



Punctuation

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Abstract

It is very important to understand the importance of punctuation marks to make the written English correct and sensible. This sense should be conveyed while reading out the sentences with punctuation, in order to render the correct meaning to the phrase or sentence. Along with the intended meaning, the tone of the sentence should also be regulated according to the punctuation used. For this, one needs to know where to use the rising tone and where falling tone should be introduced while reading out the sentence aloud. Stress is also regulated in sentences by the use of appropriate punctuation. Punctuations are very important for the learners of English language. The English Language teachers' community needs to be very receptive to the requirement of these language learners. Punctuation marks, such as commas and full stops, are conventions used in writing to make the meaning clear to the listener and the reader. Once, the students are made to understand the importance of punctuation marks, they are able to regulate their speech according to them. It is the responsibility of the mentors to make their mentees realize the importance of punctuation.

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In spoken English they serve the purpose of pauses, intonation and modulation. In written English they are used as marks, to make the meaning more clearly to the reader. It is very important for every student to understand that punctuation marks play a very important role in giving clear sense to the language. If a student uses a wrong mark of punctuation, he may change the meaning of the sentence and completely confuse between the correct meaning and an incorrect meaning. This may also eventually lead him to write absolutely incorrect English. Varanasi Bhaskara Rao speaks of learners of correct English as winners and segregates them from losers in the following lines:

Winners are those who accomplish their declared purpose. Losers are those who do not accomplish their declared purpose. They do have a declared purpose, but they fail to accomplish for many reasons. One of them is not being able to say what they mean as winners always do. 'what ought to be done remains undone' because their 'language is not correct'. 1

Other important punctuations include comma, which is one of the most important marks in punctuation because a small incorrect placement of this mark can give a completely different

1. Rao, *Communicative Competence*, 29.

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Meaning to a sentence depending where it is placed by the learner. There are umpteen number of examples where companies have had to pay millions of dollars to their clients due to the wrong placement of it. There are examples of other punctuation marks, that help to render a different context to a sentence, though the writer was trying to write something else. If we talk about the challenges of learning English language, one of them is punctuation. Because these marks constitute a set of symbols with different rules for the usage of each one, It is necessary to understand why punctuations are very important to understand and to make the reader understand the correct sense of a sentence which the writer intends to convey. Once the Czar of Russia condemned a man to death , and he sent the following message to execute him: ' Pardon impossible. To be executed.' The Czarina, who had a

soft corner for the prisoner, changed the place of the full stop from after the word impossible to before it and the order was changed to: ‘pardon. impossible to be executed .’ Finally the criminal was not executed, he was saved by a small change in the placement of punctuation mark in the sentence. This incident tells the importance of punctuation marks. B.S. Jadhav has laid stress on the importance of punctuation on the correct stages of writing. Out of these, he suggests post-writing activities:

Read your draft carefully and evaluate it for content as well as for its organization, grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. This is the stage of editing, which is very important because it is the last step towards producing a well-written document. In fact, to ensure that, for instance, a letter or report you write is both effective and impressive, the time you spend in finding information, organizing the main points you want to include and writing your first draft should approximately be equal for the time you spend revising and editing it. Editing skills are, therefore, an important step towards producing a well-written document. A well-edited text is one that conveys what the writer wants to say in a style that is clear and concise. . .meticulous proofreading is as important as careful editing is in the creation of a piece of quality writing. You will find some useful points on spelling, capital letters and punctuation. 2.

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Now-a-days people tend to ignore the importance of punctuation marks . The correct use of punctuation shows that a student has good knowledge of English language. It also helps in creating clarity in meaning. It also renders sense, clarity and stress in a sentence. One can make one’s student organized in his writings. To explain the practical use of the most widely used punctuation marks, one should remember some ground rules. For instance, Full stops are used at the end of sentence that make a statement or give an order. The colon is mainly used to introduce a list of items. A ‘semi colon’ is used to mark a break. This is longer than that represented by a comma and is in fact, closer in function to a full stop.

The current trend in written language is to use commas only when they are really needed for clarity in meaning. If we use too many commas, or on the contrary, if use only a few, it becomes difficult for the reader to understand what the writer wants to say. The question mark is used at the end of declarative sentences to express very strong emotions, such as delight, anger and surprise. Dashes have their own exclusive prominence. There are three kinds of dashes , each is used differently to punctuate sentences. The first of the dashes is known as ‘em-dash’ (simple dash) . The em-dash has two main uses namely, it is used to add information or to elaborate the text. The second kind of dash is a ‘two-em dash’, which has the length of two-em dashes. It is used in

bibliographies in place of the name of an author if there is more than one work by the person. The third kind of dash is an ‘en-dash’ , which is about half the length of an ‘em-dash’.

2. Jadhav, *Radiance: Communication Skills, Prose and Poetry*, 50-51.

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An ‘en dash’ is used to mark a range of figures or words.

The hyphen is shorter than the smallest of dashes, even the ‘en-dash’. Its main use is in forming complex and compound words, which have two or more components in them. It should be noted that not all such words are hyphenated, and so one will have to refer to a dictionary to be certain whether or not a compound/complex word has a hyphen. Parentheses are round brackets that we use most often in our writing. They are used mostly to enclose words which are not very important to understand but to make the statement clear. This subsidiary information is given in the parentheses.

Square brackets are mainly used in quoted texts to enclose words which are not mentioned by the author. Words inserted within the square brackets are mostly suggested by the editors. It is often used when some important information is missing from the author’s writings or to add some more information in the text written by the author. Another important punctuation is ellipsis. Three spaced dots are called points of ellipsis, they are used to point out lines or words which are taken from a quotation which is incomplete. Ellipsis is used to represent the missing words.

There are two main uses of the apostrophe, first of all it is used with ‘s’, before or after it, often with a noun to show possession or belonging. Language learners should also be guided on their knowledge about using quotation marks. These are inverted commas-- they are used to quote the exact words in a speech. There are two types of types of quotation marks, one is single inverted commas and another is double inverted commas quotation mark. It is one’s personal choice to use any one of them but it is imperative to remember that only one style should be used in one piece of writing.

It is very important to understand the importance of punctuation marks to make the written English correct and sensible. This sense should be conveyed while reading out the sentences with punctuation, in order to render the correct meaning to the phrase or sentence. Along with the intended meaning, the tone of the sentence should also be regulated according to the punctuation used. For this, one needs to know where to use the rising tone and where falling tone should be introduced while reading out the sentence aloud. Stress is also regulated in sentences by the use of appropriate punctuation. Thus, language with correct punctuation should be the main objective of English language learners. This would not only enhance their speaking skills but also add embellishment to their writings.

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