

Thai Students' Use of Punctuation on Social Media Posts: A Corpus-Based Study

¹Krisanin Zynce L. Patac, ²Esperval Cezhar H. Cadio, ³Jenievy C. Dungog, ⁴Alfred L. Mota

¹ Sunflower Trilingual School, Samut Sakhon, Thailand ²West Visayas State University, Iloilo, Philippines, ³Banlungklom School, Pattaya, Thailand ⁴ Pho Pratapchang Municipal Wittayalai School, Phichit, Thailand

Abstract

Social media has reached its toll at present and teenagers post and share whatever they feel in the said platform. Thus, it is very important to communicate appropriately with correct grammar and punctuation to promote understanding and appropriateness in social media posts. This corpus-based study was conducted to identify misused punctuation marks on Thai SHS Students on their social media posts. The researchers gathered forty-eight (48) social media posts from Thai senior high school students. The errors committed by the students were identified and analyzed through error analysis using percentage method. The results showed that most of the students did not use any punctuation marks in their posts. Furthermore, it was also found out that gender and grade level do not have any significant difference in the errors made. It is seen that the proper use of punctuation marks is neglected. It is very important that second language teachers give much importance in teaching the various functions of punctuation and its role in communication.

Keywords: error analysis, social media post, punctuation mark errors

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a very important role in life, it builds connection, strengthens relationships, and it is a way to express and be heard. There are various ways to communicate and one of which is through writing. Writing is the most important tool that people use to communicate with one another, such as emails, text messaging, posting, and any other platform that focuses on writing. It also aids in the transmission of knowledge to future generations. There are a lot of things to consider to effectively write and be understood, one of those is using the correct and appropriate punctuation. [9] Punctuations are special symbols that are added in writing output to have distinction between words, phrases, and sentences to express more meaningful statements and questions. Punctuations are used to make comprehension easier.

Nowadays, in this modern world, punctuation marks play a very important role in social media platforms. According to Hengirmen [7], punctuations are like traffic signs, they guide the reader to better understand the message being read. In an internet context, punctuation is often used to convey a certain kind of tone of voice, like for example a quick "thank you" message can go from friendly to passive-aggressive or anxiety-inducing, simply by changing the exclamation point to a period, punctuation marks are little things, but they are essential to good composition as nails are to a carpenter by Lukeman [13].

1.1 The Problem and the Background

Writing is one of the most important skill in communication, but for most second language learners, it is also one of the most difficult skill to learn because it requires writers to take control of various elements fundamental to the writing process such as content, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics like spelling, capitalization and punctuation marks [17]. However, one of the most neglected elements of writing is punctuation marks because they are not used the same way in all languages like in Thai language. This statement is supported that many Thai second language (L2) learners find capitalization and punctuation difficult to remember as they are totally different from their first language (L1) [18]. Moreover, whenever Thai students write in Thai language, neither capitalized words nor punctuation marks (e.g. commas, semicolons, or periods) are needed, so they do not have to worry about them. So, this kind of practice in their L1 affects their L2.

It has been observed that proper usage of punctuations is neglected in social media platforms nowadays specially to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners here in Thailand. According to recent research, there are more than 3.5 billion pieces of content (web links, new stories, blog posts, etc.) that are published every week on Facebook. [14] It is believed especially by the younger ones that what matters is they are able to express themselves and be able to share, or post something when they are happy, sad, or bored without considering proper punctuation in their output. People do have codes created to communicate and most punctuation marks do not have a place anymore in private or public chats or posts. Today, what matters to people is that they are understood by others, they do not really pay attention to punctuations or any grammar rules [10]. As Facebook being one of the leading platforms now, the youth must take into consideration proper punctuation to relay better messages to the public, thus it is very important to express with quality so the message will properly be understood by many.

1.2. Research Questions

The present study aimed to analyze the errors in punctuation marks among social media posts of SHS Thai students. In order to achieve this aim, the following research questions were formulated:

(1) What are the common misused punctuations of Thai SHS students on their Social Media posts?

(2) Is there a significant difference between the number of misused punctuations of Thai SHS students in terms of Grade Level and Gender?

1.3 Significant of the Study

This corpus-based study was conducted to analyze the common punctuation marks errors of Thai SHS students on their Social Media posts and to compare and contrast the number of punctuation errors of Thai SHS students in terms of Grade Level and Gender. The purpose of this study is to comprehend the most commonly misused punctuation and see if it is related to their grade level or gender. The findings of this study could be used to develop appropriate strategies and approaches to improve students' ability to correctly use punctuation marks.

1.4. Review of Literature

This chapter mainly shows the literature review and related studies on error analysis regarding punctuation marks on Social Media posts.

1.4.1. Errors

Experts have proposed many definitions of error. Those definitions essentially have the same meaning, with the only variation being how they are expressed. These definitions are sufficient to identify the errors in the written content. Endorgan [6] says that an error is the use of linguistic items in a way that shows faulty or incomplete learning. It's a situation in wrong belief or conduct that indicates something that is not appropriate. It occurs because language learners do not understand the rules of language. It is considered that writing is really tough; thus, the learners must possess a complete comprehension, cognitive analysis, and linguistics synthesis to pattern the language in order to convey the ideas, messages, and emotions to the listeners or readers through writings. Nonetheless, through making mistakes, learners will construct their new language skill [6]. It can be considered as a means of building learners' abilities when students make errors during studying the foreign language because they can learn something from making errors. It means that learners can increase their ability by learning from errors they make. Ho [8] confirmed that instead of just being able to recognize errors, the learners are now able to explain the rules and correct the errors.

1.4.2. Error Analysis

Error analysis is defined as the technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by a learner of a foreign language. Such analysis informs learners' errors, and thereby, notifies the competence learners attained [21]. According to Richards [19], error analysis may be carried out in order to (a) find out how well someone knows a language, (b) find out how a person learns a language, and (c) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. This definition stresses the functions of error analysis. A further idea of error analysis is provided by Crystal [5]. He stated that error analysis is a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics.

1.4.3 Social Media Posts

Social media has been the go to nowadays, regardless of the age, people post and share their milestones and whereabouts in social media. It plays a very important role in society [22]. According to Munisvararajan [16], social media such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok plays a prime role in the 21st century as a communication medium. The development in the current technology world has led the people to the wide range of exposure towards social media

1.4.4. Related Studies on Analysis of Grammatical Errors by ESL/EFL learners

In the paper of Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn [11] titled "An Analysis of Errors in Written English Sentences: A Case Study of Thai EFL Students" revealed that punctuation marks were the most often made mistakes. The mistakes may be classified into two types based on their characteristics: omission and addition. The most troublesome punctuation marks were discovered to be the comma (,) and the period (.). A closer examination showed that the inaccuracies were caused by the differences in how these two punctuation marks were used in Thai and English. As a result, while writing the sentences, the students may have used the Thai rule. In the instance of the period (.), this is explained by the fact that in Thai, a period is not used to signify the ending of a sentence. In their findings, they indicated that interlingual interference is the principal cause of mistakes. This is because the learners always thought in their original language while producing written English phrases. Interlingual interference is also a major source of mistakes in the writing of other Thai EFL students [2]

In the study conducted by Kampookaew [18], “An Analysis of Grammatical Errors Made by Thai EFL University Students in an EAP writing Class: Issues and Recommendations”, it was pointed out that the reason for the misuse of punctuation by Thai students is the fact that in their L1, neither capitalized words nor punctuation marks (e.g. commas, semicolons, or periods) are needed, so they do not have to worry about them. This kind of practice affects Thai students in learning their L2 in terms of the proper usage of punctuations. Additionally, the previous study only investigated the most commonly grammatical errors on the essays of Thai students such as errors at word level (nouns, articles, verbs, word classes), mechanical errors (punctuation and capitalization), and error at sentence level (fragments, run-ons and voices). However, the previous study did not investigate what kind of punctuation is commonly misused by Thai students, so the present study focuses on the most commonly misused punctuation of SHS Thai students on their Facebook posts. Another research which helped the present study to understand the reason behind the misuse of punctuation by Thai students was conducted by Jantarach [23]. Her study concluded that most Thai students ranked punctuation as the least important element of writing and teachers should give less feedback on it. The result of the previous study showed that grammar ranked as the most important element of writing and teachers should focus on teaching grammar, followed by organization and vocabulary then, content and ideas, spelling, idioms, cohesive devices, and punctuation.

2. METHOD

This research used a descriptive quantitative method to describe the data collected from the sample, and the results were tabulated in the form of a percentage. The researchers only analyzed and described what errors were prevalent in the use of punctuation marks in Facebook posts written by Thai SHS EFL students.

2.1. The Participants

The participants of the study were senior high school students in Samut Sakhon province in the Kingdom of Thailand. There were forty-eight (48) students. Twenty-four (24) females and 24 males were chosen as the research participants because they often post on social media, and they are senior high school students who study reading and writing courses.

2.2. The Source of Corpus

The source of corpus chosen in the study were forty-eight (48) social media posts of Thai EFL SHS students. These corpus sources were readily available and had provided enough information that answered the research questions.

2.3 Data Collection and Instrument

The data were obtained from students' Facebook posts of 50 - 100 words on the topic “How far has English language changed me?”. The Thai students performed the task as their classroom activity to gather reliable and authentic results. It also served as their way to express themselves and encourage other EFL learners in social media through their posts. The researchers gathered the forty-eight (48) Facebook posts from the senior high school students as a sampling instrument to find out the commonly misused punctuation among senior high school students' Social Media posts.

2.4: Data Analysis

Then, after determining the number of punctuation problems in their social media postings, the errors would be calculated to determine how many errors were committed. The mistakes were quantified using a percentage method.

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$$

Where:

P= denotes the percentage of Thai SHS students whose social media posts are correctly written.

f = the number of Thai SHS students who correctly write their Facebook posts.

n = the total number of Thai SHS students who posted on Facebook.

100% = constant value

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section of the study presents the results of the data gathering done by the researchers including the corresponding discussion, analysis, and interpretation. They are presented based on the logical order of the stated problems of this study. The summary results of this study showed that SHS Thai EFL students misused punctuation marks in their social media posts. This study was conducted to determine the most commonly misused punctuation marks of SHS Thai students and to find out whether grade level and gender have a significant difference in misusing punctuation marks. In addition, the misuse of punctuation marks was noted, counted, and categorized.

Table 1. Misused Punctuation Marks of Thai EFL Students

GRADE LEVEL	Gender	SHS Thai Students	Period	Comma	Question Mark	Exclamation Mark	Semicolon	No Punctuation Mark	Total Number of Misused Punctuations (TNMP)	Total Percentage of Misused Punctuations (TPMP) %	
Grade 10	Male	A	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78	
		B	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	2.34	
		C	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78
		D	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	3.91
		E	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.78
	Female	L	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78
		M	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	3.13
		N	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1.56
		O	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	3	2.34
		P	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1.56
Grade 11	Male	A	0	1	0	0	0	3	4	3.13	
		B	0	1	0	0	0	5	6	4.69	
		C	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	2.34
		D	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78
		E	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	4.69
		F	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.78
		G	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	8	6.25
	H	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	4	3.13	
	I	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	4	3.13	
	Female	L	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.78
		M	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	3.13
		N	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78
		O	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
		P	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	4	3.13
Q		0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1.56	
R		1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	3.13	
S	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	4	3.13		
T	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	3	2.34		
Grade 12	Male	A	0	1	0	0	0	2	3	2.34	
		B	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1.56	
		C	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	4.69
		D	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78
		E	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	2.34
		F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
		G	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1.56
		H	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
		I	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1.56
		J	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78
	Female	L	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	3	2.34
		M	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	5	3.91
		N	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78
		O	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	4	3.13
		P	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1.56
		Q	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1.56
		R	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
S	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	6	4.69		
T	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.78		
U	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.78		
Total			8	23	1	1	0	95	128	100%	

Table 1 shows that SHS students in Thailand used no punctuation mark in their social media posts. Thus, it is supported by the study of Parima [18] which highlighted that many Thai L2 learners find capitalization and punctuation difficult as they are totally different from their L1. When they write in Thai, neither capitalized words nor punctuation marks (e.g. commas, semicolons, or periods) are needed, so they do not have to worry about them.

Table 2. The Classification of Misused Punctuation Marks

Types of Misused Punctuation	Total Number of Misused	Total Percentage of Misused (%)	Mean/n=48
No punctuation marks	95	74.22	1.98
Comma	23	17.97	0.48
Period	8	6.25	0.17
Question mark	1	0.78	0.02
Exclamation mark	1	0.78	0.02
Total	128	100.00	

The data summary above shows that the SHS Thai EFL students made the most errors in the category of no punctuation marks, with a mean value of 1.98, followed by the comma, with a mean value of 0.48, and then the period, with a mean value of 0.17. The average value of question marks and exclamation marks was the least. It is evident that SHS Thai EFL students do not have a thorough understanding of how to use the different punctuation marks. The omission and the wrong uses of punctuation marks made by students are the most problems faced by students in writing. However, comma was appropriately used to link two clauses, where the result is often a run-on sentence. It is the common mark that confuses students to be used among words and sentences [1].

Maclaren [15] stated that comma requires the most judgment. To punctuate with commas requires not only compliance with a set of rules but also through understanding of the material being punctuated. Comma can change meaning. It is not a kind of full stop, nor had to be inserted every few words just to give the reader breather. It does not use it instead of full stop.

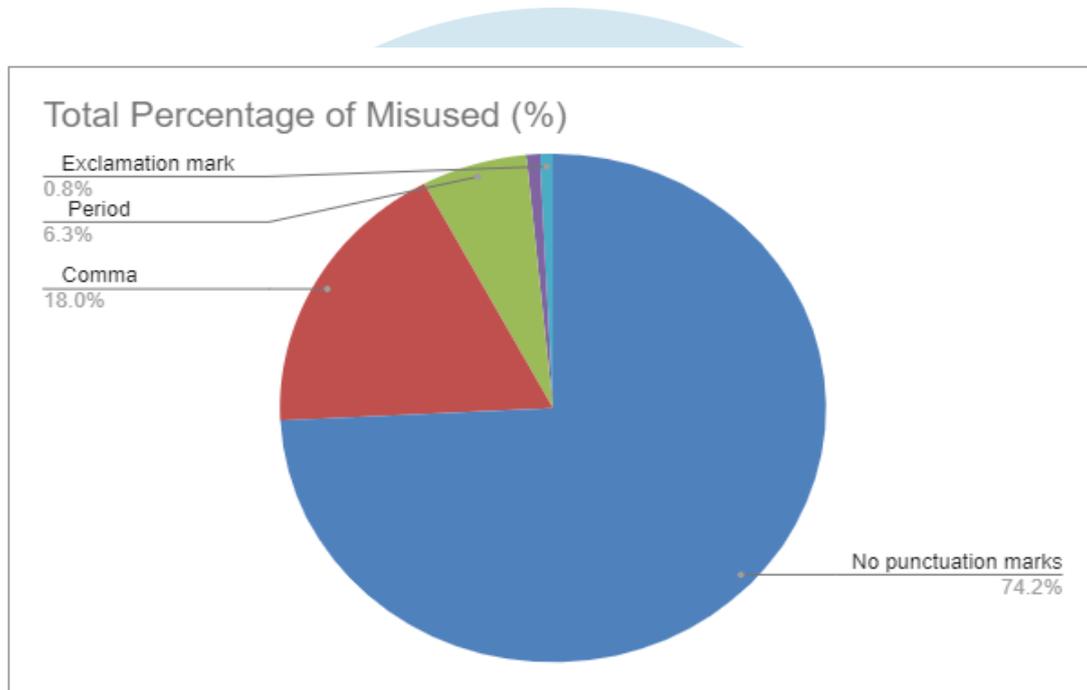


Figure 1. The Total Percentages of Grammatical Errors

Fig. 1 clearly illustrates the distinction between the misused punctuation marks, whereas the no punctuation mark shared 74.2% which is the biggest total proportion of misused punctuation. To improve student level in punctuation marks, it may be recommended to make students active and to instruct the topic of punctuation marks by allowing students to discover the topic using applications instead of traditional instruction, as the discovery approach is a motivating strategy based on student activity that allows reaching abstractions by collecting and analyzing data about a specific problem. Sahin [20] reported that the use of group research techniques improved student achievements in punctuation marks.

Table 3. Types of Misused Punctuation Marks

No	Types of Misused Punctuations	Committed errors	Total Frequency of Misused Punctuations	Total Percentage of Misused Punctuations (TPMP) %	Mean / n=48
1	Period (.) (The use of period instead of comma)	Make new friends(.) Speaking a common language enables you to meet new people who also speak that language.	8	6.25	0.17
2	Comma (,) (The use of comma instead of period)	I would never watch cartoons in any language other than Thai. Until I went into kindergarten and started to learn English(,)	23	17.97	0.48
3	Question mark (?) (The use of question mark instead of comma)	When she said it was too much (?) Do you wish you could still touch her?	1	0.78	0.02
4	Exclamation mark (!) (The use of exclamation mark instead of comma)	This is why(!) think English is an important language and can change me.	1	0.78	0.02
5	No punctuation marks	Then after a month I was able to speak English and it changed my online friend before I used to have only my friend and some of community group but now I have friends from different countries	95	74.22	1.98
Total			128	100	

Table 3 shows that most students did not put any punctuation marks at all in their social media posts. According to Yeskermessova [24] most of the modern youth do not give much attention to putting punctuation marks in social media networks, some of the students do not know that they have committed any mistakes at all. The results above show that most students tend to disregard the use and importance of punctuation marks in their social media posts. As shown in the table above, comma is the second most misused punctuation in social media posts. This is supported by Zulkifli [25] who concluded in his study that some students misused punctuation like comma and full stop because they do not understand the text and they do not know how to use comma before a quotation mark.

Table 4. Misused Punctuations of Thai SHS Students Grouped According to Grade Level

SHS Thai Students	Total Number of Misused	Mean/n Gr.10 (n =10) Gr. 11 (n =18) Gr.12 (n =20)
Gr.10	23	2.30
Gr.11	60	3.33
Gr.12	45	2.25
Total	128	

Grade 11 Thai students have the highest total number of misused punctuation and with a mean value of 3.33. Based on the table above, there is no big difference between the number of misused punctuations of Thai SHS students in terms of Grade Level.

Table 5. Misused Punctuations of Thai SHS Students Grouped According to Gender

Gender	Total Number of Misused	Mean/n Female=24 Male =24
Male	68	2.83
Female	60	2.50
Total	128	

As regards to the results of the error analysis done to compare the misuse of punctuation marks based on gender, there was no statistically significant difference in the total number of punctuation marks misused between female and male students. The mean value results for the two groups were comparable.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed that most of SHS Thai EFL Students made the most errors in the category of no punctuation marks, with a mean value of 1.98, followed by the comma, with a mean value of 0.48, and then the period, with a mean value of 0.17. The average value of question marks and exclamation marks was the least. The study of the error analysis in punctuation marks among social media posts of SHS Thai students revealed that most of them neglect the use of punctuation marks. Thus, it is clear that their lack of knowledge and confusion on the proper usage of punctuation marks are the result of their L1 interference as suggested by the study of Parima [18]. She pointed out that the usage of capitalization and punctuation marks are not needed in Thai language, so most Thai students do not have to worry about them. On the other hand, in English, these two are necessary in every sentence. Similarly, Sirilak [12] found out that the second most frequent errors in English writing of Thai students is the omission of punctuation marks and it is because of the fact that, L1 interference had some influence to Thai students in producing errors in the English writing; they sometimes employed Thai language structures and rules to complete their English written work. Another point of view about L1 interference is from the study of Brown [4] and Boey [3] which pointed out that L1 interference is the most noticeable source of errors among second language learners because the students use their L1 experience to facilitate the second language learning process. Lastly, Jantarach [23] concluded that most Thai students ranked punctuation as the least

important in writing; hence, teachers should think of different ways to show and explain to students how important the proper usage of punctuation is. In fact, Lukeman [13] stated that punctuation marks are little things, but they are essential to good composition as nails are to a carpenter.

However, there are limitations in the study of the error analysis in punctuation marks among social media posts of SHS Thai students. The study found out that the grade level of SHS students has no significant difference in the errors they made. But, there are other variables that may be overlooked by the researchers that may influence the results of the study such as the number of participants for each grade level and the number of words in their Social Media posts. For further study, future researchers may include the equal number of participants for both male and female in each grade level and an equal number of words for their social media posts as control variables. Moreover, it is also interesting to have another study of error analysis in punctuation marks among social media posts of JHS Thai students to have a comparative analysis of the two studies.

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