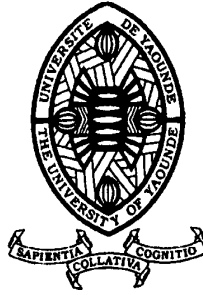


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PUNCTUATION AND SYNTACTIC ISSUES IN THE EXPOSITORY ESSAY OF FORM FIVE STUDENTS OF SOME SELECTED SCHOOLS IN YAOUNDE.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Higher Teacher Training College Yaoundé in
Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of a Postgraduate
Teacher's Diploma (DIPES II) in English Language

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Robinsons Kollo and Catherine Kollo.

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This work is the product of many efforts made by different people and I would like to acknowledge these efforts. I thank my supervisor, Dr Napoleon Epoge, for the enormous part he played in the realisation of this study. He found time, amidst his countless professional commitments, to patiently and meticulously guide my unsteady steps throughout the work. Without him this work would not have been a reality.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines punctuation and syntactic issues in the expository essay of Form Five students in some selected schools in Yaounde. Data were collected through a production test in which respondents were given two topics to write an essay on one. Findings reveal that out of the fourteen punctuation marks ear-marked, the students made use of seven of them in their essays: the full stop, the semicolon, the colon, the comma, the apostrophe, the inverted commas and the hyphen. With regard to the use of these punctuation marks, the following issues were identified in their essays: arbitrary use of punctuation marks as well as their omission where they were expected to feature in order to make the sentences express a complete and comprehensible thought. In the same vein, with regard to syntactic components, issues such as: spelling, concord, diction, tense, comma splice, faulty parallelism, as well as fused sentences, are feasible. This raises serious pedagogical questions as far as the writing component of the English language is concerned. The study suggests that punctuation and grammar should be taught overtly and thoroughly at the basic level of secondary education.

RESUME

Cette étude porte sur l'analyse de la ponctuation et de certains procédés syntactiques dans les sujets de la production d'écrit rédigés par les élèves de Form Five provenant de certains établissements de Yaoundé. Pour collecter nos données, nous avons proposé aux élèves deux sujets aux choix à partir desquels l'on a exploité leur production. Il découle donc de notre analyse que sur les quatorze signes de ponctuation qui constituaient notre intérêt, les élèves en ont fait usage de sept à savoir: le point, le point virgule, les deux points, la virgule, l'apostrophe, les guillemets et le trait d'union. Pour ce qui est de l'usage de la ponctuation, nous avons noté les phénomènes suivants: l'utilisation arbitraire des signes de ponctuation ainsi que l'omission même de ces signes là où ils doivent impérativement figurés. L'analyse syntactique a plutôt révélée les erreurs portants sur l'orthographe, l'accord, le choix des mots, les temps verbaux, la liaison des propositions indépendantes via une virgule, les éléments liés sur la base d'un parallélisme erroné, ainsi que des propositions indépendantes reliées par aucun signe de ponctuation. Ceci soulève donc d'importantes questions pédagogiques sur l'aspect de la rédaction en langue anglaise.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this work, entitled “Punctuation and Syntactic Issues in the Expository Essay of Form Five Students of Some Selected Schools in Yaounde”, was carried out by Gwendolene Bessem Kolle, under my supervision.

.....

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
RESUME	iv
CERTIFICATION.....	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	viii
CHAPTER ONE:GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO:THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.0 Introduction	7
2.1 Theoretical Considerations.....	7
2.1.1 Product Approach.....	7
2.1.2 Process Approach.....	7
2.1.3 Genre Approach	8
2.1.4 Form Focus Approach.....	9
2.1.5 Error Analysis (EA)	10
2.2 Review of related literature	12
2.2.1 Punctuation Issues	12
2.2.2 Syntactic Issues	21
2.2.3 Verb Tense and Form.....	22
2.2.4 Prospects of the study.....	27
CHAPTER THREE:METHODOLOGY	28
3.0 Introduction	28
3.1 Population of the Study	28
3.2 Instrument of Data Collection.....	28
3.3 Procedure of Data Collection	28
3.4 Method of data analysis.....	29
3.5 Difficulties Encountered	29
3.6 Conclusion.....	30
CHAPTER FOUR:DATA ANALYSIS, AND RESULTS.....	31
4.0 Introduction	31
4.1 Punctuation issues	31

4.1.1 Arbitrary use of punctuation marks.....	31
4.1.2 Omission of Punctuation Marks.....	36
4.2. Syntactic Issues	42
4.2.1 Spelling	42
4.2.2 Diction.....	43
4.2.3 Concord.....	44
4.2.4 Tense	44
4.2.5 Faulty Parallelism.....	45
4.2.6 Comma Splice	45
4.2.7 Fused Sentences	47
4.3 Conclusion.....	48
CHAPTER FIVE:SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS AND	
CONCLUSION	49
5.0 Introduction	49
5.1 Summary of Findings	49
5.2 Pedagogic Implications	51
5.3 Recommendations	52
5.4 Suggestion for Further Research	53
5.5 Conclusion.....	53
REFERENCES.....	54
APPENDIX.....	60

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	English as Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EA	Error Analysis
GBHS	Government Bilingual High School
GBPHS	Government Bilingual Practising High School
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SLL	Second Language Learning
E.G.	Example
AV	Accepted Version
ENS	Ecole Normale Superieure
SBE	Standard British English
SVO	Subject Verb Object

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Language functions as a system of human communication which, according to Richards, et al (1992: 283), “consists of different units, such as morphemes, words, sentences, and utterances”. It entails “an act of speaking or writing in a given situation” (Crystal 1992: 212). This spoken or written form of language is referred to as, “parole or performance whereas the linguistic system underlying one’s use of speech or writing is referred to as competence” (Crystal 1992: 212). One of these languages is English.

Nowadays, English plays an important role in education and students are expected to communicate effectively in institutions where English is the medium of instruction. Learners face the task of mastering content area in subjects such as mathematics, history, science, geography, and business which are taught in English. In such cases, teaching and learning of English can help the students to deal successfully with their academic demands and to perform successfully in their disciplines and professional contexts (Adams & Keene, 2000). However, of the four skills in English, writing is considered to be the most complex and difficult skill to master. This difficulty, according to Richards and Renandya (2002: 303), “lies not only in generating and organizing of ideas but also in translating these ideas into readable texts”. Thus, the important role ascribed to writing is manifested in the status accorded to it in different situations within the teaching and learning environment. For instance, writing serves as an important tool of assessing proficiency as attested by its inclusion in the form of writing tests in major examinations such as the TOEFL and IELTS writing sub-test. Beyond the realms of assessment, the skill of writing is an essential feature of material development (Cumming 1997).

In the academic context, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) point out that students are required to produce specific writing genres such as essay, summary, critical review, and research paper. However, focus on the distinguishing regularities of structure of different text types can help learners build a repertoire of the organization and the relevant language forms of different genres. It can also make learners aware of the socio-linguistic role that texts play in particular discourse communities.

As writing is an important productive skill through which thoughts and ideas are disseminated, it is incumbent for instructors of writing in different educational environments to exploit the many different methods, approaches, and techniques that can serve to produce better writers. Though over the preceding decades, the process approach to teaching writing has greatly improved L1 and L2 composition especially in terms of creativity and organization, “these advances have been compromised through the generation of written products containing grammatical and lexical inaccuracies, which often frustrate and distract readers” (James 1998: 155). Hence, grammatical accuracy in writing is an issue of concern especially among ESL learners of English in Cameroon. A number of studies affirm that a lack of grammatical accuracy in writing may impede progress. Therefore, it is imperative that learners be sensitized to such errors and be trained to apply the appropriate approaches to rectify them. In view of this, Ferries (1994) proposes an editing approach in which learners need to edit their own work while Bates, Lane, and Lange (1993) advocate teaching students the discovery approach through which they will become independent and critical self-editors.

Punctuation, whose goal is to make writing precise and grammatically correct, is directed to make writing systematic. Hence, the rules in punctuation are expected to be followed while preparing research papers so that the research strategies and the format becomes systematic and consistent in all academic sectors. This is because writing will certainly be difficult and meaning blurred if there were no such rules.

The marks that divide sentences and phrases in writing are punctuation marks. The most important function of punctuation is to help make meaning of written sentences clear to the reader. To (Crystal1995), the various marks (full stop, comma, exclamation mark, question mark, semi colon, colon, and apostrophe) indicate structural units and often show the relationship between these units.

The identification, correction, and remediation of punctuation and syntactic errors in student writing are a mainstay of conventional writing instruction in schools. Errors in a composition influence views of the value of ideas in a paper (Graham, et al. 2011; Kiuvara, et al. 2009) and possibly hinder meaning. Countless books, articles, instructional materials such as worksheets, and more recently, computer programs and online resources have been assigned to assist students correct errors in their writing and aid teachers in helping students avoid errors. In this light (Graham et al. 2011) stipulate that if encouraging correctness has

always been a central part of writing instruction, it remains so today. Thus the core standards and the growing emphasis on state-mandated writing may well play an ever-greater role in writing pedagogy in secondary classrooms.

It should be noted that the introduction of oral communication into the school curriculum has drawn students' attention to speaking as an important skill for them to master (Dayang, 2005). Though the revision of the Course of Study emphasizes "writing" as a vehicle of communication to convey messages according to the purpose and the situation; writing classes has been modified into grammar-centred classes. In other words, the students are used to writing short sentences based on the structures or the grammar points they are taught, and chances of writing effective essays are limited (Minegishi, 2005). It is true that grammar processing is needed for accurate production, but it is a challenge to teach how to write essays or even paragraphs within the available classroom hours.

However, the lack of access to the complex cognitive processes, that underpin writing has compelled most researchers to use alternative approaches to diagnose difficulties associated with language learning. One such approach is error analysis in which the output generated by learners is analysed for errors through which the underlying causes of such errors are identified and the frequency of errors are deemed proportional to the degree of learning difficulty.

In Cameroon, for instance, there has been growing concern among teachers, the Ministry of Secondary Education, parents and other stakeholders over the large number of secondary school students failing or getting very low grades in English Language at the end of their secondary education in the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (CGCE O-Level). This is surprising in view of the fact that they have been exposed to and taught the English language for at least eleven years; that is, from Class One to Six in Primary School and from Form One to Form Five in Secondary school. Whenever the result of the subject component "Essay Writing" were analysed, the majority of students were seen to have obtained the lowest grade or failed woefully. Concerned officials and teachers have been wondering what is at the root of this situation. Hence a better understanding of the linguistic features and rhetorical structures that create coherence as well as a greater insight into the problems that student experience in trying to use them will serve as a systematic approach to teaching writing (Bamberg, 1984).

In a bid to salvage the above disturbing problems associated with writing, it is therefore maximally important that the English language teaching curriculum should have writing components. This is because proficiency in language also entails a mastery of writing skills. Unfortunately, there is the tendency of aspects of communicative language teaching taking cognizance of only the oral aspects and grossly neglecting writing. It appears that the teaching of punctuation in secondary schools is far-fetched. This is a serious lacuna especially because students are required to write substantially in subjects like History, Geography, Economics, Literature and Biology and are helplessly plunged into guessing what punctuation mark to use. The results are usually run-on sentences, and other accompanying syntactic distortions.

Meaning sense and interpretation can only be gotten from any piece of write-up if such writing falls within the confines of conventional writing tenets. Despite this stringent standpoint, many students in the secondary schools continue to display noticeable weaknesses in their handling of punctuation and some aspects of syntax which invariably plays on their performance in the English language. It is therefore almost a fact that English language teaching in secondary schools grossly neglects punctuation and syntax. If further neglected, this deficiency in students could seriously affect their writing prowess by handicapping their ability of flawlessly rendering the knowledge they have acquired in writing for ultimate success. These tendencies make students to regard punctuation and syntax as peripheral in their writing process. Alternatively the rules of writing are neglected in favour of content.

In view of the foregoing background, this dissertation sets out to investigate punctuation and syntactic issues in the expository essay of Form Five students in some selected schools in Yaoundé. Hence, this study is going to serve as an appropriate pedagogical material to ESL learners in that punctuation and syntactic issues are essential elements for the language learners to test what they have learned and hunt for answers to the questions accumulating in their minds about the target language rules. In addition, learners' punctuation and syntactic issues are extremely valuable for understanding the inner processes all the learners have been passing through in their unique ways. This understanding adds to the knowledge of three parties: the teacher for having an idea of the learners' linguistic knowledge, the language researcher on the basis of having insights into language learning and learning strategies, and the learner having an opportunity to check what he thinks he knows (Corder, 1967). This verification can be fulfilled on condition that

the teacher corrects them. Ur (2008) argues that when the students employ “incorrect or unacceptable forms” in their linguistic productions, language teachers have to correct them and that learner errors should not go away unheeded. Thus, this study will provide a basis for correcting learners and for focusing the teachers’ attention on the salient issues of the learners.

The scarcity of information on punctuation and some rules which guide syntax as an impediment to academic achievement makes this work worthwhile. To students, this work will be a welcome initiation as it will tickle their interest in considering punctuation and syntax as indispensable areas in their academic success, intellectual prowess and individual linguistic superiority. This is because students are not only expected to show proof of having gone through school in speech but also in intelligible writing, augmented by a good mastery of punctuation and syntax.

Teachers on their part will not only want to focus on subject matter in the write-ups of students but will also pay attention to students’ ability to efficiently weave punctuation and syntactic norms into their writing. Stakeholders in education sector will also want to forcibly implement measure that will step up the ability to students to use punctuation effectively either by making it compulsory at every stage of the secondary school curriculum.

The study is limited to punctuation marks and syntactic issues in the expository writing of Form Five students in three secondary schools in Yaoundé: Government Bilingual High School (GBPHS) Yaoundé, Government Bilingual High School (GBHS) Mendong, and Government Bilingual High School (GBHS) Yaoundé. With regard to the above-stated, the study is anchored on the following thesis statement: Form Five students come up with expository writing characterized by punctuation marks and syntactic constructions that do not tie with the parameter values stipulated by the English language. Against this backdrop, the following research questions underlie the study:

1. What are the punctuation issues that characterize the expository writing of Form Five students?
2. What are the syntactic issues that characterize the expository writing of Form Five students?
3. How do these punctuation and syntactic issues affect the ideas to be conveyed?

This work is divided into four chapters. Chapter One, entitled ‘General Introduction’, presents the background, aim, significance, scope of the study as well as the thesis statement, research questions and the structure of the work. Chapter Two is entitled ‘Theoretical Considerations and Review of Literature’. It presents and discusses the theoretical paradigm adopted for this study and review he reviews related literature. The third chapter is entitled ‘Methodology’. It dwells on the description of the population of study, instrument of data collection, procedure of data collection and method of data analysis. Chapter Four focuses on the data analysis and presentation of results. The fifth chapter summarizes the findings, presents the pedagogical relevance, makes recommendations and draws the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main phases: theoretical considerations (2.1) and review of related literature (2.2).

2.1 Theoretical Considerations

Second language (L2) practitioners are still in search of a coherent, comprehensive theory of the teaching of writing. Though this, there are some theories proposed in the literature. The major writing theories proposed in the literature are product, process, and genre. In addition to these approaches is the form focus approach in writing.

2.1.1 Product Approach

According to Silva (1990), the product theory of writing highlights form and syntax and it emphasizes rhetorical drills. The product theory focuses on the written product rather than on how the learner should approach the process of writing. In this theory, writing concerns the knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development is the result of the imitation of input (Badger and White, 2000). In addition, Arndt (1987) argues that the importance of imitation and a model in this theory are not only for imitation but also for exploration of analysis. Similarly Myles (2002) confirms that if the students are not exposed to written model texts, their errors in writing are more likely to subsist. In fact, Jordan (1997) indicates that the students are required to focus on a model, form, and duplication. In other words, the students study model texts and attempt various exercises that enable them to draw attention to relevant features of a text, and then replicate them in their own writing.

2.1.2 Process Approach

Another theory which was proposed in order to teach writing is the process theory. Hyland (2003) indicates that the process theory focuses on how a text is written instead of the final outcome. He adds, the process theory has a major influence on understanding the nature of writing and the way writing is taught. Therefore, the process theory emphasizes on the

importance of certain procedures such as pre-writing, drafting, evaluating, and revising. He pointed out that the process theory would involve introducing techniques that help the students identify and engage a topic; students are required to show multiple drafts of a work. After discussion and feedback from evaluators, the students would revise the drafts. Hence, rewriting, revision, and editing are essential parts to writing in this theory.

In a similar vein, Jordan (1997) states that process writing enables the students to make clearer decisions about the direction of their writing by certain procedures such as discussion, tasks, drafting, feedback, and informed choices. The advantage in adopting the process theory is in updating the importance of the cyclical and recursive nature of writing that is employed by native writers where “ordinarily pre-writing, writing, and re-writing frequently seem to be going on simultaneously” (Smith, 1982: 104).

Tribble (1996) explains the process-based approach in teaching academic writing. He says that the students first brainstorm in small groups the topic to be discussed in writing. This helps them to generate ideas before starting to write. This is followed by gathering an outline of the essay and individually writing its first draft. Students revise their first drafts and give them to other students for peer-reviewing and commenting on. The final stage is editing the essay by the writer himself/herself to eliminate all language errors. Thus, this approach focuses on process rather than product.

2.1.3 Genre Approach

The genre theory in writing emphasizes on the social context in which writing is produced (Badger and White, 2000). Swales (1990) explains that the genre theory is a class of communicative events and that the members of the communicative events share some set of communicative purposes which are identified by the expert members. In the academic context, the experts will be the lecturers who are teaching the various subjects. As claimed by Davies (1988), students, teachers, and subject tutors are all involved in the written language for a selected field of study and the forms of expression permitted within the field. Davies (1988: 131) suggests that the students, in aiming to attain academic success ‘somehow discover the criteria by which the different genres they produce are assessed.’ He seems to suggest that the criteria are not made explicit to students.

Swales (1990) emphasizes the genre-based approach in teaching academic writing. He focuses on analysing communicative purposes of the text read by learners and the means used by the writers of these texts to reach such purposes. In this approach, the students learn to write their own texts trying to achieve similar communicative purposes by way of choosing the most suitable and expressive language means for that.

Flowerdew (2002) views the genre approach as a dynamic approach which varies across time, across disciplines, and across instructors in the disciplines. Thus, the aim of the genre approach in writing is to help students master the conventions of a particular form of genre that is relevant to their specific situation. This approach requires collaboration with instructors from the disciplines, which may not always be possible (Flowerdew, 2002). It is important for the teachers to have cooperation with the students, with the teacher taking an authoritative role to support learners as they move towards their potential level of performance. Similarly, Paltridge (2001) proposes a framework that involves exploring the texts and contexts of students-target situation, enabling reflection on writing practices, exploiting texts from various types of genre and creating mixed genre portfolios.

2.1.4 Form Focus Approach

The role of grammar in writing is similar to the role of listening and speaking where the two are mutually synergistic. In other words, writing and grammar are inextricably intertwined as much of good writing derives its excellence from faultless grammar. This is emphasized by Frodesen and Eyring (2000: 23) who believe that, "a focus on form (grammar) in composition can help writers develop rich linguistic resources needed to express ideas effectively". Based on these views, the researcher deduced that second language writers need to pay attention to form in developing writing proficiency. Hence, Raimes (1983) proposed a model which is based on a descriptive view. It emphasizes relevance and clarity, planning and organization as well as the mechanics of writing. It is healthy to point out here that writing assessment like language assessment is a complex and rapidly evolving field that has seen significant changes in recent years. Due to the nature of this study, in order to answer the research questions, the researcher benefited from Error Analysis (EA), which is the study and analysis of the errors made by these L2 learners. According to Richards et al. (1992: 96), EA may be carried out in order to: "a) find out how well someone knows the language, b) find out how a person learns a language, and c) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning". Although EA

has been criticised, currently, Ellis (1994: 69) adds that “it is showing signs of making a come-back”. Also he approves that “both the qualitative approach, and the improved quantitative approach to error interpretations, has much to offer SLA” (Ellis, 1994: 70). Moreover, in order to avoid any drawback, the researcher decided to classify punctuation and syntactic errors produced by the respondents.

2.1.5 Error Analysis (EA)

Error analysis is a procedure which involves collecting samples of learners’ language, identifying the errors in the samples, classifying them according to their nature and causes and evaluating their seriousness (Corder, 1967). From the definition of EA, we understand that one of its main aims is to check learners’ language for errors. Previous research has proven that most often, errors in the learner’s productions are cases of language transfer from the L1 to the L2 (Selinker, 1972). However, Corder (1967) revealed that not all errors made by second language learners can be justified by the interference of their first language into the language they are learning. He views second language learners’ errors as a natural, inevitable, integral and important part of the language learning process.

Errors are very important in learners’ language acquisition. Dulay (1982: 138) highlights three ways in which errors are important in language learning. Firstly, they help teachers to know how much progress their learners make. Secondly, errors provide evidence to the researcher on how the second language is acquired and the various learner strategies in the learning of a new language. Thirdly, errors are indispensable to the learner because the making of errors is an indication of learners’ “learning strategies”. In an effort to learn, the learner makes errors which then guide the teacher in the choice of materials.

There are basically two types of errors in the literature: intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors. Intra-lingual errors refer to errors that occur within the L2, while inter-lingual errors refer to errors that occur as a result of negative transfer from L1 to L2. Ogrady et al (1981:310) observe that intra-lingual errors are developmental, since they occur within the L2 system. Intra-lingual errors have been described as a reflection of learners’ competence at a specific level of acquisition (Richards 1974:175). In effect, these errors are found within the structure of the target language through pedagogical and methodological lapses in the process of knowledge transmission.

Ogrady (ibid) considers performance errors as a sub-class of intra-lingual errors. Performance errors are not the effects of incompetence in the target language, but the effect of lapses in the spontaneous flow of speech production as a result of excitement, stress, fear, fatigue, etc. Such an error is temporary and not usually the case in every instance of speech production. Ogrady (ibid) further observed that errors could either be omissive, additive, or substitutive. Omissive errors refer to those errors that involve the exclusion of grammatical elements which may make a word or sentence ungrammatical. For their part, additive errors refer to those errors which involve the insertion of ungrammatical segments in the case of a word, or ungrammatical word for a sentence that may render an entire construction ungrammatical. Substitutive errors refer to the replacement of grammatical structures for ungrammatical ones.

In addition to those discussed above, the following two errors could equally be noted: interference and developmental errors. Interference errors are those produced as a result of the use of elements of one language while writing or speaking another. Developmental errors occur when learners attempt to build up hypothesis about the target language on the basis of limited experiences.

Mbuakoto (2009:22) has identified some errors as typical to the ESL context in Cameroon. Some of these errors include complexities in the target language such as identifying confusables like “counsel” and “council” which are used interchangeably by learners. The inequitable allocation of teachers to different schools accounts greatly for the production of multiple errors in usage. This inequitable allocation of teachers leads to a situation whereby teachers of content subjects such as history and geography are asked to teach English due to the absence of an English teacher. Mbuakoto (ibid) also identified material-induced errors; in this light, she quotes Norrish (1983) who argues that some teaching materials use the present progressive aspect to describe a simple present aspect to describe a simple present tense. In effect, inadequate teaching materials could be a fundamental source of learners’ inability to attain a significant level of English language in our secondary schools.

Summarily, EA is relevant to this study because it provides the basis on which learners’ productions are checked for errors in relation to SBE norms because any deviation from SBE is seen as an error. It is also important because one can easily understand that source(s) of learners’ errors in their writings.

2.2 Review of related literature

Review of Literature is done in three phases: punctuation issues (2.2.1), syntactic issues (2.2.2), and verb tense and form (2.2.3).

2.2.1 Punctuation Issues

If for anything writing is a complicated exercise, it is because of the very stringent rules that must be followed for writing to be readable and sensible. That is why Fontem (2010) opines that it is not enough for students to come up with a beautifully phrased introduction, a well developed body and a well netted conclusion of an essay which is not backed by the correct use of punctuation marks. However, many students consider punctuation in writing as unnecessary “linguistic facts” because writing is a skill which is acquired. Thus the purpose for teaching it in school needs to be defined. (Byrn 1992).

A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (Quirk, et al. 1985), a work which is often cited in discussion of punctuation states that punctuation serves two purposes, separation and specification, and sees the features of punctuation as forming a hierarchy, but does otherwise list a number of reasons for the way punctuation works:

The punctuation mark specifies a grammatical, semantic, or pragmatic function, sometimes in addition to the marking of separation. [So] punctuation practice is governed primarily by grammatical considerations and is related to grammatical distinctions. Sometimes it is linked to intonation, stress, rhythm, pause, or any other of the prosodic features which convey distinctions in speech, but the link is neither simple nor systematic, and traditional attempts to relate punctuation directly to (in particular) pauses are misguided.

There is no attempt here to locate a single principle that underlines the need for punctuation. Instead of seeking a single idea that might lurk behind all punctuation features, they seem to just cobble together a number of current ideas.

The belief that grammar is a model for punctuation is firmly established in Schou (2007). After reviewing some historical documents, he comes to this conclusion:

We have now seen how the discussion of the history of English punctuation theory centres on the role that syntax has played. The general experience is that syntax has been central at least since 1600, although prosody played and still plays a certain part. Punctuation and its theory have moved towards an increasingly syntactic orientation. By examining sources in punctuation theory we have seen that in the seventeenth century, punctuation was grammatical in the sense that it was frequently used to mark boundaries of syntactic units, mainly based on criteria of form.

There are equally some scholars (Clark and Ivancic, 1997:205-207.) who find nothing useful in punctuation and would dispense with it completely:

Punctuation conventions are culturally evolved aids to meaning-making which members of a particular culture have in common, and use as a resource for communicating through written language. However, the particular set of conventions that constitutes the “rules” of punctuation for any culture are nothing other than “conventions”, and are not based on any permanent or universal principles of language. [So], while punctuation conventions can be useful, the conventions themselves have no intrinsic virtue and hence adhering to them should not be treated as a marker of ability.

This seems to give writers carte blanche to do whatever they like with punctuation, a bit severe, it seems, but there is an undercurrent of this idea in the writings of other scholars as well.

Given that we speak quiet often and write occasionally, students tend to neglect the art of writing, talk less of following but according to Byrn (1992), writing serves a pedagogical purposes such as providing learning styles to the learners, providing some tangible evidence for the progress of language acquisition, and serving as a break from oral work. Considering how important writing is, students should as a matter of necessity be enthused with the appropriate use of punctuation marks.

In 1987, Meyer published *A Linguistic Study of American Punctuation*, a book version of his dissertation. The study was limited to American writing and was based on a collection known as the Brown Corpus, from which he selected twelve samples in three styles

totalling 72,000 words. He used the approach of Summey in his 1949 work and intended to only look at “structural punctuation,” which would consist of periods, question marks, exclamation points, commas, dashes, semicolons, colons, and parentheses (Meyer, 1987:xiii). Features like paragraphing, apostrophes, hyphens, brackets, ellipsis, quotation marks, underlining, or other incidental uses of punctuation, in dates, for example, were not included in the study. (By using Summey’s approach, though, some other features that affect graphemes and morphemes were also excluded.)

Five earlier studies were investigated to establish a taxonomy for the study. Those studies produced a list of ideas that punctuation might do: terminate, introduce, separate, enclose, combine, join, and insert. It was decided that, broadly, there are two major concepts at work in punctuation: separating and enclosing. The features that separate are: ? ! : and sometimes – , (Meyer, 1987:4). The features that enclose are: , -- () (Meyer, 1987:6). Boundaries that the features functioned in are: syntactic, prosodic, and semantic (Meyer, 1987:8).

Meyer decided that an important issue to consider had to do with the three functions. “In other words, why does punctuation separate and enclose syntactic, semantic, and prosodic boundaries?” (Meyer, 1987:11.) Meyer decided that American punctuation was conventional and that the uses of the features were dictated by the three boundaries identified (Meyer, 1987:15).

The disappointing aspect of this study, like others, is that once again only some of the features of punctuation found in a text are being looked at and assessed for their use. No attempt is made to locate a single, underlying reason for punctuation in the first place. Part of the problem is that so little information about the linguistic aspects of punctuation is available. We can imagine that Meyer did the best he could with what was at hand by preparing a taxonomy from sources that were both reasonable and available.

According to Crystal (1995) there are many punctuation marks and the most commonly used is the full stop (.). It is used at the end of a declarative sentence and at the end of an imperative sentence. To him, most students see the full stop as the easiest punctuation mark to use in order for them to understand what they are writing, irrespective of where it is placed. It is renowned for students to write and construct sentences which are ungrammatical leading to a syntactic error known as fragments (a verbless sentence). Still, it

has been noted that a majority of students who make these kinds of errors pay little or no attention to punctuation; they focus rather on the content. Thus, the need to intensify the teaching of punctuations in secondary schools and at all level of education in Cameroon.

Perhaps the most referenced book on punctuation, one which also appeared close to the end of the twentieth century, was *The Linguistics of Punctuation* (1990) Nunberg. Like other writers on the subject, Nunberg laments the treatment punctuation has received, even at the hand of other linguists, and supports the study of it and writing, saying that it “should no longer be necessary to defend the view that writing is truly language . . .” (Nunberg, 1990:3). He argues that “punctuation is in fact a linguistic subsystem, and hence to be considered as part of the wider system of written language” (Nunberg, 1990:7). Furthermore, “viewed as a whole, the system has no analogue in the spoken language . . . except for a few overlapping devices,” and should be thought of “as a part of the study of graphical representation in general” (Nunberg, 1990:9).

Nunberg focuses on general kinds of writing below the level of the paragraph and puts aside special items like block quotes and bulleted lists. He sets up two grammars to makes his points in the discussion that follows: a text grammar (which is a form that relates to discourse analysis) and a lexical grammar (“which is responsible to describe the dependencies that obtain among lexical items in the text”) (Nunberg, 1990:19). From this point on, he really deals with only what he calls the “text-sentence” and defines it as “that unit of written text that is customarily presented as bracketed by a capital letter and a period . . .” (Nunberg, 1990:22). In other words, it could be a phrase, a NP + VP sentence, or some variety of compounded sentence(s)

In general, Nunberg’s work involves the “how” of punctuation more than the “why.” The different punctuation points operate and interact according to sets of rules he mostly invented. His approach involves mainly discourse and the sentence in particular. Nowhere is there a mention of a phoneme or a morpheme. But his discussion of absorbtion rules stands out as a valuable concept. It is a concept that never seems to be found in indexes to help people understand why one feature of punctuation is allowed to swallow another.

The most recent book involving a study of punctuation is *Punctuation as a Means of Medium-Dependent Presentation Structure in English* (Patt 2013). Patt cites a variety of

scholars who took the position that punctuation is essentially rhetorical, thus opening the door to a discussion of punctuation from that point of view. Punctuation marks, we are told, “can be understood as ‘indices’ in a basic semiotic sense. They predominantly convey paralinguistic material” (Patt, 2013:10).

The orthographic sentence plays an important role in Patt’s analyses, just as it has in some others. Punctuation marks “should, at least partly, function as graphic sign posts, whose choice and placement facilitates the decoding (and processing) of the structural arrangement of a given text” (Parr, 2013:88). A major part of the book is devoted to seeing how the features of punctuation interact with the language in many situations and how they influence the meaning in those places. The presentation structure is being diagnosed in these locations, but we need to be careful because “a punctuation mark does therefore not have a specific, decontextualized meaning” (Patt, 2013:275).

In his final pages, Patt confesses that “punctuation marks predominantly convey paralinguistic information” and “the communicative value of punctuation marks is not (completely) predetermined by fixed conventions, but within a given framework . . .” (Patt, 2013:275). Patt believes his approach “moves away from a static rule-based description towards a more dynamic, context-based interpretation of punctuation” (Patt, 2013:277). To others, however, it might just resemble a somewhat complex discussion of style.

According to Parkes (1993), the development of punctuation took place in several stages paired up with the development of the written medium. Each stage’s reader group required different demands to be satisfied, thus affecting the marks and their functions. Some grammarians saw writing as a means for silently conveying meaning to the reader (Parkes, 1993, p. 21).

When writing went beyond the boundaries of the monasteries and the clergy, and began to be used for secular poses, economy and speed in reading became more important (Levinson, 1985, p. 38). Writing started to use punctuation to bring out the relationship between the grammatical constituents of the sentence. The orthographic sentence became the fundamental information unit presented to the reader in an essay-to-understand manner (Levinson, 1985, p. 157)

Thus, it is important to view punctuation from a linguistic, and even from a semiotic point of view such as in Harris (1995). Harris does not take a writing system as being simply project from speech. Rather, in his work, written signs are analysed according to the types of activity (forming, processing, and interpretation) they are involved.

Style guides and grammar books (Ehrlich, 1992; McDermott, 1990; Partridge, 1953) in general, give a prescriptive account of punctuation. In the applied linguistic arena there are mostly works relating to learn-ability. Scholes and Willis (1990) recite an experiment where university students, when asked to read a text aloud, interpret punctuation marks as elocutionary even when the marks had other meaning changing effects.

Levinson (1985) essentially offers a historical perspective on the development of punctuation marks. She sees two serious flaws in recent works on punctuation. One is the idea that “Punctuation marks syntax”. The other is the idea that “The fundamental entity which determines punctuation is the sentence. She observes a potential circularity in that in trying to establish rules according to the distribution of punctuation, the rules require a prior notion of sentence; yet a clear definition of sentence is based on punctuation marks, namely the capital letters and the period. She proposes to free oneself from the circularity by separating the grammatical sentence from the orthographic one. She claims that relating punctuation to syntax may stem from the fact that it is easier to do so. Relating it with other linguistics features such as intonation contour or semantic concepts would be more difficult. She proposes to view the orthographic sentence as an “informational grouping” based on (but distinct from) syntactic structure and specified by rules of punctuation (not grammar). She goes on to describe the linguistic units she uses for this purpose (i.e., proper clause structure and sentence partials) and gives a classification of the actual grouping. Sentence partials like adverbial clauses and tenseless verb phrases, as Levinson sees them, do not classify as proper clauses.

A recent natural language understanding system that takes punctuation into account is the Constraint Grammar developed by Karlsson(1994) and his colleagues. Constraint Grammar is an effort for morphological and syntactic parsing of language-independent, unrestricted text. Karlsson et al. combine a grammar-based approach with optional heuristics, when the former fails. One of the goals of their framework is simplification of parsing through the use of typographical features such as punctuation, case (of letters), and make-up

(of texts). Also, in recognising subjects, punctuation marks such as dashes to the left of a finite verb dramatically decrease the probability of the preceding word to be a subject.

Dale (1991a:1991b) raises questions about what roles punctuation plays within discourse structure. He points out the relationship among lexical markers, punctuation marks, and graphical markers (such as paragraph breaks or lists) within the structure of written text. Punctuation marks are not openly linguistic as cue words nor openly layout oriented such as lists but they at times perform similar functions. He observes that many uses of certain marks (colon, semicolon, dash, parentheses, comma) act as signals of discourse structure usually within the orthographic sentence level. This justifies the need of a discourse theory that should be able to operate below and above the orthographic sentence level. Particularly, Dale states the punctuation underdetermines rhetorical relations in a text since the same marks can be used for different relations (as noted by Nunberg). This urges Dale to consider the possibility of taking a syntactic view of punctuation within discourse. This might involve, for example, determining whether one segment serves as a precondition for another without assigning exact coherence relations.

Pascual and Virbel (1996) analyse the “textual” punctuation marks in text understanding and generation, from a semantic point of view. They call certain entities textual objects and define a textual architecture by means of metasentence that describe the positional, typographical, and speech-act based relations between those objects distinguished by textual punctuation marks.

Cruttenden (1986) explains that for many uses of punctuation there is no intonational equivalent. Some exceptional uses usually correlate with the boundaries of a separate intonation group such as a pair of comma in parenthetical use. He claims that the often unnecessary usage of comma between the subject and the predicate of the clause occurs from such a coincidence.

Bolinger (1989) has investigated the relationships of intonation to discourse and grammar. He finds out that intonation and grammar are pragmatically interdependent, but this interdependence is not a strict one. He gives examples where punctuation marks help clarify the intonation, but in written text intonational information is bound to be lost even with punctuation. “I told the doctor I was sick!” would certainly be read with different intonation if one knows it is written on a tombstone Bolinger (1989). He concludes that “punctuation

units” (stretches of language between punctuation marks) can be considerably longer than “intonation unit” of speech due to the nature of writing as illustrated below

Quotation marks (“ ”) are punctuation marks used to enclosed the direct words of the speaker or writer. A direct quotation usually begins with a capital letter and is set off from the rest of the sentence by a comma. As a rule words, or phrases following marked, designated, named cited as classified, entitled have to be enclosed but words and expressions following known as, called, do not have to be enclosed unless the expression is a slang G.P.O. (1984)

Hyphen (-) is a within- word punctuation mark, used to mark compound or to attach a prefix where there might be ambiguity about how to pronounce it. To Howard (2005),the use of hyphen is an area of language undergoing change and usage is currently highly variable like the comma, as the dash is used both to enclose and separate. Ebbitt and Ebbitt (1992) suggest a useful philosophy towards using the dash. “if used spacingly, the dash suggests a definite tone, often a note of surprise or an emphasis equivalent to a mild exclamation. It uses regularly in a place of a comma, colon and semi colons; it loses all its effectiveness and become a sloppy substitute for conventional punctuation.

The colon (:) is another punctuation mark that causes a problem in writing. It can be used to introduce a list especially after expressions like as “as follows” and “the following”. A colon has the same separating force as the full stop and according to Bernstein (1981), it brings a sentence almost to halt. The Chicago press 1982 and Skillen et al (1974) also agree that when the introduction is a displayed list, it is not a complete sentence, no colon is used. Also a colon may be used to introduce a direct rotation particularly if the quote is long (more than a sentence), or not built closely into the sentence (Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1982). It is for this reason that Strunk (2006) is of the opinion that lapses in the mastery of colon results in the construction of semantically deficient sentences like fragments and run- on sentence.

Closely related to the colon is the semi colon (;). It sometimes plays the role of the comma separating items in a series especially closely related independent clauses or sentences. The semi-colon denoted nearly a full stop; thus its uses are as much a matter of personal choice as of a correct punctuation (Ebbitt 1997). Due to the communicative tendency in English language, the teaching of only the oral aspects is common in most English language classroom while neglecting writing especially punctuation and essays. This is because most teachers consider writing as a difficult exercise. Thus, the misuse of semi colon

arises due to the arbitrariness with which students apply it (Ritter 2005). Samuel (1999) opines that most often students find themselves in a dilemma, not knowing which one (semi colon or full stop) to use. In such cases learners usually uses the full stop, causing the direct link between the two parts of a sentence to be lost.

As regards the apostrophe (‘), it has two uses to show ownerships of relationships and to show where letters have been omitted in a contraction... the distinction between plural and singular possessives is the function of writing alone... that inexperienced writers somehow fancy the apostrophe and use it idiosyncratically when a word ends in “s” or when they wish to indicate plurals (three book’s); that the apostrophe serves another function that omission of letters in contractions like “can’t” and “it’s”, is clear reason why the correct use of possessive form seems such an extraordinary puzzle to beginning writers (Wiener 1981) .

An even greater problem in punctuation has to do with the use of the comma (,). A comma in the wrong place can distort meaning and curiously enough, comma seems to be a myth and students apparently apply this punctuation mark in writing with some degree of scepticism. According to (McCaskill 1998), the comma is the only punctuation marks students use sparingly in writing and those who dare, no doubt ends up using it wrongly. To add to this, Swan (1995) stipulates that many students who shy away from using colon in writing ,tend to seek refuge with the use (though misuse) of the comma .When confronted with the choice of which punctuation mark to use is sentence construction , students tend to adopt comma as the most preferably punctuation mark. Paradoxically, students’ usage of this punctuation mark betrays their improper mastery and this account for the superfluity of comma related errors like comma splices and run-ons sentence inherent in students’ writes-up

Furthermore, capitalization stands out as another punctuation mark. This refers to the proper use of letters in the upper case. Every sentence in English normally has to begin with a capital letter for it to be grammatical. According to Wiener (1998), students face capitalized -related problems. These problems arise from students in ability to determine sentence boundaries, proper nouns and important words in the subjects of writing. Supplementary to this McCaskill (1998) it is common place to find scripts where students at their whim capitalize some important words in the subjects of essay writing. The caprice with which students can handle this punctuation mark either signals uncertainty, negligence or impatience with such stringent linguistic demand on their part. It is therefore not unexpected that capitalization towers the list of punctuation problems students share.

According to G.P.O. (1984), it is difficult to give rules that will cover every conceivable problem in capitalization. Actually, what is capitalized is mostly a matter of editorial style and preference rather than a matter of generally accepted rules. Added to this, though there is a clearly recognized rule requiring capitalization of proper nouns and proper adjectives, opinion differ concerning what a proper noun is, so that the important goal should be consistently within a particular document.

2.2.2 Syntactic Issues

According to Lebe (2001), students learning English in Cameroon face syntactic problems in writing. This can be seen in the use of English auxiliary verbs by learners of English. He reveals that the informants could use effectively the present continuous and the present perfect continuous but they faced a lot of difficulties using the future continuous, the past perfect continuous, the past continuous, the future perfect continuous and the passive voice. They could use the verb „to do in the present tense and past tense in declarative structures but had some problems in interrogative and negative sentences. He mentioned the textbooks as one of the source of the blunders but also students inabilities to understand their lessons, poor motivation and incompetent and untrained teachers. Hence with all these difficulties, it becomes a bigger problem to put it in writings most especially in essay writing. Wochiwo (2009) goes in the same line and adds that the mistakes of learners can be attributed to the fact that the first language of the learner often acts as a draw back for the student s to understand the language since it directly or indirectly influence the learners’ use of certain tenses like the present perfect. Dayang (2005) found that some students who are poorly taught the English language “underused prepositions because of a lack of motivation on their part, whereas motivated students who used these prepositions encountered problems in their use because of the misunderstanding of their use due to poor teaching methods. Other authors investigated into some grammatical problems of Francophones learners of the English language in Cameroon like Etame (2005), Fornkwa (2013).

As Choroleeva (2011) says, there are modifications to word order attributable to the influence of French, most often illustrated in the placement of adjectives after nouns in noun phrases. In French, most adjectives go after the word they modify. Such word order is not typical of English where few clichéd phrases denoting diplomatic ranks feature nouns in the primary position. Most English sentences conform to the SVO word order. This means that the subject comes before the verb, which comes before the object, this pattern is the same in

French but we still noticed some difficulties at the sentence level and of the correct adjective order. Consider this sentence, *On the 1st of January, I visited my friends old from secondary school. We were all happy and we talked about our schools.* In the above example, the adjective is describing the noun ‘friend’ so in this case it has to be in front: old friends.

Grammar is very important in the understanding of a second language. However, most Cameroonian learners of English as a foreign language view the study of grammar as boring and not beneficial (Sokeng, 2006, Tagne, 2011). Even though Cameroonian students’ general expectations from English for Academic Purpose are very high (Tagne, 2011), they find English grammatical rules intricate and they prefer to copy notes from other students. One of the misconceptions among students is the belief that without mastering most English grammatical rules they will not be able to communicate in English

Examples of the grammatical types of errors all drawn directly from the following

2.2.3 Verb Tense and Form

The most common type of problems students face in the learning English is Verb tense and form. It has been revealed that thought the term “verb” as easy as it make be due to its four letters continue to a nightmare to most students learning English in the secondary schools. The tenses most commonly misused were the simple present tense, past tense, future tense, past perfect and the progressive. A typical problem is the wrong choice of tense. To add to this most learners of the English language find themselves in different region of the country especially in the centre region. Due to this they find pleasure in integrating themselves into the French language and give less prominence to the English language. There are frequent occasions where learners use a different tense to convey a particular meaning in English. Misuse of the simple present tense in the third person singular is the one mostly highlighted. Below are some examples:

- 1) When strangers come, my brother *go* to buy drinks for everybody. Me, I serve food.
- 2) Christmas *collocate* with food, fun and enjoyment. It is the period I prefer in the year.
- 3) We prayed God that he *keep* our family. We also pray for the new year.

In the above examples, the students have poorly used the simple present tense because they have not added the –s in the third person. The correct answers are: “goes” for the first sentence, then “collocates” and “keeps” .Also, learners tend to use the present perfect instead of the simple past or the past progressive instead of or the present perfect progressive, or they simply miss all as shown below:

4) *I have been spent* my own holidays in the village with my grand-mother.

In this example, students try to express an event that took place in the past with an emphasis on the fact and not the duration, in this case, the simple past was more adequate. The sentence should read: I spent my own holidays in the village with my grand-mother.

At the international level many recent publications have been published on the errors of learners of English as a foreign language (Etame 2005). Sarko (2008) discusses the morphophonological or syntactic transfer in the acquisition of articles by Syrian Arabic speakers. He finds that in an ESL context, there is the transfer of L1 syntactic properties into their L2 grammar. Isabelli-García and Slough (2012) goes further by distinguishing the mean rate of missed obligatory use of the definite article which are cultural, situation, structural and textual. They affirm that time spent studying the English non-generic definite article does increase accuracy rates across all these categories. Al-Badawi (2012) analyses the phonetic, morphological and syntactic errors in English of some Saudi BA students. His results reveal that most syntactic errors committed by these students can be attributed to a lack of L2 knowledge: 42.5% of the sample violated subject–verb agreement in noun phrases due to lack of knowledge of the plural system of English nouns, 57.5% failed to use the adverbial because due to lack of knowledge of cause–effect adverbial clauses, 50% failed to use the indefinite article (a/an) due to lack of awareness that each noun phrase must be preceded by a determiner, and 70% erroneously substituted the indefinite article (a/an) for the definite article (the). A significant number also used certain prepositions incorrectly due the absence of certain adverbs of place in Arabic (57.5%). A second group failed to use the correct time sequence due to lack of awareness that all the verbs in a time sequence in a sentence must carry the same tense as that of the first verb (50%). A third group failed to use (50%) or erroneously repeated (27.5%) the auxiliary be due to the absence of this auxiliary in Arabic. A fourth group failed to use the restrictive relative pronoun who after the noun phrase due to lack of awareness that each noun phrase that constitutes a clause in the embedded position must be followed by a relative pronoun (40%) and a last group added another noun phrase of

the same category to the subject of a sentence (30%). Mungungu (2010) investigated into the writing of ESL of Namibian learners. He reveals that native speakers of Afrikaans, Silozi and Oshiwambo had difficulties with English spelling, tenses, prepositions and articles respectively. On a whole, it can be said that, these kinds of errors are common among learners who do not have enough language skills to express what they want to say in a comprehensible way.

Kameni (2004) posits that the study of interrogatives has been the centre of interest to many researchers, national and international alike, though; each researcher has his/her point of focus with regards to the subject. Generally speaking, most scholars have tried to describe patterns of inaccuracies committed by Cameroonians as they engage in conversation and writings in English. This indicates that they have attempted a description of Cameroon English (CamE) both at the segmental and at the supra segmental levels. It is worth noting that Angawah (1997) reviews the ways students in some Anglophone schools in Cameroon use tags in English. Her results showed that students were unable to form proper tags in English. According to her, students face a lot of challenges in using the rules that govern the formation of tags due to the poor mastery of the language. Kwansuh (2002) handling four interrogatives structures: tag, wh, yes/no and emphatic questions and using (form 5) students of Lycee de Mendong, his findings revealed that students face problems in understanding and in giving response to these question types because of lack of motivation and bad teaching method. He holds that most teachers use the teacher centred approach in teaching these students which hinders cooperative learning and learning initiative

According to Lachi (1997) students' ability to provide appropriate answers to questions is also a big problem. In carrying out her research, she uses question types such as Yes/no questions, wh questions and tag questions. Lum (2003) set out to examine question formation in CamE with close reference to the speech of some selected Cameroonian speakers of English particularly form 5 students at lycee de Biyem- Assi. Dealing with purely Anglophone students, her study revealed that question formation by these students deviates drastically from the British Norms. She attributes this to the poor teaching methods, poor motivation and a general lack of mastery of the language rules. Lastly, Etanow (2008) carried out an investigation of the use of interrogatives by francophone learners of English. Unlike her predecessors, she handled advanced learner "Terminale students" of a commercial and industrial school. Hence, she goes out of grammar schools to see what obtains in commercial

and industrial schools. She found out that these students equally perform poor in interrogatives like their fellows in grammar schools. The teaching method in this school is “deplorable”. There is a total lack of interest and motivation. Looking at the findings above student are likely to be dormant in English lessons given that there is the neglect of some of the four skills.

Parrot (2000) postulates that in relation to nouns, learners sometimes face difficulties with the pluralisation of nouns; using plural nouns as though they were singular, choosing the wrong plural form, and using plural nouns as though they were uncountable. In relation to verbs, learners face difficulties in inflecting verbs to indicate the various verb tenses. This leads them into mixing up tenses, for example, using the present perfect for the past simple and vice versa. This problem is more serious with irregular verbs. Previous research on English learners’ has revealed that they face similar difficulties with the morphology of English nouns and verbs. Ntankeu (1998) analyses English essays of form 5 students of Mballa 2 and comes out with findings showing that these students over-generalize the use of the *-ed* morpheme as a past tense marker to irregular verbs and some of them omit the *-s* morpheme to indicate the third person singular in the present tense. Njenga (1994) reveals that students in most schools in Yaoundé face difficulties in inflecting verbs to indicate the various verb tenses; that is, ignoring or misusing the four inflectional suffixes that indicate tense (*-s*, *-ed*, *-en*, and *-ing*). According to him, these students also in some cases ignore the use of the *-s* morpheme to indicate plurality in nouns and also over generalize the use of the *-s* morpheme to indicate plurality with irregular nouns.

Neba (2002) observes that the manipulation of irregular noun and verb related to inflectional morphology in English. He observes that students forcefully inflect noun and verb in order suit the context thereby leading to redundancy of the addition of *-s* morpheme in the plural forms of irregular nouns, instead of an internal change. In general, the errors identified stem from the wrong verb, noun and adjective inflectional morphology. Some inflectional affixes are used when they are not supposed to be. This mostly involves the formation of the past and plural forms of irregular verbs and nouns respectively.

Kameni (2004) in an investigation of the problems encountered in the use of English by second year engineering students of Ecole Nationale Supérieure Polytechnique, uses questionnaires and tests to come out with the findings revealing that these students face problems mainly with the morphology of verbs. A greater percentage of them face difficulties

in using the third person present singular *-s*, the *-ing* form, the past participle forms and the past simple forms.

According to Buckley (2003), comma splices often arise when writers use conjunctive adverbs to separate two independent clauses instead of using a coordinating conjunction. He also adds that a conjunctive adverb and a comma is not strong to separate two independent clauses and creates a comma splice. Although they are acceptable in some languages and compulsory in others, comma splices are generally considered errors in English. However, Stunk and White (2007) note that comma splices are sometimes acceptable when the clauses are short and alike in form such as the famous sentence *I came, I saw, I conquered*.

Fowler (1996) notes a number of examples by reputable authors:

We are all accustomed to the... conjoined sentences that turn up from our less literate friends... curiously, this habit of writing comma-joined sentences is not uncommon in both older and present day fiction, modern examples are *I have the bed still, it is in every way suitable for the old house where I live now* (E. Jolley); *Marcus... was of course already quite a famous man Ludens had even heard of him from friends at Cambridge* (I. Murdoch).

Lynne (2003) observes that so many highly respected writers observe the splice comma that a rather unfair rule emerges on this one: only do it if you are famous. It is worth mentioning that comma splices are also acceptable in passages of spoken dialogue, and are sometimes used deliberately to emulate spoken language more closely.

According to Haiston et al (1998), some grammarians exclude comma splices from the definition of a run-on sentence though this does not imply that the usage is acceptable. It is necessary to note that the various ancient languages of literary use run-on sentences were unheard of since no punctuation existed.

English spelling is notoriously difficult to master for native speakers and language learners alike Klima (1964). He states that because English developed from several different language families, and because it so easily absorbs new words from other languages even today, the English language has many different ways to spell the same sound and many different ways to pronounce the same spelling. But improving your English spelling is not impossible: with

some patience, you will see a noticeable improvement in your spelling by using some techniques that good spellers use.

Though memory aids are useful for memorizing difficult-to-spell words, good spellers never rely solely on memory: they depend on a reliable, up-to-date dictionary. There are many kinds of dictionaries available, both in print and online. Some of your instructors will have strong preferences about spelling conventions (preferring Canadian over American spelling, for example), while others will accept any standard spelling. Most dictionaries identify all standard spellings, but Canadian dictionaries give preferred Canadian spellings before other variants.

An English dictionary designed for English language learners, such as Longman's *Dictionary of Contemporary English* or Oxford's *Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, can be very helpful for non-native speakers. These dictionaries give more information and often many more examples of words in context to help students select and use words appropriately.

In general, Canadians use both British and American spellings. While Canadians generally prefer the British *-our* ending in words like *honour* and *colour*, for example, the American *-or* endings for these common words are also acceptable. The same is true of the *-re/-er* endings of words like *centre/center* and *theatre/theater*: Canadians generally prefer the British *-re*, but the American *-er* is acceptable. On the other hand, Canadians often follow the American convention of using *-ize* rather than *-ise* endings for words like *theorize* or *hypothesize*, but *-ise* would not be considered incorrect. The key is to remain consistent in your choices throughout a single document. You should not, for example, combine both *-ize* and *-ise* forms in the same document.

2.2.4 Prospects of the study

The present work is related to previous works in that it examines the use of the various punctuation marks in students' writings. We have so far examined different works by different researchers who have researched on specific aspects of grammar usage by different levels of students. Given the fact that we have not yet had any work that handles punctuation and syntactic issues in expository essays, there is need to carry out such a study in order to relate oneself to the students need and ameliorate the hurdles.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology adopted for this study. It describes the sample population, instrument of data collection, procedure of data collection and method of data analysis.

3.1 Population of the Study

This population of study was made up of secondary schools students in the English sub-system of education. The sample was made up of 90 Form Five students from Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé, Government Bilingual Practicing High school Yaoundé and Government Bilingual High School Mendong. Form Five students were chosen on the basis that they have been exposed to and taught the English language for at least eleven years: six in primary school and five in secondary school.

3.2 Instrument of Data Collection

The instrument that was used in the collection of data was a production test. The production test was on free writing. As the topic of the dissertation spells out, focus was on expository essay. Hence, two topics were given for students to make a choice and write an essay of between 250 to 300 words. The topics were:

Traditional marriage

Explain how the computer has changed the lives of students.

3.3 Procedure of Data Collection

The production test was drafted and presented to the supervisor for correction and endorsement. After cross-checking and adoption of the test, the researcher set out to the field for administration. This test, just as the scope stipulates, was destined for Form Five students in three different schools in Yaounde to elicit specific data. Since there were more than two Form Fives in each of the schools ear-marked, two Form Five classes were randomly selected in each of these schools. After identifying the Form Five classes in a school, they were

labelled on pieces of papers. These pieces of paper were folded shuffled and thrown on a table. Two of these folded and shuffled pieces of papers were randomly selected to choose the Form Five classes to administer the production test to.

After this stage, the teachers teaching the selected Form Five classes were contacted and permission was sought to give out their class hour for the test to be administered. Each of the teachers informed the students and helped in the administration of the test in each of the classes. After administering the test in each of the schools, ninety (90) scripts were randomly selected for analysis. The procedure used was that after every two scripts, a script was chosen as a sampled script.

3.4 Method of data analysis

The sampled scripts were analysed with focus on the use of punctuation marks, on the one hand, and syntactic uses, on the other. The data collected were categorized in term of the deviate use of punctuation marks and novel syntactic issues with regards to the parameter settings of the English language. This was followed by the description of the features identified in the data.

3.5 Difficulties Encountered

There were a couple of difficulties that were encountered in the course of this project. The work would have been better handled if there had been a number of resources available.

The students were not willing to write the test because they thought it was a waste of time. In GBPHS Yaoundé, the moment I wrote the instruction on the board, some students started leaving the classroom. The discipline master had to intervene and even at that, not all the students who had left the classroom came back. The students in GBHS Mendong and GBHS Yaoundé were hesitant to do take the test saying that they don't have time to write an essay of 250 words. Their Language teachers stepped in and warned them to write the test. They took out time to supervise the students as they wrote.

Finance was also one of the handicaps to this project. There was not enough money to register in some of the libraries around. Information was gathered from a few of the libraries and most of the textbooks used were borrowed from friends.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology adopted for this study. It has presented the description of the target population, instrument of data collection, procedure of data collection and method of data analysis. The next chapter presents data analyses and results.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, AND RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected from the field. The focus here is on punctuation and syntactic issues that were identified in the field.

4.1 Punctuation issues

Of the 90 scripts sampled, it was observed that the students used punctuation marks such as: the full stop, the semicolon, the colon, the comma, the apostrophe, the inverted commas and the hyphen. The students poorly used the semicolon and the colon in their construction and this could be attributed to their ignorance of the rules that govern the use of such punctuation marks. Though our informants made use of commas and hyphens, we noticed that these two punctuation marks were sometimes wrongly used. The inverted commas were used appropriately in the essays of the students we sampled. An analysis of the errors in the use of the punctuation marks in the essays will be presented below.

4.1.1 Arbitrary use of punctuation marks

The comma is a very important but puzzling punctuation mark as it plays several roles in the written discourse. Commas tell the reader where to pause. Commas also separate phrases, ideas, and items in a list. The comma also helps avoid confusion. The students had untold difficulties in using the comma. All the students we sampled abundantly used the comma in their essays. These commas, as we mentioned above was sometime used wrongly. Some instances of wrong usage of the comma are illustrated below.

5)

- a) In some way it has changed the reasoning faculty of student, it makes them think less.
- b) A marriage is a union between a man and a woman, who come together to build up a family

Considering sentence *a*), it can be broken down into 2 independent or main clause. The 1st clause is “In some...student” and the 2nd “It...less”. When two or more independent clauses

are written side by side, they should be linked up by a semi colon (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1988) if they are therefore linked up by a comma, it becomes a mistake known as comma splice as illustrated above.

Sentence *b*) also illustrates another usage of the comma which has been flouted. As a matter of fact, commas are used to set up appositive or parenthetical information. In this sentence, we have an example of parenthetical information as the relative clause “who come...family” merely sheds light on the 1st part of the sentence. This clause can be elided without affecting the meaning of the sentence. The accepted version of these expressions could be as follow.

AV

- a) In some way, it has changed the reasoning faculty of some students; it makes them think less.
- b) A marriage is a union between a man and a woman ,who come together to build up a family.

The apostrophe is another commonly misused form of punctuation. The apostrophe has two main uses: to show ownership through the genitive case and to show missing letters in contractions. Misplaced apostrophe can cause confusion for the readers. The examples below will illustrate how the apostrophe can cause confusion for the reader if used incorrectly in a sentence.

6)

- a) I use my fathers computer during the weekends to do research.
- b) The brides compound is well decorated.

AV

- a) I use my father’s computer during the weekends to do research.
- b) The bride’s compound is well decorated.

The hyphen has a couple of usages but the one that was prominently used by the students was between the syllables of a word, especially when divided at the end of a line of text. In other words, the students used the hyphen when the word is too long to fit in one row

of writing. It should be recalled that long words are broken into parts and or into syllables. From the scripts sampled, some students used it arbitrarily. Some of these instances are presented below.

7)

- a) Also, traditional marriages help some men to know their left and right by not taking people's children and staying with, without visiting their parents or offering a bottle of wine to the family.
- b) The computer is an electronic device used in storing and retrieving of information for future use.

In the examples above, the students know that a hyphen has to be used at the end of a line to divide words but the students do not know that in dividing this word, they need to take into consideration its syllables. The student divides the word without taking this into consideration, thus, using the hyphen in an erroneous way

AV

- a) Also, traditional marriages help some men to know their left and right by not taking people's children and staying with, without visiting their parents or offering a bottle of wine to the family.
- b) The computer is an electronic device used in storing and retrieving of information for future use.

A full stop is generally used at the end of a declarative sentence. The full stop is the most commonly used punctuation mark in the English language. To avoid confusion, one must use the full stop at the end of every declarative sentence. It was observed that most of the students constructed sentences putting the full stop where it was not supposed to be. Below are sample sentences drawn from the students' essays.

8)

- a) In our village, the man's family is welcome. In a special way they must have food to eat and where to sleep because they are visitors.
- b) Some other students use the internet to scam. Whiteman and steal money from them.

In this sentences above, the students have placed a full stop in an inappropriate position altering the meaning of the sentence. A sentence must convey a meaning and must begin with a capital letter and end with any of the end punctuation signs.

AV

- a) In our village, the man's family is welcome in a special way. They must have food to eat and where to sleep because they are visitors.
- b) Some other students use the internet to scam Whiteman and steal money from them.

One of the most common uses of the colon is to warn the reader about a list ahead. It was realised that most of the students used the colon in the wrong form from the scripts sampled. This will be illustrated below.

9)

- a) Despite the advantages of traditional marriages, there also so many demerits: traditional marriages are disadvantageous in that it makes the woman's husband to spend a lot.
- b) Traditional marriages are advantageous in the following ways: Both couples are bound to be husband and wife.

The colon has been wrongly used by the student in sentence 9) a) above. The colon as mentioned above is to warn the reader of a list ahead. In the construction above, there is no list and this explains why the usage of the colon is erroneous. From example 9) b) above the student has wrongly used the colon. The student has made the colon function in this sentence as a period.

AV

- a) Despite the advantages of traditional marriage, there also so many demerits; traditional marriages are disadvantageous in that they make the woman's husband spend a lot.
- b) One of the advantages of traditional marriages is that the couples are bound to be husband and wife.

It was discovered that most students who used the inverted commas used it to indicate the unusual or foreign status of a word. A foreign word is supposed to be put in inverted commas in order for the reader to understand the meaning in context. Some student spelt some words wrongly and put in inverted commas thinking it is a foreign word. Here are some examples to illustrate this claim.

10)

- a) 'rapa'
- b) "drummer"

In the case of 10) a), the student has wrongly spelt the word. Instead of wrapper, the student spelt it as *rappa* and put it in inverted commas. This is to show that the student does not only have a spelling problem but also to show that the student thinks that the word is not an English word, which off course is not the case here. In 10) b), the student has a different understanding of the word *drummer*. To him, drummer is the instrument whereas in SBE, drummer is the person who plays the drum. Hence, the student has used the inverted commas in the wrong context. This could be blamed on the influence of Pidgin English.

AV

- a) Wrapper
- b) Drummer

Capitalisation refers to the proper use of letters in the upper case which signal the beginning of new sentences; distinguish proper nouns, proper adjectives, the personal pronoun "I", names of institutions and geographical names among others. The inability to

determine where sentences begin, figure out proper nouns/adjectives are faults related to the misuse of the capitalisation.

From the scripts we sampled, some students failed to use the capital letters at the beginning of sentences. Others used the upper case in the middle of a sentence and some did not capitalise proper nouns. Below are some examples relating to the arbitrary use of the capital letter.

11)

- a) Nowadays, the computer plays a great role in our society for communication, for research and even Education.
- b) The computer has changed the lives of students in many ways that is either positively and Negatively.
- c) Furthermore, Some Students use the Computer to misbehave.

In the sentences above, students have used the capital letter in the middle of their sentences, thus deviating from the standard norms. This shows that the use of capitalisation possess a problem to many students.

AV

- a) Nowadays, the computer plays a great role in our society for communication, research and even education.
- b) The computer has changed the lives of students in many ways that is either positively or negatively.
- c) Furthermore, some students use the computer to do mischievous things

4.1.2 Omission of Punctuation Marks

There were instances where students failed to use the punctuation marks in their essays. It is evidently clear that once there is an omission of a punctuation mark in a construction, the meaning of that construction becomes questionable. The omissions of these punctuation marks in the students essay are presented below.

As earlier mentioned, the comma is a very important but puzzling punctuation mark as it plays several roles in the written discourse. Commas tell the reader where to pause. Commas also separate phrases, ideas, and items in a list. The comma also helps avoid confusion. So, if a comma is omitted in a sentence there will be a lot of confusion in getting the exact meaning of that construction. Let's examine the following examples.

11)

- a) In this case they can get all the timetable and study.
- b) So it will lead to the husband's security in the sense that he will not be accused of kidnapping

In 11) a) above, the student has failed to separate the disjunct 'from the rest of the sentence therefore making it faulty. The coordinating conjunction "so" in 11) b) functions as an adverbial as it gives the consequence of something. Like any other adverbial fronted in the sentence, it should be followed by a comma

AV

- a) In this case, they can get all the timetable and study.
- b) So, it will lead to the husband's security in the sense that he will not be accused of kidnapping.

The fact that some students neglect the use of the apostrophe can cause confusion for the readers. The examples below will illustrate how the apostrophe can cause confusion for the reader if omitted in a sentence.

13)

- a) The couple went to the chief palace
- b) The girl friends were with the girl in her room.

As mentioned before, the apostrophe basically has two main uses: to show ownership through the genitive case and to show missing letters in contractions. From the constructions above, the students have neglected the use of the apostrophe to show ownership.

AV

- a) The couple went to the chief's palace.
- b) The girl's friends were with the girl in her room.

Some students omitted the use of the hyphen at the end of a line of text. Here are some examples.

14)

- a) The traditional marriage is been done in the vill
age.
- b) The parents of the girl will stand to greet the chief and all the impor
tant people around will address the people present in brief.

From the sentences above, we discover that the students have omitted the use of the hyphen to show that the word *village* has been divided at the end of the line, as well as the word *important*.

AV

- a) The traditional marriage is done in the vill-
age.
- b) The parents of the girl will stand to greet the chief and all the impor-
tant people around will address the people present in brief.

When it came to using the hyphen in compound words, few students omitted it. They sometimes wrote compound words without a hyphen, and sometimes they wrote the words separately.

15)

- a) Brother in law

- b) Inlaw

AV

- a) Brother-in-law
- b) In-law

It was observed that most of the students wrote long sentences without putting the full stop, thus making reading and understanding very difficult. Below are sample sentences from some students' essays to demonstrate this claim.

16)

- a) The good thing about the computer is that it is for all everybody_everyone can use it without any problem.
- b) When the traditional marriages takes place there is wine, food drinks and dancing and so many other activities_during the traditional marriages the couple have to get the blessing from their parents

AV

- a) The good thing about the computer is that it is for everybody. Everyone can use it without any problem.
- b) When traditional marriages take place, there is wine, food, drinks, dancing and so many other activities. During traditional marriages, the couple have to get the blessing from their parents.

It was realised that most of the students did not use the colon from the scripts sampled. When it came to listing, the students omitted the use of the colon and went ahead listing without using the colon. This will be illustrated below.

17)

- a) The different people present there were the villagers, the young couple, neighbours, friends of the couple and even higher personalities.
- b) There exist so many types of traditional marriages such as Ewondo traditional marriage, Bamum traditional marriage and Douala traditional marriage.

AV

- a) The different people present there were: the villagers, the young couple, neighbours, friends of the couple, and even higher personalities.
- b) There exist so many types of traditional marriages such as: the Ewondo traditional marriage, the Bamum traditional marriage, and the Douala traditional marriage.

The semicolon has two main functions. First, the semicolon links up two or more independent clauses, also known as main clauses, to form a compound sentence. The second use of the semicolon is to separate items in a series when the items contain parenthetical elements within themselves. Just like the colon, most students shy away from using the semicolon. This will be presented below.

18)

- a) On that day, all the people involved in that traditional marriage got up early in the morning and started preparing food while my aunt and her husband went to the chief's palace.
- b) In some villages, when they want to celebrate a traditional marriage, the wife will be dressed half naked, rub oil on her body and chain round her waist.

We realised that it would have been easily understood if the students would have used the semicolon to punctuate the sentences because in the course of reading such constructions, we discover that there is no pause. The semicolon would have been best used in the above sentences because we find two independent clauses in each of the sentences which need to be linked.

AV

- a) On that day, all the people involved in the traditional marriage got up early in the morning and started preparing the food; while my aunt and her husband went to the chief's palace.
- b) In some villages, when they want to celebrate a traditional marriage, the wife will be dressed half naked; she will apply oil on her body and chain round her waist.

Some student omitted the inverted comma in indicating the foreign status of some words. A foreign word is supposed to be put in inverted commas in order for the reader to understand the meaning in context. Below are some examples.

19)

- a) Fufu
- b) Njang

These words are not English words. They are words from the local languages and should be put in inverted commas so that the reader should understand the meaning of the word in context. *Fufu* is a kind of traditional meal which is often accompanied by vegetable. It is common to almost all the tribe in Cameroon. This explains why when used in a text by a Cameroonian as a whole and an African in particular, the meaning is very obvious. But if someone from Europe reads this in a text, he/she will find it difficult to guess the meaning if it is not put in inverted commas.

AV

- a) ‘Fufu’
- b) ‘Njang’

Capitalisation, as earlier discussed refers to the proper use of letters in the upper case which signal the beginning of new sentences; distinguish proper nouns, proper adjectives, the personal pronoun ‘I’, names of institutions and geographical names among others. Once capitalisation is omitted in a construction, it becomes faulty. From the scripts we sampled, some students failed to use the capital letters in the beginning of a sentence. They started their sentences in lower cases as seen in the examples below.

20)

- a) when all the activities taking place came to an end, the chief asked the entire crowd to be quiet.
- b) later on, he gave them some kola nuts to eat.

AV

- a) When all the activities taking place came to an end, the chief asked the entire crowd.
- b) Later on, he gave them some kola nuts to eat.

4.2. Syntactic Issues

Like I mentioned above, the students were given two topics and asked to choose one and write on. Of the 90 scripts we sampled, we realised that the students had a couple of syntactic issues. Some of these syntactic issues include: spelling, concord, wrong word, wrong tense, faulty parallelism, fused sentences, comma splice and inappropriate constructions. These syntactic issues will be illustrated below.

4.2.1 Spelling

From the 90 scripts we sampled, all the students faced the problem of spelling. In some instances, it could be blamed on the influence of the French language, while in other instances; the blame could be put on the students themselves. The students' vocabulary is limited thus; they find it difficult to spell some words correctly. Some of these instances mentioned will be below.

1. Influence of French on Spelling

21)

- a) Mariage
- b) Oncle
- c) Assiste

AV

- a) Marriage
- b) Uncle
- c) Assist

2. Wrong spelling as a result of the Limited Vocabulary

22)

- a) Semate
- b) Bribe price

AV

- a) Smart
- b) Bride price

4.2.2 Diction

There were many instances where the students' choices of words were wrong in the context they were discussing. We think this could be as a result of the fact that their vocabulary is very limited. Thus, they find it difficult to get the appropriate words for the appropriate context. Let us analyse the following example below.

23)

- a) In some countries where there is tribalism, the marriage will not be accepted.
- b) This is a traditional way of marriage were the man pays the bride price.
- c) To begin, one of the most greater advantages of traditional marriage is that it is accepted by the society.

Tribalism refers to the state of existing as a tribe or a very strong feeling of loyalty to your tribe. So in 23 a), the word 'countries' is too broad and does not fit in that context. In 24 b), the student has used the verb 'were' instead of the adverb 'where'. The use of the word 'greater' in 23 c) is not appropriate because it is used in the comparative form.

AV

- a) In some communities where there is tribalism, the marriage will not be accepted.
- b) This is a traditional way of marriage where the man pays the bride price.
- c) To begin, one of the most important advantages of traditional marriage is that it is accepted by the society.

4.2.3 Concord.

It is a grammatical notion whereby the verb matches with the number and person of its. In other word, they both must be singular or they both must be plural. More than 90% of the papers we sampled had the problem of concord. There were instances where the subject did not tie with the verb. This will be presented below.

24)

- a) In Africa, it is usually said that when a girl get married, she is married to the entire family of her husband.
- b) Traditional marriages takes place in the night.
- c) My mother and I was beautifully dressed.

AV

- a) In Africa, it is usually said that when a girl gets married, she is married to the entire family of her husband.
- b) Traditional marriages take place in the night.
- c) My mother and I were beautifully dressed.

4.2.4 Tense

The students had problems using the correct tenses in some constructions. The following sentence had problem with the tenses.

25)

- a) When a man wanted to get married, he has to be well prepare.
- b) The kola nut must be ate by the people.

In 25) a) above the student wanted to use the present simple tense to explain a situation in the present, but has instead used the simple past tense. This of course is not grammatically correct, thus the construction is wrong. Just like in 25) a), the student wanted to use the simple present tense in the passive voice in 25) b) but has written something that does not exist in the English language.

AV

- a) When a man wants to get married, he has to be well prepared.
- b) The kola nut must be eaten by the people.

4.2.5 Faulty Parallelism

We talk of faulty parallelism when elements of different natures are linked up causing the symmetry and clarity of the sentence to be difficult to interpret. In this case, a set of present participles, for instance, can be linked up to the bare or full infinitive of a verb. This notion of faulty parallelism was predominantly recurrent in the essays of the students. This could be blamed on the teachers because they do not teach this aspect in the secondary schools. Policy markers are equally to be blamed for not including it in the syllabuses of secondary schools. In the following sentences we will see how some students have made use of faulty parallelism.

26)

- a) The singers and dancers started to sing and dancing to entertain the guests.
- b) My uncle has the right to speak and asking questions to the boy.
- c) Another very important way in which the computer has changed the lives of students is that it helps students in typing and to store information.

AV

- a) The singers and dancers started singing and dancing to entertain the guests.
- b) My uncle has the right to speak and to ask questions to the boy.
- c) Another very important way in through which the computer has changed the lives of students is that it has helped students in typing and storing information.

4.2.6 Comma Splice

A comma splice occurs when the writer uses a comma instead of a coordinating conjunction or a semicolon to link the two main clauses. The students occasionally made use of the comma splice in their constructions. This will be illustrated below.

27)

- a) Traditional marriage is very good, a church wedding after that shows the man's love for his wife.
- b) Moreover, the girl is given palm wine in a traditional cup to drink and give her husband, she drinks and gives her husband.

There are four ways in which one can restructure this sentence:

1. Use a full stop and write two sentences.
2. Use a semicolon
3. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction
4. Make one of the clauses dependent.

AV

a)

1. Traditional marriage is very good. A church wedding after that shows the man's love for his wife.
2. Traditional marriage is very good; a church wedding after that shows the man's love for his wife.
3. Traditional marriage is very good, but church wedding after that shows the man's love for his wife.
4. Though traditional marriage is good, a church wedding after that shows the man's love for his wife.

AV

b)

1. Moreover, the girl is given palm wine in a traditional cup to drink and give her husband. She drinks and gives her husband.
2. Moreover, the girl is given palm wine in a traditional cup to drink and give her husband; she drinks and gives her husband.

3. Moreover, the girl is given palm wine in a traditional cup to drink and give her husband, so she drinks and gives her husband.

4.2.7 Fused Sentences

A fused sentence occurs when two independent clauses have no punctuation and no coordinating conjunction between them. Such constructions blur into each other and confuse the reader. Examples of fused sentences from the students' essays are presented below.

28)

- a) The computer has put in place programmes to train students they can later become secretaries in offices.
- b) When all that is done, her parents divide the kola nut into four parts for the elders the marriage continuous after that with eating, dancing, and shouting.

Just like with the comma splice, there are equally four ways to correct the above constructions. It should be noted that there are exceptional cases where these rules will not apply.

AV

a)

1. The computer has put in place programmes to train students. They can later become secretaries in offices.
2. The computer has put in place programmes to train students; they can later become secretaries in offices.
3. The computer has put in place programmes to train students so that they can later become secretaries in offices.
4. The computer has put in place programmes to train students who can later become secretaries in offices.

AV

b)

1. When all that is done, her parents divide the kola nut into four parts for the elders.
The marriage continues with eating, dancing and shouting.
2. When all that is done, her parents divide the kola nut into four parts for the elders
and the marriage continues with eating, dancing and shouting.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has identified problems of punctuation and problem of syntax in the essays of Form Five students. The chapter opened with the presentation and discussion of issues related to punctuation and ended with the syntactic problems. The next chapter focuses on the summary of findings and the pedagogical relevance of the work and recommendation for further research in this domain.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarises the results of the research. It gives the pedagogic implications of the work and makes recommendation on the possibilities of ameliorating the teaching and learning of punctuation in secondary schools, as well as ameliorating the production and or use of grammar by students.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study has investigated punctuation and syntactic issues of Form Five students in Government Bilingual High School Yaoundé, Government Bilingual High School and Government Bilingual High School Mendong. The punctuation marks that were analysed were: the full stop, the semicolon, the colon, the commas, the apostrophe, the inverted comma, and the hyphen. These seven punctuation marks were analysed because these were the punctuation marks that were used in the students' essay. Syntactically, the essays were marked for a couple of grammatical issues. These issues include: spelling, concord, diction, tense, faulty parallelism, fused sentences and comma splice. The results, however, indicate that there is a major problem when it comes to the use of basic and commonly used punctuation marks like the full stop and the comma. It was observed that some students omitted the use of the comma in some constructions. (E.g. *In this case they can get all the timetable and study*) In this sentence, the student left out the comma, rendering understanding difficult. In most cases, the students wrongly used the comma. (E.g. *A marriage is a union between a man and a woman, who come together to build up a family.*

Many students omitted the use of the apostrophe to show ownership. As a result, when reading the scripts, it becomes confusing to comprehend the essays. Here is an example of the omission of the apostrophe. *I use my fathers computer during the weekends to do research.*

The use of the hyphen posed a problem to some students. The students used the hyphen when the word was too long to fit in one row of writing and in compound words. A majority of them omitted the use of the hyphen and the few who did use it, used it incorrectly. This construction and the compound word below explains this.

The computer is an electronic device used in storing and retrieving of information for future use .

Brother in law

From the essays analysed, it was discovered that some students do not know when to use the full stop. Some students went to the point of omitting the use of the full stop in their constructions. For example in this sentence, *When the traditional marriages takes place there is wine, food drinks and dancing and so many other activities_during the traditional marriages the couple have to get the blessing from their parents* we realise that the student has omitted the use of the full stop, hence blurring the meaning of the construction.

The use of the colon posed some difficulties to the students. Generally, the students avoided the use of the colon in their essays. The most common use of the colon is to begin a list, yet the students found it very difficult to use it at that level. For instance, in this construction, *The different people present there were the villagers, the young couple, neighbours, friends of the couple and even higher personalities.*, the students did not use the colon to begin the list.

The students shied away from using the semicolon probably because they do not know when to use it. Looking at this example, *On that day, all the people involved in that traditional marriage got up early in the morning and started preparing food while my aunt and her husband went to the chief's palace.*, we discover that the student did not punctuate correctly. The student would have used the semicolon to connect the two independent clauses into a single sentence.

It was discovered most of the students used the inverted commas wrongly. One of the uses of the inverted commas is to indicate the unusual or foreign status of a word. From the essays sampled, this is the only use of the inverted comma that the students applied in their essays. For example, a word like *fufu* is foreign to the English language and so, it has to be put in inverted commas to show its foreign nature. But the student did not use the inverted commas to do that.

It was observed that some students failed to use the upper case at the beginning of a sentence. Some students used the capital letter in the middle of a sentence while others did not capitalised proper nouns. In *when all the activities taking place came to an end, the chief asked the entire crowd to be quiet.*, we discover that the students has not capitalised the first letter in the first word of that construction.

The findings equally revealed that the students had problems at the level of syntax. Most of the students had spelling difficulties which could be blamed on the influence of French. It could also be blamed on the students' limited vocabulary. The students equally had problems with diction in their constructions. They find it difficult to get the appropriate words for the appropriate context, thus giving the sentence a different meaning. For example, in this sentence, *In some countries where there is tribalism, the marriage will not be accepted.*, the student used the word *countries* instead of the word *communities*. The problem of concord was recurrent in all the essays. The subject and verb in many sentences did not agree in number. In a sentence like this, *My mother and I was beautifully dressed.*, the subject is in the plural and so the verb has to be in the plural too.

The students had problems using the correct tenses in their constructions. There was equally the problem of faulty parallelism in their construction which was pointed out. The issue of inappropriate expression was also discussed. Some students want to express a certain idea but find it difficult to say with exactly they want to say because of the wrong choices of words. For example, in this construction, *A computer is a device used to make research.*, we discover that the students has used an inappropriate expression making that sentence complicated to understand. The appropriate expression for that sentence should be, *A computer is a device used to carry out research.*

The findings also showed that the students made use of fused sentences and comma splices. On the one hand, students wrote two independent clauses with no punctuation and no coordinating conjunction between them. On the other hand, students used a comma instead of a coordinating conjunction between main clauses.

5.2 Pedagogic Implications

A close examination of the findings reveals very serious pedagogic implications in the teaching of English in Cameroon, particularly grammar and punctuation. Teachers are considered very important in the learning process. They should therefore be careful in the way they handle ESL lessons. The teachers should pay more attention on the use of punctuation and grammar.

The teacher will be able to recognise the main source of students' error and will know how and when to correct them. It can be stated that Pidgin English. French and the mother-

tongue have an influence on students' grammar. Thus, the teacher can easily recognise which error is instigated by Pidgin English, which is as a result of French and which is a negative interference from the mother-tongue.

5.3 Recommendations

From the findings revealed, students have grammatical and punctuation issues and it is in this light that we recommend teachers should anticipate students' problem (in the case, we are looking at punctuation and syntax) and prepare lessons geared towards these needs. The teachers are advised to encourage learners to read widely and to write regularly so as to improve on their use of the various writing skills and punctuation in particular, effectively.

It is equally imperative to recommend a revision of attitude, first on the part of the teachers and editors and then on the part of students and beginning writers. If the teachers trade their tolerance by paying attention to mechanics and punctuation as imperative to academic achievement and conventional writing, then the students who aspire to succeed will be invariably compelled to sacrifice their negligence by invoking mechanical accuracy in the writing process. Alternatively, the teaching of punctuation should be included in the English Language curriculum in secondary schools.

The teacher should make personal sacrifices in order to develop their teaching skills. They should enrol in local libraries, and read English language teaching journals and magazines so as to always have up-to-date materials for their lessons.

Teachers are advised to give more practical exercises on punctuation to students. Each time a writing task is given to students, the teacher should check the correct use of punctuation marks and effect the corrections.

We equally recommend that school administrators should implement English language as a condition for gaining admission into Lower Sixth. If this condition is put in place, student will definitely take their English lessons seriously. Students should be given extra time by the school authorities to visit the school library to gather information resourceful for their grammar and punctuation exercises. The school authorities should do an exchange programmes with other schools were they will bridge ideas in their language lessons particularly grammar and punctuation.

5.4 Suggestion for Further Research

This work was only a preliminary work on some punctuation marks and on some syntactic issues. Other areas of investigation are available for future research. It might, for example, be interesting to carry out an investigation on the problems faced by teachers in using punctuations. A comparative study can also be carried out on the problems that Anglophones and Francophones face in using punctuation. Further research will have to consider using quantitative methods of data collection like questionnaires so as to be able to determine the connection between social variables like ages, sex, education etc. and the students' mastery of mechanics and punctuation. It will also be necessary that the relationship between punctuation and students' achievements be established in future research.

5.5 Conclusion

This study has analysed the issues of punctuation and syntax in the expository essays of form five students. The findings revealed that the students generally performed poorly in grammar and in the use of punctuation marks. The reason of these lapses could stem from the approach used today in teaching ESL to Anglophones. The study suggests that punctuation and grammar should be taught overtly and thoroughly at the basic level of secondary education.

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APPENDIX

Production test

Write a composition of between 250-300 words on one of the following topics.

1. Traditional marriage.
2. Explain how the computer has changed the lives of students.