

# The unexpected effect of punctuation on text interpretation

Kambale Katsiwa Jimmy

(Senior Lecturer At ISTM-Butembo, DRC)

Paluku Lunga Denis et Betilombe Muvirwa Germain

(Assistants At ISP-OICHA, DRC)

---

## **Abstract**

*This article treats on the crucial role played by punctuation marks to complete the meaning of our writings. It was initiated after noticing the extent to which the finalist students of the English Department overlooked punctuation in their writing tasks. Thus, the main aim of this paper is to inform them and arouse their interest and inform them about the contribution or punctuation to the interpretation of a sentence.*

*The result shows that the students are not always able to distinguish the differences of meaning among the different versions of the sentence and phrases formed with exactly the same words but punctuated differently. Their poor results urged us to collect through reading of a few scholars some examples of confusion related to punctuation use to confirm the evidence that punctuation plays a crucial role in the meaning of written messages. This finding was then confirmed by the outcome of our enquiry through a questionnaire submitted to our sample.*

**Keywords:** *Unexped, punctuation, effect, interpretation*

## **Résumé**

*Cet article traite du rôle crucial joué par les signes de ponctuation pour compléter le sens de nos écrits. Il a été initié après avoir constaté à quel point les étudiants finalistes du département d'anglais négligeaient la ponctuation dans leurs tâches d'écriture. Ainsi, l'objectif principal de cet article est de les informer et d'éveiller leurs connaissances sur la contribution de la ponctuation à l'interprétation d'une phrase.*

*Le résultat montre que les étudiants ne sont pas toujours capables de distinguer les différences de sens entre les différentes versions des phrases qui contiennent exactement les mêmes mots mais ponctuées différemment. Leurs mauvais résultats nous ont poussés à recueillir, par la lecture de quelques universitaires, quelques exemples de confusion liée à l'utilisation de la ponctuation pour confirmer la preuve que la ponctuation joue un rôle crucial dans le sens des messages écrits. Ce résultat a ensuite été confirmé par le résultat de notre enquête à travers un questionnaire soumis à notre échantillon.*

**Mots clés :** *Inattendu, ponctuation, effet, interprétation*

---

Date of Submission: 17-05-2025

Date of Acceptance: 27-05-2025

---

## **I. Introduction**

This article essentially treats on the inappropriate use and even the omission of necessary punctuation marks within a text and the impact that these mistakes have on the overall sense of a piece of writing.

### *Historical context of the topic*

This study was inspired by the frequent mistakes that we pointed out from the writing tasks submitted to finalist English students of Oicha Teacher Training college as we taught them the writing course during the 2023-2024 academic year. Since these problems occurred over and over in the tasks of most students, and since they usually obscured the sense of the ideas that these learners intended to express, we thought that the issue was worth examining. Our curiosity pushed us to check the extent of the students' information about punctuation.

Thus, the aim of this article is to draw the students and other English readers' attention to the role played by the punctuation marks in written utterances, but also to share with them the result of our readings related to the topic at hand.

The advantage of this study is to help the writer express his ideas clearly because, as will be seen later in this paper, inappropriate punctuation or the omission of punctuation marks where they are needed might lead to confusion or even change of the intended meaning.

So, as the main problem, this paper seeks to respond is to check whether problems related to punctuation use are so crucial to express meaning in a text. And if it is so, what can happen in case of omission or inappropriate punctuation use, especially with regard to the comma among many others?

---

Our presumptions are that punctuation marks, though seemingly small features, contribute a lot to clarify meaning, and thus their use or misuse could affect meaning, especially in writing. The comma would probably be more concerned with punctuation conflicts.

## **II. Methodology**

A first step in gathering information about this modest work stemmed from observing the pupils' punctuation misuse while reading their writing tasks. During their correction, we analysed them together in order to point out the problems of punctuation.

As these problems seemed to be general to the pupils, we decided to enquire in the matter in order to make a more elaborated research.

To test the above assumption and the students' comprehension of the role of punctuation, we submitted them to an exercise that consisted of interpreting the meaning expressed in a few sentences or phrases where punctuation marks were placed or omitted at different places. To collect more data for this article, we also and mostly used the documentary approach, consisting of reading and interpreting what some scholars have said about punctuation-related issues.

During the qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data, the occurrence of the different interpretations of the sentences were recorded. By comparing these options, it resulted that case of punctuation misinterpretation dominated.

## **III. Literature Review On Punctuation**

Let us briefly review in this section, some theories explaining punctuation and its role in writing as argued by preceding researchers.

### **A. Definition**

Some authors have defined punctuation in more or less different words that we present below.

Punctuation, according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, is defined as "the marks used in writing that divide sentences and phrases; the system of using these marks." The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines punctuation as "the act or practice of inserting standardized marks or signs in written matter to clarify the meaning and separate structural units." According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the term 'punctuation' is defined as "(the use of) special symbols that you add to writing to separate phrases and sentences to show that something is a question, etc.", and "punctuation is the use of symbols such as full stops or periods, commas, or question marks to divide written words into sentences and clauses", according to the Collins Dictionary.

The above definitions from different sources converge in that they all refer to marks or tools used within a text, that is written language, to separate structural units and add something to its meaning.

### **B. Importance of punctuation**

According to Tanvi (2023), punctuation marks are important in writing to capture the meaning and flow of spoken language. They help us communicate our thoughts and ideas clearly and create an easy reading experience for our reader.

To illustrate this, let us look at this punctuated piece of writing that he suggests below:

"Can you tell me who wrote 'The Bell Jar'? I can't seem to remember," Jin said. He scratched his head, frowning, making a show of thinking very hard. "Plath," said May, not looking up from her sketchbook. "The only novel she wrote—published under the pseudonym 'Victoria Lucas', though."

Now, here's the same paragraph with no punctuation:

Can you tell me who wrote The Bell Jar I can't seem to remember Jin said He scratched his head frowning making a show of thinking very hard Plath said May not looking up from her sketchbook The only novel she wrote published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas though

As we can notice with the author, there is no rest for the eye, no pauses or separations, and absolutely no tonal changes.

Some other scholars have spoken about the importance punctuation in different terms. In this respect, let us examine some of their famous quotes.

Russel Baker (2019) explains the need for punctuation in a language beautifully: "When speaking aloud, you punctuate constantly — with body language. Your listener hears commas, dashes, question marks, exclamation points, quotation marks as you shout, whisper, pause, wave your arms, roll your eyes, wrinkle your brow. In writing, punctuation plays the role of body language. It helps readers hear the way you want to be heard."

For Nanette L. Avery, "Punctuation marks are like road signs; without them we just may get lost..."

Similarly to the above, Lynne Truss also states: " Punctuation marks are the traffic signal language: they tell us to slow down, notice this, take a detour, and stop. »

In the same vein, we learn that «Appropriate punctuation acts like a set of 'road signs' to guide the reader through the ideas expressed in your sentences. Punctuation marks can tell the reader when to slow down, speed up and stop. By breaking up your sentences, they contain and structure your ideas".  
([https://libguides.reading.ac.uk>pu.\(2024.\)](https://libguides.reading.ac.uk>pu.(2024.)))

Furthermore, Lynne Truss argues: «we have à language that is full of ambiguities; we have a way of expressing ourselves that is often complex and elusive, poetic and modulated; all our thoughts can be rendered with absolute clarity if we bother to put the right dots and squiggles between the words in the right places. Proper punctuation is both the sign and the cause of clear thinking. If it goes, the degree of intellectual impoverishment we face is unimaginable",

Ritter (2001, p.112), «Punctuation exists to clarify meaning in the written word and to facilitate reading..."

For Edgar Allan Poe, «The writer who neglects punctuation, or mispunctuates, is liable to be misunderstood for the want of merely a comma, it often occurs that an axiom appears a paradox, or that sarcasm is merely converted into a sermonoid".

On examining the above scholars' quotes concerning the importance of punctuation; despite their different phrasings we can sum up the ways punctuation improves writing as follows:

- Proper use of punctuation is crucial to express meaning clearly.
- Proper punctuation use reflects clear thinking of the writer.
- Proper punctuation reduces ambiguity and makes your writing clear.
- Proper punctuation communicates your tone and emphasis effectively.
- Punctuation breaks the sentence into smaller chunks, making it easier to read.
- It makes it easier for the reader to trust your authority.
- It prevents misunderstandings and confusion.

Now that we have seen the importance of punctuation, let us understand how to use punctuation marks correctly. We have added several punctuation marks examples to illustrate the rules.

### **C. An overview on some common punctuation marks**

<https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/writing> offers the following guidelines concerning punctuation marks and their uses.

#### *1. Period (.)*

- The period or full stop is most commonly used to end a sentence. That is, all sentences that aren't direct questions or exclamations! Here are some examples:

e.g. The roses are red.

Please close the door..

- The second most common use of the period is to denote abbreviations, initialisms, and decimals.

e.g. Abbreviation: Dr. John and Mrs. Therese are getting married next week

- Decimal: The value of pi is 3.14.

#### *2. Question mark (?)*

- The question mark is most commonly used to ask direct questions.

e.g. Are all the students present at the course ?

- Confusion and disbelief:

e.g. How is this possible?

Are we sure it's a power cut?

- Questions within quotation marks:

e.g. "Can I join you when I finish?" Mark asked.

#### *3. Exclamation point (!)*

The ! is called an exclamation point or exclamation mark. You can also call them bangs or shrieks if that suits your fancy! They're used to show strong emotion, urgency, or an outcry.

Here are the ways in which you can use an exclamation point:

- Excitement or enthusiasm: How lucky I am to win the lottery!

- Surprise or shock: I can't believe that just happened!

- Urgency: Hurry, we don't have much time!

:-Command: Stop the guy!

- Strong emotion: I'm so happy for you!

#### *4. Comma*

Below are the rules for using the comma:

- Use a comma to separate independent clause It comes before a coordinating conjunction (and, but, yet, so, or nor, for) when it joins two complete ideas (independent clauses), as in:

e.g. We all thought that the man would die, but he finally recovered.

- You can stay here watching TV, or you can take me to the market.

- Use a comma after an introductory clause or phrase. A comma tells readers that the introductory clause or phrase has come to a close and that the main part of the sentence is about to begin, as in:

e.g. When his father came in, John stopped crying.

- Use a comma between all items in a series to separate to separate them, as in:

e.g. Yesterday, my mother bought cabbage, meat, and some rice for the party.( series of words).

Peter looked through his room, inside his pocket, and under the bed for his lost banknote (series of phrases)

- Use commas to set off nonrestrictive clauses

Rule: Use commas to enclose clauses not essential to the meaning of a sentence. These are called nonrestrictive, unlike restrictive which are clauses essential to the meaning of a sentence. are called restrictive. Both restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses may begin with a relative pronoun.

e.g. Mr Brown, whose scooter you bought , is getting married tomorrow. (nonrestrictive)

vs

The man who stole the scooter has been arrested. (restrictive)

- Use a comma to set off appositives

Rule: An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun. Appositives offer nonessential information. Nonrestrictive appositives are set off with commas; restrictive appositives are not.

e.g. Laurent Kabila, the former president of the DRC , was a great nationalist. . (appositive)

The former president of the DRC , was a great nationalist.(no appositive)

- Use a comma to indicate direct address

When a speaker in a sentence names the person to whom he is speaking, this addressing of his audience is called direct address. Direct address is indicated by the use of a comma or commas, depending upon its placement within the sentence.

e.g. Brown, I think you're not right to claim.

I think you're wrong, Brown.

I think, Brown, you're not right to claim

- ❖ Use commas to set off direct quotations

e.g. Mun said, "I hate waiting so long"

"I hate waiting so long" ,she said.

- Use commas with dates, addresses, titles, and numbers

Rules for dates: In dates, the year is set off from the rest of the sentence with a pair of commas.

e.g. Catholics believe Jesus was born on December 25.

- Rules for numbers: In numbers more than four digits long, use commas to separate the numbers into groups of three, starting from the right. In numbers four digits long, a comma is optional.

e.g. 3,500 (or 3500)

#### 4. Semicolon (;)

- The semicolon is used to connect two independent clauses that are closely related to each other.

e.g. The cinema was so crowded; we were obliged to return.

The teacher is arriving tomorrow; we should get ready for the class.

#### 5. Colon (:)

Mostly, the colon has one and only one major use: elaborating on whatever precedes it.

You can use this punctuation mark to introduce a list, further explanation, or a quote.

- List:

e.g. This job requires a lot of qualities: obedience, honesty, courage and a lot of patience.

- *Elaboration:*

e.g. He soon realized the danger: He was being tailed.

- Quotation:

e.g. The man objected: " You can't take me to prison; I know my rights."

- A colon can also help add emphasis on a phrase or word.

e.g. There is one thing I really admire in my wife: her hospitality.

When using a colon, always capitalize the first word if—and only if—the following element is a complete sentence.

Less commonly, we also use the colon in the following instances:

- *Subtitle:* Hyena and Hare : Part One

- *Time:* 04:15 a.m.

#### 7. Hyphen (-)

The – is called a hyphen. Shorter than both the dashes, it is most commonly used to join words or parts of words.

- *Compound words:*

e.g. son-in-law, five-year-old

- *Prefixes and suffixes:*

e.g. cross-check, self-assured, all-expenses, sugar-free,

- *Numbers:*

e.g. twenty-eight, forty-ninth

#### 8. **Apostrophe (')**

The ' is called an apostrophe. It is a punctuation mark used to indicate possession or to show that some letters have been omitted from a word.

- *Possession*

My child's toy has been stolen.

- *Contraction*

e.g. I have: I've

Do not: Don't

They are: They're

- *Plural for letters and numbers*

e.g. How many 10s are there in this deck?

#### 9. **Quotation marks (" " ' ')**

The quotation marks(" ") or more specifically, double quotation marks are most commonly used to indicate dialogue writing in fictio, as in:

e.g. "Honesty pays", said Flora.

- *Titles:*

"A Temporary Matter" is the first short story in Interpreter of Maladies.

Do you know who wrote "The Mine Boy" ?

Single quotation marks ('')

The '' are called single quotation marks. They are used to indicate a quotation within a quotation or to highlight a word or phrase being discussed.

e.g. Highlighting words or phrases:

The word 'culture' came from the Latin word 'cultura', which means 'cultivation or growing'.

Single quotation marks are more widely used in British English. While American English favors double quotation marks, British English favors single quotes.

#### 10. **Slash (/)**

The / is called a slash. It is used to represent a number of different things, including division, fractions, and options.

- *Options:* The book is available in paperback/ebook format.

- *Fraction:*  $\frac{2}{3}$  of Earth is covered in water.

- *Division:*  $36/4$  equals 9.

For the purpose of our study, we do not intend to involve all these punctuation marks; only some will be concerned in our analysis.

### **D. Some instances of evidence showing punctuation impact on meaning**

From our readings in order to support and enrich our findings above, we came across some good instances of how faulty punctuation can totally and unexpectedly change the meaning of a sentence. In this respect, *digital synopsis.com* argues in these terms: "The absence or presence of a comma can change the entire meaning of a sentence...The same holds true for apostrophes, hyphens, colons, and other punctuation marks". The same source states that the comma is the most confusing punctuation mark.

In this respect, let us mention more examples from independent researchers. From <https://www.quora.com>, it is suggested the following instances in which alternative versions produce each an opposite or conflicting interpretation:

e.g. 1. **Misplaced Punctuation:**

Punish him not let him go

- Punish him not, let him go.

> *Interpretation:* Here the person is released without punishment.

This sentence will have the opposite meaning by shifting the comma:

- Punish him, not let him go.

> *Interpretation:* The person is retained for punishment.

e.g. 2. **Misplaced Punctuation**

"The teacher said, 'John is smart.'" vs. "The teacher, said John, is smart."

> *Interpretation:*

The placement of commas changes who is making the statement. In the first sentence, the statement is that of the teacher whereas in the second it is John who is making the statement.

e.g. 3. Ambiguity in meaning (with use vs omission of punctuation)

Example suggested by *digital synopsis.com*

"Let's eat, grandma!" vs. "Let's eat grandma!"

> *Interpretation*

In the first sentence, grandma is invited for eating; in the second, there is a cannibalistic idea of eating grandma. Example 4: A period might come across as indifferent or sarcastic, while an exclamation mark suggests enthusiasm, as in:

"Sure." vs " Sure!"

e.g. 4. Quotation Marks and Context

Example:

He said he was "fine."

Quotation marks can imply scepticism or irony, leading to potential misunderstandings.

e.g. 5. *Hyphen matter*

Let us consider the following phrases, where only the hyphen position changes the meaning:

1) I saw a man eating lion today

2) I saw a man-eating lion today

> *Interpretation*

Sentence (1) here could describe a man who was eating lion meat. But (2) is clear because we hyphenated " man eating", which shows both terms as modifying " lion".

e.g. 6. *Comma and colon matter*

Let us examine a classic example of how punctuation is powerful by professor Konstantinos who wrote a sentence on the chalkboard and asked students to punctuate it correctly :

"A woman without her man is nothing".

Male students wrote: A woman, without her man is nothing

Females students wrote: A woman: without her, man is nothing.

> *Interpretation*

In the first sentence, the message is that the woman's existence depends on her man. In the second, on the other hand, woman is crucial for man's success in his professional or personal life, as interpreted by Rachel Neumeier .

We notice that with the comma and colon used purposely by the two groups , each aimed to show their supremacy over the other. Once more, punctuation is all the problem. We can even imagine how such a situation can possibly affect the harmony in a couple.

e.g. 7. To illustrate how punctuation marks can change the meaning of sentences and thus is very crucial, Srivastava (2022) also tells the following story:

Once, a king ordered the hanging of an ordinary man based on the advice of his minister. Following the order, the king wrote a message and handed it to the minister.

The message read, "Hang him, not leave him." The minister passed the note to a guard, who was tasked with delivering it to the executioner.

Meanwhile, the simple man had a friend named Manu, who was concerned and wanted to save him. Manu was present as events unfolded, and he convinced the guard to show him the note. Feeling sympathy for his friend, the guard agreed to reveal its contents. In a split second, he altered the message, ultimately saving his friend's life. This change was due to a single punctuation mark. It changed the initial message "Hang him not, leave him" into "Hang him, not leave", thus saving a person's life.

e.g. 8. Let us now examine these two versions of a letter written by a lady to John:

- Letter 1

*Dear John,*

*I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we are apart. I can be forever happy- will you let me go?*

Let us now see what the message becomes when punctuated differently as follows:

Letter 2.

*Dear John,*

*I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we are apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me go?*

> *Interpretation*

In the first paragraph, the woman is praising John for his qualities as a good lover, generous, kind, thoughtful, superior, the one who has gained her heart unlike other men. So the woman is expressing her admiration of the man.

In the second paragraph, however, the message of the letter is exactly the opposite, that of mockery. In fact, the woman says that all men around John have the up-cited qualities, but it John, who is inferior and useless! She declares that she would feel forever happier when they are separated, and thus wants to leave him!

What is interesting here is to realize how two letters written with exactly the same words produce opposite effects, here praise and mockery! Punctuation usage here is what explains the different effects: When reading the first letter, John will certainly feel comfortable, but will feel here when reading the second. It is here where Howard's (2020) quote in his book *The Making of Henry* comes in: "It is from his grandmother that Henry learns that punctuation can be a weapon. With a comma you can hurt someone." Indeed, the commas used in the second version of the act exactly like a weapon against John's heart.

e.g. 9. An example from the Bible

According as one consults some editions of KJV (King James Version) and NIV (New International Version), the Bible verse Luke 23:32 reads respectively as follows:

1) "And there were also two other malefactors, led with him to be put to death." (KJV)

2) The other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed". (NIV)

> Interpretation:

There should normally be a comma after "other" in (1); without which the text indicates that Jesus an evildoer. So, again here the absence of the comma in the sentence is blasphemous.

In sentence (2), on the other hand, the use of the comma around the phrase in opposition indicates that only the two men executed with Jesus were wrongdoers. (<https://biblehub.com>)

So, we realize the ambiguity in the interpretation of a text caused by the punctuation use - here the comma.

In fact, all the literature above seems to converge towards showing how true it is that punctuation influences a text. However, for this work we want to check ourselves whether this phenomenon is also true with our sample students in order to verify the veracity of the phenomenon rather than simply relying on the relevant literature. In addition, the examples provided above are not all interpreted for a better clarification, something we have done to complete their comprehension.

#### IV. Research Results

In this section, we present the test questionnaire and the results of the exercise that we submitted our students to. Their discussion will follow in the following section.

*Instruction:* Read the sentences carefully, paying attention to punctuation, then answer the questions based on them.

Question: 1) Are all the four sentences identical in meaning? Yes/ No (if yes, stop there)

2) If not identical, match each sentence (1st column) with the corresponding interpretation (2nd column)

1. John, Peter the sorcerer has come!                      A. The sorcerer's name is Peter and the speaker is informing John

2. John Peter, the sorcerer has come!                      B. The speaker is informing Peter and John about the coming of the sorcerer!

3. John, Peter, the sorcerer has come!                      C. The sorcerer's name is not mentioned, and the speaker is informing both John and Peter.

4. John Peter, the sorcerer, has come!                      D. The sorcerer's name is John Peter

E. The speaker is informing John and Peter that the sorcerer has come.

> *Right responses with the students' scores:*

Right answers.	Frequencies.	%	:
1- A	: 2	4 %	:
2.- B.	: 4.	8 %	:
3- C.	: 6.	12 %	:
4- D.	: 3.	6 %	:
5. No difference of meaning.	: 35.	70 %	:

2. Exercise 2.

a) I understand Ann. b) I understand, Ann

Concerning the two sentences, what is the right interpretation ?

A. In sentence (1), the speaker informs Ann that he understands her, but in (2), he understands the situation. (Right: 6/ 50, i.e. 12 %)

B. In sentence (1), the speaker understands the situation, but in (2), he says he understands Ann. ( wrong: 7/50, i.e. 14%)

C. Both sentences have the same meaning. ( score: 37/50, i.e. 74%)

3. Exercise 3.

Write in figures:

- a) Twenty five-dollars bills (= 100\$ ) and Twenty-five dollar bills (= 25\$ ) : 12/50, i.e. 24%
- b) Twenty five-dollars bills ( = 25\$ ) and Twenty-five dollar bills (=100\$ ): 15/50, I.e. 30%
- c) Both expressions are the same and equal' to 100\$ : 5/50, i.e. 10%
- d) Both expressions are the same and equal to 25\$: 18/50, ie. 36%

## V. Discussion

For the purpose of our study, we are only interested in the frequencies of the students who did not find any difference in the interpretations of the different sentences. In fact, the objective of the work is to check the extend at which the students overlook the impact of punctuation on meaning. So, the few cases of those who answered well such or such other question are not very relevant for our study.

1) John Peter the sorcerer has come

For this sentence , most students (70 %) ignored that punctuation can affect sentence meaning because they were unable to distinguish the senses of the sentences where the commas were placed at different positions. For these, all the sentences about the sorcerer are the same in meaning. Yet, each of the four sentences has got a different interpretation as far as the sorcerer and the addresses' identities are concerned. This high proportion implies that their knowledge of punctuation impact on sentence meaning is very poor.

2) I understand Ann

a) version 1: I understand, .

b) version 2: I understand Ann

Unlike only 6 students who answered right, , 37 out of 50 subjects, who constitute 74% said that the two versions are the same. Yet, in the first version, the speaker is addressing Ann, whereas in (2) the speaker is addressing somebody else about Ann.

3) a) Twenty five-dollars bills vs Twenty-five dollar bills

For this exercise, the findings were as follows:

- Only 12/50 students responded right, representing a proportion of 24%
- The remaining students (i.e. 38) representing 76% responded wrongly. Among them, 30% made a confusion between 25 and 100, and the remaining, i.e. 46% said that the two versions have the same value ; 25\$ for some and 100\$ for the others. With such problems arising from the different figures, we can then realise the effect of such mistakes in terms of potential money loss or gain.

In fact, for this question, the problem was that of a simple hyphen! According to <https://www.thesaurus.com.comp.>, we are using a noun with a number to describe another noun, that's a compound adjective. The two words that form the compound adjective are separated by a hyphen. The hyphen used with numbers give them completely different values. Below, are, indeed, the different right interpretations

a) Twenty five-dollars bills = 100 \$, i.e. 20× 5 uniform bills of 5\$)

b) Twenty-five dollar bills = 25 \$ ( a total of 25\$)

Thus, for the above test exercise, in the expression " twenty five- dollar bills ", five is attached to the noun dollar to form a compound adjective qualifying the noun " bill" . So, we have here 20 bills of 5 dollars each, which makes a total of 100\$. On the other hand, for the expression " twenty- five dollar bills ", the hyphen separates the figures 20 and 5 to make 25. Thus, here we have bills that make a total of 25\$.

As a general observation, we notice that our hypothesis that students are unaware or the contribution of punctuation to meaning is largely confirmed by the preceding findings.

## VI. Conclusion And Remedial Suggestions

- *General observation:*

After overviewing punctuation issues through these lines, it follows that punctuation actually matters in writing and its usage is worthwhile considering in order to avoid at all the related misunderstandings, due mostly to the comma use. The comma, according to Lee Charles is, comparatively speaking, the most complicated punctuation mark to use in the English language, and it is claimed to be 11 times harder to use than all or the other marks combined. Our hypotheses assumed above are thus confirmed, as numerous examples have shown that improper, omitted or shifted punctuation marks are likely to transform, often unwillingly, the intended thought of a writer. Following this, some remedial suggestions can be considered.

- *Suggestions for avoiding punctuation misunderstandings:*

Owing to the punctuation- related problems raised above, some helpful orientations might be at all necessary to consider. In this respect, we suggest the following among many other possible alternatives:

- Using commas, periods, and other marks appropriately to clarify meaning.
- Rereading sentences aloud to ensure clarity.
- When texting, consider adding context if punctuation could be misinterpreted.

These suggestions being not exhaustive, we would encourage other researchers interested in this topic to search for more guidance likely to help minimize punctuation misinterpretation.

### References

- [1] A Guide To Compound Adjectives And Hyphenation (2022). Retrieved On 6th November 2024 From <https://www.thesaurus.com/comp>
- [2] Baker, R. ( N.D ). How To Punctuate, Retrieved On 1st February From <https://scribd.com>,The New York Times
- [3] Edward A. Poe (1985), The Collected Writings Of Edgard Allan Poe-Vol. II: The Brevities, Pp. 325-330.
- [4] Hornby,A.S. (2016), Oxford Learner's Dictionary, Oxford: OUP
- [5] Howard, J. (2020), The Making Of Henry, Amazon.Retrieved On 14th November 2024 From <https://www.amazon.fr>
- [6] <https://www.everdltc.com>
- [7] <https://www.thesaurus.com/comp>.
- [8] <https://biblehub.com>
- [9] <https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/pu/>(2024.)
- [10] <https://www.quora.com>
- [11] King James Bible (2008): Oxford University Press.
- [12] Konstantinos, K.(N.D ), The Power Of Punctuation. Retrieved On 6th Jan 2025, From <https://www.quora.com>.
- [13] New International Version. Biblica, 2011. [www.biblegateway.com/versions/new-international-version-niv-bible/#booklist](http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/new-international-version-niv-bible/#booklist).
- [14] Ritter, R.M. (1996-2024), The Oxford Style Manual, Oxford: Amazon.Com, Inc.
- [15] Srivastava, S.(2022), Retrieved On 6th Jan 2024 From [Quotation.Com/Profile/Sunitha-Srivastava](https://quotation.com/profile/sunitha-srivastava)
- [16] Truss Lynne (2024), Eats, Shoots& Leaves :The Tolerance Approach To Punctuation, Retrieved On 14th November From <https://www.amazon.com/eats-s>
- [17] 10 Hilarious Examples Of How Punctuation Makes A Big Difference, Retrieved On
- [18] 10th December 2024 From <https://digital-synopsis.com>
- [19] 14 Punctuation Marks: Examples & Free Guide On How To Use (2023), Calenderjul 09
- [20] Webster, N. (2011). The Merriam-Webster.Com. Retrieved January 25, From <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hacker>the Merriam-Webster Dictionary