

Punctuation and Capitalization in Writing: How Do Students Produce Them?

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Abstract

This study aimed to know the way the students produce punctuation and capitalization in their writing of descriptive text. The students as the respondents of this study were 38 eleventh graders a certain senior high school in Semarang. They were given a descriptive text writing test. Their writing test result was the data of this present study. The data were analyzed by using the rule of punctuation and capitalization writing. The analyzed data were interpreted to get the final conclusion of the study. The results of the study were that the students' incorrect writing of punctuation was on comma, full stop and apostrophe, while for capitalization was on the first word of a sentence, the name of people, and the names of places. In short, the researchers classified the ways the students wrote descriptive text were incorrectly on comma, full stop, apostrophe, the first word of a sentence, the name of people, and the names of places.

Keywords: *punctuation; capitalization; writing*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesian curriculum, time allocation of learning English at school is one of the obstacles faced by most of Indonesian students. It happens because English is as a foreign language not as a second language. Therefore, it is not surprising that for senior high school students, writing in English is difficult task because it needs complex elements (Mohr, 2017). Sometimes changes the components of first-language (L1) into second-language (L2) writing is often as the solution (Kormos, 2012).

Writing good paragraphs should cover some aspects. There are five important aspects in writing should be provided by writers, for example, content, organization, vocabulary, language use or grammar and mechanics (Acosta Corte, 2010). Mechanics is about the usage of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The presentation of incorrect punctuation can result improper writing and it makes confusion for readers. Punctuation and capitalization serve different functions. Punctuation assists the reader in comprehending the meaning of a statement (Nuriyanti & Yuliawati, 2017). It explains the writing's meaning in order to avoid ambiguity and confusion. While capitalization maintain semantic clarity, yet the absence or misuse of capitalization can completely change the meaning of the words (Pathan, 2021). It is as a warning to the reader. It is sometime used as the writer's mood representation. Both of them are important aspects in a writing.

Senior high school students are faced by the ability to write texts. One of the texts they learn is descriptive text. Descriptive text is learned at secondary level. In writing descriptive text, students are forced to be able to provide good sentences. The criteria of good sentences are supported by topic sentence and supporting sentences (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). Writing those sentences take the students attention on the elements of punctuation and capitalization. According to (Salman et al., 2017), punctuations are symbols that are used to make written language more comprehensible and clearer. On the other hand, the use of a capital/uppercase letter at the beginning of a word, with the rest of the letters in the word remaining small/lowercase, is known as capitalization (Pathan, 2021).

The previous researchers focused on punctuation error in writing (Awad, 2012) and researchers focused on capitalization error in writing ((Anwar Siddiqui, 2018; Pathan, 2021) serve different perspective. On the other hand, in this present study, the writer combines two main mechanics as the focus of the study: punctuation and capitalization. The reasons are based on the phenomenon that senior high school students often neglect both punctuation and capitalization in their writing. The writers correlate their errors in the situation where they write a descriptive text. As the essential aspects of writing, senior high school students should understand the rules. In fact, some students do not obey the rules. They are not aware of the usage of correct punctuation and capitalization in their writing. Moreover, there are many rules of capitalization that they should consider to be paid attention to their writing. At the same time, students should consider the rules of punctuation, therefore they can predict sentences as the continuation of their previous sentence.

Writing is an arrangement of structured statements and paragraphs as the representation of idea based on certain topic (Nunan, 2013). In writing, there are some aspects should be considered, as stated by Acosta Corte (2010), the aspects are content, organization, vocabulary, language use or grammar, and mechanics. Mechanics are divided into three aspects: spelling, punctuation and capitalization. The ability to provide those aspects in writing is important in academic writing. In an academic writing, the students' writing activity is linked with genre (Hinkel, 2003). The activity of genre writing can be taught in several level of education. The previous researchers Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali (2000) focused on the important of writing in academic writing for high level of education: university. On the other hand, in this present study, the researchers focused the phenomena of writing in lower level of education: senior high school. The writing ability of those different level of education students are different. In the way the students of senior high school wrote English descriptive text is not as good as the university students. Descriptive text is a text about certain place, person or building (Wardani et al., 2014). It has certain composition: identification and description (Etfita, 2018 ; Siregar, 2021). Each component has different function. The components are arranged from sentences which form paragraphs. Hinkel (2003) states that in academic writing, one of the students' activities is paying attention and editing of errors they make in their writing. There are some parts that the students have in making errors, two of them as the focus of this present study were punctuation and capitalization.

Punctuation is a group of symbols or signs used to demarcate phrases, words, and portions of sentences as well as to clarify what is being written (Husada et al., 2018). It shows the sentence's sequence and the level of comprehension utilized while writing (Yuliah et al., 2020). It demonstrates to the reader how each sentence is connected to the others and aids the writer in providing clear information. There are several types of punctuations which clarify different function. For example, full stop is used to end the sentence, comma is used to break up a complicated sentence with a sentence, question mark is used to show question statement, and exclamation mark is used to show command phrase and an expression to convey surprise or emotion.

There are several connected sentences within a paragraph. They are organized into clear, concise paragraphs or whole texts. The description of information represented, which is normally

at the beginning of the sentence of a statement, must be capitalized in each sentence. Capitalization is placed at the opening of a sentence or statement as a signal or symbol (Straus et al., 2014). Some words, including nouns, adjectives, temporal adverbs, and others, use capitalization. However, the rules of capitalization usage are varied. It can be used at the first word in sentence, at the pronoun *I*, at the person's name and titles, at the nationalities name, at the place name, at the name of building, roads and bridges, at the name of month, holiday, special time period, and the days of week, at the name of organization, at the abbreviations, at the titles of movie, book, magazine or newspaper, and at the titles of paragraph (Butler, 2007).

METHOD

This present study took qualitative as the method. The purpose of the qualitative method was to collect, examine, and interpret the data through description and visualization (Gay et al., 2006). Qualitative method was suitable with the purpose of this present study which was to know the common error made by certain senior high school in Semarang in writing descriptive text. The errors were about punctuation and capitalization.

Respondents

One of senior high schools in Semarang was chosen as the subject of the study. The reason for choosing the certain senior high school in Semarang was based on the consideration that it was the school under the researchers' partnership. The respondents of the study were 38 students of grade eleventh.

Instrument

The instrument of the study was in the form of writing test. The researchers gave a writing test to the respondents. They were asked to write a descriptive text. The result of their writing was as the source of data. Their writing test was checked based on their error of providing punctuation and capitalization. The errors of punctuation and capitalization were analyzed based on the rules of providing punctuation and capitalization as suggested by Butler (2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the students' writing were varied. The writers differentiated their incorrect writing into two categories: punctuation and capitalization categories. The first result stated about the students' incorrect writing based on punctuation category. The second result stated about the students' incorrect writing based on capitalization category.

Result of incorrect writing based on punctuation category

Table 1. The students' incorrect writing based on punctuation category

Student 1	:	-
Student 2	:	-
Student 3	:	-
Student 4	: <i>the people at the area and other place</i> <i>One of them is Gambang Semarang</i>
Student 5	:	-
Student 6	:	<i>In my opinion the most beautiful place</i>
Student 7	:	<i>In Semarang I was born and raised.</i>
Student 8	:	-
Student 9	:	<i>I,m</i> <i>I,m</i>

Student 10	:	-
Student 11	:	<i>as you know it has traditional food..</i>
Student 12	:	-
Student 13	:	-
Student 14	:	-
Student 15	:	-
Student 16	:	-
Student 17	:	<i>..... mosque, many islamic boarding school and many madrasah. My city is occupied by many ethnicity, there are java, madura, and sunda</i>
Student 18	:	-
Student 19	:	-
Student 20	:	-
Student 21	:	-
Student 22	:	-
Student 23	:	-
Student 24	:	-
Student 25	:	-
Student 26	:	-
Student 27	:	-
Student 28	:	<i>therefore the city is full. therefore the people.....</i>
Student 29	:	-
Student 30	:	-
Student 31	:	-
Student 32	:	-
Student 33	:	-
Student 34	:	-
Student 35	:	-
Student 36	:	-
Student 37	:	-

Based on the result above, the writers concluded that the students mostly did not have problem with difficulty in writing correct punctuation. There were seven of thirty-eight students were in trouble of providing correct punctuation. There were six students had similar difficulty when they wrote sentences. They got trouble on comma. On the other hand, there was a student got trouble on full stop writing.

Full stop is used at the end of the sentence. Student four did not provide full stops at the end of her sentences. She should add full stop on her sentences: *the people at the area and other place; One of them is Gambang Semarang*. By looking at the rest of her sentences in writing a descriptive text about Semarang, she made only two incorrect writing of punctuation.

Comma is used for three criteria: (1) when a subordinate (less important) clause comes before the principal clause; (2) to separate phrases in apposition (describing the same Person or thing mentioned earlier) from the rest of sentence; and (3) to separate items in the same list. Based on the students' writing, the writers concluded that six students had different way in placing or providing comma and even forgot to put comma in their sentences. Student six wrote his sentence without comma: *In my opinion the most beautiful place is Sampokong*. He should add comma after *opinion* which function to separate two clauses: subordinate and principal clause. Therefore,

the writers stated that student six wrote a wrong way for criteria one. Student seven wrote his sentence without comma: *In Semarang I was born and raised*. He should add comma to separate *In Semarang and I was born*. There were two different clauses; the first clause was about the place of he was born. Hence, the function of the first clause was to make the information more detail. The way that student seven made was similar with student six. Student eleven wrote her sentence without comma: *as you know it has traditional food*. The use of comma in that sentence was actually for separating two different clauses produced in that sentence: *as you know* and *it has traditional food*. Student seventeen produced two different sentences which did not cover appropriate comma. In the first sentence, *mosque, many islamic boarding school and many madrasah*. It could be said that he had to add more comma after the word *school*. Comma in that sentence functions to separate items in the same list. On the other hand, in the second sentence, he put inappropriate comma. In the sentence *My city is occupied by many ethnicity, there are java, madura, and sunda*, comma should be replaced by a full stop because there are two different sentences. In the sentences of *therefore the city is full and therefore the people*, as produced by student twenty-eight, should be written by adding comma after the word *therefore*. Nevertheless, student nine made different way of writing punctuation. She did not have trouble on providing punctuation and comma, rather than providing an apostrophe. She wrote I'm into *I,m and I.m*. In two different sentences, she wrote inappropriate punctuations. In addition, an apostrophe is used in three criteria: (1) to refer to possessive singular or plural; (2) to be included when telling the time; and (3) to show letters are missing in words (omission). Based on the student nine's way of writing punctuation, the apostrophe should be recognized to show letters are missing in words.

Result of incorrect writing based on capitalization category

Table 2. The students' writing based on capitalization category

Student 1	:	<i>I think the most beautiful in my city is kota lama. Simpang lima is the most Famous in my city.</i>
Student 2	:	<i>Many People success with business. Semarang Famous for Atlas City. There is a mosque that Famous.</i>
Student 3	:	<i>People are Workers. in the marina, there is a beach. Beach in marina is used as tourist destination. ... and Fine soil texture many Tourist come....</i>
Student 4	:	<i>Semarang is capital city of central java province. such as lawang sewu, kota lama and simpang lima.</i>
Student 5	:	<i>.... the capital city of central java. people take advantage of it.</i>
Student 6	:	-
Student 7	:	-
Student 8	:	<i>Semarang is the right Place</i>
Student 9	:	<i>I live in west semarang city. is led by mr hendy.</i>
Student 10	:	<i>... is the Most Popular City in Central java. it's located in ... and people know it as atlas city. as the capital of Central Java,</i>

		<i>.... as Factory Employee.</i>
Student 11	:	<i>... among Tourist Resort.</i> <i>.... like bali.</i> <i>as you know it has traditional food.</i> <i>it has many Favorite Food.</i>
Student 12	:	<i>I think the most beautiful Place is ...</i>
Student 13	:	-
Student 14	:	-
Student 15	:	<i>.... the most beautiful place in semarang City is ...</i> <i>There are Famous place ...</i> <i>there are many tourist buy Lumpia.</i>
Student 16	:	-
Student 17	:	<i>... with many other panorama in semarang.</i> <i>If you come to my City, ...</i> <i>..... mosque, many islamic boarding school and many madrasah</i> <i>..... there are java, madura, and sunda.</i>
Student 18	:	-
Student 19	:	-
Student 20	:	-
Student 21	:	-
Student 22	:	<i>... in central java, Indonesia.</i> <i>I live in Semarang with my Family.</i>
Student 23	:	<i>the scenery is still beautiful.</i>
Student 24	:	-
Student 25	:	-
Student 26	:	-
Student 27	:	<i>It is located in semarang.</i>
Student 28	:	<i>I live in semarang, central java.</i> <i>in Semarang,</i> <i>therefore the city is full.</i>
Student 29	:	-
Student 30	:	<i>Semarang is a capital city of central java.</i> <i>bandeng presto is a traditional food in Semarang.</i> <i>semarang has many shopping center.</i>
Student 31	:	-
Student 32	:	<i>It is located at central java province.</i>
Student 33	:	-
Student 34	:	-
Student 35	:	-
Student 36	:	-
Student 37	:	-

Based on the result above, the writers concluded that the students mostly got problem in the way of writing capitalization. There were eighteen of thirty-eight students were in trouble of providing correct capitalization. Some of them wrote inappropriate capital and several students wrote without capital. The inappropriate capital produced by several students were about misplaced the capital in their sentences. There were eleven students wrote capital in that way. On the other hand, there were twenty-six students did not write capital as the way it is.

According to Azar (2003), the rules of capital usage cover (1) the first word of a sentence, (2) the name of people, (3) titles used with the names of the people, (4) months, days, and holidays, (5) the names of places, (6) the titles of books, articles and movies, (7) the names of languages and nationalities and religion, and (8) the pronoun 'I'. Student one wrote *Simpang lima is the most Famous in my city*. In this case, the word *famous* should be written in the form of small letter because the word *famous* does not deal with the explanation of the rules of capitalization. The rules are not about the use of capital for adjective. Student two wrote *Many People success with business and Semarang Famous for Atlas City*. In this case, the first word is many, so the word *people* does not need to be written in capital. The word *famous* is an adjective. There is no specific rule of writing adjective into capital. Student three wrote *People are Workers and as Factory Employee*. From the rules of capital usage, those two sentences should be written appropriately, so the words *workers* and *factory employee* should be written in small letters. Student eight wrote *Semarang is the right Place*. The word *place* is not about the parts of rules of capital usage. So, it should be written in small letter. Student ten wrote *the Most Popular City in Central java* and *as Factory Employee*. The words written in capital are not about the words as stated in the rules of capital usage, so they should be written in small letters. Student eleven wrote *among Tourist Resort* and *it has many Favorite Food*. The words *tourist resort* are not about the specific place so they should be written in small letter. The words *Favorite Food* are not about specific name of food so they should be written in small letters. Student twelve wrote *I think the most beautiful Place*. The word *place* is not about the specific place or name of certain place so it should be written in small letter. Students fifteen wrote *There are Famous place*. The words *famous place* has not mentioned the certain place which is famous so it should be written in small letters. Student seventeen wrote *If you come to my City*. The word *city* is not about the name of city such as Semarang, Jakarta, etc., so it should be written in small letter. Student twenty-two wrote *I live in Semarang with my Family*. The word *family* is out of the word that should be written in capital as stated on the rule of capitalization usage. In short, the writers can say that capital in the cases should be correlated with the rules of capital usage. Therefore, understanding the usage of capital in writing is important.

In the way of providing capital appropriately, in several cases, students did not write capital in the way it is. Students did not write the first word of a sentence. For example: *in the marina, there is a beach; people take advantage of it; it's located in; and people know it as atlas city; as the capital of Central Java; as you know it has traditional food; it has many Favorite Food; there are many tourist buy Lumpia; the scenery is still beautiful; in Semarang; therefore the city is full; bandeng presto is a traditional food in Semarang; semarang has many shopping center*.

In the rule of the name of people, the student did not write capital. In some writings, the writers found a sentence which dealt with the case: *is led by mr hendy*. The correction of that problem is *Mr. Hendy*. The student should be careful in providing capital for people's name.

In the rule of the names of places, students did not write capital. For example, *I think the most beautiful in my city is kota lama; Simpang lima is the most Famous in my city; in the marina, there is a beach; beach in marina is used as tourist destination; Semarang is capital city of central java province; such as lawang sewu, kota lama and simpang lima; I live in west semarang city; and people know it as atlas city; like bali; the most beautiful place in semarang City; with many other panorama in semarang; mosque, many islamic boarding school and many madrasah; there are java, madura, and sunda; in central java, Indonesia; and bandeng presto is a traditional food in Semarang*. The words *kota lama, simpang lima, marina, central java province, lawang sewu, west semarang city, atlas city, bali, semarang, islamic, java, madura, sunda, central java* and *bandeng presto*, are categorized into the names of places. Therefore, they should be written in capital.

CONCLUSION

The way the students wrote punctuation and capitalization were varied. The students wrote without considering the rules of punctuation and capitalization writing. Most common problems faced by the students of certain senior high school was different. The ways to write punctuation were on comma, full stop and apostrophe. On the other hand, the ways to write capitalization were on the first word of a sentence, the name of people, and the names of places. For the rests of ways on writing punctuation and capitalization were not shown in the students' writing. As a result, the writers suggest the students to recognize the criteria and rules of writing punctuation and capitalization. In addition, the teacher could mediate the students when they wrote descriptive text by reminding them about the criteria and rules of punctuation and capitalization writing. For the next researchers can develop the same topic for different text and students' level. Since considering them can help the researchers have deep analysis.

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