

Methods of teaching English adopted by Libyan teachers affect students' speaking

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Abstract

Speaking skills is essential issue in teaching and learning operation. Recently, it has been valued as a skill, speaking enables learners to express their thoughts and opinions. Therefore, the aim of new methods of teaching is to improve students' communicative skills. Hence, this study tries to find out if there are any problems when students attempt to use the target language while working in oral activities. It will see if methods of teaching that used by Libyan teachers have an impact on learning speaking.

When speakers want to attain any purposes they need to use suitable expressions to get these purposes. They added that speaking in the early years when communicative teaching was employed is considered as just how to produce the language and the other skills were ignored, but recently there has been a tendency to associate speaking with listening because the listener can shape the discourse with the speaker.

It has been noticed that students in Libyan secondary schools face difficulties when they try to communicate and when trying to express themselves in English language, although they spend more than six years learning English at schools.

EFL Libyan teachers still employ the grammar translation approach as the method in teaching and learning the English Language in secondary schools where their considerations is on explaining the grammatical structures. Beside to this they usually rely on translation

investigations about the causes of lack of using punctuation marks by Libyan EFL learners.

- This paper, for reasons states at the outset of this study, has only looked at the lack of using punctuation marks, further research is needed to investigate the misuse of punctuation marks by Libyan EFL learners.

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very little emphasis on the teaching of punctuation marks. This, I believe, should change. The syllabus designers in Libya need to realise that, unlike in Arabic, punctuation marks in English are essential in writing and, therefore, I believe that more emphasis should be placed on teaching punctuation marks for Libyan EFL learners to help them to improve the quality of their writing in English. I am not by any means trying to suggest that teaching punctuation to Libyan EFL learners will make them fully aware and competent in using punctuation marks, but it will certainly improve their understanding and appreciation of the use of punctuation in English. This would, I believe, help to improve the Libyan students writing abilities and make their writing more organized, clearer and easier to follow.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications:

In the lights of the current study results and due to the importance of punctuations marks in writing, I believe that Textbook designers, policy makers and teachers of writing/grammar/reading in Libya should give space to teaching punctuation marks as they are very essential part of writing in Arabic and English.

5.2 Limitation of the study and suggestion for further research.

Despite some of the important findings in this study, there are some limitations which should be taken into account in future investigations about the topic of the current study:

- Small sample size. Larger sample from various locations in Libya should be used in future studies.
- Using a single research method to gather the data. Other research methods such as Interviews and questionnaire could be used in future

write, and there are those who see it as happening through imitating through reading (ibid).

However, despite the importance of these two points, they are irrelevant to my argument here. This is because, as noted earlier, the problem in Libya is not so much that teachers do not know how best or to what age punctuation should be taught to students, but the problem is rather that punctuation marks are hardly taught to students. In other words, my argument here is not that there are problems in the ways punctuation are being taught to Libyan EFL learners but rather that the teaching of punctuation is highly neglected in Libyan schools in Arabic and English. Thus, in order to help Libyan EFL learners in using punctuation, more emphasis needs to be placed on the teaching of punctuation not only in English but also in Arabic. This will help to raise the student awareness of the importance of the punctuation system which in turn will help them to improve the quality of their writing.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed at investigating the problems Libyan EFL learners encounter in using punctuation marks in English. The findings revealed that the main problems Libyan EFL learners have in using punctuation marks in their writings is the lack of using punctuation marks followed by misuse. It is believed that the cause of the absence of punctuation marks in the Libyan EFL learners writing is mainly due to learners' mother tongue influence and, more importantly, the lack of knowledge of using these marks. This lack of knowledge on how and why to use punctuations made them unsure of how to use punctuation; therefore, they have avoided using them in their writing. The current English syllabus in Libyan schools and universities puts

problems in using punctuation marks in English. Some may argue that the problem with Libyan EFL learners with regard to punctuation is simply due to the influence of their native language which often ignores the use of punctuation. This is true to some extent. However, the intensive research done on the area of error analysis proved that most second or foreign language students' errors do not reflect their first language, except in area such as pronunciation, where the transfer of the mother tongue is quite obvious (Dulay et al 1982:103).

Thus, although there is no doubt that some of the problems faced by Libyan EFL learners in using punctuations marks is attributed to the learners' mother tongue (Arabic), I believe that the lack of emphasis on teaching English punctuation in Libyan schools. The examples shown above and from my informal discussion with the participants clearly show that the Libyan EFL learners have very little or no knowledge about the functions/significance of using punctuation marks in writing. Moreover, two of the participants claimed that they had never heard of the word 'punctuation' before. This lack of knowledge of the function of using punctuation marks has left the students with no choice but to resort to the avoidance strategies by not using punctuation marks completely in their writings.

It is true that there has not been much research done on how best punctuation can be taught to students (Hall & Robinson 1996:5). Unlike spelling and handwriting, punctuation has received very little attention (ibid). Despite the fact that there are a number of books written about punctuation, very few are dedicated to the teaching of punctuation (ibid: 6). Moreover, there is strong disagreements on how punctuation knowledge should be achieved (ibid: 13). There are those who see punctuation knowledge being achieved through rules, and there are those who see it as learned through being allowed to

Example (4)

We should be spending our money and resources to help those poor people who are living in misery in every part of the world and we should be spending our money on how to protect our planet from climate change and we should be spending our money on combating diseases such AIDS which is killing millions of people in Africa and in other parts of the world.

Example (5)

The problem is that in the name of the war on terrorism the USA and its allies could go and invade any country and today is Iraq and tomorrow could be Iran or Syria or Libya or North Korea or any other country.

Example (6)

The deteriorating situation of the education in Libya could be attributed to the instability in the system or lack of financial support or because of inappropriate policies or to all the previously mentioned reasons.

Example (7)

The USA and its allies claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destructions and that they wanted Iraq to be a free and prosperous country and they also claimed that Iraq was posing a real threat to the world security and that it did not comply with the united nations resolutions

As illustrated in the above examples that, apart from full stops which have been used occasionally, no other punctuation marks have been used. These examples are only some samples from the problems that face Libyan EFL learners regarding the use of punctuation. However, they should be sufficient to show that Libyan EFL learners have

As it was stated that the lack of using punctuation marks was very common feature in the Libyan students' writing. Next are some extracts demonstrating how Libyan students tend to underuse punctuation marks with some possible explanations for these problems.

Example (1)

There is no doubt that the Iraq war was unjustified and immoral because it was built on lies and on self interests and only God knows the real intentions of those people who planned and executed the war and what they wanted out of it. In my opinion all wars are wrong and I know that may sound ideal but I believe that if we think deeply we have lots of other and more serious issues in the world such as poverty and disease which we should be concerned about rather than going to war

Example (2)

In recent years for example the government have introduced a new system for secondary school and within this system students have to spend four years in the secondary school and they also need to choose their area of interest which they will study for four years in the secondary school when they go to university

Example (3)

The Iraq war was not fair because when American and its allies went to the war they did not give good reasons and one of the reasons they gave was that they wanted to spread peace and democracy in Iraq and the Middle East

3.2 Participants

The participants were students in the English Department at Sirte University. A total of twenty female and male students participated in the study. The table 1 below summarizes information about the study's participants.

Table 1: Study Participants

No	Gender		Age	Educational level
	F	M		
20	17	3	18-21 years	7 th and 8 th semesters

3.3 Research Method

To answer the research question stated above, the present study adopted writing essays as a method for data collection. The data compositions were collected from the participants who were asked to write essays on two different topics: the so called war on terrorism 2) The education system in Libya. The essays were then rated by two experienced EFL teachers in the English Department.

4. Results & Discussion

The results reveal that the problems that Libyan EFL learners' encounter in using punctuation marks are of two types: misuse of punctuations marks (with 26%) and lack (or the absence) of using punctuation marks (with 74%). Owing to the lack of space and the fact the lack of using punctuation marks is, by far, more common in the Libyan EFL learners' writing; the focus of this paper will be limited to the lack of using punctuation as discussed next:

4.1 Lack of Using Punctuation Marks

These differences between the two languages and cultures, I believe, are the main reasons of why the two languages differ in the way they value and appreciate the use of punctuation marks. That means that because of the high degree of orality and its reliance on pragmatics and context, Arabic views punctuation marks as unnecessary and insignificant in writing. Whereas English, which is literate language and relies on the text in the interpretation of meaning, sees punctuation marks as important and essential in clarifying the meaning in writing. The marginalization of punctuation in Arabic is also reflected in the fact that Arabic puts very little or no emphasis on the teaching of punctuation in Arabic schools. Moreover, punctuation marks are often neglected and are not given any importance in grammar and writing books in Arabic. In the case of Libyan schools, from my experience as a student and from informal discussion with friends, there is no formal instruction on Arabic punctuation. Unfortunately, the situation is not any better in teaching the punctuation marks in English in Libya. Punctuation marks do not receive much attention and students are not made aware of their significance in English. This lack of emphasis on punctuation has led to the fact that many Libyan EFL learners face many difficulties in using punctuation marks in English. The following section will try to look at some of these problems by looking at some samples of essays written by Libyan EFL learners.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Question:

- What sort of problems do Libyan EFL learners under study encounter in using punctuation marks in their writing?

high degree of orality in Arabic is a result of the influence of the Qur'an on the language. As Ostler (1987) argues that the orality in Arabic language is mainly due to the fact that the Qur'an, which represents the ultimate standards of the written Arabic grammar and style, was revealed orally and was only written down later in its oral style without any changes (cited in Ayisha 1993:141). Others claim that the high orality in Arabic is due to the influence of the traditional rules of rhetoric on Arab writers or as William (1989) puts it "the persistence of orality in modern written Arabic suggests that Arab writers are still influenced by traditional rules of rhetoric, which are largely prescribed for the public speaker" (cited in Ayisha 1993:140).

Another difference between Arabic and English writing systems is that Arabic is largely a reader-responsible language, where a heavier burden is placed on the reader for the semantic interpretation of text (Ghazala 1995:18). In contrast English is largely a writer-responsible language, where the conveniences for the reader, rather than the writer, is emphasised (ibid). This difference between the two languages is rather important in explaining why Arabic and English differ in the way they value the use of punctuation marks. Being a writer-responsible language, English writers use punctuation marks in order to help their readers to understand their message. In contrast, Arabic, which is a reader-responsible language, leaves the task for the reader. The differences in the writing systems of Arabic and English are mainly due to the differences between the cultures that these two languages represent. Arabic culture is largely classified as oral whereas English culture is classified as literate (ibid). In oral cultures, pragmatics and external non-linguistics context play an important role in the semantic interpretation of texts. In literate cultures, on the other hand, it is the organization of the linguistic forms within the discourse that is crucial to the semantic interpretation of text (ibid: 19).

addition, they are used to achieve organization, clarity, ease of reading and of comprehension, and to avoid possible ambiguity of structure and meaning (ibid.:4). However, this is not the case in Arabic where punctuation marks have been and are still being ignored. Punctuation in Arabic is considered ornamentation, neither more nor less, and is therefore disregarded sometimes completely (Haywood 1984, P.44). To confirm this, the following is an example taken from Al-Jurani's book: اسرار البلاغة Mysteries of Rhetoric (2004:33)

(The other case in which the name can unarguably be a metaphor is when it does not serve to affirm the meaning of something and nor is that the speaker's intent which can only be so if the noun is functioning as the predicate/comment of the subject/topic in a nominal clause. If it is not so and instead it is the subject/topic itself of a nominal clause or the subject or object of a verb or the governed noun in a genitive construction then what you are saying is intended to affirm something other than the meaning of a noun) My translation.

As can be seen in the original and translated texts that, a part from the one single full stop in the whole paragraph, punctuation marks are completely ignored including full stop at the end. This is just an example for the common tendency in Arabic in ignoring the use of punctuation. Reading any book in Arabic, you go through pages and pages and you hardly come across any punctuation mark apart from the full stop which is used occasionally. Many people attribute the differences between Arabic and English, as far as the use of punctuation is concerned, to differences in the writing systems of the two languages (Ghazala 1995:16). The writing system in Arabic, unlike English, allows a high degree of orality (ibid). This degree of orality often makes Arabic written texts look like they are written to be spoken rather than to be read (ibid: 17). Many believe that the

(ibid). In other words, a full stop in Arabic is used for a determinate conclusion while double or triple dots are used to mean an indeterminate conclusion (ibid).

2.2.3 Punctuation marks that only different in form

- Question mark

The question mark in Arabic is only different in form. The question mark in Arabic is written this way (؟) (ibid).

- Semicolon

The semicolon in Arabic serves more or less the same functions in English. The difference is only in the form. Semicolon in Arabic is written upside down (;)(ibid: 11).

- Quotation marks

There is variation in the use of quotation marks in Arabic. The single goosefeet (<>) and double goosefeet (<< >>) are both used to indicate quotation in Arabic (ibid, P.11).

2.3 Differences between Arabic and English Punctuation Systems

The above discussion may leave the impression that there are subtle differences between Arabic and English as far as the punctuation system is concerned. That is that the two languages share many similarities and the differences are only superficial. In theory that is true. As already discussed, the forms and functions of most of the punctuation marks in both languages are very similar in form and function. However, when it comes to practice, the two languages differ in the importance they attach to the use of punctuation marks. English uses punctuation marks systematically and emphatically as part and parcel of any piece of text (Nunberg 1990:3). They are graphological, grammatical and stylistic tools used to perform particular functions and convey meanings in writing (ibid). In

very similar in form and function to the ones that are used in English, there are some slight differences, notably in the forms but also in the functions, of some of the punctuation marks in the two languages. Because of the similarity between the two punctuation marks, and due to lack of space, the discussion here only touches on the punctuation marks in Arabic which are different from English.

2.2.1 Punctuation marks not available in Arabic

- Capital letters

Arabic does not use capitalization at the beginning of a sentence or with proper and place names and titles (Nayeef 1991:9).

- Apostrophe

Arabic does not use apostrophe to mark possessive or contraction (ibid)

2.2.2 Punctuation marks that are different in form and function from English

- Comma

The comma in Arabic is written up side down(،). There are not specific rules to account for the use of the comma in Arabic (ibid).In Arabic you use a comma if you feel you need to use it (ibid). However, Arabic generally tends to use comma in situation when English uses a full stop. Moreover, commas in Arabic tend to be used in positions corresponding to the occurrence of pauses and breadth (ibid).

- Full stop

Although Arabic often uses a single dot to mark the end of a sentence, sometimes it uses double (..) or triple (...) dots for the same purpose (Nayeef 1991:10). The differences between single dot, double or triple is that the sentence that ends with a full stop is presented as ‘complete’ both in the linguistic and the real world (no more words or ideas added) (ibid).On the other hand, double or triple dots indicate that the sentence has not yet ended in pragmatic terms

- The mark (قلي) means that stopping or continuing is permissible here. In other words, when a reader comes across this mark, s/he either continues or makes a stop (ibid).
- The mark (صلي) means that a stop is preferable here. However, the reader can continue if s/he wishes (ibid).
- The mark (لا) is called 'The prohibited stop' which means that the reader must not stop here because the meaning is not complete yet because it is connected with what follows it (ibid:17).

- The mark (م) is called the 'Compulsory stop'. In the case of this mark, the reader is required to stop because this mark indicates that the meaning is complete and is separated from what follows (ibid).
- The mark (س) is called 'the moderate pause' which is the breaking of the voice at a Qur'anic word for a brief moment without taking breadth at two counts (nearly two seconds) (Ibraheem 1980:18).

These marks are often placed at the last letter of a word in order to indicate their functions. As we mentioned earlier that these marks were the first punctuation marks that appeared in an Arabic text. However, these marks were only used in the Qur'an and they did not appear in classical or modern Arabic texts (ibid: 19). Therefore, Arabic continued to be written without the use of punctuation. However, the need for punctuation in Arabic came as a result of the spread of Islam which meant that many people wanted to learn Arabic (Haywood 1984:3). Therefore, the purpose of introducing punctuation into Arabic was largely to help non Arabs to read the written language (ibid). However, since Arabic did not develop its own punctuation system, it had to adopt a Latin punctuation system which is used nowadays by most languages (ibid). However, since this paper is concerned with the punctuation in Arabic and English, the discussion here will focus only on these two languages. Despite the fact that the punctuation marks that Arabic uses nowadays are

2.1.10 The hyphen

The hyphen is used in writing compound words that would be ambiguous, hard to read or excessively long (Field 2003:103). It is also used to indicate a long word has been broken off at the end of a line. Another use of the hyphen is to avoid what is called letter collision (ibid).

2.1.11 The dash

The dash is used in pairs to separate a strong interruption from the rest of the sentence. Other uses of the dash are to add emphasis or drama, to indicate a range of numbers and to link two connected words (Field 2003:102).

2.1.12 Brackets

There are round and square brackets. Round brackets can sometimes be used instead of dashes to insert an extra idea into a sentence (ibid:102). Square brackets are used when words within quotation are not part of the original material (ibid).

2.2. Punctuation Marks in Arabic

Punctuations marks did not exist in early texts in classical Arabic. The first time punctuation was used in Arabic was when the Arabs wanted to write down the Qur'an (Ibraheem 1980: 15). The functions of these marks are mainly rhetorical (ibid). That means that they were mainly used to signify where the emphasis and the pauses are (ibid: 16). The following is a brief description of the forms and functions of these punctuations marks:

‘however’, ‘nevertheless’, ‘accordingly’, ‘consequently’, or ‘instead’(ibid). The other use of the semicolon is to separate items in a list when one or more of those items contains a comma (ibid).

2.1.6 The colon

The colon was adopted into the English language in the sixteen century (ibid: 101). It is not one of the most frequently used punctuation marks. Like the semicolon, it is not followed by a capital letter. The colon is often used for the following purposes:

- To introduce examples expanding the previous sentence.
- To introduce a list.
- To emphasis two main clauses.
- To reinforce two main clauses (ibid).

2.1.7 The exclamation mark

The exclamation mark is used after an exclamation of surprise, shock or dismay, which is generally a short sentence or phrase expressing very strong feeling (Field, 2003:104).

2.1.8 The quotation marks

The quotation mark is used solely to enclose a direct quotation (ibid).

2.1.9 The apostrophe

The apostrophe is used for two purposes. It is used to indicate possession where the apostrophe is used to show that a noun has something belonging to it (ibid: 106). It is also used to indicate a contraction which is a form of word in which one or more letters are omitted (ibid).

comma is used very frequently and for different purposes. It is used for the following purposes:

- To separate items in a list.
- To separate a list of main clauses.
- To separate the subordinate clause from the main when starting the sentence with a subordinating conjunction.
- To separate a subordinate clause in the middle of a main clause.
- After a participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence.
- To separate phrases in the middle of a main clause (ibid).

2.1.3 The full stop

The full stop is always used to mark the end of a sentence expressing a statement (Field 2003:102). It can also be used after abbreviation but not contractions (ibid).

2.1.4 The question mark

The question mark is mainly used at the end of a direct question but it can also be used for a rhetorical ones. (ibid: 103)

2.1.5 The semicolon

The semicolon was first recorded in English in 1644(Field 2003:98). It is mainly used to join two complete sentences into a single written sentence when the two sentences are too closely related to be separated by a full stop and there is no connecting word which would require a comma such as 'and' or 'but'(ibid). The semicolon is also used link two complete sentences into a single written sentence where the second sentence begins with a conjunctive adverb such as

where we will be retreating the main points in this paper and try to suggest some ways which could help in minimising or overcoming these problems.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Punctuation in English

By the end of the 17th century, English punctuation system has been complete (Peters 1968:304). At one time, there was considerable debate as to whether punctuation in English should be based on the places where one should pause while reading aloud, or on grammar (ibid). The debate was won by those who favoured using punctuation to mark grammatical divisions (ibid). In this section, we will try briefly to look at the functions of the punctuation marks in English. But before I do so, it should be clear that I am aware of that many people believe that the punctuation marks rules often found in grammar books do not always reflect the way people often use them, therefore; the discussion here should be taken only as a general guideline.

2.1.1 Capital letters

Capital letters are used at the beginning of a sentence and with proper, place names and titles (ibid). They are also used sometime to show emphasis on important words (ibid: 97).

2.1.2 The comma

The comma was introduced to English in the sixteen century and plays a very important part in punctuation (Field 2003:98). The

المشاكل التي يواجهها المتعلمون الليبيون في استخدام علامات الترقيم هي قلة استخدام وسوء استخدام علامات الترقيم بنسبة 74% و 26 على التوالي. وتعزى هذه المشاكل بشكل رئيسي إلى تأثير اللغة الأم للمتعلمين (العربية) ونقص المعرفة بهذه العلامات بسبب عدم التركيز على تدريسها في الكتب المدرسية العربية والإنجليزية. تختتم الدراسة ببعض التوصيات والاقتراحات لدراسات لاحقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، قلة الاستخدام ، علامات الترقيم

1. Introduction

Punctuation marks are very important and essential in written language. They help and facilitate the understanding of any written work. In speaking, we can pause, stop, or change our tone of voice. In writing, we use punctuation marks to emphasize and clarify what we mean. Despite their importance in writing, many Libyan EFL learners face a number of difficulties in using them in their writing. Libyan students are usually unsure and sometimes even unaware of how, where, when and why to use punctuations. This lack of knowledge of the appropriate usage of punctuations often results in the absence and misuse of punctuation marks in their writing in English which consequently leads to unclear and poor writing. However, owing to the lack of space, this paper will only look at the absence of punctuation marks in the Libyan EFL learners' writings. In doing so, this paper will be organised as follows: the first section will discuss punctuation in English. The second section will look at punctuation in Arabic. The aim of these two sections is to look at the similarities and the differences in the punctuation systems of the two languages. The third section will be concerned with the analysis of the data. The data consists of some examples taken from five essays written by Libyan EFL learners. Finally, we come to the conclusion