

5- Interpretation: all the people saw the accident:

- (a) The people who saw the accident will talk to the police.
- (b) The people, who saw the accident, will talk to the police.
- (c) The people, who saw, the accident will talk to the police.
- (d) The people, who saw the police will talk to the accident.

Appendix B

Test Answers

Q1/

1. a

2. a

3. c

4. b

5. d

6. a

7. a

8. c

9. b

10. a

Q2/

1. b

2. b

3. b

4. b

5. b

10. The swans, which are white, are in the south part of the lake.

- (a) All the swans are white.
- (b) The swans are not white.
- (c) The swans which are in the south part of the lake are not white.
- (d) Some swans are in the south part of the lake.

Q2: Consider the following interpretation and decide which sentence it fits.

Put (✓) in the box of the correct answer.

1- Interpretation: Johnny will pick up three people:

- (a) Johnny will pick up Sarah and Jill Tom.
- (b) Johnny will pick up Sarah, Jill, and Tom.
- (c) Johnny will pick up Sarah Jill Tom.
- (d) Johnny will pick up Sarah Jill, Tom.

2- Interpretation: John was walking down the street when he saw Tom:

- (a) John saw Tom walking down the street.
- (b) Walking down the street, John saw Tom.
- (c) Walking down, the street John saw Tom.
- (d) Walking down the street, Tom was seen by Jack.

3- Interpretation: asking Sam not to tell:

- (a) Keep quiet and don't tell Sam.
- (b) Keep quiet and don't tell, Sam.
- (c) Keep, quiet, and don't tell Sam.
- (d) Keep, quiet, and, tell Sam.

4- Interpretation: I am talking about my best friend Joe:

- (a) My best friend Joe arrived.
- (b) My best friend, Joe, arrived.
- (c) My best friend arrived, Joe.
- (d) Joe, my best friend arrived.

- (a) Most of the time, all the travelers worry about their luggage.
- (b) Most of those who are time travelers worry about their luggage.
- (c) Time worries about their luggage.
- (d) Travelers worry about time.

5. You have to pay, dear.

- (a) My idea is dear.
- (b) We are dear together.
- (c) I am talking to pay.
- (d) I am talking to someone dear.

6. You have to pay dear.

- (a) The price will be dear.
- (b) I am talking to someone who is dear.
- (c) The person is dear.
- (d) I am paying to someone dear.

7. My brother Bill is here.

- (a) I have more than one brother.
- (b) All my brothers are here.
- (c) I am taking to someone called Bill.
- (d) I have only one brother.

8. My brother, Bill, is here.

- (a) I am telling my brother that Bill is here.
- (b) I am talking to my brother.
- (c) Bill is my only brother.
- (d) Bill is not my brother.

9. The swans which are white are in the south part of the lake.

- (a) All the swans are in the south part of the lake.
- (b) Some swans are white.
- (c) Only a group of swans is white.
- (d) Only a group of swans is in the lake.

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Appendix A

Punctuation Test

Q1. Match the sentence with its correct meaning. Put (✓) in the box of the correct answer.

1. The colours of the flag are red, green and gold in stripes.

- (a) Red and green with gold stripes.
- (b) Red, green and gold stripes.
- (c) Red, with green and gold stripes.
- (d) It doesn't make sense.

2. The colours of the flag are red, green, and gold, in stripes.

- (a) The flag consists of just three-colour stripes.
- (b) All stripes are gold.
- (c) Only green and gold are in stripes.
- (d) It doesn't make sense.

3. Most of the time, travelers worry about their luggage.

- (a) All the travelers worry about the time.
- (b) Most of the time worries about luggage.
- (c) All the travelers usually worry about their luggage.
- (d) Travelers worry about most of the time.

4. Most of the time travelers worry about their luggage.

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ter. Also, students' varying performance in the questions reflects varying knowledge. Knowing the required interpretation in the first question reflects semantic knowledge. Knowing the correct comma position in the second reflects syntactic knowledge. The results demonstrate that comma rules' vary in their difficulty; the rule of setting off nonessential information appears to be the most difficult rule for the students, specifically the restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. The appositive rule also seems to be a challenging rule to tackle. The vocative rule gets the third level concerning the difficulty classification. Setting off introductory expressions and separating items in a list seem to be easier for students to deal with. Based on these results, the researchers recommend more focus on the area of punctuation and specially comma usages through incorporating them in all the written curriculums. Teachers need to pay more attention when teaching comma usage since it can affect the delivered meaning and

lead to conveying a completely different message.

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clauses is 21.3% in the first question and 26.2% in the second. This result points out that this rule is the most challenging one among the rest of the rules since the number of correct answers from this rule in both of the question is lower than all the rules mentioned earlier. The next figure shows the details.

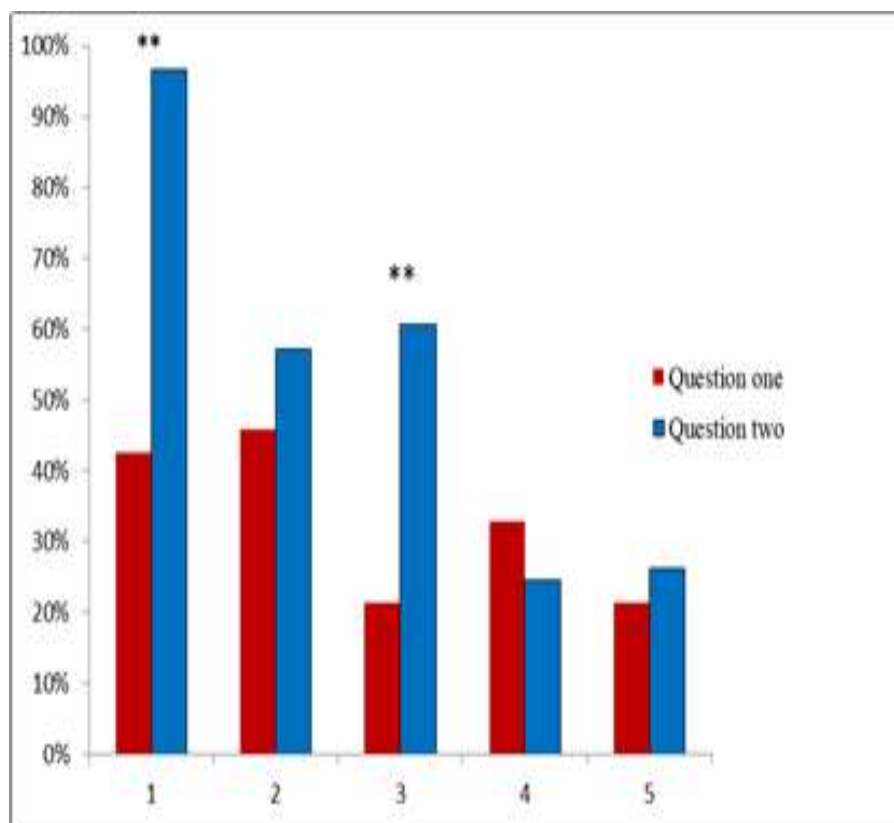


Figure (1) The Correct Answers in the First and Second Questions

Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between comma position and the meaning through testing students' ability to discriminate the intended meaning according to the position of the comma. It is concluded that the comma is a challenging concept that students need more practice to mas-

Table 3 presents the percentage of correct answers for each rule in the first and second questions. As the table shows, the first rule gets 42.6% of correct answers in the first question and 96.7% in the second. This result indicates that students find it considerably difficult to identify the intended meaning of the sentence, concerning the rule of separating items in a list, when they were asked to decide the correct interpretation of the given sentence. On the contrary, in the second question, the percentage indicates a low level of difficulty for the same rule when the students were asked to decide the correct sentence for the given interpretation. The percentage of the second rule, that of the separation of introductory expressions, is 45.9% of correct answers in the first question and 57.3% in the second. This closeness in percentage of the two questions suggests that students find this rule

challenging in both questions. The number of correct answers for the third rule, which deals with the concept of vocative, is expressed in a 21.3% in the first question and 60.6% in the second. This result indicates that the students encountered problems with this rule when it required providing the correct interpretation. But the percentage of correct answers in the second question reflects better ability when it required to provide the correct sentence for the given interpretation. Based on table 3, the fourth rule, which deals with appositives, gets 32.7% of the correct answers in the first question and 24.5% in the second. This means that students found this rule difficult and challenging in both questions even though the percentage in the first question is relatively higher than the percentage in the second one. Finally, the percentage of the fifth rule dealing with restrictive and non-restrictive

Table 2. The Results of the Chi-square Test for Each Rule in the Second Question

Question 2

Point	Correct answer		Incorrect answer		P value
	No.	%	No.	%	
1	59	96.7	2	3.3	<0.001
2	35	57.3	26	42.7	>0.05
3	37	60.6	24	39.4	<0.05
4	15	24.5	46	75.5	<0.001
5	16	26.2	45	73.8	<0.001

Table 2 reveals that the second rule shows no statistically significant association between the position of comma and students' ability to identify the intended meaning since the *P* Value of Chi-square test for this rule is >0.05.

The third rule shows statistically significant association with a *P* Value of <0.05. The result of Chi-square test for the first, fourth and fifth rules shows that there is statistically significant association between the variables since the *P* Value of Chi-square test for these three rules is <0.001.

Table 3 The Correct Answers for Each Rule in the First and Second Question

Item	Question 1 correct answers (%)	Question 2 correct answers (%)	P value
1	42.6	96.7	<0.001
2	45.9	57.3	>0.05
3	21.3	60.6	<0.001
4	32.7	24.5	>0.05
5	21.3	26.2	>0.05

rules according to the resulting percentage and the number of correct answers. Table 1 presents the number of correct answers for each rule in the first question followed by the Chi-square result accompanied by the *P* value, which shows the significance for each rule.

Table 1. The Results of the Chi-square Test for Each Rule in the First Question

Question 1

Point	Correct answer		Incorrect answer		P value
	No.	%	No.	%	
1	26	42.6	35	57.4	>0.05
2	28	45.9	33	54.1	>0.05
3	13	21.3	48	78.7	<0.001
4	20	32.7	41	67.3	<0.001
5	13	21.3	48	78.7	<0.001

Table 1 shows that the first and second rules have no statistical significance associating the position of comma and students' ability to identify the intended meaning, since P Value of Chi-square test for these two rules is >0.05 respectively. The results of the Chi-square test for the third, fourth and fifth rules show there is statistically significant association between the variables, since the P Value of Chi-square test for these three rules is <0.001 respectively .

the discrimination power and the difficulty level of the test items, and to find out the reliability of the test. It was found that the average time is approximately one hour and some items were discarded from the test because their difficulty levels were more than 0.80 and their discrimination power were less than 0.30.

5.3 Data Analysis

In order to determine whether the students are able to distinguish meaning according to changes in comma position a Chi-square test was employed. According to Tavakoli (2013: 59), the Chi-square test compares actual or observed frequencies with expected frequencies in a sample data to decide if the two frequencies differ statistically. It is also employed to investigate the relationship between the variables, which provides the researchers with information on how the variables may influence each other

(Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015:155).

This may propose that Chi-square is the suitable data analysis instrument in the present study since it aims to decide whether changing the comma position influences students understanding of the intended meaning.

6. Results and Discussion

The multiple choice question test consisted of two questions, each question represents the same five rules of comma which have direct effect on meaning. The first rule is of separating items in a list the second rule concerns setting off introductory expressions, the third rule is to indicate the vocative, the fourth rule is the setting off of non-essential information specifically appositive and finally the fifth rule is setting off of restrictive and non restrictive clauses. A Chi-square test was conducted to determine students' ability to identify the five

5.2 The Test

A multiple choice question test was constructed to determine whether participants are able to discriminate meaning according to change in the position of comma or not. The test consists of two questions. The first question includes ten sentences; each sentence represents a rule of using comma. The students were asked to match a sentence (where a comma is used) with its correct meaning. The second question includes five sentences; each sentence represents an interpretation. The students were asked to decide which sentence fits the given interpretation. These interpretations correspond to the rules of comma that have been used in the first question. It is important to mention that, rules of comma vary in their effect on meaning. Some rules have a direct effect on meaning; if we change the position

of comma the resulting sentence will deliver a completely different meaning from the intended one. This will consequently lead to different understanding. This test is designed to deal with the rules that have direct and crucial effect on meaning. To ensure the face and content validity of the test, the researchers exposed it to a jury of experts to judge whether the test items are suitable or not for the intended purpose. Then, the jurors were asked to read the test, add, delete or change the items. The jurors agreed upon the suitability of the test items 100% since none of the included items were deleted. However, some items were modified in the light of the jurors' opinions. Also, the researchers chose 20 students as a pilot sample and exposed them to the test to determine the required time to answer the questions, to identify

NONESSENTIAL ELEMENT:
although I may attend the awards ceremony.

WHY IT IS NONESSENTIAL:
The writer decisively states that they are not going to the party. The information on the awards ceremony is additional; it does not relate to the narrator's attending the party (Woods, 2006: 45).

Appositives are interrupting elements, contends Larson (1999: 40). They may take the form of phrases or clauses that interrupt the flow of a sentence adding information about a noun (or pronoun). They may appear midsentence or finally. When final in sentence, appositives are set off by a comma.

< 8> *My favorite professor is Dr. Hallaby, the president of the UFO society.*

Straus et.al (2014: 28) stresses adding this important comma after appositives since many writers for-

get it. The closing comma used in this context is called the *appositive comma*. Below are two examples of the urgency of an appositive comma to clarify the meaning using a couple of nouns.

< 9 >

a- **UNINTENDED MEANING**
(expresses vocative): *My best friend, Joe arrived.*

b- **INTENDED MEANING** (expresses appositive): *My best friend, Joe, arrived.*

The example sentences above are both grammatically correct. They are brought together to contrast the use of a single comma and an appositive (double) comma(s).

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants

Sixty one of third year students, majoring in English at University of Baghdad, College of Arts for the academic year 2017/2018 participated in the present study.

sential or nonessential and, therefore, are described as *restrictive* and *nonrestrictive* and grouped under *appositives*. The basis for using comma in such context is simple: nonessential information that occurs midsentence is always enclosed by commas; essential information is not (Woods, 2006: 45; Straus et.al, 2014: 28).

Before punctuating, one must first decide whether a particular expression is essential or not. The following guidelines are proposed:

If essential information is dropped, the intended main idea is changed. Nonessential information may be interesting but not crucial and will not affect the reader's understanding of the sentence. The sentence conveys the same thing without the nonessential detail.

Another way to identify the importance of elements is to see whether an element identifies the word it describes or merely gives an addi-

tional fact. Essential elements are identifiers without which one may not know which person, place, or thing is in question. In contrast, a reader might like to know some additional information (nonessential elements) but does not need in order to understand the sentence. The following examples further illustrate the difference in meaning and, hence, punctuation.

< 6 > *I'm not going to the party unless you go.*

ESSENTIAL ELEMENT: *unless you go*

WHY IT IS ESSENTIAL: If *unless you go* is left out, the statement becomes absolute: *I am not going to the party*. But the writer will probably go to the party if a certain condition is fulfilled.

<7> *I'm not going to the party, although I may attend the awards ceremony.*

remainder of the sentence makes it clear that one has misread the beginning—that the first meaningful group is supposed to begin after *frequently*:

A comma removes the uncertainty:

< 3 > **b- MEANT:** *Frequently, adjusted totals need to be scrutinized* (Ibid:35).

4.3 To Indicate Direct Address (Vocative)

In a sentence, *direct address* denotes an audience that is intentionally named—those to whom we are writing (Woods, 2006: 66). Commas set off that person or group being addressed from the rest of the sentence (Hands, 294 :2009). A single comma suffices to set off the direct addressee at the beginning and end of the sentence; two commas are required to do the job if the direct addressee is midsentence.

< 4 > *Girls, please hand in your art projects now.*

(*Girls* = initial direct addressee)

< 4 > *Don't go into the water after the lifeguard leaves, George.*

(*George* = final direct addressee).

< 5 > *The origin of this proverb, Mr. President, is not entirely clear.*
(*Mr. President* = *midsentence direct addressee*)

(Woods, 2006:66).

4.4 To Set off Nonessential Information

For grammarians, sentence elements are either *essential* or *nonessential* to the meaning of the sentence. These elements, which are generally descriptive, reveal how or when something happens or provide information about a person or thing. Clauses and phrases containing these descriptive items (adjective and adverb) can be es-

<1>: *Lisa speaks French, Juliet speaks Italian and I speak Spanish.*

(Trask, 1997: 13).

Straus et al (2014: 26) points out that the last comma in a series *and* or *or* is known as the *Oxford comma*. Most newspapers and magazines leave out the Oxford comma in a simple series feeling that it is unnecessary. However, missing Oxford commas can lead to misunderstandings.

<2> a- *We had coffee, cheese and crackers and gripes.*

By simply adding comma after *crackers* clarify that *cheese and crackers* represent one dish. In such cases, it is the Oxford comma that renders the text some clarity.

<2> b- *We had coffee, cheese and crackers, and gripes.*

4.2 To Set off Introductory Expressions

A comma should be used to set the boundary of an introductory element at the beginning of a sentence. Sentences often begin with an initial word or word group that indicate time, place, manner, reason, or other ideas in line with the main statement. In speaking, speakers aid their listeners to identify the boundary of such preliminary elements by changing intonation and pausing. With writing, giving readers similar aid is a must and is done by signaling the boundaries of preliminary elements with commas (Kirkman, 2006: 34).

Omission of commas in such position is one of the most frequent sources of confusion for readers, as the following examples show:

< 3 > a-WROTE: *Frequently adjusted totals need to be scrutinized.*

In a first reading, one readily takes in an idea about *frequently adjusted totals*, but considering the

kinds of clause, phrase and word groups (Partridge, 2005: 13).

The comma may be the trickiest PM to master. It is by far the most flexible, its uses are the most varied, it carries few rules and has been used (and not used) by great authors in varied ways (Luke-man, 2006: 45). Trask (1997:33) suggests a four type classification of comma into: the *listing*, *joining*, *gapping* and *bracketing* comma.

- * A **listing** comma can always be replaced by *and* or *or*,

- * A **joining** comma is followed by one of the connecting words *and*, *or*, *but*, *yet* or *while*.

- * A **gapping** comma indicates that there is no need to repeat some words that have already appeared in the sentence.

- * **Bracketing** commas always come in pairs, unless one of them comes at the beginning or the end of a sentence, and they always indicate a weak interruption that could simply

be removed from the sentence.

Examining a variety of resources that discuss punctuation, the researchers concluded that most of them show that punctuation marks differ in their effect on meaning. The rules selected for this study are limited to those that have the most effect on meaning and that are most frequently misused by language learners.

4.1 To Separate items in a List

Things written in a list are called items. Instead of inserting *and* between every item, commas are used (Butterworth, 1999: 12). The *listing comma* replaces the word *and* and, sometimes, *or*. It occurs in two different cases. One is when a list comprises three or more words, phrases or even complete sentences that are joined by *and* or *or*. This construction may be called *X, Y and Z list*.

3. Behavior and Function of Punctuation

Punctuation marks appear singly or in different combinations; in a single position or in varying positions; with a single meaning/function or a variety of them. These marks are often categorized relative to their position in the sentence. This gives us end and non-end punctuation marks. Some linguists classify marks according to their function. Quirk et al (1985: 1610) group them into two sets: those showing boundaries and those showing meaning of sentence elements. Huddleston et al (2002:1729-30) are more specific in their classification; they divide the marks into four kinds: indicating boundaries, status, omission or linkage. Concerning PMs' functions, those interested in simulating speech add establishing tone as a second function of punctuation besides indicating how elements of a sentence relate to each other,

consequently ensuring clear and unambiguous communication. The first function is more mechanical and hence more easily learned; the second is part of what distinguishes the skilled writer from the novice. Sometimes the reason for selecting one mark over another has more to do with achieving a certain nuance than with major differences in meaning (Stilman, 1997: 53).

4. Comma and Its Rules

Comma, the Latin transliteration of Greek *komma*, related to *koptein* (to cut), means literally 'a cutting', 'a part cut off', 'a clause', which, after all, is merely a part, especially a (comparatively) short part, cut off from the rest of the sentence; hence the sign that indicates the division. The comma separates not only clauses but also phrases and words; more precisely, it separates certain

2. Focus of This Study

Punctuation rules cover all the marks, of course, but punctuation studies focus on the ‘functional’ marks. Statistical studies show that over 90% of marks are periods and commas, with commas occurring more frequently (Dawkins, 1962: 2). Myer (1989: 123) points out that the comma requires more rules and leads to more problems in writing. Jones asserts that the comma is far more versatile than the other PMs and is involved in almost three-quarters of all punctuation patterns (Jones 1996 as cited in Grindlay, 2002: 74). Based on frequency alone, argues Lukeman, the comma has remarkable influence, outnumbering the period by at least three to one, and outnumbering other punctuation marks by at least five to one (2006: 44). And yet, it is also the mark most open to interpretation. It has few hard rules, but it turns out

to be the mark most often misused. Cronnel (1980:12) observes that though numerous handbooks and manuals have been printed, inside, they are basically the same and familiar to readers of this digest: rules for comma, with clauses, phrases, and words. They are usually based on grammatical description, but often rely on semantic respects.

King (2004: 33) seems to confirm Stilman’s opinion denoting that the comma is the most flexible, versatile of all the PMs. Because it tends to be less emphatic than other marks, it became the subtlest and most complex. It can form complex sentences, elaborate thoughts, connect them to more thoughts and after thoughts and additional information. Hence, the current study focuses on the comma and its effect in defining the meaning of the sentence in which it appears.



many a time do translators produce translation with meaning different from that in the source text. Moreover, students are not always able to identify parts of a sentence in order to change their form or change the sentence structure. This may be due to reasons of lack of syntactic proficiency, lexical incompetence, or simply the lack of knowledge of these little signs that are called punctuation marks (PMs). The comma, for instance, is often cited as one of the most confusing and frustrating elements of writing.

In speaking, one uses pauses and gestures to clarify the meaning of their words. In writing, punctuation marks (commas, dashes, colons, semicolons, etc.) provide most of these interpretation clues. By inserting standardized marks or signs in written matter meaning is clarified and structural units are separated (Webster, 2000:52). PMs indicate a pause, place emphasis, alter the function or show the

relationship between elements of the text. Misplaced or insufficient punctuation can change the meaning unintentionally and create ambiguity. Well-used punctuation, on the other hand, can enhance clarity (Truss, 2007: 202). Chafe (1987:1) maintains that punctuation contributes substantially to the effectiveness of a piece of writing and its successful use calls for an awareness of the sound of written language. Kirkman (2006: 5) asserts that punctuation marks are integral part of the signaling system we call writing. They do two jobs. One is grammatical and the other is rhetorical. Though PMs may appear to be a small detail in comparison with structure, theme, organization, and craft, they may well be key to complex thinking. Punctuation is what glues ideas together, what writers use to enclose and, in turn, express layers of thoughts with clarity and grace (Angelillo, 2002: 5).

1.Introduction

The word *punctuation* derives from the Latin for *point*, which means that the marks within a sentence *point* to the various meanings of its words, giving sense to what may otherwise be a string of sounds (Stilman, 1997: 62). Bussmann (2006: 969) prefers to view punctuation as rules for the optimal order of **written language** by which non-alphabetic characters such as periods, commas, and exclamation marks are utilized. Such defining symbols clarify grammatical and semantic aspects of a text. They signal quotes, contractions and direct speech, and can reflect the intonation of a spoken text. (Salmon, 1962: 360) adds that punctuation marks provide the boundaries of syntactic units (sentences) and, most importantly, of meaning. Without punctuation, a text will appear as a mass of jumbled words,

severely loosened by the lack of logical relations between its different parts. The absence of such relations makes it difficult for readers to discern the exact content of the text. Even worse, the reader may be misled to a completely different content because of the meaning difference resulting from careless punctuation or the lack of it. The gravity of punctuation, hence, lies in its existence and absence alike (Kirkman, 2006: 8). Punctuation provides a regulatory aspect for a sentence through identifying the positions of its constituents. Setting out these boundaries consequently helps set out meaning boundaries.

Comprehending a written text and specifying the intended meaning is a crucial aim that foreign language learners need to achieve. Many a time do EFL learners read texts and misunderstand them, and

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to changes in comma position. In addition to specifying the rules of comma that have direct effect on meaning. To this end, the researchers designed a multiple choice question test to determine whether students are able to find the connection between the position of comma and the meaning of the given sentences. Data analysis was performed using Chi-square test to compare proportions of correct and incorrect answers. The result shows that the comma can identify meaning and its rules vary in their difficulty for students. Finally, the study concludes with a number of recommendations.

Keywords: punctuation, Meaning, Identifying Element.

يتطلب كل فعل منظم مجموعة معينة من القواعد أو الاعراف التي يتبعها. هناك قواعد للحدث والكتابة والقراءة وما إلى ذلك. هناك أيضًا قواعد لعلامات الترقيم. في الواقع ، تعتبر علامات الترقيم في حد ذاتها قاعدة. فهي تعوض عن التنعيم الذي لا يمكن التعبير عنه بسبب غياب التعبير الصوتي ، ويعوض عن الإيماءات التي لا يمكن إظهارها بسبب غياب التمثيل المادي. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى إثبات أن علامات الترقيم (وعلى وجه التحديد الفارزة) يمكن أن تحدد المعنى في النصوص المكتوبة. وتختبر الدراسة قدرة الطلاب على تمييز المعنى وفقًا للتغيرات في موضع الفارزة. بالإضافة إلى تحديد قواعدها التي لها تأثير مباشر على المعنى. بناء على ذلك ، صممت الباحثتان اختبارًا ذي أسئلة متعددة الاختيارات لتحديد ما إذا كان الطلاب قادرين على إيجاد العلاقة بين موضع الفارزة ومعنى الجمل المعطاة. تم إجراء تحليل البيانات باستخدام اختبار Chi-Square لمقارنة نسب الإجابات الصحيحة والخاطئة. تظهر النتيجة أن الفارزة يمكنها تحديد المعنى وتختلف قواعدها في الصعوبة التي يواجهها الطلاب. أخيرًا ، تنتهي الدراسة بعدد من التوصيات بناء على ما ظهر من النتائج.

كلمات مفتاحية: علامات الترقيم، المعنى، النصوص المكتوبة.

Punctuation: A Meaning Identifying Element

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Abstract

*E*very kind of regulated action or performance is carried out following a certain set of conventions. There are conventions for speaking, writing, reading, etc. There are also conventions for punctuation. As a matter of fact, punctuation itself is a convention. It makes up for the intonation that cannot be expressed due

to the absence of vocal expression, and it makes up for the gestures that cannot be shown due to the absence of physical representation. The present study aims at proving that punctuation (specifically comma) can identify meaning in written texts. It tests students' ability to discriminate meaning according