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Acerca de algunas posibles diferencias entre los signos de puntuación en las lenguas china y española

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Abstract:

Languages vary in spelling and grammar. Starting from Didactics in the field of Language and Applied Linguistics, this research is conducted on suprasegmental features: contrastive analysis for future Spanish teachers to Chinese speakers. Punctuation marks are essential for correctly understanding any written text, in any language. However, they are not the same for each language, nor do they have the same usage or the same form. This work presents a research proposal to compare the following punctuation marks in Chinese and Spanish: period or full stop, comma, question marks, and quotation marks, which are the most commonly used and, above all, because the differences between them are more representative. To achieve this objective, it starts from the deficiencies in the use of these marks in both languages and reflection on the historical ignorance regarding their usage, form, and possible similarities between the Chinese and Spanish segments. We conclude with the idea that the formal dissimilarity between certain Spanish and Chinese punctuation marks, such as the period and the question mark, does not cause extraordinary difficulties for Chinese speakers in acquiring their correct use in Spanish. Those signs whose forms share similarities, such as the comma and quotation marks, do represent acquisition difficulties. In order to specify the scope of this phenomenon on punctuation, in the future it will logically be necessary to study more punctuation signs, such as semicolons, colons, as well as ellipses.

Keywords:

Spelling; punctuation; contrastive linguistics; Chinese; Spanish.

Resumen:

Los idiomas varían en la ortografía y la gramática. A partir de la Didáctica en el campo del Lenguaje y la Lingüística aplicada, se investiga en cuestiones de rasgos suprasegmentales: análisis contrastivo para futuros docentes de español a sinohablantes. Los signos de puntuación son fundamentales para comprender correctamente cualquier texto escrito, en cualquier idioma. Sin embargo, no son los mismos para cada lengua, ni tampoco tienen el mismo uso ni la misma forma. Este trabajo plantea una propuesta de investigación de comparar los siguientes signos de puntuación en chino y en español: el punto, la coma, los signos de interrogación y las comillas, que son los más usados y, sobre todo, porque las diferencias entre ellos son más representativas. Para lograr este objetivo, se parte de las carencias en el uso de estos signos en ambas lenguas y de la reflexión sobre el desconocimiento histórico en cuanto al uso, forma y posibles similitudes entre los segmentos chinos y españoles. Se concluye con la idea de que la desemejanza formal entre ciertos signos de puntuación del español y el chino, como son los casos del punto y la interrogación, no les causa a los sinohablantes dificultades extraordinarias en adquirir su uso correcto en el español. Son aquellos signos cuyas formas comparten similitudes como son los casos de la coma y las comillas, los que representan dificultades de la adquisición. Para precisar el alcance de este fenómeno sobre la puntuación, en el futuro será necesario, lógicamente, estudiar más signos de la puntuación, como el de punto y coma, dos puntos, así como puntos suspensivos.

Palabras claves:

Ortografía; marcas de puntuación; lingüística contrastiva; chino; español

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1. Introduction

The teaching of Spanish to native speakers has always been an object of study and analysis. The teaching of the language, today, depends on the school tradition of the community in which it is developed. But this tradition is frequently altered by linguistic theories in continuous change, by psychological theories of learning and by the increasingly numerous data on language acquisition within psycholinguistics. In short, by the trends that dominate educational policy.

Punctuation marks are essential to correctly understand any written text, in any language. However, they are not the same for each language, nor do they have the same use or the same form. A perfect example of the latter is found in the Chinese language, specifically in Mandarin Chinese, called by them "Hànyǔ" in Pīnyīn (phonetics transcribed into letters of Western origin, including the corresponding tones in each vowel) or 汉语 (in character).

Within Chinese society, (most of its inhabitants, apart from the literate and well educated, such as young university students), there are important deficiencies in the knowledge of the use of the most-known punctuation marks, not in their form. The same occurs within all Spanish speaking countries. It seems that they neglect the importance of writing correctly thanks to the use of each punctuation mark. For this reason, this work arises after verifying, from an observation methodology in interviews, the frequency with which certain orthotypography errors are found, that is, the serious lack of knowledge of Spanish spelling of the Chinese-speaking students in Spanish classes of the Degree in Hispanic Philology in the case of the University of Huelva. This lack occurs especially in punctuation.

The learning of spelling is a gradual process that is being learned until reaching an optimal degree of competence, hence it is assumed that students should reach this academic level with a knowledge that is largely based on it. However, observation and analysis of the work they carry out during the course reveals unacceptable basic deficiencies that, with total certainty, they carry over from their schools of origin. Thus, in this article, some of the different Chinese punctuation marks and the difference with the Spanish punctuation marks will be exposed, in order to try to demonstrate that, in certain cases, there is no similarity between them. To do this, we pose two research questions that will be answered throughout the proposal: what similarities and differences are there between the use of the punctuation marks analyzed in this article in both languages, and what deficiencies are there in the acquisition of Spanish punctuation marks by Chinese-speaking students in terms of use and form?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Deficiencies in the use of punctuation marks in both languages

Contrastive studies of the Chinese and Spanish languages are becoming more and more numerous as a consequence of political and economic interests, in the first place, and inevitably sociocultural ones nowadays. Thus, in Galloso (2014) we studied how the great success of the application of the Opening and Reform policy of 1978 not only benefits in trade, but also favors the teaching/learning of other languages. The so-called *small or minority languages* (xiǎo yǔ zhǒng 小语种) within China are receiving more and more attention, such as Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. New manuals have been developing and teachers are getting more opportunities to go abroad for preparation. And new postgraduate and doctoral foreign language courses are also organized so that their academic level is gradually rising (Santos, 2010).

Likewise, new works are becoming known, mainly carried out in research centers in Spain, which address the intercultural and interlinguistic similarities and differences of the two languages, such as that of Sui (2020, p. 2), whose study is based on the standard of the *Spelling of the Spanish language* of the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE, hereinafter, 2010) and the *Use of the national standard punctuation of the People's Republic of China* (Chinese State Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, hereinafter AQSIQ, 2011). This is aimed at the current public awareness of punctuation marks and their functions and the current state of punctuation research in Chinese and Spanish linguistics, has been compared and organized by attending to the definition, form and specific usage of punctuation. It analyzes the similarities and differences between the use of punctuation marks in both languages, summarizes the cases of interference between them, introduces a questionnaire on the correct use of punctuation marks and some compositions of Spanish candidates in the HSK corpus of the Beijing University of Language and Culture. In addition, it introduces readers to several possible reasons why punctuation may not be paying attention to. Then, based on these factors, suggestions for learning and teaching punctuation in both Spanish and Chinese are summarized, which more effectively helps Chinese and Spanish students to use punctuation in the second foreign language skillfully in writing.

Each language has its own rules for applying punctuation marks. Punctuation marks are an important part of a complete understanding and correct expression of the written text. The various punctuation marks are intended to reproduce the intonation used in spoken language. The proper use of punctuation makes it possible to avoid ambiguity in works without which they could have different interpretations. As Truss, a British journalist and writer pointed out, "punctuation is a courtesy designed to help readers understand a story without stumbling" (2003, p. 7) and "without it there is no reliable way of communicating meanings" (2003, p. 20). And all this despite the fact that punctuation marks are, in many cases, of flexible use and, therefore, their use is subordinated to the particular style or way of writing of each author, individual or community to which they write, for example, mainland China where Mandarin Chinese is used vs. Taiwan where traditional Chinese is used.

The differences between the Spanish and Chinese punctuation are notorious. A Chinese student in a Spanish language class once commented that, when she watched a Spanish soap opera for the first time, she thought she had located a big mistake in the subtitle because it contained the double question marks of our language (?). It is when you start to learn Spanish when you study that it is typical of Spanish spelling. Studying the differences favors language learning because the punctuation marks vary according to the writing style, morphology and, also the syntax of the languages.

The curious thing is that much similarity is perceived between Chinese and Spanish punctuation. According to Santiago (1996, p. 273), an essential reason missing in this reasoning is the fact that Castilian punctuation, like Romance punctuation in general, and also the one used in other languages, was not, in last term, but an adaptation of the one used in Latin; something that, certainly, several authors also recognized, both in the 16th and 17th centuries (Gómez, 2007; Arellano, 2010).

In the history of Spanish, in the 6th century, Saint Isidore of Seville took up the punctuation system created by Aristophanes, the librarian in charge of the Library of Alexandria (Houston, 2014). At that time, the system of Castilian punctuation was already beginning to be formed. However, formal

Chinese punctuation has a short history. Although some punctuation marks have been found in inscriptions on bones or turtle shells from antiquity, Chinese editorial books did not add punctuation marks until 1919 imitating Western ones: "European-style punctuation was officially introduced into China around the beginning of the twentieth century, with the advent of vernacular *baihua* (白话) in education and literature" (Pellatt, 2018, p. 180). Before that time, according to Taylor and Taylor (1995, p. 107), "readers of classical Chinese, without the benefit of markers of upper-case initials and full stops, could recognize the beginnings and endings of sentences only with efforts". Sentences were separated by different sentence structures, by auxiliary words such as 也 (*yě*, is positioned at the end of an idea, a statement, a phrase or parallel structures functioning as a slash), among others.

The use and form (especially the use) of punctuation marks in both languages have differences due to the characteristics of the two languages. As a result, Chinese learners tend to make some mistakes in this regard. Thus, in this work, we will summarize the main differences between some of the punctuation marks in Chinese and Spanish, the reason and also the current usage in order to facilitate the understanding of punctuation marks of the two languages both for teachers and students.

Peñalver (2002) explains how the *Real Academia de la Lengua* (1999, p. 55) insists on the necessary use of punctuation to achieve correct textual cohesion: "The correct expression and understanding of written messages depends to a large extent on punctuation. Punctuation organizes the discourse and its different elements and allows us to analyze ambiguity in texts that, without its use, could have different interpretations". Briz (1997, p. 102) also stresses the importance of punctuation marks in the arrangement of texts and states: "Apart from the phonic (rhythmic) and syntactic information that punctuation marks provide to the reader of a text, they can also have a reading related to the greater or lesser cohesion (semantic) between statements". Likewise, Figueras (2000) does so from a pragmatic-cognitive perspective, distinguishing signs that function as mode indicators (question marks, exclamation marks and ellipsis) and signs that have the function of hierarchically defining textual units (period, semicolon, semicolon, semicolon, colon and comma).

The correct teaching-learning process of punctuation in both languages depends to a large extent on the correct expression and comprehension of written messages. Punctuation organizes the discourse and its different elements and makes it possible to analyze ambiguity in texts that, without its use, could have different interpretations (Camps et al., 2007). However, the situation of teaching and the use of punctuation does not seem to be much relegated, leaving the rule of use of punctuation to the background; in fact, on many occasions it is omitted. This is a sample of the economy of the language, but it does not favor the development and diffusion of the language.

2.2. Lack of historical knowledge regarding the use, form and possible similarities between the Chinese and Spanish signs

Mandarin Chinese or also called Hànyǔ (汉语), as we mentioned before, until today has been a language that has received little attention when compared to Japanese and Korean, languages that also come from the Asian continent. (Romanos, 2022, February 15). According to the latest *Duolingo Language Report* (Blanco, 2022, December), Japanese and Korean are respectively ranked fifth and seventh among the ten most studied languages in the world, while Chinese, however huge its native speakers may be, ranks eighth on the same list. This is due to several factors or reasons. The first of these factors has been the very ephemeral contact we had with the country in question given that,

years ago, for political reasons, China was closed to the outside world, and many countries, including Spain, remained for a long time without entering their world (language, culture, customs, ...). Over the years, this situation has been changing. China has opened its borders to the exterior establishing political and, above all, economic relations with this immense country and that has made us to investigate more about them.

The second reason is that their language, Mandarin, is the most widely spoken in the world, ahead of Spanish. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate everything related to their language and customs, since language and customs in China are closely related, they cannot be separated. To do so, it is necessary to learn the language as well as its customs and history, since many of the characters used in its writing are closely related to reality (old pictograms). We will give several simple examples:

(1). 中国 Zhōngguó -China

This word, bisyllabic, is made up of two words, monosyllabic. The first is Zhōng (中) means 'center', because the first cartographic maps of the world were made by Chinese and placed China in the center of the map. Therefore, if we look closely, the rectangle would be the map and the vertical line that divides it in two explains that China is located in the center. The second is guó (国). This word and/or character means 'country'. This character is a rectangle placed by the shortest side that represents the area of the whole country and the lines inside the rectangle, that is, 玉 (yù) mean 'jade'. All enclosed in that rectangle representing the borders of China. Therefore, historically China is the *country of the center*.

(2). 西班牙 Xībānyá -Spain

This word, trisyllable, is made up of three monosyllabic words that, separately, have their own meaning, a translation cannot be made in the same way as with the previous word Zhōngguó. The first is Xī (西), and it means west or west. If we look at the character, it looks like a bottle with a big stopper on top. This could be due to a possible relationship of Spain as the wine country. The other two words have their own meaning: bān (班) which means group or class and yá (牙) which means tooth or molar. If we pronounce Xībānyá many times in a row, we will realize that phonetically it is similar to the word *España*, that is, that a part of the word *España* (*Spain*) has been transcribed phonetically, because it did not exist in their vocabulary.

These two cases have been examples that their characters have to do a little with reality, and that rather they are related to their knowledge of abroad and their own country, and that, being characters, their punctuation marks are also essential and important since everything in the Chinese language is closely related. Thus, in Chinese, punctuation marks are essential for the correct understanding of written texts. And, as there is practically not much formal information about this language from the language side, many people dare to claim that, for example, Chinese punctuation marks are practically identical in form and use to the Spanish ones.

It is true that there are similarities in this aspect, but there are few cases, since sentences are structured differently, and therefore, these orthographic punctuation marks have different uses within those sentences. There are many Internet sites in which it is stated, without any historical knowledge, that as in all languages, punctuation marks are also used in Chinese. They are very similar to ours, althou-

gh with some particularity. However, this is not so simple, in fact, an erroneous case of punctuation in both Spanish and Chinese we have located in the prolegomena of a doctoral thesis (Miranda, 2013, p. 6), which includes the following quote from Charlemagne in Spanish and Chinese:

(3). "Whoever speaks two languages, has two souls."

Charlemagne.

“掌握两种语言的人，就拥有两个灵魂。”

查理大帝。

In Spanish, it is a punctuation error to separate a subject from a predicate with a comma (*Quien habla dos lenguas posee dos almas*); in Chinese, the word Charlemagne needs a separator sign (jiàngé hào, 间隔号) between Carlo and Magno as in ‘查理·大帝’, is not written together as stated in (3). This shows the lack of knowledge about the Chinese language and one’s own language.

As Ma (2014) indicates, and as noted earlier in this paper, Mandarin Chinese has a greater number of speakers than any other language, and is widely understood in most of China and Southeast Asia. Likewise, the second most spoken language in the world is Spanish. We are dealing with two totally different languages because Mandarin Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan languages and Spanish belongs to the Indo-European languages. Spanish, like the other Romance languages, is a modern continuation of spoken Latin (called Vulgar Latin). It has alphabetic writing that uses symbols to express sounds, as opposed to logographic systems like the one used by Chinese, which use symbols to represent whole words. The Chinese script is a stable representation of the Mandarin language, that is, a set of codes (or characters) used to communicate. Comparing this language with Spanish is not really comparing their writings, but rather the history of these civilizations and the human development of their speakers in both very different contexts. The difference in logical structure decides the distinction of the forms used in each language, especially in Chinese, where the characters have directed the written form from its origins.

Every student of Chinese has to learn the characters at the beginning of his or her study of the language. The writing is different from ours, not alphabetic but not syllabic either. With the passage of time the pronunciation becomes easier to learn, but the character ends up being forgotten. The Chinese language is conceived in three superimposed dimensions, which are form, sound, and meaning. Learning Chinese involves these three planes without being able to avoid any of them.

Spanish students, on the other hand, start from a two-dimensional language by having an alphabet and rules of accentuation and punctuation. Each Chinese character is colloquially considered as a *little drawing* that can group a lot of information, and this myth should be abandoned, since it refers to pictograms, characters that were born as a result of elements present in nature. They are the oldest characters and represent a minority of the total number of characters. As the need arose to create new, more complex concepts arose, the rest of the categories that include the characters of the Chinese language were born.

To improve the comprehension and assimilation of characters, there are very diverse methods which often take the form of their own mnemonic rules. We have found that understanding the characters,

their history, their category within the existing character types and their breakdown into radicals and components helps a lot. In fact, the simplification of characters, although it has reduced the number of strokes, has also simplified numerous radicals and components that helped to understand the character by providing more information about it.

However, the frequent use of 汉字 (hanzi, the Han characters) in the daily life of the Chinese and the social and cultural reflections that the characters have poses difficulties in adapting or including Western punctuation marks in texts: these are two very different mentalities. This was so much the case we must remember that the Chinese classics were published with vertical lines of characters and without punctuation. This fact that learning Chinese characters, with their structurally perceptible images, brings great contributions to the Chinese language and people, potentially synthesizing their Chinese expressions and ideologies, makes language learning both difficult and enriching. For this reason, Spanish-speaking learners must be prepared to accept this challenge, assuming they know their punctuation rules.

3. Methods

As mentioned above, although there are more and more works on spelling and punctuation in Spanish and Chinese, this article intends to insist on the importance of this content for applied linguistics with the analysis of some possible differences between the signs of score for both languages. By following the work of Sui (2020), a doctoral thesis previously reviewed in the theoretical part, regarding the use of two documents of normative value: *Ortografía de la lengua española* (RAE, 2010), *Uso de la puntuación estándar nacional de la República Popular de China* (AQSIQ, 2011), our study seeks to deepen –with more examples presented–, in the contrastive analysis of the use of punctuation between Chinese and Spanish, concentrating on four signs most commonly used in both written languages: the period , the comma, the question mark and the quotation marks.

This work is divided into two parts, a theoretical exposition and an applied investigation. The theoretical part has been carried out following a qualitative documentary review methodology with a critical-interpretative approach (Gómez et al., 2015). Through this method and based mainly on the two normative documents mentioned in the last paragraph, the state of the art about the importance of history in the differences of characters and punctuation marks as dictated by standard of each of the languages of the work, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish, is synthesized.

In the applied part we will observe the use of signs in both languages taking into account the documentary text methodology. In addition, the qualitative methodology has also been used with interviews on the use of the four punctuation marks carried out with 10 Chinese students of Spanish at the University of Huelva (3 males and 7 females). The students, who are located in the age range from 20 to 27 years old, have an intermediate level of Spanish according to the curriculum and tests of the EEE-4 (*Examen nacional de español para estudiantes chinos de la especialidad española*, level-4). According to previous studies on equivalence of Spanish language proficiency levels in China (Bataller, 2014; Zhou, 2017), this exam is equivalent to CEFR level B2. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way without renouncing the unstructured. This means that our interviews,

apart from covering previously prepared questions for the participants (semi-structured interview), were always open to receiving free reflections from them on the use of punctuation in Chinese and Spanish (part of the unstructured interview). As for the questions designed for the semi-structured part, it is a set of 8 pairs of phrases adapted based on the *Use of the National Standard Score of the People's Republic of China* (AQSIQ, 2011), except for one pair that was taken based on in Pellatt (2018). Among these 8 pairs, each is composed of two sentences, specifically, one written in Chinese with punctuation mark and the other in Spanish, translated from the first one (own translation) but without punctuation mark. Participants are required to use punctuation marks in the sentence written in Spanish.

It is recalled that we try to find out if what the norm dictates is fulfilled, as well as the demonstration that they are not as similar languages as they are presented in numerous studies, that is, to answer the questions already advanced in the justification: what similarities and differences are there between the use of the punctuation marks analyzed in this article in both languages, what deficiencies are there in the acquisition of the signs of the Spanish language by Chinese-speaking students in terms of use and form? the standard answers that correspond to the questions designed in Chinese were elaborated taking as a reference Chinese normative documents (AQSIQ, 2011); while those that respond the questions in Spanish were provided based on the Spanish normative document (RAE, 2010).

To save space and taking into account that our analysis is qualitative, in the Results section we limit ourselves to exposing the standard answers, together with the mention of the typical errors made by the participating students, as well as, if possible, their incorporated reflections. Thus disregarding the statistical figures of the correct and incorrect answers. To those sentences in which the participants do not make significant mistakes when using punctuation marks, we only provide standard answers without referring to data relating to the participants.

As just indicated, this analysis is based on reference to two documents that have normative value: *The Spanish Spelling*, from the RAE (2010), and the *Use of the national standard punctuation of the People's Republic of China*. But to these works, other documents have been added that contribute to enrich the reference materials, such as the work of Su (1994), Zeng (2011), as well as that of Pellatt (2018). The latter has been mentioned in the theoretical section.

4. Results

4.1. The point 句号 。 / .

In Spanish, as in the rest of the Romance languages, the period is written as a period (.); however, the dot in Chinese is a small circle (。)

(4). 我的名字是黎贝卡。 My name is Rebecca.

In ancient times, although punctuation marks were not added in editorial books, readers used this dot/circle 。 indicating that a sentence had ended, and the full stop/dot 、 (dùnhào顿号) to indicate that a sentence had not finished. The spelling difference is due to the writing style. For Spanish, which is an alphabetic language, the small circle can be confused with the vowel "o", so the point is

more appropriate; and, at the same time, the dot can be confused with Chinese characters. *Apuntes de clase de la gramática española* (Zeng, 2011) recognizes 。 as the period in Chinese.

According to the RAE, the main use of the point is to graphically indicate the pause that marks the end of a statement –that is not interrogative or exclamatory–, of a paragraph or of a text. It receives different names, depending on whether it marks the end of a statement, a paragraph or a text:

- Period and followed period. It is written at the end of a statement and the other begins next on the same line, it is called a period followed by a period.
- Semicolon. It is written at the end of a paragraph and the following statement starts a new paragraph, it is called a semicolon.
- Period. It is written at the end of a piece of writing or an important division of the text, it is called period.

However, in Chinese, there are no different types of periods. According to *the Practical Manual of Punctuation Marks* (Su, 1994), it is defined as a punctuation mark that is written at the end of the sentence.

It is more efficient to have different points depending on their function in the sentence, paragraph and text. Thus, as one interviewee pointed out, *during a Spanish dictation, with the name of the point, one knows how to structure the text*, which in our opinion, explains the phenomenon of language economy and explains the reason for the existence of punctuation marks that have an important function. Some uses of the period do not exist in Chinese, such as the period after an abbreviation since only the characters are abbreviated and they do not require its use.

4.2. The comma 顿号, / 、

In Chinese there are two types of comma. One is very similar to the comma used in Spanish (,); and the other is a comma indicating a shorter pause, which is called d ù n h à o (顿号) as we already mentioned o f ǎ n xié dou hào (反斜逗号, in English: chinese back- sloping comma (、)).

The function of the comma, both in Chinese and in Spanish, is normally to indicate the existence of a brief pause within a sentence. The most significant difference is the existence of, as we have just pointed out, the other type of comma that exists in Chinese, whose name is d ù n hào, literally is 'short pause comma'. According to the *National Standard Punctuation Use of the People's Republic of China* (AQSIO, 2011), it indicates a pause after enumerated words and ordinal numbers, as we see in (5), (6), (7) the Chinese phrases.

(5). 全家都来了：祖父母、父母、孩子。

The whole family attended: grandparents, parents, children.

(6). 我准备讲两个问题：一、逻辑学是什么？二、怎么学好逻辑学？

I am going to study two questions: 1. What is logic? 2. How to study logic?

(7). 在中国有省：山东省、陕西省、黑龙江省等，他们的城市分别是：济南、西安、哈尔滨 哈尔滨 哈尔滨

In China there are many provinces: Shandong, Shanxi, Helongjiang, etc., whose capitals are: Jinan, Xi'an, Harbin.

In Chinese, the first comma (,) indicates the structure between sentences, and the other (、) indicates the structure between words or locutions. According to Pellatt (2018: 183), the second, on several occasions, assumes the same function as the *enumeration comma* in the English language.

Another significant difference in the use of a comma between Chinese and Spanish is that in the case of the latter, the semicolon can be used in the previous sentence because it serves to connect two long and related sentences without a conjunction, which would be as follows, see the phrase written in Spanish in (8), while in Chinese the same use does not exist. It should be noted that in this sentence the participants were unaware of this special use of the semicolon. In the same position of this punctuation mark, most of the participating students placed the comma.

(8). 在中国有省：山东省、陕西省、黑龙江省等，他们的城市分别是：济南、西安、哈尔滨 哈尔滨 哈尔滨

In China there are many provinces: Shandong, Shanxi, Helongjiang, etc.; its capitals are: Jinan, Xi'an, Harbin.

In addition, we must highlight the use of the comma in the peripheral circumstantial complement. In Spanish it is mandatory to put a comma after the peripheral circumstantial complement, while in Chinese it is optional, see (9).

(9). 然而他还没有通过考试。 or 然而，他还没有通过考试。

However, he did not pass the exam.

Another important specific use of the comma (,) of the Chinese language consists of its function played in separating long sentences or complete ideas, in whose final position would be a period (.) if they were in the case of the English or Spanish language (see Li and Thompson, 1989; Lu, 2013; Huang and Shi, 2016; Sun and Lu, 2022). This means that in Mandarin Chinese the comma (,) could play the same function as the period (.) in English or Spanish. As Pellatt (2018: 182) specified: "Transferring Chinese *dou hao* directly into English as commas may result in length wandering, senseless and breathless sentences".

(10). 许多人谈癌色变，认为得了不治之症，主要的治疗手段包括手术治疗、放射治疗、化疗及生物治疗等，有时多种方式联合治疗，使喉癌5年生存率得以提高，最大限度的保留了患者喉的发声功能，提高了患者的生活质量。

Many people blanch at the mention of the word cancer, believing that cancer is incurable. In fact, there are several treatments for laryngeal cancer, mainly surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy and biotherapy. Sometimes a combination of treatments is used, and this has led to an increase in the

five-year survival rate and the extent to which patients can retain their vocal function. This has improved the quality of life for many patients.

We see that in (10) (sentence pair adapted from Pellatt, 2018, p. 182), the long sentence written in Chinese that constitutes several subordinate clauses, contains all commas to separate said compound sentences. However, in the sentence translated into Spanish and in order not to generate comprehension difficulties, it would be appropriate to use the period to divide the long sentence translated into short sentences. The results we obtained from the interviews suggest that the participating students abuse the use of the comma, as a consequence of the negative interference of the Chinese use of the same sign.

4.3. The question marks 问号 ? / ? _

There are two question marks in Spanish: one for opening (¿) and one for closing (?). Spanish is the only language that uses double question marks, that is, they are placed not only at the end of the sentence as in Chinese, but also at the beginning of the same sentence. They appeared between the 8th and 10th centuries. At that time, they were only placed at the end of the sentence. However, scholars debated a lot about the opening question marks and, according to some minutes of one of the meetings they held, they began to consider that there are long periods in which the mark that is placed at the end of the sentence is not enough, which makes it necessary to place question marks at the beginning of the sentence to indicate the questioning sense and tone.

According to García (2002, pp. 218-219) the question mark performs the same function in written language as intonation does in oral language, that is, that the sentence being read or emitted implies or denotes an interrogative modality. The scholars of the 18th century solved the problem of interpreting these sentences in the written language by duplicating the sign: they inverted the old sign and placed it at the beginning of the sentence, in the place where, in the spoken language, the interrogation begins, whose melodic curve starts with an elevation. We think that this is just another example of the traditional desire of Spanish orthographers to represent the language in the most reliable and appropriate way for pronunciation.

It was then in 1870 when the Spanish Academy decided that the initial question mark should be used in all interrogative sentences.

As for the question mark in Chinese, only one is required at the end of the sentence because of the syntax of the language. In both Chinese and English, it becomes necessary to add auxiliary words or change the sentence order to construct an interrogative sentence. However, in Spanish, there is no such need. For example, to a question that is answered with a *yes* or a *no*:

(11). Have you eaten?

你吃饭了吗?

Have you eaten?

In English, the verb *have* moves to the beginning of the sentence to indicate an interrogative tone. In Chinese it is said: 你吃饭了吗? and “吗” is an auxiliary mood. With this word added to the end of the sentence it is reported that it is a question sentence.

Although there are only closing marks for the exclamation mark and the question mark in the Chinese language, it is true that they can be omitted. Interrogative sentences in Chinese have a monosyllabic word that is placed at the end and that is written in both pinyin and character, read and pronounced. This word is *ma*, in character 吗. As in interrogative sentences, in exclamatory sentences there are other monosyllabic particles or words that are placed at the end, they are written both in pinyin and in character, they are also read and pronounced. One of them is *ba*, in character 吧. Another is *a*, in character 啊.

Therefore, it can be said that Chinese question and exclamation marks (?/!) can be omitted for these two characters. In Spanish there is nothing similar (see Che et al., 2016).

4.4. Quotation marks

书名号 《》 /〈〉 / «» / "" / ”

In Chinese, quotation marks are used to indicate the title of a book, a text, an essay, a newspaper, etc. In French, *guillemet* literally means ‘the book title sign’, and it is with this meaning that it is used in Chinese. However, this sign does not exist exactly in Spanish because the titles must be in italics, as we see in (12).

(12). 《百年孤独》是作家加夫列尔·加西亚·马尔克斯的代表作。

One Hundred Years of Solitude is a representative work of the writer Gabriel García Márquez.

In Spanish, quotation marks are double signs that have an opening part and a closing part to indicate the part referenced part of the text, not titles. In fact, the RAE’s *Dictionary of the Spanish Language* defines quotation marks as a double orthographic sign used to frame the reproduction of textual quotations and, in narrative, of the characters’ speeches of their inner speech, and to delimit titles of articles, poems, conferences, etc., as well as words and expressions that are to be highlighted because they are improper, vulgar or from other languages.

There are three main types that are different in both functions and forms. All of them appear in Spanish writing and occupy important and indispensable positions: angular quotation marks («»); English quotation marks ("""); single quotes (”). Some of its uses in Spanish are to literally indicate the reproduction of words said or written by someone, such as quotations or textual phrases; to enclose or reproduce what the characters think in narrative works; to point out neologisms, vulgarisms, barbarisms, words borrowed from another language or expressions with an ironic tone that do not represent their usual meanings.

Regarding Chinese usage, the use of double and single quotes is becoming more widespread, imitating English usage, not Spanish (Stan, 1988). Our interviewees added that, when writing a text in Spanish, they used to use double and single quotation marks but not angle brackets to quote literally from a work. Regarding the use of angle quotes, they did not know precisely when and how to use them.

5. Discussions and conclusions

Although it is true that the sample studied is short and focuses on four signs (period, comma, question mark and quotation mark), it has been possible to show how the use of punctuation differs between Chinese and Spanish. In the first place, and regarding the dot sign, the results have shown that although Chinese differs from Spanish in the form (point/ □ vs. point/ .), Chinese-speaking students

do not present significant difficulties in handling the correct use of the Spanish period. The different ways with which the dot sign is called in Spanish, although they do not exist in the Chinese language, turn out to be points in favor for Chinese learners, facilitating the exercise of dictation in Spanish.

Secondly, and by focusing on the comma, we discover that the great similarity in the form that Chinese and Spanish share (coma / , / 、 vs. comma / ,) does not favor, however, the Spanish use of this sign by part of the Chinese speakers. Specifically, it is shown that, on the one hand, although the participants are able to change the *dùnháo* (coma / 、) for the comma (coma / ,) being aware of the non-existence of this sign in their acquired language; they do not know that, in this same text, the comma can and is usually replaced with the semicolon (;) when connecting two long and related sentences without conjunction. On the other hand, the participating students have difficulty in avoiding the negative transfer of the Chinese use of the comma in Spanish, so that they abuse this sign to join long sentences, which is unacceptable in their learned language. This last result is added to the precursor works that we mentioned previously (Li and Thompson, 1989; Lu, 2013; Huang and Shi, 2016; Pellatt, 2018; Sun and Lu, 2022). According to these authors, Chinese speakers of English show a preference the comma use when compared to native speakers.

Regarding the question mark, our results indicate that the formal contrast found between the two languages (question mark in Chinese/ ? vs. interrogation in Spanish / ¿?) does not hinder the acquisition of the use of this sign by Chinese-speaking students, so that all participants use it correctly.

Finally, as regard the use of quotation marks, Chinese speakers have shown themselves to be aware of italicizing the title of a book while refraining from using quotation marks, which is the native use of this sign. But as regards the type of quotation marks (angle, double, single), a preference for using the last two is discovered in the learners, a use of quotation marks more identified with the punctuation system of the English language. This result, together with the data obtained from the unstructured interviews, points to the need to promote knowledge of the angler quotation marks which, according to the RAE, are recommended to be used in the first instance, reserving the other types such as the English or simple quotation marks for when parts of a text already in quotation marks must be placed in quotation marks.

As Pellatt (2018) points out, the native use of punctuation –as in the present article, the use of Chinese punctuation by Chinese speakers–, tends to be intuitive, but it is not always correct when transferred to the second language (L2) or to the foreign language (LE), as is the case of Spanish in this study. In conclusion, we propose that the formal dissimilarity between certain punctuation marks of these two languages, such as the cases of the period and the question mark, does not cause Chinese speakers extraordinary difficulties in acquiring their correct use in Spanish. It is those signs whose forms share similarities, such as commas and quotation marks, which represent difficulties of acquisition.

This study, although only focused on four punctuation marks, has been able to shed some light on the study of this phenomenon. Future studies should include more signs, such as semicolons, colons, and ellipses, which, according to our interviewees, are very difficult for them to use safely and correctly in Spanish writing. On the other hand, it is necessary to pay more attention to the abusive use of the comma by Sino-Spanish speakers of Spanish, including English. Although in this regard, the works cited in this article (see Pellatt, 2018; Sun and Lu, 2022) propose that in Mandarin Chinese-

se a sentence is defined more according to the completeness of an idea than a sentence structure (i.e., structure formed by the union of a subject and a predicate), which explains why Sino speakers abuse the comma in their L2 or LE; more empirical studies are needed to deepen the analysis of this phenomenon.

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