....

If an ellipse occurs at the end of a sentence and you are representing three dots, it is not necessary to add a fourth dot to indicate the full stop.(J. Morison 2001: 93)

2.5.8 QUOTATION MARKS (“ “)

Quotation Marks are sometimes called quotes or inverted commas. They come in pairs, one to open and one to close the quotation. They may be

single or double, with British usage favoring single quotation marks, and American usage favoring double. They are used to mark off direct speech, to show that a word or phrase has been highlighted, and to indicate the title of a short story, an article, or a short poem.

2.5.8.1 DIRECT SPEECH

Direct speech is always enclosed within quotation marks: Where are you going? He asked the child.”And where is your coat?

I’m going to the circus, was the reply, to see the clowns

I don’t need a coat I’m not cold 9J. Morison 2001:99)

2.5.8.2. QUOTES WITHIN QUOTES

As stated earlier, British preference is for single quotes, while American usage favors double quotes, For quotes within quotes, the preferences are reversed doubled quotes for UK and single quotes for US Usage.

The key witness said, I saw the whole thing, and looked at he Judge for encouragement.

The translator of the authorized version of the Bible , which was published in 1611, knew nothing about quotation marks.

2.5.8.3 DOUBLE OR SINGLE QUOTES

Fowler, (2002) was the most eminent advocates of the use of single quotation marks for normal use and double ones to enclose quotes within quotes.

2.5.9 APOSTROPHE

The Apostrophe has two functions in punctuation. It marks the possessive or genitive case, and it indicates contraction or the omission of letters in spelling words.

2.5.9.1 POSSESSION

The Horse's mouth (singular) The Horses' mouth (plural)

The women's institute and the Mother's union Life of one's own

Unlike possessive nouns such as the above possessive pronouns (apart from one) do not require an apostrophe: examples she took hers, we took ours and theirs: The group of genitive; in which more than one

subject or object is involved, is marked on the last noun. Example Gilbert and Sullivan's operas *William and Mary's reign* (J. Morison 2001: 111)

2.5.9.2 OMISSIONS

The apostrophe, taken in from Greek language, joined the English system of punctuation in the Seventeenth century. It is symbolized by (a superior comma) and therefore appears to be identical with the mark that closes a quotation for example: *Aristophanes, plays were popular with Athena's citizens*. Good writers and auditors will recast such a sentence as the above if actual confusion is likely:

The plays of Aristophanes were popular with the citizens of Athens. (J. Morison 2001: 112)

2.5.9.3 THE PLURAL USE

The apostrophe is commonly used before the-s that serves to form the plural of letters and words used (often in Italics) as letters and words Partridge, however cites a very good use of the pluralizing apostrophe:

The class includes three Louis's and two Lewis's. Several commendations have noted that the apostrophe has been or being dropped in many areas. Reference to cox's and dot's (or potato's) are actually not wrong because the apostrophe signals omission of letters, References to lettuce's and cabbage's are wrong and should be avoided. And anybody who writes the word baby's for babies cannot spell (J. Morison 2001: 121-123)

2.5.1.0. QUESTION MARK AND EXCLAMATION MARK

Question mark is a specialized version of the full stop; it is used to end an interrogative sentence or sentence fragment example:

Who is Sylvia, What is she? Have you paid your poll tax? He looks tired, doesn't he?

The last sentence, however may also be viewed as a statement and appear without a question mark. Like the question mark, the exclamation mark is a specialized version of the full stop. It signals strong feelings or urgency, and is used at the end of an emphatic utterance or phrase, for example.

Get out of my house! And don't come back! How lovely she looked!

Be quite! Cheers!Ow! (J. Morison 2002: 124-125)

Multiple exclamation marks are to be avoided in print. They usually indicate a rather desperate attempt to pep up a tired piece of text and are much loved by writers of comic stripe and tabloid press headline, examples Eceek!!!!!!!!!!!! Kerplork!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The question mark and the exclamation marks are, strictly speaking, not stops, or pauses marks, but are in fact marks of expression or tone. An important fact about their function, however is that they peace the full point at the end of sentence that are interrogative or exclamatory (J. Morison 2001: 125)

2.5.1.1 CAPITAL LETTERS

Capital letters are used fore two purposes in English punctuation. Firstly, they mark the beginning of new sentences; secondly they indicate a proper noun.

2.5.11.1 CAPITALS AT THE BEGINNING OF A SENTENCE

Capital letters follow full stops. Capital letters invariably signal the beginning of a sentence, just as full stops (or equivalents invariably signal the end of a sentence. Example:

The King was working in the garden. He seemed very glad to see me.
We walked through the garden. It was very jolly. We talked for a long time. Like all Greeks he wanted to go to America (Hemingway 1948)

2.5.11.2 CAPITALS AFTER OTHER PUNCTUATION MARKS

Capitals are found after other punctuation marks, including commas and colons, this unusual use of capital signals a specific purpose, for instance introducing a quotation or a semi-quotation example:

As the Poet Burns: A Man's a man for that she was thinking: by this time tomorrow this die will be cast.

2.5.11.3 CAPITAL LETTERS AT THE BEGINNING OF LINE OF POETRY

Traditionally, the first word of a line was capitalized whether the punctuation of the poem required it or not:

Wine comes in at the mouth. And Love comes in at the eye, that's all we shall know of truth before we grow old and die..... (W.B. Yeats)

If all the good people were clever, And all clever people were good. The world would be nicer than ever. We thought that it possibly could-Elizabeth words worth. (J. Morison 2001: 139-143)

2.5.12. BOLDFACE

Bold Face and Italic type are typographical terms and used to apply only to typeset or printed materials.

Authors who write for publication should indicate boldface not by printing it as such on their word processors or typewriters but by typing ordinary text and underscoring it with a wavy line. For example:

Newton's Early Life Newton was born at Woolsthorpe.

Lincolnshire.....

2.5.12.1 USES OF BOLD FACE

Bold face is used exclusively for emphasis or contrast. Its main use is in headings and subheadings. Usually such headings are the same point

size as the text face or a point of two larger. But boldface may also be used in a much bigger point size for display headings, or chapter titles e.t.c. Any punctuation directly following a bold title, heading or word in text is usually included in the bold face.

2.5.13 SLASH (/)

The Slash is sometimes called the oblique mark, and by the Americans- the virgule. It has become in recent years and has acquired several punctuation uses.

2.5.13.1 SLASHES TO SHOW ALTERNATIVES

Dear Sir/Madam

Dinner Jacket/Lounge suit to be worn

2.5.13.2 SLASHES TO INDICATE PERIOD OF TIME

These are particular common in fiscal and academic costs fro 1993/4 are not yet fixed. He's claimed the new allowance in his 1992/3 tax form.

2.5.13.3 SLASHES FOR ABBREVIATION

Several abbreviations commonly incorporate a slash, example

I'm staying c/o 49 Bentick Drive (c/o = care of) charge to my a/c
(a/c/=account)

This mark, shown by the (/) symbol, is known a\by all the above names and few more besides, such as the diagonal, slant, mark or shilling stroke. The names slash (mark) slant and oblique are predominantly British, the names virgule and diagonal are American.

2.5.14 HYPHEN (-)

Hyphen refers to a small stroke used to join two words together or to indicate that a word has been broken at the end of a line because of lack of space.

The Hyphen is sued as the prefloxed element in a proper noun. As in: pre Christian' Post-Renaissance; anti- British". It is also used before dates or numbers, as pre-1914, prc 1 066 e.t.c.

2.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it has been discovered that ambiguity is one of the linguistic problems because it renders the intention of the communicator uncertain, thereby leading to a wrong response from the respondent;it is

also an inevitable phenomenon in an interaction or conversation while punctuation marks are symbols that indicate the structure and organization of written language as well as intonation and pauses to be observed when reading aloud.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to describe the types and sources of data used for this research. This is done to enable the reader to realize that, relevant texts are consulted, observed and described in an effort to throw more light on the subject of the research.

3.1 SOURCES AND METHODS OF DATA GENERATION

The data for this research comprise both primary and secondary collection methods. The primary source is observation method and the secondary sources are materials consulted such as text books, journals, etc. which have been found relevant to the topic of the research. This has been acknowledged in the citations and bibliography.

3.2 RESEARCH POPULATION

Basically, the target population for this study is the UG III Students of Department of Modern European Languages, Usmanu Danfodiyo

University, Sokoto. As the research studies incorrect punctuation as a cause of ambiguity and misunderstanding of written communication among students.

Therefore, for the purpose of objectivity and also to have accurate information, the students of English that live in the hostel were consulted for assessment of scripts, where ten were assessed.

3.3 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

This research aims at finding out how ambiguity arises in written communication as a result of wrong use of punctuation marks, from which some essays of UG III students of English were selected in order to identify the problems. The essays were selected both in the departmental notice board and hostel. The sampling technique was random, as essays placed on the notice boards are sometimes removed by the students within a short period of time.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

The nature of the research makes it more convenient to use observation and recording of the problems noted, rather than resorting to the use of any

other instrument. As a result, no data collection instrument such as questionnaire or interview was used.

3.5 PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

The observation method for data collection was applied. The observation consists of some selected essays of students of English. Also the essays were surveyed carefully to identify the mistakes students make in written communication.

3.6 PROCEDURE FOR ANALYZING COLLECTED DATA

The data collected from students were carefully analysed. By way of scrutinizing the essays of the students one-by-one. The essays were also numbered accordingly, each part with its analysis, indicating the ambiguity in it.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter briefly talks about the method employed in data collection as well as the sampling techniques. The data collected would be presented and analyzed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Incorrect punctuation causes a lot of ambiguity and misunderstanding in written communication. With this point being made, this research examines incorrect punctuation in selected essays of UG111 students of MELL, UDUS by analyzing the essays and highlighting how such incorrect punctuation creates ambiguity and misunderstanding in written communication

4.2 DATA PRESENTATION

In written essay, student use punctuations wrongly. It is said that most of the weaknesses of students are in the area of improper use of punctuation which carries greater percentage in the cause of ambiguity. All examples given in part illustrate the wrong use of these punctuations. Ten scripts were selected to analyse the errors.

On the Press Board

Data I

1. A list of all players with the houses were put on the notice board.
2. Whereas Ojo and Wike are in the principal's office
3. Amina always runs away from school, this is because she wants to marry.
4. One of my friend which is called Peter

Analysis

1. The players with their "houses" can either be the "players" and the "houses" were on the notice board because there is no use of any periodic mark such as comma, in between players and the phrase 'the houses'
2. The statement is confusing and so clumsy
 - (a) If it is a question, it should be with question mark(?) and the other phrase will begin with the subject in capital letter. Example where is "Ojo" and "Wike". They are in the principal's office.

(b) If it is a rhetorical question then it should be with an exclamatory mark to indicate tense.

(c) If it is a report of the success and position, it will be read as “where Ojo and Wike are (now) in the principal office”|

Periodic Sentence

Data II

The greatest mistake here is that many of those students do not know when to end a sentence. The sentences are often too long and consequently not defined because they are ambiguous. ‘As we were going to Abuja, where we were going to visit the dereaved family which had been postponed several times because of circumstances which were beyond the control of:.’

Analysis

The sentence is too long and confusing in meaning. The reader cannot understand between the ‘visit’ or ‘dereaved family’ was postponed several times because of the omission of period between the two clauses. If it means a visitation comma is not needed and also in the phrase

“dereaved family” there is no need for a period (comma) but the relative adverb “where” in between the dependent clause “where we were going to visit the dereaved family” inbetween “family” and the dependent clause which have been postponed several times” comma is wrongly inserted.

Omission or Arbitrary Use of Apostrophe (Wrong/Correct)

Data III

- a. The Igbo’s/igbos demand high bride price on their daughter.
- b. My uncles/uncle’s friend
- c. The dog caught its leg in a trap

Analysis

- a. The use of small I with “igbo” makes it confusing between common noun and proper noun and it is wrong to use apostrophe with demand as a verb not a noun. Therefore should rather be “Igbos” a group of individuals with “s” of plurality to avoid ambiguity.

Indiscriminate Use of Capital Letter

Data IV

- a. I am Happy to write you this letter
- b. The toilet in the hostel is So dirty and you are compelled to use it.
- c. The prime minister in the world Britain, Magret.

Analysis

- a. “Happy” is capitalized, confusing between a proper noun and expression of delightfulness.
- b. “So” is capitalized as a means of emphasis which is confusing between “so” as a complement to “hostel” or “So” as an intensifier to the word “dirty”.
- c. The “Prime minister” should be capitalized because it is a position not an adjective describing minister.

Unnecessary Abbreviation

Data V

“...with the help council and the P.T.A (Parent Teachers’ Association)”

The requirement needed for this building will be met in no time.

Analysis

“Council” should be read “council” because it is a department.

“PTA” (Parent Teacher’s Association) as it stands, a fullstop is necessary after the abbreviation i.e. after “A” in the Abbreviation; but “P.T.A” (not fullstop at all is equally accepted as “Parent”, “Teacher’s” and “Association” should have capital Initial “P” and “A” reflectively. However, note that full phrase is neither “Parent Teachers’ Association”, or Parent/Teachers/Association”. Finally it should not read (Parent-Teachers’ Association but Parent Teacher Association(P.T.A)

Ommision of Comma

Data VI

“... Although the price of rice continues to rise people still demand for it especially students”

“ it is certain that if women should be involved in the repair of Government it can foster mutual relation among sexes”

Analysis

“A comma is needed after “rice” in the statement before “people” otherwise it will confusing between “rise people” and “price” of rice is continues to rise” which is the intended meaning. Also a comma is needed in after ‘government’ in the second statements; otherwise it will be confusing between “women affair and “government affairs”.

Ambiguity created as a result of incorrect and misuse of Comma

Grammatically, commas are used to indicate a short break or pause in sentence. However, when it is not correctly used in a sentence, it usually alters the meaning of the sentence, which in turn creates ambiguity. The major incorrect use of comma that creates ambiguity in a written discourse includes:

(a) When a comma is used to separate either a subject of a sentence from its verb, or a verb of a sentence from its subject. In grammar, a subject and a verb of a sentence are regarded as a single component which is inseparable in other words, a sentence is seen as consisting of a subject and a predicate (subject and verb), the meaning

of sentence is usually altered thus, making the sentence ambiguous and incomprehensible. This could be seen as presented in the data below;

Data VII

After school hours, Aisha, walked home with her friends. As they approached the entrance of the house, then suddenly the dog, barked and they all ran shouting for help.

Analysis

From the above sentence, the incorrect use of comma could be identified. This is specifically indicated where the student incorrectly used comma to separate a subject from its verb as seen in this phrase derived from the data: ‘Aisha, walked’ and ‘the dog barked’

Grammatically, these sentences ought not to be separated by a comma, because in grammar a subject and a verb is a single component which is not separated by any punctuation. In this instance, the incorrect use of comma in separating the subject of the sentence from its verb distorts the entire meaning of the sentence. As a result, it creates ambiguity which makes the sentence incomprehensible or difficult to

understand. Therefore, from the example presented above, we could see how incorrect use of comma in separating a subject of a sentence from its verb could create or cause ambiguity in written discourse which generally hinders effective communication.

Therefore, the following phrases 'Aisha walked' and 'the dog barked' thus, properly express the meaning of the phrases.

(b) Another perspective from which incorrect use of comma can cause ambiguity in written communication is when a comma is used in place of a full stop. The most basic rule of writing, especially in essays is to express a single idea or point in a sentence and such point being expressed should be indicated with the use of full stop. This implies that every single sentence that expresses a full idea or a point should end with a full stop. However, in an instance where a sentence that expresses full point or idea ends with the comma, it does not properly convey the point but rather, it joins the point being expressed with other sentences, which consequently changes the meaning of the sentence that makes sentence incomprehensible and ambiguous. This is clearly indicated in the following:

Data VIII

The boy was expelled from school for stealing from a fellow students, he should have avoided such act for his own good.

Analysis

In the data above, there are two sentences, each expressing a single thought or point which ought to be indicated or separated by a full stop rather than being joined together with a comma. This is so because a single point in a sentence should be indicated with a full stop rather than with a comma. However, the student incorrectly used comma to join the sentence in order to indicate the point being expressed. Thus, such incorrect use of comma in the sentence presented above creates ambiguity which makes the sentence unclear and difficult to understand.

Hence, the sentence would have rather been punctuated as:

The boy was expelled from school for stealing from a fellow student. He should have avoided such act for his own good.

Unlike the sentence made by the student by using comma in the first sentence of this example, this sentence is properly punctuated by using

full stop to properly separate the points being expressed in the sentences which clearly conveyed the appropriate messages

However, in order to avoid such incorrect use of comma in writing, the basic thing to do is to make one point and afterward use a full stop, then make the next point. This will properly separate the different points in the sentences. Alternatively, one can use a semi colon in place of a full stop; this would indicate that the two points are sufficiently related to deserve being braced in a single sentence.

Data IX

“I will wash the rice with clean water to ensure that all dirt are removed, after I might...”

Analysis

There is need for replacement of comma after removed with a fullstop and begin a new sentence with capital letter “After”. Otherwise it would be confusing between “dirt are removed after” which is not the intended meaning, “all dirt are removed”.

Data X

“... furthermore long live my club and I also thank you”

Analysis

The sentence should have ended with exclamatory mark (!) and begin a new sentences with “I also thank you”.

Hyphenating compound words

Compound words are commonly found in scientific words. There are no definite rules. Only when compound words appear as an adjective before noun, it requires hyphen to avoid misleading the reader. This student makes use of an adjective as a compound without hyphenating which distorts the meaning totally.

Data XI

‘ Today many states take the trend of the super power. I find one in the description of that white house’.

Analysis

In the data above, the student is describing the government house in America which is ‘White-House’ but ends up taking common noun

description instead because he student had no knowledge of capitalization and hyphenation

4.3 Conclusion

Based on the data presented, omission or wrong use of fullstop, comma, question mark, exclamation causes ambiguity. Also wrong insertion of comma between subject and object, verb and complement, between adjective and noun, verb and adverb. Omission of comma that used to separate items in a list of words, phrases or clauses. Use of small letter for a personal "I" and capital for some common noun alters the meaning. Wrong combination of initials in abbreviation or omission of a hyphen as indicated in the last example of (P.T.A) and unnecessary abbreviation which may carry different connotations. And lastly, misuse of compound letter is analysed as the cause of ambiguity in the students' essay.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This is the final chapter of the research work and also an important one, which deals with summary and conclusion.

5.1 SUMMARY

This research has been able to give a detailed account of punctuation marks, what they are and how students make use of punctuation marks.

It shows how the use of incorrect punctuation marks causes ambiguity and misunderstanding which is an inevitable phenomenon in written communication.

5.2 CONCLUSION

From the findings of this research work, It clearly shows that the use of punctuation marks makes written communication effective and shows its ambiguity where the punctuation marks are used improperly. It also shows how people use punctuation marks in different ways. Students

find it difficult to use punctuation marks properly in written communication.

Often times, when we speak English, we usually utilize prosodic features such as stress, intonation, rhythm etc to make our meaning clear. However, in writing, of the function, these periodic features in speech are handle by punctuation in writing.

Consequently, written English has developed a conventional system of punctuation which is consistent and sensible: Every punctuation mark has one or more particular functions in accordance to its ascribed functions.

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