

THE GENESIS OF COMMAS IN STORIES INVENTED BY NEWLY LITERATE STUDENTS: IDENTIFYING METALINGUISTIC ACTIVITIES BASED ON PUNCTUATION MARKS AND SPONTANEOUS COMMENTS¹

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- **ABSTRACT:** This study analyzes the occurrences of commas and the spontaneous verbalizations during the textual production of invented stories written by two 6-year-old students. Based on the field of study of Textual Genetics, within a linguistic-enunciative approach, six school manuscripts and their respective writing processes were analyzed. The filmic and multimodal recording of these processes preserved the ecological conditions of the classroom. The dialogue between the students, established during the textual production, was taken as a unit of analysis. The occurrences of commas were identified in the school manuscripts and related to what these students said (commented) about these punctuation marks. The results show that the comma was the most used punctuation mark, but its application occurred in only three manuscripts. Almost all occurrences were “remembered” after writing the invented story, complemented with comments indicating a “graphic-spatial” understanding for its use. However, their occurrences in the last manuscript produced indicate the beginning of a “linguistic” conception, when the position of the comma competes with the full stop, commencing to delimit semantic units. And its application is also anticipated by the students, which takes place during the linearization process. These two conceptions are correlated in the same manuscript, suggesting that the genesis of the comma goes through a “hybrid use” function.
- **KEYWORDS:** text production; collaborative writing; dialogue; learning; punctuation. metalinguistic knowledge.

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Introduction

Many studies on the acquisition of written language analyze the students' punctuation marks (PM)² in the literacy process or newly literate students.³ Among these studies the following are highlighted: Chanquoy and Fayol (1995), Favart and Passerault (2000), Garcia-Debanc (2010), with francophone students. Edelsky (1983) and Hall (1999, 2005), with English students. Also with newly literate Brazilian students, the work of Chacon (2003), Mendes (2009) and Rocha (1996), and with Spanish students, the work of Davalos and Ferreiro (2019). Or even the comparative study with the analysis of productions of Spanish, Brazilian and Italian students (FERREIRO; PONTECORVO, 1999). Despite the diversity of their non-alphabetic graphic forms, their multiple functions, and the variable frequency with which they occur in texts read by children (FAYOL; CARRE; SIMON-THIBAUT, 2014), the “period” and “capital letters” are the most used and recurrent in different textual genres produced by students in the early years of Primary Education. The comma is used at a much lower frequency, rarely present in the writings of 6-year-old students (CHANQUOY; FAYOL, 1995; FABRE, 1990 HALL, 1998; MENDES, 2009).

Most studies with children aged 6-7 years old analyze the PM in the text produced by the student, given to the teacher or researcher. In general, when analyzing the product, researchers presume that the PMs were entered during the linearization process, in other words, it is assumed that the PMs were entered as the text was being written.

Identifying the PM in the textual product does not provide information regarding the moment they were written, nor what the 6-7-year-old students thought when applying them on the sheet of paper or how an erased or crossed-out PM was motivated by a metalinguistics activity. Another important methodological aspect, as pointed out by Hall (1998), is the absence of ecological information related to the classroom, during the textual productions when the PM occurred.

Based on the identification of PMs in stories invented by two 6-year-old French students,⁴ this case study will discuss the occurrences of “commas” and what the students spontaneously say about this PM. Therefore, we will analyze how the students use the “comma” in their first written texts, what function is attributed to it and what they say about this PM when they inscribe it on the sheet of paper. Thus, the object of study

² By “punctuation marks” we mean a multidimensional system, composed of three domains, as proposed by Catach (1996) and described by Bechara (2009): word domain (blank spaces, initial capital letters, abbreviation period, hyphen dash, hyphen or separator, apostrophe, underscore, italics), sentence domain (comma, semicolon, period, exclamation point, ellipses, colon, quotation marks, dash, parentheses, square brackets, braces) and text domain (titles, initials, margins, choice of spaces and characters, layout of chapters and book design). The first two domains are directly related to the linear and internal characteristic of the written text. Studies on acquisition of punctuation select, for the most part, punctuation in sentences.

³ In general, they are children between 6 and 7 years old, attending the 1st or 2nd year of Elementary School (Primary School).

⁴ Data was collected in a classroom of French students, as part of the InterWriting project, an international collaboration project, Brazil-France-Portugal. At the French school, two pairs were accompanied, one formed by boys and the other by girls, chosen by the teacher herself. The choice of the teacher considered the spontaneous groupings of the students. In this case study we will analyze the filmic records of the two girls.

chosen was the school manuscript under construction and the dialogue between two 6-year-old girls, preserving the classroom's ecological conditions.

We will initially present some studies that discuss the children's comments about the PM based on different objects and methodological designs. Then, we will delimit the field of Text Genetics, based on a linguistic-enunciative approach. We will describe the PMs identified in the school manuscripts and then analyze the occurrences of commas, relating them to the students' spontaneous comments. Our goal is to understand how these comments, made during the manuscript under construction and produced in the classroom's real time and space, can express the metalinguistic activities of newly literate students.

Some studies on punctuation marks and student comments

Among the studies on punctuation that, in a school context, considered the recording of children's comments about PMs, we highlight two techniques: interviews and observations conducted by researchers in the classrooms while the students were writing their texts.

In the comprehensive The Punctuation Project (HALL, 2005), involving English students aged 6 to 11 years, the researchers used these two techniques to understand the child's point of view about the PMs he/she inscribed. The results of this project indicate there is disagreement between the teaching and learning of PMs. On the one hand, some PMs are taught, then others, and a phrase are taken as a textual reference for using the PMs. On the other hand, there are "huge differences between children, between schools, between how the concepts associated with punctuation are understood" (HALL, 2005, p. 3). Despite the diversity of results found, the studies supervised by Hall provide some evidence on how children develop punctuation. Confirming certain findings from previous studies, Hall (2005) identifies three moments related to learning about punctuation:

- "Resistance to punctuation": a persistent and generalized absence of punctuation, the child being able to read his writings with intonation, even if he/she has not used punctuation marks.
- "Graphic punctuation": distribution and positioning of a PM according to graphic-spatial criteria.⁵ The main characteristic of these criteria is their non-linguistic character. At first, children add periods at the ends of lines or at the end of the written text or start the first sentence of the text with a capital letter. The children then internally punctuate their writings, and their justifications

⁵ According to Hall, "as the use of, or belief about the use of, punctuation which is dominated by the positioning of the marks on the page according to space rather than any underlying linguistic principle." (HALL, 1999, p. 181). Ferreiro and Pontecorvo (1999) also recognized this phenomenon by stating "in some cases and under certain circumstances, controls the use of graphic (i.e., punctuation) marks not related to syntactic or discursive border." (FERREIRO; PONTECORVO, 1999, p. 558).

relate these PMs to the length of the linguistic units, the number of PMs already inscribed and their distribution throughout the written piece. It is common, at this time, to insert the PMs after the student has written the text.

- “Linguistic punctuation”: initially, children start to consider certain linguistic elements (e.g., the connective “and”, “then”) and prosodic aspects related to certain semantic units. Then, there are uses linked to grammatical principles, enriched with the linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge of the technical terms and functions of PMs.⁶

It should be noted, however, that this developmental path seems to be associated with sociocultural aspects, which restrict the child’s access to printed materials (conveyed in family and school literacy practices), the didactic-curricular approach determined by the school (especially that articulated by the teacher about punctuation) and the textual genre prevalent in the classroom.⁷ For example, 7-year-old students, literate only through the use of simple texts and short sentences, tend to write short texts and use full stops at the end of a written line and/or at the end of the written text (EDELISKY, 1983; HALL, 1999); and literate students of the same age group through interaction with different textual genres (SILVA, 2010), comic books (CALIL; BORÉ, 2011) or etiological tales (CALIL; AMORIM, 2017; CALIL; BORÉ; AMORIM, 2014) tend to write longer texts and insert more and more diverse types of PMs into their initial writings.

To understand how the articulation between the uses of PM and the sociocultural dimension interferes in the children’s way of thinking, Hall and collaborators (HALL, 2005; HALL; SING, 2011; SING; HALL, 2009) take a favorable position in recording the children’s oral discussions, organized in small groups, to solve punctuation exercises together:

The significance of this technique is that it represents a more powerful method of gathering insights into young children’s thinking than retrospective examination of writing or individual discussion between a child and a researcher (both techniques that have dominated the few existing studies on punctuation systems in any age group) (HALL, 2005, p. 2).

Despite defending the technique of recording oral discussions in small groups, the children’s statements are elicited or prompted by the researcher. In Hall’s studies, the researcher is inside the classroom, following the textual production of the students. Generally, the researcher addressed the students after they wrote a sentence or when

⁶ This aspect is strongly related to the writing of fictional narratives and personal experience reports. Studies with Portuguese, Brazilian, Spanish, Italian, French and English students indicate the same developmental path.

⁷ It must be noted that these aspects are directly related to the written language, the way in which the punctuation system is organized in written texts in a particular language. For example, the frequent use of apostrophes in English and French is practically absent in Portuguese, Italian and Spanish. As a result, the apostrophe is not identified, for example, in texts written by students of these nationalities.

they had finished writing it, inviting them to review what was written. The researcher would then ask if something was missing, if something had to be modified in what was written or, also, why a certain PM had been inscribed.⁸

Moreover, the use of exercises proposed for students also reflect the punctuation in an already written text. In these studies (HALL; SING, 2011; SING; HALL, 2009) certain empty graphic spaces (“boxes”) of texts offered to students are chosen, to decide which PM will be applied or whether the PM is correct or not. Researchers pre-select the places in the text where a PM (period, quote, comma, colon, dash, question mark, exclamation period, for example) should or should not occur. Evidently, the previous allocation of positions and types of PM in an already written text is not a situation of textual production. It is, at most, a task of textual revision, proposed based on an exercise that has a text written by an adult.

Thus, the discussion and reflection on the pre-selected PM elicited by the teacher or researcher takes place outside a real situation of textual production. We understand an “actual situation” as that in which the written text does not yet exist. A situation where the student must deal with several linguistic problems (graphic, spelling, semantic, syntactic, punctuation, cohesion, and textual coherence, etc.), while linearizing what he/she is writing. Therefore, in these studies, there is no analysis of empirical material that presents the students’ spontaneous dialogues about a PM that occurred during the elaboration of the textual production.

The article by Boré and Bosredon (2013) is one of the few studies to present the spontaneous words of newly literate students about punctuation during a manuscript under construction. In this exploratory study, the authors choose the verbalization of the term “phrase” and the punctuation produced by two pairs of 7-year-old students (CE1)⁹ during the textualization of their invented etiological tales. Over 12 collaborative production tasks, the students used the term “phrase” only 13 times, while the term “period” was used 71 times. In some statements, the term “phrase” is associated with the use of a “period”. This happened when the student finished writing “once upon a time,” adding a “period”, saying that “[once upon a time] is a phrase.”. This association also occurred when the student had already punctuated the end of the title and the first part of the story,¹⁰ written in four lines. After the pair of students counted the words written so far, one of the students says: “Alright! I wrote two phrases.”.

⁸ The questions asked are like those asked by researchers who use the interview (retrospection protocol) as a technique to access the student’s way of thinking (DÁVALOS; FERREIRO, 2019; VIEIRA, 2012).

⁹ School year corresponds to the 2nd year of Elementary School. In the French education system, the acronym means “*Cours Élémentaire 1*”.

¹⁰ The aforementioned stretch was linearized and punctuated as follows (BORÉ, BOSREDON, 2013, p. 21):

<i>“Comment les singes font pour grimper sans glissé . Les singes grimpe sur les branches comme un escalier . pour ne pas glissé il se serve des lianes comme une balançoire .</i>	[How monkeys climb] [without slipping.] [The monkeys climb the branches] [like a ladder. To not] [he uses vines like] [a swing.]
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These insertions suggest there is implicit knowledge about the use of “periods”, delimited by prosodic and/or semantic units. However, the two verbalizations containing the term “phrase” indicate that the “phrase” is defined by the presence of the “period” and not by prosodic, semantic, or grammatical criteria.

When the term “period” is expressed by these students, the statements do not indicate an explanation or justification for inscribing them. They are verbalized as a request, a need, or an order: “*on met un period*,” “*il faut mettre des periods*,” “[*mettre*] *un period à la fin*”.¹¹ Although these statements may be associated with implicit knowledge related to prosodic or semantic units, they echo or approach the requests teachers commonly make to their students.

This initial study by Boré and Bosredon (2013) does not provide information about the occurrences of other PMs, nor does it indicate the correlation between the number of PMs inserted in the texts, the verbalizations (spontaneous dialogues) of linguistic terms and possible metalinguistic activities that the statements can express. We will discuss these aspects, based on the theoretical delimitation described below.

Textual genesis and verbalization

Our theoretical-methodological perspective is centered on the field of studies proposed by Textual Genetics (BORÉ, 2010; FABRE, 1990), from a linguistic-enunciative approach (CALIL, 1998, 2008; FELIPETO, 2008). Our general objective is to understand the textual genesis (process of creation and construction of the school manuscript) and the metalinguistic activities related to the occurrences of PMs carried out during the execution of the textual production school task.

As for metalinguistic activities, which occur in the didactic situations of teaching the mother tongue, we assume the delimitations proposed by Fontich and Camps (2014, p. 605). According to the authors, these activities can be manifested in different ways:

1. Metalinguistic activities not explicitly verbalized, which can occur in procedural activities, such as reformulations, repetitions, emphases, erasures...; where it is observed, whether in speech or writing, different modes of permutation or substitution of linguistic or textual elements.
2. Metalinguistic activities verbalized in everyday language, that is, spontaneous and informal conversations, when students talk about linguistic elements they use and manipulate, without verbalizing technical terms or concepts.
3. Metalinguistic activities verbalized in a specific metalanguage when there is enunciation of specific linguistic names or concepts. These activities are based on the knowledge and systematization of school grammar concepts.

¹¹ Respectively: “We put a full stop”, “It is necessary to put periods”, “[put] a period at the end”.

The knowledge about language (metalinguistic knowledge) expressed in the second and third manifestation modes of these activities will be the focus of our analysis. Preserving the ecological conditions of the classroom¹² is one of the essential components to capture what students spontaneously say to each other while writing.¹³ To enable this, we chose the dialogue between pairs of students as the study object, while they write together a single fictional narrative. We performed the filmic record of what is being inscribed, linearized, or crossed out in the sheet of paper while they talk.¹⁴ These different modal aspects (visual, audio and written) are part of Ramos System (CALIL, 2020), employed for collecting the analyzed data.

We understand dialogue, *in locus* and *in natura*, among students during the textual production as a dialog-text (CALIL, 2017). The dialog-text (DT) is transcribed in order to preserve the genetic path of the manuscript under construction. We have proposed the analysis of different aspects (graphic-spatial, linguistic, or textual) of the textual genesis of each school manuscript, based on the identification of “tension points” (CALIL, 2003), that is, when the writing flow is interrupted, through reformulations, hesitations, doubts, disagreements, explanations, students’ justifications about what should or should not be inscribed in the manuscript under construction.

According to Calil (2016, 2020), tension points are characterized by the return to a given textual object (TO), its recognition and its modification/preservation, followed or not by comments. This triple action of the writer (return, recognition, and modification/preservation) indicates some form, implicit or explicit, of metalinguistic activity. When there are no comments, the return can be identified in the graphical changes (erasures) on what has already been inserted and linearized, but it is not possible to know what the student thought or why he crossed out a certain TO. When there are verbalizations (spontaneous comments) about a recognized TO (graphic-spatial, orthographic, syntactic, punctuation: textual), which may or may not be accompanied by an inscribed erasure, these comments offer indications about the students’ ways of thinking during the manuscript under construction.

Our focus of interest lies precisely on the way they use and what they say about commas (spontaneous comments) during the construction of the school manuscript, following a perspective of microgenetic analysis, already assumed in other studies (CALIL, 2016; CALIL; MYHILL, 2020; CALIL; PEREIRA, 2018). As we have

¹² The ecological conditions presuppose preserving the classroom environment, its uniqueness and diversity, characterized both by the socio-historical and cultural context, as well as by the didactic aspects (materials fixed on the walls, layout of worktables, teaching materials used by students, etc.) and interactional aspects (interaction between teacher and students).

¹³ The fact that there is a filmic record of the dialogue between students requires considering the multimodal aspects that accompany these speeches, such as body movements, facial expressions and gestures (holding a pen, taking a sheet of paper), in addition to interference from the teacher and other colleagues.

¹⁴ We are not aware of studies with students of this age group who have recorded occurrences of erasures and verbalizations (and their valorization as a metalinguistic activity inherent to the act of writing), in the *here and now* of textual production in the classroom. We observed that the researchers are not present in the classroom when the film recording is carried out. These favors maintaining the ecological characteristic of the classroom.

proposed, the spontaneous comments of newly alphabetic students present two basic linguistic-enunciative structures:

- Simple comment: Comments with short linguistic-enunciative structures without explanation or development of an argument. For example: “Put an ‘S’ here”, “It is capitalized” or “Don’t forget the period”.
- Expanded comment: Comments with longer linguistic-enunciative structures, presenting argumentative value (description, explanation, justification). These linguistic structures may contain terms such as: because otherwise, but it must, it looks like, that is, I mean, they will think that, meaning that, look like... For example: “the letter ‘K’ is like the letter ‘R’” or “You can’t write [‘had’] because it doesn’t fit”.

The correlation between recognized TOs and spontaneous comments helps us understand the metalinguistic activities of newly literate students. Delimited by this theoretical-methodological framework, we will identify the PMs in the school manuscripts of a pair of newly literate French students, if there was any form of “comma” erasure and if the spontaneous comments (simple or expanded) would characterize the related metalinguistic activities to this PM.

Methodology

The material obtained for this study followed the same methodological design proposed by Project InterWriting, developed in collaboration with Brazilian, French, and Portuguese researchers. The corpus to be analyzed was extracted from Dossier La Cigogne,¹⁵ composed of weekly video footage of pairs of French students, aged 6-7 years, in a classroom of the *Cours Préparatoire* (CP) of a school in Paris, between the months of March and April 2014.

For two months, the film records¹⁶ of six production tasks of invented stories took place weekly.¹⁷ The teacher organized her students into pairs. The same pairs were

¹⁵ The Dossier La Cigogne, created in collaboration with Professor Catherine Boré, financed by the Inspection Académique du Val d’Oise, is part of the “Practice of textualization at school” collection, based at School Manuscript Laboratory. We are immensely grateful to the school administration, the teacher and the students for having accepted the development of this study. The collection of this material was authorized by the CEP/CONEP (CAAE: 61330816.0.0000.5013).

¹⁶ Soon after installing the equipment for filming the two pairs, the researchers leave the classroom, leaving only the teacher and her students. This contributes to the preservation of the classroom’s ecological environment, since any form of interaction between researchers and students is avoided. It is also observed that there is a tendency of the participants, especially the students, to “forget” the presence of the camcorder.

¹⁷ Due to the phonic method used by the school to teach literacy, the students’ written production was, until then, limited to responding to the phonological awareness exercises, for the construction of the alphabetic principle, generally completing or copying words and sentences. The few textual production proposals were also restricted, such as writing

maintained in all tasks, only alternating the role of who wrote and who dictated. Each pair should orally agree on the story. After they had agreed on the story, the students asked for a sheet of paper and a pen to write it down. In this study, we will analyze the six writing processes and the respective school manuscripts of the pair formed by two girls: Isadora (I, 06:08) and Maria (M, 06:11).¹⁸

It is highlighted that all 23 students in this CP class were newly literate students. The teacher adopts the textbook collection of *Justine et Compagnie CP* (GOASDOUÉ; COURTIES; SABATHIÉ, 2000),¹⁹ where the chapters are organized according to a certain phoneme. She also uses the book *30 phonèmes en 30 comptines, GS – CP* (DEGORCE-DUMAS; TRÉSALLET, 2000), as well as photocopied exercises from the *Petits Pas* material (L Pinault).²⁰ The set of these didactic materials, which were used to alphabetize the students, take a phonological approach (phonic method), in which exercises with letters, words and short sentences predominate.

In this case study, characterized by the ecological (naturalistic) and interactional conditions of the classroom, we will carry out qualitative and microgenetic analysis of the commas used by these two students, while writing their invented stories. Thus, we will identify the occurrences of this PM in the school manuscripts and, based on the synchronized films, the multimodal material edited through the technique proposed by Ramos System (CALIL, 2020), we will analyze their spontaneous comments while they inserted the commas identified in the school manuscripts.

To identify the commas in the synchronized film, the moment when the students recognize the need to use this PM will be considered. This recognition will be done through the enunciation of technical terms, in this case, the verbalization of the term *comma* or non-technical or generic terms (sign, dash, round ordinal number, periods...) or through identifying gestures (for example, hand gestures, pointing with the finger where to place the PM, etc.) referring to the *comma*.

The genesis of commas and metalinguistic activities

From the filmic record of the writing process in the classroom's real time and space, we will analyze the episodes in which the students recognized the need to insert the commas during the textual production processes. In the six school manuscripts the pair produced, the commas occurred 24 times, distributed in only 3 manuscripts (4 in M1,²¹ 8 in M4 and 12 in M6). Thus, only the 1st (M1), 4th (M4) and 6th (M6) processes (P)

the end of a short story. Thus, it can be stated that the students were, for the first time, inventing and writing a fictional narrative from beginning to end.

¹⁸ The student's names are fictitious.

¹⁹ Book 1 and Book 2, Exercise booklet were used by the teacher; Book 1 and Book 2, Reading Book.

²⁰ This material is available for download at the website: <https://www.fichier-pdf.fr/2011/12/27/fiches-lecture-comprehension/fiches-lecture-comprehension.pdf>. Access on: 16 Sep. 2022.

²¹ M1 indicates the first manuscript, M2 the second, and so on.

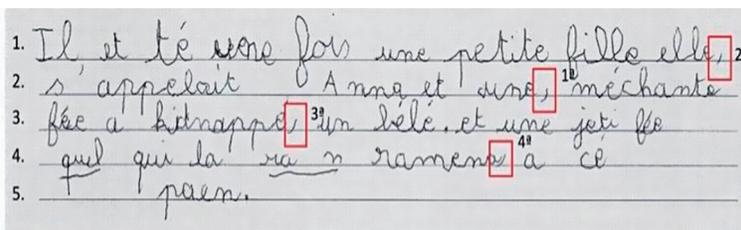
will be presented and discussed, whose manuscripts are the products. The comma was the most common PM, followed by the occurrences of capital letter (18 occurrences) and period (14 occurrences).

In these school manuscripts the prevalence of the “comma” stands out because the PM is not expected or frequent in the writings of 6-year-old students (ARSENEAU, 2020). The occurrence of this high number of commas directed us to search for its genesis and understand its relationship with possible verbalized metalinguistic activities.

1st Process: 4 commas and their comments

In M1, written with 28 words, it was the product of the first process (P1) of recorded textual production; it was also the first time that these students wrote a “complete” invented story (03/03/2014).²² There are 9 PMs: 4 commas, 2 capital letters, 2 periods and 1 apostrophe. Below, we highlight the positions of the commas and number the sequence of occurrences, together with the dialogue formed between the students established among the students during their registration on the sheet of paper.

Figure 1 – Status of M1,²³ at 00:34:16, indicating the sequence in which the four commas were inserted by Isadora



Source: School Manuscript Laboratory.

²² As can be seen in the Exercise Book used by the teacher (GOASDOUÉ; COURTIES; SABATHIÉ, 2000) and in the exercises written in the students' notebooks, the writing proposals were limited to the production of sentences. It is also worth noting that in (GOASDOUÉ; COURTIES; SABATHIÉ, 2000) the term “sentence” appears 35 times, and the term “text” appears 13 times, in 98 pages.

²³ Diplomatic transcript of the M1, accompanied by the translation:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Il et té une fois une petite fille elle | [Once upon a time there was a little girl she] |
| 2. s'appelait Anna et une méchante | [her name was Anna and an evil] |
| 3. fée a kidnappé un bébé. et une jete fée | [fairy kidnapped a baby. and a kind fairy] |
| 4. qui qui la ra-ramena a ce | [gave it back to its] |
| 5. paen. | [parents.] |

P1_TD1_00:33:49-00:34:16.²⁴ Isadora, responsible for writing the story, right after finishing the invented story and putting the full stop period, looks at the teacher who is walking in front of her and gets up to hand her the sheet of paper.

528. ISADORA*: (Teacher collecting the sheets of paper of other pairs of students that have already finished the story and walking in front of the pair Isadora and Maria. Isadora gets up) **Teacher, we're done.** (Sitting down) **Wait! No. Actually, no, we're not done...we're not done.**
529. TEACHER: Haven't you finished? Alright then, finish.
530. ISADORA*: No... (Talking to Maria) **Let's put commas, we have to breathe our sentence** (Maria leans over the table annoyed.) **The commas are short** (Adding a comma between 'an' and 'evil' (line 2) [an | evil / fairy], pausing for a moment, looking at the manuscript, seeming to look for where to put another comma; inscribing the 2nd comma after 'she' (end of line 1) [she |]); putting the 3rd comma in line 3, between 'kidnapped' and 'an' [kidnapped | an]; making the 4th comma between 'took back' and 'to the' [ramena | a]). **A little bit on each line. Here! Here!** (Gets up again and addresses the teacher) We're done, teacher.

Based on the relationship between this school manuscript and the DT turn corresponding to the time when the four commas were added, we can extract important information. The first is when the student Isadora recognized the need to place commas. This takes place only after they finished writing the story, when the student gets up to hand the sheet of paper to the teacher. This delayed recognition emerged as a “memory”, as indicated by the statement “Wait! No. Actually, no, we're not done... we're not done.” (I, in turn 528), and confirmed by her subsequent action.

After “remembering” the commas, Isadora inserts the four commas identified in the product, commenting on them. The order and sequence in which the commas were added (see Fig. 1) and how they were distributed (a comma on each line), evidenced by the synchronized-film, undoes any interpretation that associates inscribing the commas to the linearization flow of the ongoing manuscript. While the student Isadora added each comma in the finished story, she verbalized justifications for her punctuations.

The first comment probably resumes what she was told at some point during her school learning: “Let's put commas, we have to breathe in our sentence” (I, turn 530). This comment is expanded. It seeks to justify the need for the comma. The student uses as an argument something she heard in the classroom or spoken by an

²⁴ Following the coding pattern adopted in our studies, the initial code indicates that this episode corresponds to the first textual production process (P1) that will generate the first school manuscript (M1) of this pair. The episode presents the text-dialog transcription (TD), transcribed between 33 minutes and 49 seconds and 34 minutes and 16 seconds. What the pair wrote and linearized at the end of TD is indicated in the image of what precedes the TD. The asterisk next to the student's name indicates that she is responsible for writing the story, while the other would be responsible for dictating the story. The red font identifies the textual object (TO) recognized by the student and the blue font highlights the comment referring to that textual object. The block in green, between the square brackets, shows what was entered while the student was speaking. All transcripts will follow this same encoding.

adult. As stated by Hall (2005), it is common for students in this age group, and older, to repeat the “mantra” said by the teachers, when inappropriately associating the use of “period” and “comma” with “pause for breathing”. The position of the first inscribed comma, separating the indefinite article “an” and the adjective “evil [fairy]”, is random.

The second comment, this time a simple descriptive observation about the graphic property of this PM, occurs at the same time as the first insertion, in the 2nd line: “Commas are short” (I, turn 530). This metagraphic observation can be understood as a “simple comment”. The students’ concern with the graphic forms of PMs, such as “commas”, “periods” and “quotation marks”, was also observed by Hall (1999) and Hall and Sing (2011).

The following two entries are not immediately associated with comments. The student directs her gaze to the end of the 1st line, inscribing the 2nd comma after “she” at the end of the line. The addition in this position may be related to the “end of the line”, although nothing has been verbalized, nor are there other commas in an equivalent position. Then, Isadora directs the pen to the 3rd line, adding the comma between “kidnapped” and “a baby.”

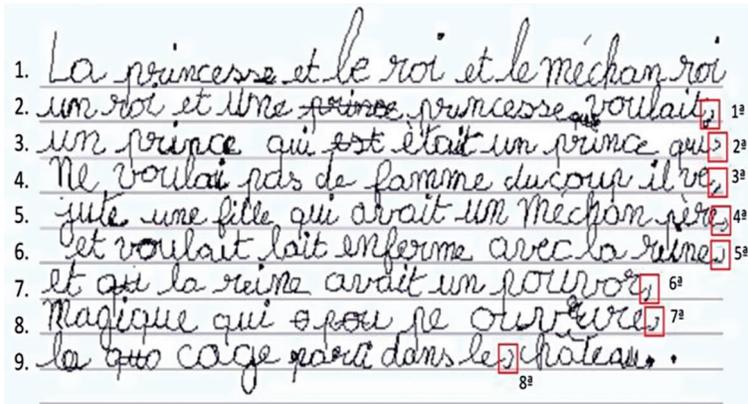
And, finally, after placing the last comma, another expanded comment is verbalized: “a little bit on each line” (I, turn 530). This argument reveals a concern with the graphic-spatial aspect of the school manuscript. This indicates that the student knows she needs to put commas in the written text, and one of the criteria for its distribution seems to be not putting all the commas on the same line.

4th Process: 8 commas and their comments

In the next two text production tasks (M2 and M3), the students produced stories with 12 and 63 words, respectively. In these two productions no comma was placed (did they forget?).

The comma only reappears in the fourth school manuscript (M4), written with 74 words, 21 days after the production of M1. Before inserting the commas, the pair of students had finished the story and were waiting for the teacher to give back the text. At that moment, they had already used 1 capital letter at the beginning of the title and 3 end periods in the last linearized line (4 PM). In the next DT we present M4 after placing the 8 commas and the dialogue between the students during these insertions.

Figure 2 – Status of M4²⁵ indicating the sequence of the eight commas inserted by Isadora



Source: School Manuscript Laboratory.

P4_TD1_00:46:43-00:47:18. Maria, responsible for writing the story, after finishing the task, waiting for the teacher to hand in the completed task.

476. MARIA*: (Remembering she forgot the commas) **Wait. I forgot to do... to do...** (Shaking her left hand to describe the comma and making interjective sound) **...belabelabela...**
477. ISADORA: **Do what? Let's make commas.**
478. MARIA*: to... (Tracing her finger on the table) Ah, yes. Commas!
479. ISADORA: **Because otherwise we cannot breathe.**
480. MARIA*: (Agreeing) Yes... (Maria pointing to the end of the 2nd line for Isadora to put the comma).
481. ISADORA: Let's see, I will...
482. MARIA*: (Indicating the end of the 2nd linearized line with her finger) **Put a comma here.**
483. ISADORA: No...
484. MARIA*: No, no, no, no...

²⁵ Diplomatic transcript of the M4, accompanied by the translation:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>La princesse et le roi et le méchant roi</i> | [The princess and the king and the evil king] |
| 2. <i>un roi et une prince, princesse, voulait</i> | [a king and a princess he wanted]] |
| 3. <i>un prince qui est était un prince qui</i> | [a prince who was a prince who]] |
| 4. <i>ne voulais pas de femme du coup il ve</i> | [he didn't want a woman all of a sudden he wants]] |
| 5. <i>jute une fille qui avait un méchant père</i> | [just a girl who had an evil father]] |
| 6. <i>et voulait lait enferme avec la reine</i> | [and wanted to be with the queen]] |
| 7. <i>et qu la reine avait un pouvoir</i> | [and the queen had a magic power]] |
| 8. <i>magique qui a pou se ouvrir</i> | [that could open]] |
| 9. <i>la quo cage parti dans le château.</i> | [the prison in the] castle..] |

485. ISADORA: (Speaking at the same time and removing Maria's hand from the sheet of paper) No. I'm the one who decides where to put it. (At 46'50, adds the 1st comma to the end of the 2nd line [volait/wanted]). **Wait.** (Retracing this comma). **Let's do it... a little bit on each line?**
486. MARIA*: **Yes.**
487. ISADORA: **On each line** (Placing, at 47'02, the 2nd comma at the end of the 3rd line [qui/what]). At 47'04", the 3rd comma at the end of the 4th line [veux/wanted]). At 47'06, the 4th comma at the end of the 5th line [père/father]). At 47'08", the 5th comma at the end of the 6th line [reine/queen]). At 47'11, the 6th comma at the end of the 7th line [pouvoir/can]).
488. MARIA*: **All... Not in all the lines** (Isadora putting, at 47'12, the 7th comma at the end of the 8th line [ouvrier/open]).
489. ISADORA: **Now it's too late.** (At 47'14, Isadora takes a short break looking at the end of the 9th row; this is the last line of written text in which there are already two full stops after the last linearized word [château/castle]. At 47'16", she writes the 8th comma separating the noun phrase, puts the 8th comma separating the noun phrase [le/o , château/castle]). **I did it.**
490. MARIA*: **Leave it! It's not serious.**
491. ISADORA: (Standing up and removing the pen from the sheet, she asks her colleague to call the teacher). She holds up her finger.

In the transcribed event, it took only 35 seconds for the students to add eight commas. Again, these inscriptions also occurred after the story was finished, remembered by the student who wrote, as in M1. Her enunciation confirms this: "Wait. I forgot to... to do it..." (M, turn 476). Even without remembering the technical term, she gestures her hand to indicate that she said placing "commas". The gesture made by Maria is enough to help Isadora verbalize the linguistic term: "Let's put commas" (I, turn 477). Throughout the dialogue, while adding the commas, Isadora resumes the same arguments previously stated (P1):

- Turn 479: "Because otherwise we can't breathe."
- Turn 485: "Let's do... a little bit on each line?"
- Turn 487: "On each line."

The three arguments do not have grammatical value. But there are differences between the comments made during the textual genesis of M1 and the textual genesis of this manuscript (M4).

First, in M1 we have the fact that the student has inserted almost all the commas in practically random positions, distributed among the lines. In M4, this student inserts all the commas at the end of the graphic lines. The eighth comma, in the ninth line, separating "*le*" from "*château*", seems not to have been inserted at the end of the line,

after the last word “*château*”, because the two final periods were already inscribed there, as seen in Fig. 2. In the synchronized-film, it is observed that the student, when starting to place the last comma in the same position, moves her hand and inscribes it between the words “*le*” and “*château*”. It is also likely that, as it is the end of the story, the comma in this position would be avoided (there is no occurrence of a comma at the end of a story; the students have always used the full stop, other studies also do not indicate the comma marking the end of the text).

The presence of punctuation at the ends of lines, in students of this age group, has been described since the study by Edelski (1983). Hall (1999) shows, for example, the use of periods and even exclamation marks. This explanation seems to be related to how printed texts are presented and the way students interpret the punctuation marks they observe. For these students, the vast majority of texts from textbooks the teacher uses (GOASDOUÉ; COURTIES; SABATHIÉ, 2000), both in the exercise notebook and in the reading book, are presented with short sentences, ending with a period or divided by a comma at the end of the line. Visual access to this type of formatting and graphic organization of these texts appear to have an effect on how these students interpret some PMs in the manuscript.

The second aspect to highlight is the difference between Isadora’s and Maria’s way of thinking. Maria does not fully agree with the positions of the commas inserted by Isadora. First Maria suggests, in turn 482, inserting the comma at the end of the 2nd line, pointing that position with her index finger. Isadora replies that she will decide where to place them, starting to insert a comma at the end of each graphic line. Noting that Isadora had already placed 7 commas, all at the end of the lines, Maria tries to stop her, saying: “Not on all the lines.” (I, turn 488). Despite this comment, she does not establish a relationship between the use of the comma and its linguistic function, stating that even in this manner there is no problem “Leave it! It’s not serious.” (I, turn 490). This contradiction between “not placing commas at every end of a line” and, at the same time, “accepting all commas in this position”, seems to put into question the prevalence of the graphic-spatial criterion.

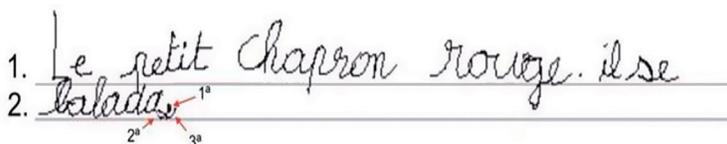
Added to this is the fact that, in this age group, there appears to be some difficulty in changing graphic forms that have already been inscribed, as Isadora puts it: “Now it’s too late. I already did it.” (I, turn 489).

6th Process: 12 commas and their comments

The difference between these two students in using the PMs seems to widen in the last task they wrote together. Maria was responsible for writing the M6. This manuscript has 75 words. Only one more word than M4, but a total of 23 PMs, distributed differently: comma (12), period (5), capital letter (4), question mark (1) and dash (1). The commas identified in the school manuscript stand out not only for their quantity, but also for the different moments in which they were verbalized and written, as indicated by the synchronized film (P6).

In this process, the first use and verbalization referring to the comma was made by Isadora, although she was not responsible for writing the story. She places the “period” and the “comma” erasing one for the other. This erasure marks “tension points” (CALIL, 2003) in which these two MPs compete. Initially, Isadora placed the “period” and then turned it into a “comma”. Then, next to this comma, she placed another one. The DT below shows how this triple movement occurred: returning to a given textual object, identifying a problem related to this textual object and changing the already written textual object, accompanied by brief comments.

Figure 3 – Status of M6,²⁶ at 00:15:38, indicating the sequence in which the three PMs were inserted by Isadora



Source: School Manuscript Laboratory.

P6_TD1_00:15:13-00:15:38. Maria had just linearized the sentence “he walked around [il se / balad]”, written after the title, between the end of line 1 and the beginning of line 2. Isadora rereads the sentence and abruptly takes the pen from Maria’s hand, repositioning the sheet of paper facing her when she places the punctuation.

217. ISADORA: (Picking up pen and paper, reading [he walked]). ... **He walked around... Period!** (Inserting a period [balad.])... **Period... and a comma...** [balad.,] (Transforming the “period” into a “comma” [balad -,], returning the pen) **Don’t forget the comma. Ah, wait!** (Taking the pen) **I didn’t do it well...**
218. MARIA*: (While Isadora makes another comma next to the first [balad -, .]), Maria is speaking.) And... he found Spider-Man walking around... walking around... (Isadora returns the pen).

Before applying these three MPs, Maria had already used the capital letter in the first sentence of the story (the title) and in the name of the character “Chaperon”, spelled “Chapron”. And it was Isadora who placed a period right after the title “Le petit Chaperon rouge”, on line 1, when she took the pen from her colleague’s hand for the first time. Then, she returned the pen to Maria who continued the linearization of the next sentence: “Il se balad”. Until that moment, the first three PMs (2 capital letters and 1 period) were placed without hesitation, nor any form of verbalization.

²⁶ Diplomatic transcript of the M6, accompanied by the translation:
 1. *Le petit Chaperon rouge. il se* [little Red Riding Hood. he]
 2. *balada* [walked around]

However, the following three PMs (1 period and 2 commas), highlighted in the image (Fig. 3), were verbally recognized by Isadora. Her assertive way of speaking (“period!”), after reading the phrase “*il se ballada*” suggests that Maria “forgot” to punctuate it. The competition between the “period” and the “comma” appears immediately after the “period” was inserted, as indicated by the substitution erasure, accompanied by the verbalization of two metalinguistic terms: “Period... and a comma...” (I, turn 217). This written erasure, accompanied by verbalizing these metalinguistic terms, places these two MPs related to the end of a unit of meaning. This would be the first time that verbalizing the metalinguistic term “comma” comes close to its linguistic function. At this point in the manuscript under construction, the decision taken by the writers concerns the delimitation of the “graphic phrase” or the “syntactic phrase”, depending on how the story will continue. A delimitation still far from these students’ linguistic knowledge, but already functioning as a form of implicit knowledge about the use of commas.

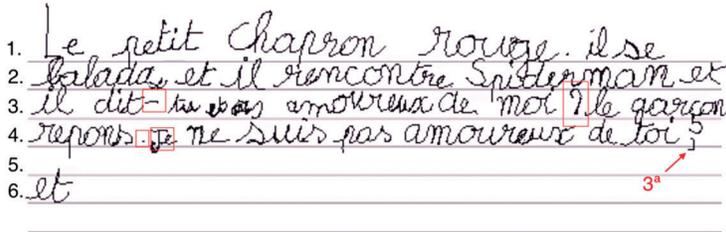
Although the verbalization of these two PMs emerged as something that was remembered, but not inserted, the fact that the comma is not randomly inserted indicates the emergence of this implicit knowledge, albeit incipiently. This results in the comma being treated as a textual object integrated into the linearization of the manuscript. This is also happening with the “period”, delimiting the end of the title and indicating its syntactic function in the sentence. Here, we can observe what has been observed in several works (LURCAT, 1973; FAVART; CHANQUOY, 2007): period and comma are related, indicating degrees of delimitation in the semantic unit.

However, the comment made during the insertion of the “comma” remains associated with a “memory”, as if it were the teacher saying: “Don’t forget the comma” (I, turn 217). It is known that commas have to be inserted when writing. It is known that this PM cannot occur in any position. But why the “linguistic” is not known, the relationship between this PM and the linearized phrase is not clear.

The importance of the graphic aspect is still present in the way of thinking and describing this PM. By writing two “commas” and commenting “I didn’t do well...” (I, turn 217), the student indicates that she values the metagraphic aspect of this PM. By placing them side by side, occupying the same syntactic position, without having annulled the first, it also suggests that the duplicated presence does not interfere in the production of meaning, as if the new inscription “automatically” nullified the previous entry.

The 3rd entry was made by Maria, a few minutes after the last PM, at the end of line 4. Below we present the status of the manuscript at the time it was written.

Figure 4 – Status of M6,²⁷ at 00:26:04, with emphasis on the 3rd comma



Source: School Manuscript Laboratory.

In this manuscript fragment, between lines 3 to 6, we have five PMs (a “dash”, a “question mark”, a “period”, a “capital letter” and the insertion of the 3rd “comma”) with only the “dash” inserted by Isadora. All these PMs occurred without any comment. The positions of the first four PMs again suggest that their uses were not random. Quite the contrary, they all respect the expected functions. The “dash” introduces the character’s speech, the “question mark” marks a question, the “period” closes the sentence and the “capital letter” starts the next sentence.

However, the comma written by Maria at the end of line 4 is in place of a “period”, closing the sentence “I’m not in love with you”. It was added after the connective “et” was inserted in line 6.²⁸ This connector will be part of the following sentence “il part” not yet finalized. Maria’s action, when interrupting the linearization of this sentence, and returning to the end of the previous sentence to add the comma, again indicates an understanding that this PM must be integrated into the construction of the sentence.

Although the PM entered was not the “period”, the “comma” has the function of closing the sentence. The preceding occurrence of the comma, when separating, on line 2, “He walked” from “And he meets Spiderman” fulfilled the same function. This reiterates the competitive relationship between these two PMs, allowing the notion of a phrase to be implicitly constituted, even if its functions are not well differentiated for the students. Thus, we have evidence that this 3rd comma is not associated with the end of the line or with random use. The way in which the “comma” was written suggests the action of textual revision, quite different from the random additions of commas after the conclusion of the written history. This action characterizes a metalinguistic activity without verbalization.

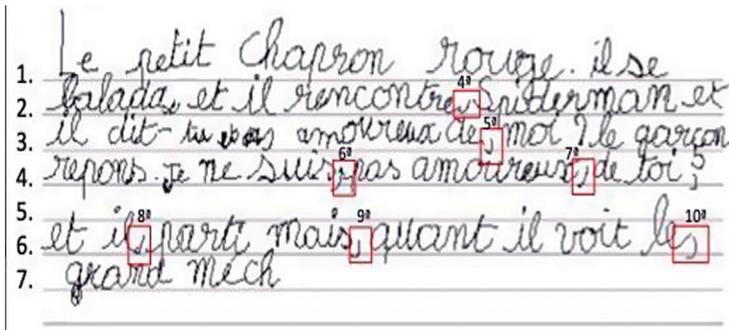
Despite the occurrences of “commas” starting to integrate the sentence and the linearization of the manuscript under construction, the graphic-spatial aspect still seems to impose itself. This happens with the addition of the seven subsequent commas.

²⁷ Diplomatic transcript of the M6, accompanied by the translation:

3. <i>il dit - tu es amoureux de moi? le garçon</i>	[he said - are you in love with me? the boy]
4. <i>reponde. Je ne suis pas amoureux de toi</i>	[responds. I'm not in love with you]
5.	
6. <i>et</i>	[and]

²⁸ We saw that line 5 was ignored.

Figure 5 – Status of M6,²⁹ at 00:30:39, indicating the sequence in which seven commas were added by Isadora



Source: School Manuscript Laboratory.

P6_TD2_00:29:42-00:30:39. Maria had just written “*le grand*” and was starting to write the word “*mechant*” when Isadora interrupts her, takes the pen, and adds seven more commas to the manuscript under construction.

378. MARIA*: (Starting to write ‘mechant’) me [mé]... mé... chant [ch]...
379. ISADORA: **It needs a comma, it’s needed!** (Trying to take the pen) **I know something.** (Maria has stopped writing - not letting Isadora get her pen).
380. MARIA*: **Wait! Wait! I made a comma.** (Looking at the sheet of paper, to where a comma is).
381. ISADORA: **Before... it is necessary to put a comma.** (Taking the pen from Maria’s hand). ... puts one...
382. MARIA*: **I put a comma here.** (Showing the end of line 4, where there is a comma).
383. ISADORA: ...put a period ... because the teacher... that a story... you put two there.
384. MARIA*: **But... no! I did... I put it there... I put a period there...** (Pointing with her finger where she put the period after the word ‘answered/response’, line 4).
385. ISADORA: (talking at the same time) **You put a period there. You put a period there.** (Turning the sheet of paper towards her and starting to add commas. Maria watches Isadora add the commas.) **Hopla... Then, a comma here** (Adding the 4th comma between ‘rencontre’ and ‘Spiderman’ [rencontre | Spiderman], line 2) ...here... (Adding the 5th comma between ‘de’ and ‘moi’ [de | moi], line 3)

²⁹ Diplomatic transcript of the M6, accompanied by the translation:

1. <i>Le petit Chapeau rouge. il se</i>	[The little red-riding hood. he]
2. <i>balada ↗, et il rencontre Spiderman et</i>	[walked around ↗, and he finds Spiderman and]
3. <i>il dit - tu es as amoureux de moi? le garçon</i>	[he said - are you in love with me? the boy]
4. <i>reponde. Je ne suis pas amoureux de toi,</i>	[responds. I’m not in love with you,]
5.	
6. <i>et il parti mais quant il voit le </i>	[and he left but when he saw the]
7. <i>grand méch</i>	[great evil]

- ...here... (Adding the 6th comma between ‘suis’ and ‘pas’ [suis | pas], line 4)
 ...here... (Adding the 7th comma between ‘amoureux’ and ‘de’ [amoureux | de], line 4)
 ...here... (Adding the 8th comma between ‘il’ and ‘parti’ [il | parti], line 6)
 ...here... (Adding the 9th comma between ‘plus’ and ‘quant’ [more | quant], line 6)
 ...here... (Adding the 10th comma after ‘le’ [le | /] to the end of line 6).
386. MARIA*: (Looking at Isadora who added the 10th comma, speaking with emphasis) **No!! It is not an ‘s’.** (Reading) ‘Ooo’!!!
387. ISADORA: (Stopped writing) **It doesn’t have a comma after?**
388. MARIA*: (Grabbing the sheet of paper and looking at the comma) **They’ll think it’s an ‘s’...** (Isadora dropping the pen. Maria taking the pen and continuing to write the story).
389. ISADORA: **...it doesn’t matter... don’t change it...**
390. MARIA*: (Reading) The great...

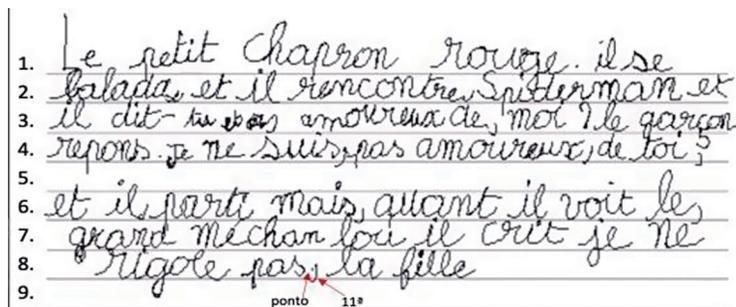
The DT starts with Isadora abruptly recognizing the “comma” as a textual object to be added: “A comma, it’s necessary.” (I, turn 379). Even after Maria said that she had already added a comma (“Wait! Wait! I added a comma.” (M, turn 380), Isadora insists: “Before... we need to add a comma.” (I, turn 381). This recognition and the need to add commas occurs without any relation to what was being written by Maria. Until the beginning of turn 385, the question is restricted to having or not having added a “comma” and “period”.

During that same event, Isadora, in just 57 seconds, adds seven more commas to the manuscript under construction. The way she did this is the same as what she had already done in the two preceding manuscripts. Isadora takes her partner’s pen and starts adding commas, almost randomly, in different positions, distributed between the lines and the words already written. We cannot say that the commas are placed in a completely random way because the student avoids inserting them at the beginning of lines, in positions where there is already another PM or only at the end of lines.

Maria carefully follows each of the insertions. When her colleague enters the 10th comma, after the article “le” (“o”), at the end of line 6, Maria verbalizes a simple and unpredictable comment: “No!! It’s not ‘s’ ‘Ooo’!!!” (M, turn 386). As seen in Fig. 5, writing the comma, starting above the lower limit of line 6, near the end of the letter “e” makes this last letter look like the spelling of the “s” cursive letter. This acknowledgment, verbalized in Maria’s comment, is then expanded in an explanatory argument: “They’ll think it’s an ‘s’...” (M, turn 388). This explanation, while not providing any indication of the function of the comma in this position, seems to be an answer to Isadora’s question: “Isn’t there a comma after?” (I, turn 387). The insertions made by Isadora, and Maria’s two comments show that the students still consider the comma as a graphic-spatial problem.

But this understanding is again contrasted by delimiting a new semantic unit. This is what the DT shows during the insertion of the next comma (11th comma).

Figure 6 – Status of M6,³⁰ and the 11th “comma”, inserted by Maria, at 00:34:12.



Source: School Manuscript Laboratory.

P6_TD3_00:33:21- 00:34:12. Maria had just written the phrase “je ne / rigole pas”, at the end of line 7, beginning of line 8. Isadora takes the sheet of paper, holding it with both hands and reads what has been written from the beginning of the story to the last line.

410. ISADORA: (Reading line 6) He... and he... left... but... when he... sees... the... (Reading line 7 and 8) ...big mean wolf... he yells (Changing intonation) ...I don't... ...euuh... I'm kid-ding. (Speaking with emphasis as if she were the character) I'm not kidding! (Short pause, placing the sheet of paper on the table) **End! Let's put it! A period.** (Grabbing the pen from Maria's hand).
411. MARIA*: **No! I'm not done, Isadora.** (Isadora adds the period after the word “pas” [pas ɶ].)
412. ISADORA: **Ops... a period.** (Isadora putting the pen on the table and turning the sheet of paper to Maria).
413. MARIA*: **I want a comma** (Writing the 11th comma over the period made by Isadora [pas - ɶ]).
414. ISADORA: ...comma...
415. MARIA*: ...the... (writing [la]) ... (writing [fille]) ...girl...

These two PMs – the “period” inserted by Isadora and the “comma” inserted by Maria – express their intersubjective difference. For the first, the “period” is justified because the story is over. For the second, the comma is needed because the story will continue. This erasure is similar to the one at the beginning of this manuscript's linearization, delimiting a semantic unit. However, the difference here is the size of the semantic unit. For Isadora, the end of writing of the story would justify the use of the

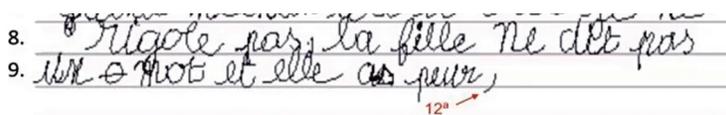
³⁰ Diplomatic transcript of the M6, accompanied by the translation:

6. et il , parti mais , quant il voit le ,	[and he, left but when he saw the ,]
7. grand méchn lou il crie je ne	[big bad wolf he screams I'm not]
8. rigole pas [la] la fille	[not kidding [la] the girl]

“period”. For Maria, considering that the story is not over, the “comma” would allow closing the sentence and continuing the narration. The refusal to accept the “period” suggests precisely her understanding that the “period” marks the end of the story, not the end of the sentence. This shows the students’ difficulty in establishing the syntactic boundaries of the sentence. This difficulty may be indicated in the simple comment, with subjective argumentative value, made by Maria: “I want a comma.” (M, turn 413).

The last comma (12th comma) was inserted by Maria at 00:36:02, right after finishing the linearization of the following sentence:

Figure 7 – Status of M6,³¹ at 00:36:02, highlighting the 12th comma.



Source: School Manuscript Laboratory.

The 12th comma was not accompanied by any comment, and it was inserted during the linearization flow. That is, after she finishes linearizing the last word of the sentence “and she is afraid”, Maria stops writing, with a long pause of 19 seconds (between 00:35:43 and 00:36:02). During this pause, she stares at the sheet of paper. At the end of the pause, she says to herself “and...” while inserting that comma, before continuing to linearize what will be the last sentence of the story “and he won’t / let them go.”.

Maria’s long pause seems to be related to this last comma, which preceded writing the connective “and”. The correlation between the connective “and” and the use of the comma had already occurred in line 6. Although this PM is occupying the position of a “period”, these occurrences confirm the initial articulation between the comma and its syntactic function.

Conclusion

It should be noted that these were the first textual productions of these two 6-year-old students. The analyzed material, composed of the 6 invented story production processes, allowed following how the two students inserted the commas, the relationships established between these MPs with the ongoing manuscripts, with spontaneous comments indicating the metalinguistic activities carried out.

The commas had already occurred in the first manuscript, then in the fourth and sixth. Although there is no occurrence in 3 of the school manuscripts, this was the largest number of PMs, which is not common in such young students’ writings.

³¹ Diplomatic transcript of the M6, accompanied by the translation:

8. rigole pas -, la fille ne dit pas	[I'm kidding -, the girl doesn't say]
9. un-o mot et elle as peur	[a word and she is scared]

The most important aspect to highlight is the difference in how the commas were written in those three school manuscripts. Both in the 1st and 4th manuscripts, they were “remembered” (recovered from long-term memory) after the invented story was completed, when the students had already finished the task and were calling the teacher to hand in the sheet of paper. It is worth noting that this behavior is similar to that of English students (HALL, 1999), when children remember to put “periods” after the researcher asks them if there was something missing to add to what they had already written.

In the 1st manuscript, the 4 insertions were distributed over the 4 written lines, one on each line. In the 4th manuscript, all 8 commas were placed, one by one, at the end of the lines. All of them placed “at once”, no relationship with the narrative content, with what was in fact linearized. The comments and use of commas in these two manuscripts are good examples of metalinguistic activities related to “graphic punctuation”. Or to be more precise, we prefer to consider it as a “graphic-spatial period”, since the graphic organization of written history – as entered in the sheet of paper – seems to interfere with the positioning of the commas.

There were some spontaneous comments while these 12 commas were being inserted. They indicate, on the one hand, the prevalence of the graphic-spatial dimension (“a little bit on each line”, “on each line”). On the other hand, the comments mirror possible comments of an adult (“because otherwise we cannot breathe”) when they “teach” the function of the comma or its difference in using the “period”. Until that moment, the verbalization of the metalinguistic term, the comments related to its use, associated with the positions where they are written on the sheet of paper, suggest that the metalinguistic activities are not, properly, metalinguistic.

For the students, the comma seems to be part of the graphic configuration of a written text. Their actual use seems to assume the following concepts: There is a graphic mark called “comma” that is “used for breathing”. In the texts I read, there are periods “on the lines” and “at the end of each line”. Then, when I write, I can’t forget to use these punctuation marks, distributing them throughout the text.

This and other PMs would not, therefore, be related to the sentence, to the syntactic or grammatical construction, but related to an “image” of what a written text should have. Despite understanding the syntactic function of the comma, and other PMs within the sentence, following a long learning process (FAYOL, 1991), this first concept seems to be inevitable from a developmental point of view.

Of the 12 commas in the last manuscript, 5 of them had a linguistic function, although there are inscriptions and comments like those made in the two previous manuscripts. There were two important changes in the status of the comma and its use.

The first refers to the fact that these 5 commas were anticipated, inscribed during the linearization of the current manuscript, and not at the end. The second concerns the position in which they were inscribed. All of them delimiting the closing of a sentence, with 4 commas prior to the connective “and”. The competition between “period” and “comma” is characterized by two erasures, both indicating the second

one overwriting the first mark. These two changes in how the “commas” are inserted in the current manuscript suggest the genesis of “linguistic punctuation”, when there is implicit linguistic knowledge about their use and function, as well as a differentiation in relation to the “period”. However, this knowledge is not yet verbalized. Every time they comment on the commas that are being inserted, the arguments express “graphic-spatial” values, as the one where Maria opposes placing the comma at the end of line 6, arguing that “they will think it’s an ‘s’” or the one when she erases the “period” her colleague made, saying “No. I did not finish, Isadora.”.

The disagreement between the linguistic use of the comma and the spontaneous comments suggests that verbalizing the metalinguistic activity does not coincide with implicit knowledge. This aspect appears to characterize a “hybrid use” of this PM, a concept of “graphic-spatial punctuation” and “linguistic punctuation” that simultaneously prevails. On the one hand, the “comma” occurs in predictable positions, giving it a syntactic function. On the other hand, the comments about this PM do not indicate an explanation or grammatical justification for its use. This may happen because the use of syntactic PM, especially the “comma”, depends on the linguistic knowledge of other concepts related to understanding what a sentence is (graphic and syntactic). This requires that the writer should know how to relate the “comma” to the use of the “period” and the “capital letter” (GARCIA-DEBANC, 2010). In other words, without knowing what a “sentence” is, even if one knows these linguistic terms and there is an implicit knowledge about their uses, it seems to be difficult to verbalize a justification or linguistic explanation for the need for a “comma”.

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CALIL, E.; FELIPETO, C.; AMORIM, K.; BORÉ, C. A gênese de vírgulas em histórias inventadas por alunas recém-alfabetizadas: identificação de atividades metalinguísticas a partir de inscrições gráficas e comentários espontâneos. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.66, 2022.

- *RESUMO: Este estudo analisa as ocorrências de vírgulas e as verbalizações espontâneas durante a produção textual de duas alunas francesas de 6 anos de idade. A partir da Genética*

Textual, dentro de uma abordagem linguístico-enunciativa, foram analisados seis manuscritos escolares e seus respectivos processos de escritura. O registro filmico e multimodal desses processos preservou as condições ecológicas da sala de aula. Tomou-se como unidade de análise o diálogo entre as alunas, estabelecido durante a produção textual. As ocorrências de vírgula foram identificadas nos manuscritos escolares e relacionadas ao que essas alunas comentavam sobre essas marcas de pontuação. Os resultados mostram que a vírgula foi a pontuação mais usada, porém sua inscrição só ocorreu em três manuscritos. Quase todas as ocorrências foram “lembradas” após o término da história, acompanhadas por comentários indicando um entendimento “gráfico-espacial” para seu uso. Contudo, suas ocorrências no último manuscrito indicam o início de uma concepção “linguística”, quando a posição da vírgula concorreu com o ponto final, começando a delimitar unidades semânticas. Suas inscrições também passam a ser antecipadas pelas alunas. Essas duas concepções coabitam no mesmo manuscrito, sugerindo que a gênese da vírgula passa por um “uso híbrido” de suas funções.

- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: produção textual; escrita colaborativa; diálogo; aprendizagem; pontuação; conhecimento metalinguístico.*

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