

Visible Language

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research

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a study analyzing the playful use of punctuation by children 9-11 and the design-like process they use to communicate effectively, with implications for how the writing process is conceptualized

Simpson

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study exploring the integration of visual cultural elements in emerging scripts, suggesting that incorporating visual cultural elements in script design could play a significant role in promoting cultural continuity, supporting language preservation

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announcing changes in how *Visible Language* is published

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Children as Designers of Texts: Punctuating Persuasive Writing



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Abstract

Framed within literacy education and applied linguistics, children's playful punctuation is considered within a paradigm of 'writing as design'. Drawing particularly on the work of Sharples (1999), the article examines data from a repeat design study of 9-11 year old children tackling a persuasive description task. The data showed evidence of children making plans, setting goals and satisfying constraints to fulfil communicative effect. As well as being testament to children's ingenuity in using punctuation in creative ways, the findings have implications for how the writing process is conceptualised and for how writing is taught.

Keywords

Children's writing
Advertisements
Design
Playful punctuation



Introduction

This article considers young writers as designers of texts (Sharples, 1999; Myhill, 2009) who creatively shape meaning through textual ideas and layout. The main focus is on punctuation and particularly how children use punctuation in playful ways. The article extends recent work on language play in general (Beard & Burrell, 2021) by examining children's use of playful punctuation in persuasive writing. The data are from an earlier study of writing development in the 9–11 age-range that initially focused on a range of linguistic and text-level features. During the data analysis it became apparent that the children's writing also contained a range of ludic (playful) features, including the use of playful punctuation, and this was then subjected to further study. The present article extends this study by re-examining the data to identify features that are commensurate with a view of young writers as designers of texts.

The article draws on an established body of theory, criticism and discourse that directly addresses notions of designing one's own writing, namely 'design authorship' or 'designer as author'. According to the design critic, Rick Poyner (2003, p. 118), 'The emergence of the "designer as author" is one of the key ideas in graphic design of the postmodern period.' A significant moment was the publication of an essay by Michael Rock entitled 'The Designer as Author' in 1996 exploring the implications and possibilities of designers taking on an authorial role. The term gained widespread currency in the United States in the late 1990s and is reflected, for example, in the establishment of the first Master of Fine Arts degree in design based on the idea of 'The Designer as Author' at the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1999 (Poyner, 2003). The term emphasizes the role of the designer as a creator and originator of visual communication. It invites exploration of how designers contribute to the creative process and shape visual communication by infusing it with their own unique perspective, style and intent. The term also invites exploration of how designers navigate the interplay between the intentions of the author and the interpretation of the reader.

Writing as Design

Although the article is principally framed within literacy education and applied linguistics, the conceptual framework is also derived from Sharples' (1999) avowedly eclectic work on 'writing as creative design.' Sharples views 'the writer as a creative thinker and designer of text' (1999, p. 6). In this conceptualization, 'writing as design involves problem solving, when the writer sets goals, makes plans and satisfies constraints, but these processes support the broader purpose of writing which is to communicate with and through the text to achieve a human effect.' Writing is thus 'a cognitive process, creative act and a cultural activity' (Sharples, 1999, p. 71). As Maun

and Myhill (2005, p. 10) point out, Sharples' view of design includes 'not only the idea of visual design and spatial layout, but also the idea of semantic and linguistic choices being intrinsic to the design process.'

Sharples (1999, p. 72) provides a diagrammatic summary of the writing process, in which the main components of 'compose', 'plan' and 'revise' are linked by a series of skills and processes. Interestingly, however, there is no direct reference to punctuation. This relative neglect of punctuation is evident in other publications on the writing process. For example, the influential work of Graves (1983) relegates punctuation to a relatively subservient 'secretarial' role, with little attention being given to strategic design elements. Hayes and Flower's (1980) influential model lacks detail in terms of translation processes (turning plans and ideas into text to meet goals). While Berninger and Swanson (1994) adaption of the original Hayes and Flower model elaborated on these processes, punctuation was considered part of transcription (rather than an integral part of text generation). Alamargot and Fayol (2009) argue that models of text composition remain relatively imprecise in relation to the linguistic and orthographic processes involved in formulation. In contrast, the present article explores how playful punctuation can play a more central role in the design of written texts.

Punctuation

Punctuation is an integral part of written English, as it is in many written languages. The topic has been discussed at length by distinguished linguists (e.g. Crystal, 2016) and by professional writers (e.g. Truss, 2003; Waterhouse, 1994; Houston, 2015). As well as a relative neglect of punctuation in work on writing as design, little work has been done on punctuation in children's writing, despite its educational significance (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002). The main empirical work that has been done has used an ethnographic perspective (e.g. Hall, 1998, 2009). Even less work has been done on how children use punctuation in playful ways, which is specifically examined in the present article.

Punctuation can help us establish meaning in text. It can be defined as the use of spacing, conventional signs, and certain typographical devices as aids to the understanding and correct reading, both silently and aloud, of handwritten and printed texts (Brown, 2020). Punctuation adds structure and intention to a piece of text. Smith (1982) likens the 'transcribing' aspects of writing (pen to paper or finger to keyboard) to a 'tapestry', combining decisions on word choice and spelling with use of punctuation. He suggests (1982, p. 156) that punctuation 'reflects the structure of meaning in written language' in that it provides a visible spatial framework, marking out connected and embedded meanings in texts of different kinds.

According to Ravid and Tolchinsky, a primary function of punctuation is 'signalling nuances of semantic significance which might otherwise not be conveyed at all.' (2002, p. 438). Caracciolo (2014), citing the work of Nunberg (1990), suggests that punctuation needs to be considered alongside other graphical features of written text, as they serve the same kinds of purposes. According to Caracciolo, these written cues serve a similar function to non-verbal communicative cues that accompany spoken language (see also Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002, p. 437). The views of Caracciolo's are echoed by Hall (2009), in relation to punctuation use in children's literature. He observes how, for example, some writers signal speech by typestyle (bold, underlining etc.), type size, and space, or by a combination of these features. Typography in picture books has become especially diverse with a range of different devices being employed. Graphic novels, such as those of Dav Pilkey, are similar to comics in that they include boxed pictures and text (known as lettering) (see, for example his *Captain Underpants* series). Written in comic style, using the author's hand lettering, Pilkey's stories contain copious examples of conventional punctuation being used in playful ways. These include the recurrent use of emboldened words, ellipses, block capitals, underlining, dashes, quotation marks and the hashtag. His books also contain frequent use of unconventional punctuation in the form of multiple consecutive marks (of question or exclamation marks). Many of these conventions are also found in serial comics. In the light of these published sources, the fact that punctuation has been relatively neglected in work on writing as design is even more notable.

Punctuation Choice and Individual Writing Style

Punctuation use can of course vary according to a writer's style. Nicholas Rougeux (2016), a Chicago-based designer and data artist, examined the *visual* rhythm of punctuation in well-known works of literature for his *Between the Words* poster series. His exploration of punctuation in literary classics reveals some interesting differences between texts. This entailed removing all the letters, numbers (with the exception of chapter numbers), spaces and line breaks from these works so that only the punctuation was left in one continuous line as they appear in those texts. Rougeux arranged the text in a spiral, with markings for each chapter and an illustration in the centre to create a visual representation resembling a vinyl record. Figure 1 shows the result of this process being applied to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Rougeux found differences between the contributions of different punctuation marks in those texts he examined – as did Adam Calhoun (2016) who also visualized some classic texts through only their punctuation. When considering children's literature, Rougeux remarks that, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, there are a large number of exclamation marks which reflect the expressions of surprise and strong reaction in the story.

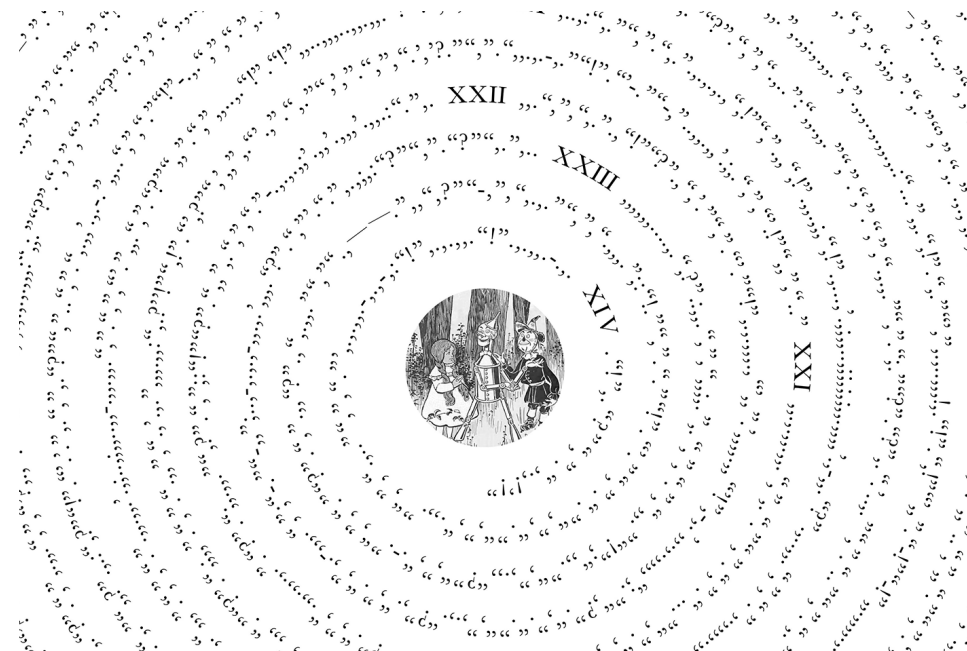


FIGURE 1.

The punctuation of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (excerpt).
Artwork from 'Between The Words' (Rougeux 2016).

Punctuation in Advertisements

Punctuation use can also vary according to the type of text being written, and this is clearly evidenced in advertisements, where conventions of continuous prose are often circumvented or modified to increase reader interest and perhaps pursue commercial gain. Advertisements, part of a 'meta-genre of non-fiction' (Andrews et al., 2009, p. 292), may use a range of distinctive language features, such as vivid vocabulary, short, catchy phrases and conversational grammar to persuade, argue and advise (Crystal, 1995; Leech, 1966; Packard, 1981).

These features are incorporated into an advertisement's structure. From their experience in developing the standardised writing task whose use is reported in the present article, Twist and Brill (2000, p. 48) suggest that persuasive writing in children is often characterised by a three-part overall framework consisting of an introduction, main description and concluding appeal. According to genre theorists (e.g. Martin, 1989; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993), this may be extended to include an opening statement or 'headline', followed by such features as arguments and evidence and re-statements of a point of view. Jefkins (1992) suggests that advertisements have to fulfil five functions: (1) attract attention, (2) stimulate interest, (3) create desire, (4) inspire confidence and (5) provoke action. Both the three-part framework and Jefkins' suggestions are returned to later in this article.

Language Play in Advertisements

Language play is open to a range of interpretations but a definition that has enduring utility is ‘any use of language that is creative and unusual: that has purpose beyond the mere communication of basic information’ (Nilsen & Nilsen, 1978, p. 28). A recent critical review of the topic (Beard & Burrell, 2021) identified a wide range of occurrences in English, including rhymes, jingles, alliteration, repetition, riddles and puns. Such resources can be tools for the imaginative design of advertisements, as Cook (1994, 2000) has shown. The recent review by the present authors also illustrates how punctuation may be used in playful ways, although few publications to date have yet addressed this possibility and even fewer have considered the potential role of playful punctuation in work on writing as design.

As well as language play, advertisers seek to capture the reader’s attention by employing a range of typographical features. Such features include aspects of typeface – for example, different print sizes, fonts and styles – as well as punctuation. The following may be employed for emphasis or contrast: block capitals, bold, colour, italics or underlining. Sometimes several of these may be combined for impact. Variations in spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, italicization and paragraphing may also be employed in ways which playfully bend and break the rules. The successful slogan used by the British Milk Marketing Board and Dairy Council (‘Drink a pint a milka day’) made playful use of spelling, popularising the word ‘pinta’ (to refer to a pint of milk) in a similar way to ‘cuppa’ (as a word for a cup of tea). The ‘Beanz Meanz Heinz’ slogan used to promote Heinz Baked Beans also incorporates unconventional spelling. Schlotzsky’s, the American chain of restaurants specializing in sandwiches and pizza, has also made playful use of spelling in its slogans (for example, ‘Every Bite Lotz Better’).

Jenkins (1992 p. 269) notes how punctuation is a writing tool ‘which can be used to make copywriting a literary form different from any other.’ Advertisements may include short pithy sentences (‘Life tastes good.’ (Coca-Cola)), abbreviations (‘It’s Finger Lickin’ Good’ (KFC)) and may deliberately break the rules (‘The Best Burgers Yet!’ (Wendy’s)). Punctuation marks can be employed in other unconventional ways (e.g., ‘Itz a Red Thing’ (Tizer drink)) where an individual mark is used to denote a particular letter. However, playful punctuation in advertisements is most frequently used in conventional ways as illustrated by the majority of the examples in Table 1. Sometimes they even form part of the product’s name (e.g., ‘I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter!’ (substitute for butter) and ‘Oh Henry!’ (Candy bar)).

TABLE 1. (OPPOSITE PAGE)

Professional advertisements incorporating playful punctuation.

Advertisement	Punctuation use
The Vegan ‘Jack ‘n’ Ch**se’ Pizza (Pizza Hut Restaurant menu)	Asterisks to indicate the omission of certain letters
@ BK You Got It! (Burger King)	Commercial @ sign to stand for ‘at’
A Little Bottle of Science (Not Magic) (Yakult probiotic drink)	Round brackets to slip in asides
HEINZ [SERIOUSLY] GOOD MAYONNAISE (Heinz mayonnaise)	Square brackets to identify added emphasis
EVERY day is a YAKULT day (Yakult probiotic drink)	Block capitals to express emphasis
Kids and grown-ups love it so – the happy world of Haribo. (Haribo candy)	Dash to connect or separate phrases or sentences
A cheeky chomp of chewy caramel, covered in delicious Cadbury milk chocolate – the tasty treat you can sink your teeth into! (Cadbury Chomp bar)	Dash to emphasize a point
“Have a break... Have a Kit Kat.” (Nestlé Kit Kat)	Ellipsis to indicate a pause in speech
It’s way better than fast food... It’s Wendy’s. (Wendy’s)	Ellipsis to indicate a pause
<i>A joy to give, a delight to receive...</i> (Lindt Master Chocolatier Collection)	Ellipsis to leave something to the reader’s imagination
He likes it! Hey Mikey! (Life Cereal)	Exclamation mark to express surprise
It’s the Real Thing! (Coca Cola, soft drink)	Exclamation mark to emphasize a statement
They’re Gr-r-reat! (Frosted Flakes Cereal)	Exclamation mark to exclaim or admire
New Waffelos Cereal... a nice part of a complete breakfast. Yaaa Hooo! (Waffelos cereal)	Exclamation mark to exclaim
PAYDAY IS ALMOST TOTALLY NUTS! (PayDay candy bar)	Exclamation mark to indicate a strong feeling of surprise, approval, etc
Snap! Crackle! Pop! (Rice Krispies cereal)	Exclamation mark to attract attention or for drama
Charlie says, “Love my Good and Plenty!” (Good and Plenty, candy)	Exclamation mark to give a command
Swedish Fish: The #1 Fish Shaped Candy in the World (Swedish Fish, candy)	Hashtag to stand for ‘number’
“Tyrrelbly, Tyrrelbly Tasty” (Tyrrells potato chips)	Italics for emphasis or contrast
Starburst isn’t life juicy? (Starburst, candy)	Question mark to indicate rhetorical questions
got milk? (California Milk Processor Board campaign)	Question mark to mark truncated questions
How many licks does it take to get to the tootsie roll center of a tootsie pop? (Tootsie Pop, lollipop)	Question mark to mark the end of a sentence which is a direct question
Did somebody say McDonald’s? (McDonald’s)	Question mark to show that something is uncertain
“The milk chocolate melts in your mouth- not in your hands.” (M&M’s, candy)	Quotation marks to indicate direct speech
THE TROUBLE IS THEY <u>ALL</u> TASTE TOO GOOD! (Kellogg’s Crunchy Nut cereal)	Underlining as a form of emphasis

Laffy Taffy candy wrappers feature jokes and puns, which have become a popular feature of the candy. They first appeared on the wrappers in the 1980s and began incorporating jokes sent in by children with a question and answer format that reinforces the use of the question mark (joke) and exclamation mark (punchline).

Children as Designers of Text?

In considerations of children as designers of text through their use of playful punctuation, it is notable that there have been relatively few studies of children's understanding and use of punctuation, despite its important role in writing. Hall (1999) examined the writing development of young children (between the ages of 5 and 7) over a two-year period. He found that children initially used 'graphic punctuation' whereby the children viewed punctuation as a visual feature (a mark on the page) rather than a linguistic feature (where a visual mark is used to mark meaning). A later study by Dávalos-Esparza (2017) examined the understanding of the uses and functions of punctuation by children aged between seven and 12 years of age. Findings from this study support those of Hall (1999) by suggesting an evolution in the children's conceptualization of punctuation that progresses from punctuating by using graphic criteria to punctuating using textual criteria. Analysis of the data led to the identification of certain evolutionary indicators of the development of punctuation. Initial indicators include: punctuation at the edges; graphic criteria focussing on order or visual highlight. In contrast, later indicators of development include: combining the use of basic punctuation with expressive forms (question marks and exclamation marks) in almost all areas of the text; choosing one mark – among several – to create an effect on the reader or to change a word's meaning. The findings from her study also suggest that primary school children employ clues from some categories of words which guide their decisions about the choice of punctuation marks to use that best reflects the semantic and / or discursive function in the text.

In designing texts, children need to draw on their knowledge of text types. Persuasive texts, particularly advertisements, are not commonly referenced genres within the school setting (Rose, 2009). This is surprising given that children frequently encounter this genre in non-school settings with the average American child watching an estimated 40,000 television commercials a year according to a widely disseminated report some years ago (APA Task Force, 2004). This figure that may well have increased substantially with the more recent availability of smart phones, I-pads and other electronic media. According to a more recent report (Rideout et al., 2010), the average American child (age eight or older) spends

more than seven hours a day with screen media – watching television, using the computer, playing video games, and using hand held devices – through which they are exposed to advertising. Four product categories (toys, cereals, candies, and fast-food restaurants) account for approximately 80% of all advertising to children (Encyclopedia.com, 2023).

Children's own attempts at designing advertisements are likely to draw upon these various modes, although their experiences of them outside of school may vary greatly in nature and extent. It is from these multimodal experiences that children may appropriate appealing content and form to bring to their own writing. Some sources suggest that such texts are likely to be created through redesign rather than through simple replication (Siegal, 2006; Geneshi & Dyson, 2009; Marsh, 2009). Adaptation is evident in children's playground rhymes which parody familiar songs and rhymes (Ackerley, 2002; Opie & Opie, 1959) including some from advertising. Moore and Lutz (2000) report on the ways in which engaging advertising can have a strong impact on children. The children they interviewed were able to recall advertisements, sing jingles, mimic characters and to relate information gleaned from the content. The children also recounted how they looked forward to seeing particular advertisements, indicating that they were not passive recipients of advertising but active and involved.

Work on writing as design has rarely included references to scholarly publications on punctuation. This has prompted the re-examination of an existing dataset of children's persuasive writing reported in the present article. The dataset came from an investigation of language play in children's writing. Such a re-examination can provide new insights into the study of writing as design and also the field of visible language as a whole.

Dataset

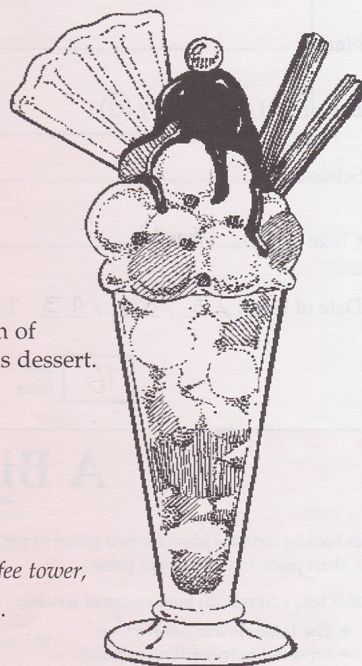
The research underpinning the present article involved the use of a standardised task to investigate the writing of an advertisement by primary (elementary) school children. The task was *Literacy Impact Test B* (Twist & Brill, 2000). It involves writing a description for a new dessert called the *Toffee Tower*. The context of the writing is a café menu, where the description will accompany a picture of the dessert. Children are told in the prompt (see *Figure 2*), read aloud by the teacher, that the purpose of the description is to (i) inform the reader about the contents of the dessert; and (ii) persuade the reader to try it. The task is described by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) as a 'persuasive description.' The task was deemed to have ecological validity in that it enabled the children to draw upon their real-life experiences of reading and listening to advertisements. The task is complemented by an additional one, the writing of an imaginative narrative, details of which are reported elsewhere (Beard & Burrell, 2010).

This is the first, short piece of writing. Your teacher will read it through with you. You will then have 10 minutes to do your writing. Your teacher will tell you when to stop.

The Toffee Tower

The *toffee tower* is a new kind of ice cream dessert to be sold at Treats café.

This picture of the *toffee tower* will appear in the Treats café menu.



Now Treats café needs a tempting description of the *toffee tower*, to encourage people to try this dessert.

Your task is to write a short description of the *toffee tower*.

The purpose of the description is to:

- give information about what is in the *toffee tower*,
- encourage people to try this new dessert.

Think about:

- describing the interesting details of what is in the *toffee tower*
- how to make the *toffee tower* sound delicious enough for the customers to want to try it.

FIGURE 2.

Pupil prompt for *The Toffee Tower* writing task

The participants were 9–10 year-old pupils (60 boys; 52 girls) from two English Local Authorities in the UK representing a range of socio-economic catchments. At the time of the investigation, the five schools that were involved all followed the statutory national curriculum and the same non-statutory guidance (additional details are provided in Beard, Burrell & Homer, 2016).

Procedure

In line with the Guide for Literacy Impact Test B, the children were given 10 minutes to complete the task (the separate narrative writing task is allocated 30 minutes). As part of the administration of the test, the children are told that their 'writing should not include illustrations or elaborate lettering' (Twist & Brill, 2000, p. 4). The prompt makes no mention of the use of playful language or punctuation. The task was then administered a year later to the same children. On both occasions the tasks were administered by the children's respective class teachers and the extant ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association were followed. Children wrote their persuasive descriptions in handwritten form as this was part of the children's usual classroom practice. The analyses were undertaken on both pieces of writing.

Initial Analysis

The test guide provides a numeric scheme focused on five constituents of writing, applied to the persuasive and the narrative tasks (Twist & Brill, 2000, p. v). The scheme and its administration have been discussed in previous publications which reported on features of linguistic and text-level development in the two genres over the 12-month period (Beard & Burrell, 2010; Beard et al. 2016).

In addition to the findings from the sample as a whole, the numeric scheme was used to identify three attainment sub-groups whose writing could be analysed in detail and comparisons made. The sub-groups comprised (i) the highest-attaining children in the second administration of the task ($n = 13$); (ii) the children with the lowest scores on both occasions ($n = 12$); (iii) the children whose attainment increased most over the twelve-month period ($n = 13$, three of whom were also in the high attainment group). The writing of the sub-groups was further investigated to identify the features of language play that were apparent, including playful punctuation (Burrell & Beard, 2022 a and b; Burrell & Beard, 2023).

As children's punctuation use has not been extensively studied, the analysis included the children's use of a broad range of punctuation marks including unconventional use through combining marks. However, it omitted the use of basic punctuation (in the form of full stops and commas) and near-ubiquitous punctuation as these are not

granted the value of 'expressive' (Dávalos Esparza, 2016) and are likely to be included in studies examining more general aspects of writing development. Throughout this article, we collectively refer to such punctuation as 'playful punctuation.'

As brackets and (single and double) quotation marks only occur in pairs, each pairing was recorded as one occurrence, for example brackets – *chocolate (Dairy milk) flakes*; quotation marks – *scrumptious toffee balls*'. Children's use of capital letters (to express emphasis) was recorded as one occurrence where all the letters in a single word or consecutive words appeared in block capitals (i.e. *a TOFFEE TOWER*). When capitals were not used in this way, they were not included in the analysis (for example, *It's The Toffee Tower*). Where children used multiple exclamation marks together, each mark was recorded as an individual occurrence. One child used compound punctuation in the form of a dash after a colon (i.e. :-). In this instance the dash was not counted in the numerical analysis but was considered in the overall analysis. Punctuation used for decorative purposes was not included in the numerical analysis but is examined in the Discussion.

Subsequent Analysis

For the purposes of the investigation reported in the present article, an additional sub-group (n=14) was included, to provide examples of features that were not evident in the writing of the other sub-groups (i.e. bullet points and square brackets). This additional opportunity sampling optimised the search for indications of punctuation-based text design.

The two principal research questions were:

- What features of playful punctuation are evident in the children's persuasive writing?
- How is this punctuation used to fulfil the different design elements outlined by Sharples for example setting goals, making plans and satisfying constraints, through communicating with and through the text (semantic and linguistic choices) to achieve a human effect?

In answering the first research question, 'What features of playful punctuation are evident in children's persuasive writing?' all the anonymised scripts were re-read by the two authors of the present paper and all forms of playful punctuation were categorised and tabulated. Only punctuation that was used by the children themselves was included in the numerical analysis (with any missing punctuation being overlooked). This missing punctuation typically reflected a writer's limited knowledge

of how punctuation is used conventionally. In order to answer the second research question, concerning how this punctuation is used to fulfil different design elements, further use was made of the earlier categorisations and tabulations that were undertaken to address the first research question.

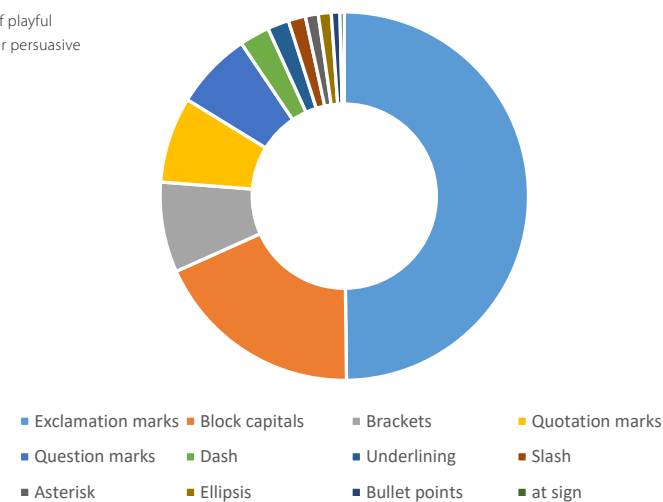
Results

What features of playful punctuation are evident in the children's persuasive writing?

In presenting the results for an article in the present journal, it is appropriate to use a suitable means of visual representation. Figure 3 presents data in the form of a doughnut chart. The doughnut chart is similar to the traditional pie chart but with a blank centre, allowing for additional information about the data as a whole to be included, for example, labels, the name of a selected category, or the chart title. Doughnut charts are also generally seen as similar to pie charts in effectively illustrating proportions, and as supporting multiple statistics at once; they are additionally seen as providing a better data intensity ratio than standard pie charts. The use of doughnut charts eliminates the need to compare the size or area of the 'slice' and shifts the focus on the length of the arc, which in turn is easy to measure (Harris, 1999).

FIGURE 3.

Children's choice of playful punctuation in their persuasive descriptions



As can be seen in Figure 3 the most-used punctuation mark was the exclamation mark accounting for almost half the punctuation. Block capitals, brackets and question marks were also frequently used by the children. In contrast, the commercial @ sign, bullet points, the asterisk, ellipsis, slash, underlining and the dash were used most infrequently.

How Is This Punctuation Used to Achieve the Different Design Elements?

The three-part overall framework (introduction, main description and concluding appeal) that often characterises advertisement writing (Twist & Brill, 2000) was regularly employed by the children. Within this organisational framework, a variety of playful punctuation was noted that was commensurate with text design. (All the children's names in the present article are pseudonyms and all original spelling and punctuation have been retained.)

Design Elements within the Three-part Framework

Besides punctuation marks, the children's use of punctuation is evident in the visual arrangement of text through the use of space and certain typographical devices. The three-part overall framework used by the children either took the form of a single paragraph or a more complex arrangement. Both Luke and Helen's persuasive descriptions consist of a single paragraph ending with a feature that is attention-drawing. Luke's engaging final appeal to the reader is further supported by a footnote at the bottom of the page signalled by an asterisk, whereas Helen ends her persuasive description with an element of consumer choice, centre-set on the page ('served with wafer (optional)') and arranged over two lines. Figure 4 shows some different arrangements of text where children have chosen to include three paragraphs. Each paragraph is signalled by the use of line spacing. This has the effect of creating clearly identified paragraphs for readers – each with a main theme and related points. For example, the middle paragraph is used by each writer to describe the contents of the Toffee Tower dessert. Carol includes a heading at the beginning of her paragraph in block capitals and is underlined for additional emphasis. Lottie includes a heading, centred and in block capitals to create impact.

Punctuation Uses as Design Elements

Michael's text design incorporates the three-part framework and is set out in Table 2 in order to illustrate his choice of punctuation for effect; it is consistent with the primary goal or purpose of the writing: to inform the reader about the contents of the dessert and persuade the reader to try it.

Carol's text

Get your TOFFEE TOWER at the TREATS CAFÉ. You will find a picture of it in the TREATS CAFÉ MENU.

WHATS IN THE TOFFEE TOWER

In the toffee tower desert there is vanilla, strawberry and chocolate flavoured ice-cream, two chocolate flakes, melted toffee poured on to it, with a cheery on top and last of all a biscuit.

This toffee tower once you have eaten it you will want more. If you feel hungry go to the TREATS CAFÉ.

Lottie's text

THE TOFFEE TOWER

The Toffee Tower is sold at Treat's Café. The price of this delicious desert is £1.50!

On the bottom of the Toffee Tower is the delicious a strawberry. On top of that is a tasty helping of vanilla ice-cream. Thirdly there is a few of Treats café special marshmallows, coming out of the top is a pile of tasty chocolate chips with treacle on the top. To finish it off two flake sticks, a wafer and a bright red juicy cherry on the top.

But remember this tasty treat is only sold at TREAT'S CAFÉ!!

Tony's text

This new ice-cream, Toffee Tower, is absolutely delicious. Its full of sprinkles and chocolate drops. Infact its got every thing to tickle your taste-buds. You can chosse any two types of ice cream, vanilla, chocolate, strawberry. You name it whatever two flavours of ice cream you want. you can have.

At the top of the ice-cream there is oozing melted toffe (that tastes delicious with vinilla ice-cream, just a tip). Then there is two toffe flavoured delectable flakes rested in the ice-cream just waiting for you to dip into the creamy ice-cream, also, a waffer is on the * top (unfortunatly not toffe flavour).

So what do you think? Is it worth trying for just three pound! or not? After all its your choice, at the end of the day.

FIGURE 4.

Children's arrangement of text

Michael's writing illustrates how, through thoughtful design, punctuation can be used to confirm and embellish the text's persuasive structure and elements (e.g. audience, hook, key information). Advertisement form is maintained throughout, demonstrating accurate attention to task purpose and recognition of the constraints it imposes on the writer. Paragraphing is used to mark the main divisions of Michael's description and this is indicated through the use of new lines and also line spaces that draw attention to different parts of the text. His description is abundantly detailed and its sequence is confidently managed to engage the reader's interest. For example, the opening sentence establishes the writing's persuasive purpose through the inclusion of a 'hook' to capture the interest of the reader. Quotation marks are used to draw attention to particular words and to clarify his hyperbolic sentence: 'This highly rated mouth-watering toffee tower is the most gorgeous Ice-Cream on Earth, 'well nearly!'' In the main description, Michael includes specific information that readers will want to know about the contents of the new dessert. He chooses to use quotation marks again, but on the second occasion their function is to highlight a particular ingredient: 'Strawberry Sauce'. Dashes set off an interruption in a sentence to highlight another ingredient and to indicate an expansion: 'We have two flakes, – chocolate – and a crispy wafer shaped like a sea-shell.' Reference is made to his chosen target audience for the Toffee Tower (i.e. parents and their children) and also an additional 'hook' in the form of an offer ('Free with all of this'). Besides factual information, Michael also includes humour. Round brackets are used to clarify descriptive details ('your choice') and to slip in a humorous aside ('Please Eat Me') with the latter also containing quotation marks to indicate direct speech. His design demonstrates sustained awareness of the reader. For example, in the main

TABLE 2.

Playful punctuation choice in
Michael's Toffee Tower description

Persuasive Structure and Script Content	Punctuation used
<p>Introduction – Attracting attention</p> <p><i>This highly rated mouth-watering toffee tower is the most georgeous Ice-Cream on Earth, 'well nearly'.</i></p>	<p>Quotation marks to draw attention to particular words and clarify</p>
<p>Main description – The information</p> <p><i>Filled, in the jar, is soothing toffee and vanilla Ice-Cream mixed together. As we move nearer the top, we approach a delicious topping of 'Strawberry Sauce'. We have two flakes, – chocolate – and a crispy wafer shaped like a sea-shell.</i></p> <p><i>Free with all of this is a cherry, apple or lemond bubble gum (your choice) and it is placed on top of this outstanding piece, however if your child is young we have a chewy jelly baby that they could have.</i></p> <p><i>This Ice-Cream should be tasted by you as it wants to be eaten ('Please Eat Me')</i></p> <p><i>We have delicious deserts, but this is our all time best as it tastes, smells and looks the best.</i></p>	<p>Quotation marks to highlight a particular ingredient</p> <p>Dashes to set off an interruption in a sentence, to highlight an ingredient and to indicate an expansion</p> <p>Round brackets to clarify descriptive details</p> <p>Quotation marks to enclose direct speech</p> <p>Round brackets to slip in asides</p> <p>Paragraph (Line space) to draw attention.</p>
<p>Concluding appeal – The slogan</p> <p><i>So why not try the new, amazing toffee tower? It soothes and waters your throat releasing any soreness around it!</i></p> <p><i>Go on give it a go!</i></p>	<p>Question mark to directly appeal to the reader</p> <p>Exclamation mark to emphasize a statement</p> <p>Paragraph (Line space) to draw attention</p> <p>Exclamation mark to appeal to the reader to try it</p>

description the text directly addresses the reader through the inclusion of brackets ('*your choice*') while later in the final concluding appeal it directly appeals to the reader using a question ('*So why not try the new, amazing toffee tower?*'). An exclamation mark is used to emphasize the dessert's appeal and health benefits for the reader ('*It soothes and waters your throat releasing any soreness around it!*'). The design ends with a call for action – a final appeal in the form of an alliterative slogan ending in an exclamation mark: '*Go on give it a go!*'

The following sections, corresponding to the three-part overall framework, consider the use of persuasive elements used by other children within their Toffee Tower descriptions.

Design Elements within the Introduction

For his introduction, Luke wrote:

— *Try the knew 'Toffee Tower' the knew tasty desert that will get your tastebuds tingling.*

This short attention-getting introduction refers directly to the new dessert by name and also incorporates alliteration to engage the reader. Luke's use of quotation marks around the words 'Toffee Tower' draw attention to the name of the dessert giving the enclosed words special status. Highlighting them in this way helps also to embed the product's name into the reader's memory which is particularly important for a new product. His single sentence introduction is a direct appeal to the reader to try it. In contrast, Lata's more extended introduction consisted of:

— *Do you crave for large toffee filled deserts? Does it make your mouth water for large ice-creams filled with all your favourite things? If the answer is yes, you must try the brand new Toffee Tower, exclusively at Treat's Café.*

Her introduction also directly appeals to the reader, but this time through a series of questions with a consistent focus on persuasion through a recognition of human instincts and drives. Lata's introduction also refers directly to the dessert's name with additional reference to the name of the café where the new dessert is to be sold. Both writers incorporate persuasive elements (audience, branding, a hook) into their introductions to attract the attention of readers, with punctuation helping to confirm and embellish the persuasive nature of the text. Table 3 provides some additional examples taken from the introductions of other children's designs for the Toffee Tower description.

Design Elements within the Main Description

For her main description, Rhona wrote:

— *There are 3 different sizes of toffee tower which are:- Small = 50p, Medium = 75p, Large = £1.00. However, if you can't eat it all, don't*

TABLE 3.

Design elements included in the introduction

Persuasive element	Excerpt of writing	Punctuation used and effect when combined with words
Headline / Heading	<i>TOFFEE TOWER</i> (Jack)	Block capitals [centred] to create impact
	<i>THE TOFFEE TOWER!</i> (Lottie)	Block capitals [centred] to create impact Exclamation mark to emphasize
Brand name	<i>The new dessert is in town. The toffee Tower!</i> (Sophia)	Exclamation mark to emphasize
	<i>Why not try our new delicious dessert called 'Toffee Tower'</i> (Natalie)	Quotation marks to draw attention to the name of the dessert giving the enclosed words special status
	<i>The Toffee Tower is a absolutely huge ice cream treat, with several ice cream flavours such as Chocolate, Vannilla, Strawberry, bubblegum and many many more!</i> (Blake)	Exclamation mark to emphasize a statement
Audience	<i>The toffee tower is so tastey you will never want to stop!</i> (Blake)	Exclamation mark to emphasize
	<i>The Toffee Tower is the best ice cream you could possibly think of!</i> (Mary)	Exclamation mark to indicate a strong feeling of approval
Hook	<i>you'll NEVER belive the treat we've got up our sleeve's.</i> (Abigail)	Block capitals to express emphasis
	<i>there is no better ice cream around!</i> (Julia)	Exclamation mark to indicate a strong feeling of approval
Call to action	<i>Come to Treats café!</i> (Sophia)	Exclamation mark to emphasize an instruction
	<i>Come to Treats café and and buy yourself a Toffee Tower at a low price of £2.00!</i> (Mary)	Exclamation mark to emphasize an instruction

worry! Our staff will provide you with a small tub for the rest of the ice-cream if you wish. For every kid's sandwich you buy, one ice-cream will become 50% cheaper (if it's a medium ice-cream, it becomes 37p). You must hurry, though! The delicious Toffee Tower is only sold in the Spring and Summer, and we have a limited amount we can make. However, the more people buy, the more we'll be able to make!

Unusually, Rhona chooses to use compound punctuation (in the form of a dash after a colon) to list the sizes of Toffee Tower available to customers. This use could be interpreted as an attempt at being creatively inventive, perhaps even referencing an emoticon or a glyph like the interrobang (a combination of a question and exclamation marks). Parentheses are used to clarify the cost of the medium size when purchased with a child's sandwich creating a more informal and relaxed style. Rhona maintains a consistent persuasive appeal. Underlining is used to emphasize a certain word in a sentence – with the same sentence ending in an exclamation mark for added drama. Both forms of punctuation convey the need for readers to act promptly in order to avoid disappointment. Her main description ends with an exclamation mark which expresses enthusiasm to meet consumer demand for the product. Rhona's description incorporates a number of persuasive elements to tempt her readers to try it (audience, brand name, call to action, key information, the offer).

In contrast, Bryony's main description consists of a detailed description of the dessert's key ingredients:

This breath-taking delicious ice-cream, is way better than any knicker bocker glory. It has, two Cadbury flakes in, all types of different sauces (where you can choose which ones you want), different flavoured ice cream scoops-like all the colours from the rainbow, little crunchy crispy blobs and one nice big golden toffee, mouth watering ball on the top; which when you lick it / put it in your mouth, it starts dissolving.

When you indulge yourself with this ice-cream, then you'll feel like king of the world. For as soon as you have one taste of it, you want more, more and more! (Do you feel like eating this yet?). Nevertheless, save the best till last – at the bottom, there is warm-chocolate bananas – or any other fruit you'd like. However, if you want, we can add some extra things, in like; sweets or hot chocolate bars.

Bryony's use of descriptive advertisement-style language is maintained beyond her opening sentence through the use of hyperbole by comparison to a competitor. Round brackets are used to inform readers that they are able to choose which sauce they have on their dessert. A slash is used to separate alternatives and an exclamation mark is

used at the end of a hyperbolic sentence to emphasize the indulgent nature of this new dessert. Round brackets are used again, but on this occasion they are used to include an aside by directly appealing to readers through the use of a question. A pair of dashes create an expansion to inform readers of the dessert's best part. There is a consistent focus on persuasion which is achieved through the use of strong imagery, a conversational relationship with the audience, key information about the product and related offers (choice of sauces, optional additions). Rhona and Bryony both incorporate persuasive elements (audience, key information, imagery, etc.) into their main descriptions in an attempt to convince readers to buy the dessert, with punctuation helping to confirm and embellish the persuasive nature of the text. Table 4 provides some additional examples taken from the main descriptions of other children's designs for the Toffee Tower description.

Design Elements within the Concluding Appeal

For her concluding appeal, Carol wrote:

— *So grab some mouny and get down here now!*

— *THE TOFFEE TOWER
IT'S THE GREATEST!*

Carol's concluding appeal aims to call to action readers and her use of an exclamation mark emphasizes the need to act promptly. As indicated above, part of her concluding appeal was centre-set on the page. Written in block capitals letters – the hyperbolic sentence included an exclamation mark for drama. Luke's final and engaging appeal to the reader was supported by some small print and the use of an asterisk and an exclamation mark:

— *try this knew 'Toffe Tower'* before they all sell out and they have none left!*

to slip in an aside from the author:

— ** I/me off to get one.*
[written as a footnote, near the bottom of the page].

Both writers incorporate persuasive elements (audience, branding, call to action) into their concluding appeals to create a memorable ('take home') message, with punctuation helping to confirm and embellish the persuasive nature of the text. Table 5 provides some additional examples from the concluding appeals of other children's designs for the Toffee Tower description.

TABLE 4.

Design elements included in the main description

Persuasive element	Excerpt of writing	Punctuation used and effect when combined with words
Hook	<i>Whats in the toffee tower your asking?</i> (Carol)	Question mark to engage readers and pave the way for information about the dessert's ingredients
	<i>Now for what the toffee tower contains!</i> (Kayla)	Exclamation mark to attract attention or for drama
Audience	<i>why should you resist?</i> (Julia)	Question mark to directly appeal to readers
	<i>will definately be the most delightful thing you have ever tasted!</i> (Helen)	Exclamation mark to emphasize hyperbolic phrase
Brand name	<i>We've kicked the knicker-bocker-glory's off the menu with this tounge tempting, terrific toffee tower treat!</i> (Elizabeth C)	Exclamation mark to emphasize a statement
	<i>only sold @ treats café</i> (Max)	Commercial @ sign to emphasize the dessert's exclusivity and availability
Key information	<i>10 – 10 people loved it</i> (Noah)	Dash to highlight customer satisfaction
	<i>At the top of the ice-cream there is oozing melted toffe (that tastes delicious with vinilla ice-cream, just a tip).</i> (Tony)	Brackets to add information and illustrate via an example
	<i>& <u>two</u> scrumpcios, fudge-centred chocolate covered flakes</i> (Helen)	Underlining to emphasize descriptive detail
	<i>[Danger nut product may cotain traces of soya milk seeds and/or/ defently nuts.]</i> (Tommy)	Square brackets to identify added emphasis for food allergy information with slashes used inside to indicate alternatives
Imagery	<i>Secondly, there are the most biggest Bubble Exploders that will make your tounge Fizzle and Pop, also they have the most delicious taste!</i> (Rose)	Exclamation mark to indicate a strong feeling of approval
	<i>Try this new dessert! Warning, VERY MOREISH.</i> (Lee)	Exclamation mark to emphasize an instruction
	<i>The smooth, soothing ice-cream along with sticky toffee sauce is a real dream!</i> (Ruby C)	Block capitals to highlight a cautionary note
The offer	<i>As soon as you have a bite of a chocolate flake it takes you into a chocolatey dimension!</i> (Bryony)	Exclamation mark to indicate a strong feeling of approval
	<i>your choice of ice cream (chocolate, bannana or vanilla)</i> (Luke)	Exclamation mark to emphasize a claim
	<i>To celebrate our new terrific toffee tower, Treats cafe has lowered it to half price!</i> (Elizabeth C)	Brackets to provide extra detail
		Exclamation mark to admire

TABLE 5.

Design elements included in the concluding appeal

Persuasive element	Excerpt of writing	Punctuation used and effect when combined with words
Audience	<i>you'll love it!</i> (Jack)	Exclamation mark to exclaim
	<i>So why don't you treat yourself with that wonderful desert!</i> (Jessica)	Exclamation mark to emphasize a statement
Brand name	<i>But remember this tasty treat is only sold at TREAT'S CAFÉ!!</i> (Lottie)	Block capitals to highlight the dessert's exclusivity Exclamation mark to emphasize a statement
	<i>buy the Toffee Tower! (Only at Treats café).</i> (Rhona)	Exclamation mark to emphasize an instruction Brackets to add information about the dessert's exclusivity and availability
	<i>Remember, only in treats cafe!</i> (Elizabeth C)	Exclamation mark to emphasize a statement
Call to action	<i>so get them while you can!</i> (Samuel)	Exclamation mark to add drama and emphasize the need to act promptly
	<i>by it now before its gone!!!!</i> (Ben)	Exclamation marks for additional drama and to emphasize the need to act promptly
	<i>Get yours NOW!</i> (Mary)	Block capitals to emphasize a command Exclamation mark to emphasize the need to act promptly
Slogan	<i>So go on, try the toffee tower, (if your tastbuds can handle it!)</i> (Ruby C)	Brackets to slip in an aside to challenge the reader Exclamation mark for emphasis
	<i>Get them before their gone! NOW!</i> (Susan)	Exclamation mark to emphasize a command Block capitals and exclamation mark for emphasis
	<i>If you'd like this, then buy it from Treats café – treat yourself!</i> (Bryony)	Dash allows for humour (in the form of a pun) to create a memorable ending Exclamation mark for emphasis
	<i>So come down to Treats café we will make your life SUPER DELICIOUS</i> (Octavia)	Block capitals for emphasis (further reinforced by the visual arrangement of text)

Discussion

It is important to note that this was an exploratory study that had some limitations, including the relatively small sample. The arbitrary and limited nature of the task, and the lack of choice in the task the children were asked to complete might also be considered limitations. However, Sharples (1999) argues that such a set of constraints should not be considered restrictions on writing. Instead, he suggests they should be viewed as a means of focusing the writer's attention. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that an alternative task (or even the one reported above) would have resulted in an even more playful use of punctuation if it were to be completed under normal classroom conditions. As indicated above, the task was a standardised test designed to assess children's writing attainment. However, the task could also be given with some means of print production to conjoin literary and graphic which would emphasize the graphic formatting of type (for example, typeface choices, line measure, leading, font size, letter- and word-spacing, justification, margins and relationships to pages, negative space, images and other graphic elements).

Poyner (2003, p. 128) argues that 'In the most fully realized and persuasive examples of postmodern graphic authorship, the designer has full control over the text, as commissioner, editor or writer.' However, the children in this study were not afforded such control as the task was prescribed rather than self-initiated and there were additional constraints (for example, time, the use of lined paper, length of lines, etc.).

In designing their texts, children had to be mindful of the goal (or purpose) of the writing. This was predetermined by the task itself that states that the description needs to both inform the reader about the contents of the new dessert and persuade the reader to try it. Other constraints inherent in the task included the form and audience for the writing with both the dessert's name and the café where it will be on sale being prescribed in the rubric of the assessment. The children were given a relatively short amount of time in which to complete their writing.

In relation to the first research question, 'What features of playful punctuation are evident in children's persuasive writing?', the children drew on their knowledge of punctuation and chose to employ a range of punctuation to attend to the task. Their advertisements for the new dessert included those punctuation marks frequently found in professional advertisements (e.g. exclamation and question marks) and also those less frequently used (e.g. asterisk and @ sign). The exclamation mark was used most frequently. Block capitals, brackets and question marks were also frequently used by the children. In contrast, the commercial @ sign, bullet points, the asterisk, ellipsis, slash, underlining and the dash were used most infrequently. The children's choice not to make more use of the ellipsis is interesting given Todd's (1995, p. 71) claim that it is often used in advertising

to leave something to the reader's imagination.

In relation to the second research question, 'How is this punctuation used to fulfil the different design elements outlined by Sharples for example setting goals, making plans and satisfying constraints, through communicating with and through the text (semantic and linguistic choices) to achieve a human effect?', the children's punctuation choices reflected an awareness of the effect they needed to achieve on the reader. Persuasive elements were included in each of the three parts (introduction, main description and concluding appeal) although some elements typically only appeared in one part.

Headings were typically centred. Block capitals being used to create impact ('TOFFEE TOWER' (Jack)) with the exclamation mark being used for additional emphasis ('TOFFEE TOWER!!!!!!' (Susan)). Within the opening, quotation marks around the dessert's name helped draw attention to the name of the new dessert (*Why not try our new delicious dessert called 'Toffee Tower'* (Natalie)). Punctuation was used for strong persuasive effect right from the start in Lata's extended opening that directly appeals to the audience ('*Do you crave for large toffee filled desserts? Does it make your mouth water for large ice-creams filled with all your favourite things?*'). Her decision to use questions helps to engage the reader from the beginning as well as create desire for the product. The importance of drawing the reader in is illustrated in Abigail's hook where block capitals were used to express emphasis ('*you'll NEVER believe the treat we've got up our sleeve's.*'). Some introductions also featured a call to action in the form of an invitation: '*Come to Treats café!*' (Sophia).

Punctuation was also chosen for persuasive effect in the children's main descriptions. For example, Carol's use of a question stimulates interest in the new dessert in the form of a hook and engages the reader by paving the way for information about the dessert's ingredients: '*Whats in the toffee tower your asking?*' Bryony's use of a parenthetical question appeals directly to the audience: '*(Do you feel like eating this yet?)*'. Her choice to use both round brackets (to slip in an aside) and a question mark (to provoke thought in the reader) helps to create desire for the product. The main description typically featured key information about the dessert's features. This is illustrated by Helen who used underlining to emphasize descriptive detail: '*& two scrumpcious, fudge-centred chocolate covered flakes*'. Strong imagery also featured in this section as illustrated by Ruby C who used an exclamation mark to indicate a strong feeling of approval: '*The smooth, soothing ice-cream along with sticky toffee sauce is a real dream!*'. Some of the children's persuasive descriptions made readers an offer, usually a benefit to potential customers. This is exemplified by Elizabeth C who included an exclamation mark to admire: '*To celebrate our new terrific toffee tower, Treats cafe has lowered it to half price!*'

The children's concluding appeals incorporated punctuation that was chosen for persuasive effect. Carol's final concluding appeal was centre-set on the page (and arranged over two lines). Written in capital letters, her hyperbolic sentence incorporated the dessert's name (on the first line) and included an exclamation mark for drama: '*THE TOFFEE TOWER IT'S THE GREATEST!*' Her choice to combine these helps attract attention. Block capitals were used by Lottie to highlight the dessert's exclusivity with multiple exclamation marks used for emphasis: '*But remember this tasty treat is only sold a TREAT'S CAFÉ!!*' Typically, the children's concluding appeals included a strong call for action as exemplified by Ben ('*by it now before its gone!!!!*') and Mary ('*Get yours NOW!*') with the exclamation mark being used to emphasize the need to act promptly. Slogans sometimes formed part of the call for action with explicit reference being made to the café's name. Bryony, for example, created a memorable ending through the use of a pun offset by a dash and ending in an exclamation mark for emphasis: '*If you'd like this, then buy it from Treats café – treat yourself!*' In contrast, Octavia used block capitals for emphasis which were further reinforced by the visual arrangement of the text: '*So come down to Treats café we will make your life SUPER DELICIOUS*'.

As indicated in the Results section, the children used punctuation to confirm and embellish various persuasive elements (e.g. audience, hook, key information). This helped the young writers to fulfil five important functions that according to Jefkins (1992) successful advertisements have to meet (see Table 6).

As designers of text, the children seemed to sense that conventional uses of language might be sometimes modified to create a certain effect. This was evident in the children's use of multiple exclamation marks (to add even more emphasis). As noted above, Susan used them in her heading after the dessert's name. This, combined with the use of block capitals, helps to fulfil an important function ('Attract attention') that, according to Jefkins (1992), successful advertisements have to fulfil. Multiple exclamation marks were evident in the children's concluding appeals. Julia used them to emphasize the new dessert's exclusivity ('*a PG rated ice cream!!*') where they helped her fulfil another important function ('Stimulate interest'; Jefkins, 1992). Lottie also used them to emphasize the new dessert's exclusivity (see Table 5) which helped her fulfil a different function ('Create desire') that advertisements have to fulfil (Jefkins, 1992). In contrast, Rose's use of multiple exclamation marks to express strong approval ('*Go on, give it a try. you'll never regret it! I promise!!!!*') help fulfil yet another function ('Inspire confidence') cited by Jefkins (1992). Finally, multiple exclamation marks were used by Ben (see above) and Sophia ('*so come down AND GET IT!!!*') for additional drama and to emphasize the need to act promptly – helping them to fulfil another important function ('Provoke action') of Jefkins' (1992).

TABLE 6.

Some examples of using punctuation and persuasive elements being used to fulfill Jenkins' (1992) functions

Persuasive element	Excerpt of writing	Punctuation used and effect when combined with words	Function
Headline / Heading	<i>THE TOFFEE TOWER!</i> (Lottie)	Block capitals [centred] to create impact Exclamation mark to emphasize	Attract attention
Hook	<i>you'll NEVER believe the treat we've got up our sleeve's.</i> (Abigail)	Block capitals to express emphasis	Stimulate interest
Audience	<i>Do you crave for large toffee filled deserts?</i> (Lata)	Question mark directly addresses the reader	Create desire
Key information	<i>10 – 10 people loved it</i> (Noah)	Dash to highlight customer satisfaction	Inspire confidence
Call to action	<i>Get yours NOW!</i> (Mary)	Block capitals to emphasize a command Exclamation mark to emphasize the need to act promptly	Provoke action

However, the breaking of 'rules' is a feature of design. Bringhurst, in *The elements of typographic style* (2004, p. 10), tells his readers 'By all means break the rules, and break them beautifully, deliberately and well. That is one of the ends for which they exist.' Rule breaking is indicated in the subtitle of Samara's (2020) bestselling graphic design book, *Design Elements: Understanding the rules and knowing when to break them - A Visual Communication Manual*. As noted earlier, commercial advertisements may deliberately break the rules or employ punctuation in other unconventional ways. Literary writing in particular has sometimes seen punctuation being playfully omitted. For example, the final chapter of *Ulysses* has no punctuation between two full stops. The poet e. e. cummings used capital letters inconsistently and often largely ignored conventional punctuation.

While exclamation marks featured frequently in the children's writing, some punctuation marks were only used on a few occasions. Despite this, they still assisted in fulfilling the writers' purpose:

The commercial @ sign was used by Max (see *Table 4*) to 'create desire' by emphasizing the new dessert's exclusivity and availability.

Bullet points were used by Ruby P and Lottie to 'stimulate interest' by listing dessert's contents.

Luke used the asterisk in his concluding appeal (see Results above) to 'provoke action' by slipping in aside which was written as a footnote, near the bottom of the page.

Kayla used an ellipsis to 'inspire confidence' by introducing each of the direct quotes of satisfied customers.

*'Many people have gave us there opinion. Robyn age 11 says...
Once I had finished my toffee tower I just wanted more!'*

*Beth age 11 says...
'My favourite bit was the toffee chunks.'*

Tommy used slashes to 'inspire confidence' by indicating alternatives when providing food allergy information.

Rhona used underlining in her main description (see Results) to 'provoke action' by emphasizing a certain word.

Michael used dashes (see *Table 2*) to 'create desire' by setting off an interruption in a sentence, to highlight an ingredient and to indicate an expansion.

In addition to these, Tommy also incorporated a trade mark symbol which – although not a punctuation mark – creates the effect of an authentic advertisement.

With few exceptions, the vast majority of children complied with the test's rubric that their 'writing should not include illustrations or elaborate lettering' (Twist & Brill, 2000, p. 4). However, Susan was an exception. She used eight medium spaced asterisks (not included in the numerical analysis) as decorative elements that were arranged as part of the heading (in a way similar to typographic ornaments). One of these asterisks was positioned in an elevated form in the heading between the words 'TOFFEE TOWER'. These, together with the use of block capitals and six heavy exclamation marks were used to create impact. The heavy exclamation mark (similar to the conventional exclamation mark) 'is often used to denote strong emotions or to emphasize something important in a text' and is 'often seen in more decorative or ornamental contexts' (HTML Symbols, 2024). A further two uses of this stylized version of a standard exclamation mark were

used by her. On both occasions they came immediately after the name of the new dessert ('So come on in and ask for a **TOFFEE TOWER!** and get dug in to your new **TOFFEE TOWER!**'). Susan's final concluding appeal ('**TRY It you know that you want to.**') was ringed (and so placed outside of the standard syntactical framework of lines and columns) for added emphasis.

Besides punctuation, paralinguistic qualities are also enabled through typography. As the article concerns writing, the graphic manifestation of language, a broader analysis could describe how typeface choice and text formatting – even if handwritten – impact both comprehension and personality. However, the children's persuasive descriptions were completed as a standardised assessment designed to assess their writing attainment. For this task, children are only given 10 minutes to complete it so it is likely that presentational aspects were not uppermost in their minds. Furthermore, the rubric states that the 'café needs a tempting description of the toffee tower' which will appear in their menu with the picture provided (see *Figure 2*) presumably in printed rather than handwritten form. In such instances, as Crystal notes 'When preparing material that will be printed, whether on paper or screen, writers leave most of the design decisions to the publisher and typesetter.' (2016, p. 130). This is especially true in terms of the graphic formatting of type (for example, typeface choices, line measure, leading, font size, letter- and word-spacing, justification, margins and relationships to pages, negative space, images and other graphic elements). An image of the Toffee Tower was supplied and as previously mentioned, children are told as part of the administration of the test, that their 'writing should not include illustrations or elaborate lettering' (Twist & Brill, 2000, p. 4). Furthermore, children are given a writing booklet that includes a page of lines on which to write their description thus adding certain constraints in terms of design decisions.

Conclusion

Through their writing, the children demonstrated an ability to draw on their knowledge of the topic. They used this knowledge to construct their own texts through redesign rather than through simple reduplication (Siegal, 2006; Geneshi & Dyson, 2009; Marsh, 2009). Sharples (1999, p. 59) notes how 'We continually reshape the ideas and words of others for our own needs.' Sometimes this borrowing is more obvious than others. For example, Nathaniel incorporated the words of a popular song into his advertisement ('*you scream! I scream! we all scream for ice-cream!!!*') – but with the addition of unconventional punctuation in the form of multiple exclamation marks to express strong feeling and in doing so creating an effect on the reader. Interestingly, the same words have also been used in a commercial advertisement for chocolate syrup (by Hershey's which can be viewed on Youtube

(Tanner, 2010).

In designing text, considerable cognitive demands are made on young writers. Cognitive studies of the writing process have shown it to be a complex and demanding activity where the writer has to satisfy a variety of constraints. Structural models have sought to capture this complexity. Perhaps the most influential of these is the model proposed by Hayes and Flower (1980), in which they identified three component processes – planning, translating (formulation) and review. Alamargot and Fayol (2009) critique this model for neglecting the formulation component and its constituent processes. In an adapted version of the Hayes and Flower (1980) model, Berninger and Swanson (1994) included text generation and transcription within the formulation component with the latter including punctuation. In the past, punctuation has been relegated to a relatively subservient 'secretarial' role (Graves, 1983) where – along with spelling – it is considered part of the mechanics of writing (e.g. Glynn et al., 1982).

More recently, Fayol (1997) has argued that punctuation is an integral part of transforming thought into the linear dimension that writing requires. Wagner et al. (2011) suggest that as such, punctuation may be more related not only to thought but also to simple grammar. Findings from Dávalos Esparza (2016) suggest that primary (elementary) school children employ clues from some categories of words which guide their decisions about the choice of punctuation marks to use that best reflects the semantic and / or discursive function in the text. She also found that in terms of children's punctuation development, there were later indicators where children combined the use of basic punctuation with expressive forms (question marks and exclamation marks) in almost all areas of the text, as well as choosing one mark – among several – to create an effect on the reader or to change a word's meaning.

Findings from the present study are testament to children's ingenuity in using punctuation in creative and imaginative ways to design text. The findings indicate that 9–11 year-old children find persuasive writing offers a range of opportunities for creative and playful uses of punctuation, even though the young writers were not prompted to consider using this. The intuitive recognition of these opportunities led to children demonstrating how they could make numerous stylistic choices that enhanced their imaginative writing, helping them to support the writer's intention in a similar way that paralanguage does in speech using tone of voice, hesitation noises and body language to convey a message. More nuanced meanings and emotions were conveyed using a broad range of punctuation. The study reported in the present article illustrates how playful punctuation can contribute to the design of a text and how young writers can use it to contribute to the meaning, purpose and appropriateness of the text for its intended audience.

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