Some Common Errors in English Made by Business College Students in Daily Transcription Work

Homer Williams
Western Kentucky University

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Williams,

Homer N.

1936
SOME COMMON ERRORS IN ENGLISH MADE BY BUSINESS COLLEGE
STUDENTS IN DAILY TRANSCRIPTION WORK

BY

HOMER N. WILLIAMS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

WESTERN KENTUCKY STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE
AUGUST, 1936
Approved:

Major Professor
and
Department of Education

Minor Professor, Economics

Graduate Committee, Chairman
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I wish to acknowledge my great indebtedness to the dissertation of the late Dr. M. A. Leiper. His Diagnostic Study of the Errors Made by College Freshmen in Their Written Compositions was an inspiration to me and a great aid in developing the present study.

Much credit is due my instructors in the Graduate School of Western Kentucky State Teachers College for helping me to get a broader view of the work of a teacher and for their guidance in the preparation of the accompanying thesis.
CHAPTER I
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

For a great many years, business men have been complaining
than many of their stenographers are unable to spell or to
punctuate correctly. Their criticisms have, in most cases,
been justified, as any teacher of commercial subjects will
freely admit. Instructors in shorthand dictation and
transcription classes know what a problem it is to get some of
their students to apply the rules that they have studied in
their English classes.

It would seem that young men and women who are expecting
to enter business employment as stenographers and typists
would be able to put into practice the things that they have
studied in school, especially as the degree of their efficiency
as office workers will determine the amount of their salaries.
They know that their success depends upon their ability to
turn out satisfactory letters and other typewritten material.
As a matter of fact, many of them do excellent work, but there
are being made daily numerous errors that should not occur.

Just what kinds of errors are being made? Why are they
made? Do they show evidence of failure to understand and
apply fundamental rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling?
Are they due to carelessness? What can be done to overcome
the tendency to make the same mistakes day after day? These
are some of the questions that teachers and administrators
should ask. Private commercial schools and public high schools
are anxious for their students to succeed in their work and
render a real service to their employers and to the community.

The present study was made for the purpose of ascertaining the particular types of errors that students make in transcribing their shorthand notes from day to day. In addition to finding out the kinds of errors and their frequency, it is earnestly hoped that some conclusions may be reached as to what instructional methods may be employed to advantage in teaching English to dictation students in such a way that they will be well prepared for the tasks that the business office will require of them.
CHAPTER II
COLLECTION OF THE DATA

Source of data.--Over the period of time extending from September 1, 1934, to August 15, 1935, the writer collected 15,000 transcription papers from the students in his dictation classes in the Smithdeal-Massey Business College, Richmond, Virginia. Certain material was dictated to the students each day. They used typewriters to transcribe their shorthand notes and handed in their final work some time during the class period the following day. The material dictated consisted of letters of varying length and difficulty taken from dictation textbooks, articles mostly on business subjects taken from the same source, articles from current popular magazines, legal forms found in typewriting textbooks, and actual legal instruments in common use. This gave a fair sample of the kind of material that a stenographer would be called upon to transcribe in the average business office.

Treatment of data.--All these papers were gone over with care, they were compared with the material that was dictated, and a detailed record was made of all the errors. Later on, these errors were classified and tabulated. The final results are shown in the tables following.

Additional information.--Two hundred fifty-six students were enrolled in these classes during the time mentioned above. They had varying degrees of academic preparation, as will be seen. All, of course, had a grammar school education. Most of them had completed a regular four-year high-school
A large percentage had from one to three years of college work, and a considerable number held A. B. and B. S. degrees. Two students had done graduate work, and one of these held the M. A. degree from a university. All had completed the regular business English course in the business school, or had passed a required examination in the subject.

These young people had received their previous education in high schools and colleges in seven different states—North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Delaware.

Summary.—Taking into consideration the large number of papers examined, the type of material used, the number of students whose work was included, their academic education, and the different states represented, the writer believes that the results of the study will provide something of value for teachers and administrators.
CHAPTER III
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

Since the material used in this study was dictated to the students by the instructor, one would not expect to find the same difficulties that students often encounter in writing original compositions. The matters of sentence structure and of different grammatical constructions ought not to cause any trouble. Yet the investigation shows that the transcriptions were by no means free from errors of this type.

Incomplete sentences.—Heading the list, as shown in Table I, is the incomplete sentence. This was responsible for more than one-fifth of all the grammatical errors. This type of error is clearly due to carelessness in reading the shorthand notes or to looking over the typed transcription too rapidly, as none of the material dictated contained the various kinds of fragments of sentences that were found in the typed pages. Students who have progressed this far in their education should have no trouble in identifying a sentence, as they should be able to recognize a complete thought. Yet 120 subordinate clauses were set off as complete sentences, and seventy-five phrases of various kinds were treated in the same way. The remaining errors were made up of miscellaneous fragments of sentences and groups of words that would be difficult to classify. A little thought on the part of the students would have shown them the absurdity of setting these off as separate sentences.

Lack of agreement between subject and predicate.—Second
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Error</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Incomplete sentences</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>22.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lack of agreement between subject and predicate</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>20.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Verbs and non-modal forms confused</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>10.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Adjectives used for other parts of speech</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>7.17</td>
</tr>
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<td>5. Adverbs used for other parts of speech</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Errors in use of articles</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
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<td>8. Nouns used for other parts of speech</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Lack of agreement between nouns and indefinite modifiers</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.82</td>
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<td>10. Incomplete clauses</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.42</td>
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<td>11. Omission of prepositions</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.42</td>
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<td>12. Incorrect tense forms of verbs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.09</td>
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<td>13. &quot;And etc.&quot;</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Objects of transitive verbs omitted</td>
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<td>15. Miscellaneous errors in use of adjectives</td>
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<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. &quot;It&quot; for &quot;there&quot; as expletive</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Non-modal forms confused</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Co-ordinate conjunctions omitted</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Objects of prepositions omitted</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Verbs used for other parts of speech</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1,242</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in frequency of occurrence is the lack of agreement between subject and predicate. In 134 sentences—somewhat more than one-half the cases noted—a plural subject was used with a singular verb, and in the remaining 115 a singular subject was used with a plural verb. Such a sentence as this, "The carving on these suites are genuine," should be easily noticed by any student. In such an error as this particular one, the student probably considered the word "suites" as the subject because of its nearness to the verb. Leiper\(^1\) says that probably very few of the errors of this type are due to ignorance of grammar, but that they are largely careless slips and overlappings from colloquial speech.

Verbs and non-modal forms confused.—It seemed somewhat difficult for many of these students to distinguish between real verbs and non-modal forms of verbs. In ninety-nine cases, verbs were used for participles, verbal nouns, or infinitives. On the other hand, some one of these forms was often used for a predicate verb. The students who made these errors evidently did not have a very clear idea of the function of a verb in a sentence.

Adjectives used for other parts of speech.—Somewhat more than 7 per cent of the errors were due to the use of adjectives for some other part of speech. An adjective was used instead of an adverb in seventy-nine of the cases. Forty-three times an adjective was used to modify a verb, as

\(^{1}\) M. A. Leiper, A Diagnostic Study of the Errors Made by College Freshmen in Their Written Compositions (Nashville, Tennessee, George Peabody College For Teachers, 1926), p. 54.
in the sentence, "The price has advanced considerably." An adjective modified another adjective twenty-three times.

Adverbs used for other parts of speech.--On the other hand, adverbs were used for adjectives almost the same number of times--seventy-three. Notice this sentence: "There will be a considerably saving." Adverbs were not used for any other part of speech. Leiper\(^2\) states that the history of many adverbs and adjectives is so closely associated that they are often confused. Clearly, some means should be devised that would enable the student to understand thoroughly the difference between them.

Errors in use of articles.--It was a considerable surprise to find that on forty-three different occasions students used the article "a" before words beginning with a vowel sound, e. g., "a extremely important job." "An" was used only four times before a word beginning with a consonant sound. There would seem to be no good reason for students to be guilty of such errors.

Lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent.--On fifty-nine occasions a pronoun failed to agree in number with its antecedent. Sometimes this particular rule is difficult to apply, but anyone should be able to see that this is not a good sentence: "We are ready to supply your wants, whatever that may be."

Nouns used for other parts of speech.--According to a table worked out by Stormsand and O'Shea\(^3\) after much study,


the noun is the most commonly used part of speech, having a relative frequency of 24.2 per cent. In view of this fact, one would not expect to find nouns used for other parts of speech; yet this happened forty-two times. A further analysis shows that a noun was used for an adjective thirty-seven times. For instance, the expression, "introduction order," was used for "introductory order." Five times a noun was used for a non-modal form. No reason can be given for such mistakes except disregard for well-known grammatical principles.

Lack of agreement between nouns and indefinite modifiers.--Nineteen times plural forms like "these" and "few" were used to modify singular nouns, while "this" and "a" modified plural nouns sixteen times. This is another evidence of poor thinking. There should be no trouble in deciding what modifiers to use in such cases.

Incomplete clauses.--Pence defines a clause as "a group of words forming a part of a sentence and containing a subject and a predicate." Yet in thirty constructions treated as clauses in these papers, predicates were lacking in seventeen, and subjects were lacking in twelve. One adverbial phrase was treated as a clause. The students who made these mistakes evidently did not have a clear conception of a clause.

Omission of prepositions.--Why should a preposition be omitted in what was intended to be a prepositional phrase? This ought to be considered a most inexcusable error; yet it

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was made thirty times. More than two-thirds were adverbal phrases—twenty-three, to be exact.

Incorrect tense form of verbs.--Failure to understand the words of the dictator might account for some of the mistakes made in transcribing the verb "talk" for "talked," and so on, but corrections could have been made had the students read their papers carefully before handing them in. Some glaring errors were made. It is inconceivable that these students had not had previous training along this line.

"And etc."--This expression was found twenty-three times. Evidently the students did not know that the "and" was not necessary. If the matter had been made plain to them before, they had forgotten it or were careless.

Objects of transitive verbs omitted.--Objects of transitive verbs were omitted eighteen times. Surely the students ought to know that such a verb is not complete without an object. Transitive verb-forms were found without objects five times.

Miscellaneous errors in use of adjectives.—Such awkward expressions as "costs records" for "cost records" appeared twenty-two times. Another error in this group is "two dozens lamps."

"It" for "there" as expletive.—"It" is sometimes used as an expletive, as in the sentence, "It is inconceivable that this should have happened." However, in the errors reported in this study, "it" was used incorrectly for "there" in such a sentence as this one, "It is a man in the office to see you,"
for "There is a man in the office to see you." This is very crude.

**Non-modal forms confused.**--Comparatively few errors were made in the use of one non-modal form for another. Such incorrect uses of gerunds, participles, and infinitives need to be guarded against, however, for they make a very poor sentence.

**Co-ordinate conjunctions omitted.**--It is difficult to see how a student can consider a sentence clear and complete if the conjunction "and" is omitted between two words or groups of equal rank, placed in such a way that a connecting element is necessary. Such a student apparently needs some review work in constructing sentences. This mistake was made eleven times.

**Objects of prepositions omitted.**--A preposition without an object appeared eight times. While this is a very small number when the total is considered, the expression is a very awkward one and should be easily discovered by the careful student.

**Verbs used for other parts of speech.**--According to the last item on the list, a verb was used for some other part of speech eight times. As a matter of fact, it was used as a noun in each case. The most common error was the sentence, "We had a contract with the cloth manufacture." This sentence was dictated: "We had a contract with the cloth manufacturer." Since "manufacturer" sounds very much like "manufacture," the students failed to understand the dictation or did not check over their transcriptions very thoroughly.
Summary.—Much has been said about the place of "formal grammar" in the curriculum. There are those who advocate its retention, with greater stress being placed upon fundamentals and less upon minor details. They believe that a great deal of drill and frequent reviews are necessary if students are to be able to speak and write clearly and forcefully. A writer in the *English Journal* has this to say:

"Theoretical grammar is not the root of the trouble. The root is in slipshod thought and slovenly expression." 5

In another article in the same publication appears the following statement:

"I challenge any English teacher to show the way to a larger appreciation of written and oral expression which does not stress a thorough mechanical foundation." 6

On the other hand, can we teach grammar without a slavish adherence to what Lord Dunsany calls the "tyranny of rules"? 7 Are we not to keep in mind that current usage is a powerful force in molding and shaping the English language? A living language, such as ours, is constantly undergoing changes, as so clearly explained by Stuart Robertson. 8

Further discussion of this matter will be deferred to a later chapter.

CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF PUNCTUATION ERRORS

Since the students themselves punctuated their transcriptions, the results of this study will probably give a fairly accurate measure of their ability to do this necessary part of their work. It should be pointed out here that not every error in punctuation is included in this list, as it would not have been practical to tabulate and classify all that were made in so large a number of written exercises. However, the ones that are shown in the table occurred in sufficient numbers to make them worthy of study.

It will be observed that the largest number of errors occurred in the use of the comma. This was to be expected, as other studies of a similar nature have shown practically the same results. Leiper\(^1\) found that errors in the use of the comma accounted for 82.05 per cent of the total punctuation errors. Ashbaugh's study\(^2\) of 200 letters written by high school graduates as part of an entrance examination required by teacher-training institutions in Ohio showed that the misuse of the comma was the most common of all the errors. If we add together items 1, 2, 5, and 16 on Table II, we find that the total is 10,155, which is 82.5 per cent of the entire number of punctuation errors. This would seem to indicate a deplorable lack of mastery of the various rules for the use

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\(^1\) Leiper, p. 86.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Error</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Commas omitted</td>
<td>7,432</td>
<td>60.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Unnecessary commas</td>
<td>2,334</td>
<td>18.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hyphens omitted</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>6.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Apostrophe with genitive form</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Commas used for other marks</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Periods used for other marks</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Semicolons omitted</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Periods omitted</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Quotation marks misplaced</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Semicolon used for other marks</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Unnecessary apostrophes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Quotation marks omitted</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Misplaced apostrophes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Omitted apostrophes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Colon</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Dash</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Unnecessary periods</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>18. Misplaced commas</td>
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<td>19. Question mark</td>
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<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>12,307</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
of this particular mark of punctuation.

Commas omitted.--The first item on Table II shows the number of times that commas were omitted when they should have been used. This amounts to slightly more than 60 percent of all the punctuation errors, and is three times as large as the second most common. Further analysis will show that parenthetic units, or independent elements, of several different kinds were not set off by commas on 2,653 different occasions. This is more than one-third of all the errors in this particular group. Students seem to have difficulty in deciding when such elements are to be separated from the rest of the sentence. Transposed, or introductory, adverbial clauses ranked second, with 1,460. This is another rule which seems hard for the students to understand and apply. Non-restrictive clauses ranked third, with 883; independent participial phrases, fourth, with 776; transposed word and phrase modifiers, fifth, with 422; appositives, sixth, with 209. Miscellaneous omissions not easily classified amounted to 1,029. The students must have had many exercises in the different rules for the use of the comma, but the evidence shows that they failed to apply these rules when they were left to their own devices.

Unnecessary commas.--It is interesting to note the number of times that commas were used when they were not required. In 973 cases a comma was used between words, phrases, or clauses of equal rank, even though a co-ordinate conjunction was used to connect them. This does not include the comma
used with "and" between the last two of a series of three or more. A good illustration of this error is found in the following sentence: "Your early consideration, and reply are requested."

Then, strange to say, on 332 different occasions a comma was used to separate a subject from a predicate. It is true that in many of these cases the complete subject consisted of a substantive with a short phrase modifier, but such a construction should not have presented any special difficulty.

Equally difficult to explain is the large number--238--of times that a comma was placed between a noun and its modifier. Sometimes the modifier preceded the noun, and again it followed. The most common error in this group was the placing of a comma between a noun and a modifying adjective phrase immediately following.

Commas were used to set off 218 restrictive clauses.

Leiper makes the following statement concerning this error:

"The frequency of this error shows that students cannot make careful distinctions between clauses which are restrictive and those which are non-restrictive. The cause of the error, therefore, seems to be either an ignorance of certain facts of grammar or an inability to apply them to adjective and adverbial clauses in their written work."

The importance of being able to distinguish between these two types of clauses is seen more clearly when Stormzand and O'Shea report that in the written language of the adults studied by them restrictive clauses appeared about four times

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as often as did non-restrictive clauses. 4

The remaining examples of the unnecessary use of the comma cannot be enumerated and classified here, because of the limitations of time and space. However, one other error should be mentioned at this time. It is found in the phrase, "a small, bronze savings bank." The students were unable to see that "small" modifies all the rest of the phrase and that it is not of the same rank as "bronze." This type of punctuation error was found thirty-four times.

Hyphens omitted.--Out of 619 omissions of the hyphen, 732 were due to failure to hyphenate compound adjectives preceding the noun modified. "A paid up policy" is a good illustration of what is meant here. Once more, the students had failed to master a well-known rule. Thirty-three compound numbers, e.g., "eighty-four," and an equal number of compound nouns were not hyphenated.

Apostrophe with genitive form.—The apostrophe was omitted entirely from the genitive form 438 times. The word "genitive" is used in preference to "possessive," because, as pointed out by Stormzand and O'Shea, 5 the apostrophe is used to indicate many relations other than possession. Some common examples are "ten minutes' walk" and "a dollar's worth." Some mistakes would naturally be expected in such constructions. A number of the students did fail to insert the apostrophe in such expressions, but, as a matter of fact, more of them

omitted it in indicating possession.

Commas used for other marks.--The comma was used for the period 252 times. The error known as the "comma-splice" accounted for 206 of these. Instead of bringing the sentence to an end and starting a new one, the students used a comma to separate two distinct thoughts. A comma was used for a semicolon eighty-seven times.

Periods used for other marks.--A period was placed at the end of an interrogative sentence on 219 different occasions. No good reason can be given for this error, except that the question mark and the period are near each other on the typewriter keyboard, and the error may have resulted from improper fingering. Reading the transcription carefully before handing it in would have shown the students the incorrect punctuation mark, however.

Semicolons omitted.--Woolley\(^6\) requires a semicolon before an adverbial clause beginning with "so" and following the main clause in the sentence. This rule is by no means universally followed, however. Woolley's rule is followed when it is said that a semicolon was omitted before such a clause 191 times. In fact, there was no punctuation whatever preceding the clause. This statement is made in order to make it plain that this error might be included in item 1, "commas omitted."

Periods omitted.--The statement was made in Chapter III that several students seemed unable to recognize a sentence.

That opinion is further substantiated when it is found that in eighty-two cases two sentences were run together without any punctuation marks between them. As a matter of fact, in a few of these cases three sentences were combined in this way. These were all imperative or declarative sentences--mostly the latter. Therefore, it was considered best to designate these errors as "periods omitted." The period was omitted after common abbreviations thirty-seven times. This was evidently due to carelessness.

**Quotation marks misplaced.--**The quotation marks were misplaced ninety-five times. In about two-thirds of the cases, or sixty-two, the quotation mark was placed before the period at the end of a sentence, as in the following: "Burroughs decided that his son should follow a 'gentleman's occupation'." The reason for this is clearly seen. The quoted phrase was not considered the real end of the sentence. A somewhat similar mistake was made thirty-two times when the quotation mark preceded a comma instead of following it. The rules for placing the quotation marks seem difficult for some students to interpret, although they are clearly explained in modern textbooks and usually a number of illustrations are provided.

**Semicolon used for other marks.--**For some reason, a semicolon was used for a colon before a formal list or enumeration fourteen times. This may have been the result of a typing error. The semicolon and the colon are on the same key, but the typist must shift for a colon, just as he does for capitals. It may be assumed that the student forgot to
shift at the proper time. Then it might be asked why the error was not found and corrected when the transcription was read after being typed.

Unnecessary apostrophes.--Fifty times the apostrophe was used when it was not needed. "It's" was written for "its" thirty-four times, and "your's" was written twice. The first of these errors is often found in students' work. The same contraction was written as "its'" five times. It is another evidence of confused thinking. The rules for the apostrophe apparently have not been mastered.

Quotation marks omitted.--Final quotation marks were omitted twenty-five times. The reason for this omission is not clear, as beginning quotation marks were used in every one of these cases. In quoted material consisting of several paragraphs in regular order, it is customary to put quotation marks at the beginning of each paragraph. This rule was violated thirteen times. In two cases, direct quotations were not indicated by the quotation marks.

Misplaced apostrophes.--Many students were not clear as to the proper place for the apostrophe in the genitive. They often wrote "children's books" and similar expressions.

Omitted apostrophes.--Fourteen times there was no apostrophe used with contractions. This is only a small percent of the total errors of punctuation and is probably due to carelessness.

Colon.--Only a few errors were made in the use of the colon. The one of most frequent occurrence was the expression
"12:01" for "12:01" when referring to time.

Dash.--Dashes were very rare in the material. There were a few cases where students failed to use a dash to indicate an abrupt break in the thought. These, however, are relatively unimportant.

Unnecessary periods.--The most common misuse of the period was placing it after ordinal numbers, as in the following sentence: "Your letter of the 15th. has been received." It should not be difficult to eliminate this error altogether.

Misplaced commas.--Commas were misplaced a few times. The errors had no common characteristic, and since there were only a few of them, no attempt has been made to discuss them in detail.

Question mark.--Likewise, there were very few errors in the use of the question mark. Rewriting incorrect papers before receiving credit for them would be an effective method of eliminating this error.

Summary.--The results of the study, as shown in this chapter, show very clearly that many students are not able to punctuate properly. Especially is this true with regard to the comma, the hyphen, and the apostrophe. Causes for many of the errors have been suggested and some remedial measures briefly mentioned. In a later chapter more will be said about some instructional methods to help students overcome their weaknesses.
CHAPTER V
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF CAPITALIZATION ERRORS

Failure to capitalize.—It will be observed from Table III that failure to begin proper nouns with capital letters accounts for approximately one-fourth of the total errors in capitalization. It has been suggested that varying practice in current usage often leaves students in doubt as to whether a small or a capital letter should be used in writing certain words. In the papers that were included in this study, recognition was given to this fact, and only those words were marked that under no circumstances could have been called correct. The only solution to this problem seems to be careful observation of current usage in books, newspapers, and magazines, together with frequent reviews of the principles involved.

In ninety cases, a direct quotation began with a capital letter. It seems that students ought to understand this principle fully, but it is evident that they do not, or cannot use it when they need it in work outside their English classes.

Miscellaneous errors accounted for nearly 5 per cent. They cannot be taken up and discussed in detail here, because they were of so many different kinds that time spent in this way would be practically wasted.

Adjectives derived from proper names were begun with small letters on fourteen different occasions. In ten

1 Leiper, op. cit., pp. 118, 120-121.
## Table III

**Capitalization Errors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Error</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Failure to capitalize:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Proper nouns</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>25.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Direct quotations</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>17.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Miscellaneous</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Proper adjectives</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. First word of sentence</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Incorrect use of capitals:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Common nouns</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>28.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Adjectives</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>13.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Miscellaneous</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>520</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sentences the first word began with a small letter.

These last-mentioned errors do not seem to be of great importance, and a reasonable amount of drill work should eliminate them.

**Incorrect use of capitals.**—The reasons for beginning common nouns with capital letters are not very clear. As was said in the first paragraph of this chapter, sometimes confusion exists in the student's mind as to whether a word should begin with a capital or a small letter. However, in the material used in this study, there should have been very few cases of this kind, if any. Yet the figures show that this was the error of greatest frequency.

Ordinary adjectives were capitalized a number of times, amounting to slightly more than 13 per cent. There seems to be no logical reason for this error.

Just as hard to explain are the fourteen times when a capital letter was used to begin some other word in a sentence than the first one—excluding proper nouns, of course. This number constituted slightly more than one-half of the errors designated as "miscellaneous."

**Summary.**—Before deciding definitely that errors in capitalization are principally due to carelessness, a few moments may be taken to consider a study reported in a recent issue of the *English Journal.* The authors, after tabulating and analyzing the errors in capitalization made by a number

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of ninth-grade students, talked with each one of the boys and girls who had taken the test to find out why they had not applied the principles correctly in every case. They report, as a result of these individual conferences, that in almost every case the students had logical reasons for their errors. One of the observations of the authors is given as follows:

"It will be seen that errors center about certain usages where a word may be capitalized in one situation but not in another."

This gives weight to the statements that were made in the opening paragraph of this chapter.
In incorrect division of words. -- According to Table IV, the incorrect division of words at the end of a line in typing is the most common error of the type designated as "general." It accounted for nearly one-half the total number. It is difficult to suggest a reason for this error, as one would naturally suppose that these students had been taught to divide words according to the syllables. A natural inference would be, then, that the students were careless. Probably they did not take the time to find out from a dictionary the correct syllabication of the words. The opinion that gross carelessness was responsible for this error is further strengthened when a further analysis of the data shows that, of these 801 words, 56 were monosyllables.

Textbooks, of course, give rules for dividing words at the end of a line. Sheperd in particular gives a number of such rules, which may be studied with profit. However, some teachers and writers question the value of these rules for the average student. The student should be taught to consult a dictionary whenever he is in doubt. This method is always dependable, while, as pointed out, the value of rules is questionable. Leiper does not advocate the study of rules. He considers that students waste time and energy that might have been better employed in other ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Error</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Incorrect division of words at end of line</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>48.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Incorrect compounding</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>22.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Incorrect division of miscellaneous terms</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>17.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Errors in interpreting shorthand outlines</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hyphens—miscellaneous errors</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Errors in business letters</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Errors in writing numbers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Errors in writing amounts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1,665</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
be better employed in more important matters.

Incorrect compounding.—Incorrect compounding ranks second in this group. The most common fault discovered was writing one word as two, thus, "mean time." This was done 151 times. The next most common one was writing two separate words as a compound expression with a hyphen, as "car-line." This was found ninety-two times. Two separate words were written as one solid word seventy times. A good illustration of this is "percent." Forty-eight times one solid word was written as a compound word with a hyphen. A common example is the expression "book-let." Eleven times a hyphen was placed between a word and a modifier immediately preceding it, as "four-weeks."

A careful study of the illustrations of the different errors leads to the opinion that the writing of one solid word as two is the least excusable. No good reason can be seen for writing such an expression as "over whelm." It can be easily understood why a student might write "plate-glass" instead of two separate words, as the hyphen is commonly used in writing compound adjectives when they precede the words that they modify. Likewise, it is not difficult to see why a student should write "maybe" for the two separate words of a verb phrase. On the other hand, it would seem that carelessness alone is responsible for such errors as "out-standing" and "ten-days."

The matter of compounding sometimes, however, presents a real difficulty. Usage varies so much that there seems to
be a woeful lack of uniformity in textbooks and current periodicals. Newspapers, too, are often unreliable guides. Most textbooks present this matter in a fairly complete manner. Shipherd\textsuperscript{3} gives considerable space to a discussion of compounding and includes a long list of valuable illustrations. Students should know how to apply the rules and should also observe the changes in current usage from time to time, but they should not be too eager to take up new ways of writing these expressions.

**Incorrect division of miscellaneous terms.**--Dates were divided at the end of a line 193 times. For instance, "May" would be at the end of a line and "15" would be at the beginning of the next line. In the same manner, titles were separated from proper names sixty-three times, "Dr." being at the end of a line and "Green" at the beginning of the next one. The abbreviation "No." was thus separated nineteen times from the arabic numerals following it. Miscellaneous errors of this type accounted for twelve more. This error is clearly due to lack of observation of the rules for correct form.

**Errors in interpreting shorthand outlines.**--Particular attention is called to the fourth item on the table. This has been called, for the lack of a better designation, "errors in interpreting shorthand outlines," but of course other factors are involved. The shorthand character for the word "you" is the same one that is used for "your." Fifty-nine times "you" was used for "your," as in the sentence, "You

check was received." Most of the students, when this error was pointed out to them, recognized it immediately. They often said that they had not noticed it when they were reading the transcription after having typed it. "Your" was used for "you" eight times.

Other errors in this group amounted to seventeen. Since the same shorthand symbol represents "be," "but," and "by," the students in a number of cases transcribed one of these words for another, and some very noticeable errors resulted. The reasons for such glaring errors lie in the fact that the students do not read their notes carefully while transcribing them. Furthermore, from what has been said, it can be seen that they do not check over their typed material in the proper manner.

Hyphens.--Sixty-one times the hyphen was used without any particular reason. This type of error was not included under "incorrect compounding," as it is entirely different. Such expressions as "500-yards" were found twenty-six times. These could not have been considered as compound adjectives, as their position in the sentence made this impossible. The reason for this error is obscure. Twenty-four times the hyphen was used incorrectly in cardinal numbers, as "one-thousand." This was perhaps due to failure to distinguish clearly between this form of expression and such compound numbers as "thirty-seven." The remaining errors in this group were of miscellaneous types.

Errors in business letters.--Of the thirty-three errors
listed as item 6, twenty-six were omissions of the inside address of business letters. This is an important part of a business letter and should, of course, always be included.

**Errors in writing numbers.**—Practically all those included in the seventh item were due to carelessness. For instance, such errors as "36,00" for "36,000" were found eight times. Such expressions as "the 7 instant" and "36 thousand" occurred six times each.

**Errors in writing amounts.**—Very similar to those in item 7 are those mentioned last. The most common one was "75.00dollars." This is another example of slovenliness.

**Summary.**—The numerous violations of rules of grammar and punctuation were the most serious faults to be found in many of the transcriptions, but there are certain rules for form and arrangement that cannot be ignored without detracting from the clearness and the appearance of the written transcription.
CHAPTER VII
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Errors in punctuation constituted 78.22 per cent of the aggregate number of errors. These far outnumbered all other types. As was explained in Chapter IV, the results showed by this study are a fairly accurate measure of the ability of the students to use the different marks of punctuation. Mistakes in the use of the comma were most frequent, with the hyphen, the apostrophe, and the period following in the order named.

General errors ranked second in frequency of occurrence and amounted to 10.58 per cent of the total number. Failure to divide words according to syllables ranked first in this particular group. Incorrect compounding was second, and various types of incorrect division ranked third.

Grammatical errors accounted for 7.39 per cent of all errors tabulated. It was pointed out in Chapter III that, since the material studied consisted of dictated exercises rather than original compositions, grammatical errors should not have occurred. The mistakes that were made, however, were due to failure to take the dictation correctly or to transcribe it as it was given in class by the instructor. The students should have had sufficient knowledge of grammatical principles to enable them to discover violations of these principles upon seeing them in type. Their inability to do this, however, is demonstrated by the information shown
in Table I, Chapter III. Careful study of this table discloses the fact that the three most common grammatical errors were incomplete sentences, lack of agreement between subject and predicate, and failure to distinguish between verbs and non-modal forms. These accounted for 53.14 per cent of the grammatical errors, and all of them are very clearly fundamental faults of sentence structure.

Errors in capitalization amounted to only 3.31 per cent of the total, but they are of such a type that they need attention. Too often the students were unable to decide whether to use a capital or a small letter. This is not an infrequent difficulty, however, as was explained. The most common error discovered was the use of a capital letter to begin a common noun. A close second was the use of a small letter to begin a proper noun. Failure to begin a direct quotation with a capital letter was a fairly common error, as was the beginning of an ordinary adjective with a capital.

Conclusions

In view of the results of this study, the following conclusions seem to be justified:

1. Many students lack a thorough knowledge of grammatical principles, or they are unable to apply rules when they are needed.

   a. Students too often fail to recognize fundamental faults of sentence structure.

   b. Students frequently fail to make the proper distinction between the different parts of speech and their
functions in the sentence.

2. Students frequently fail to punctuate properly, either because they cannot apply the rules or because they are careless.

   a. Particularly is this true with regard to the comma, the rules for which are evidently not clear.

   b. Other marks of punctuation that are often omitted or used incorrectly are the hyphen, the apostrophe, and the period.

3. Errors in capitalization are entirely too frequent.

   a. These may be due to carelessness or to inability to apply the rules.

   b. Sometimes current usage raises doubt in the minds of the students.

4. Students are too often careless with certain mechanical details that do not always affect the clearness of expression but that play an important part in the appearance of the finished product.

5. Many students do not read their shorthand notes carefully before or during the process of transcribing them.

6. The typed transcriptions are not checked over properly before they are handed in.

7. The dictionary is not consulted often enough when doubtful matters arise.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Mastery of the fundamental principles should be
insisted upon in the English classes. Intensive drills and frequent reviews should characterize the work in technical grammar. A larger proportion of the time available should be spent upon the study and use of the rules that are most frequently violated.

2. Careful selection of textbooks is imperative. A sufficient number of review exercises should be provided by the textbook itself. The enterprising teacher should supplement these with other appropriate material from various sources. To that end, there should be close co-operation between English teachers and shorthand teachers.

3. Students should be taught to read their shorthand notes carefully and thoughtfully before transcribing them. Reading from notes taken in class should be an important part of the work in dictation groups.

4. Instructors should require that all transcribed material, as far as practicable, be rewritten if it contains serious errors of any kind. Students should not be given credit for anything except exercises that are correctly transcribed.

5. Dictionaries should be made available in every classroom. Students should be trained to use them correctly and to consult them on all doubtful points.

6. Correct English should be required in every class as far as possible. Words are the stock-in-trade of every stenographer, and if he cannot use them properly, he will find himself seriously handicapped.
7. Further study in this field is advisable. Errors in the use of the comma call for detailed investigation.

If these recommendations are earnestly followed, it is believed that the number of errors can be considerably reduced and many of them practically eliminated. This will lighten the work of the dictation teacher and will enable schools to send out more efficient stenographers.
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