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**Children Transitioning from Oral to Written Argumentation:  
Signaling Meaning through Punctuation in Writing**

**Part II**

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**Abstract**

This research examines children transitioning from oral to written argumentation in persuasion. We study young children's use of punctuation in argumentation. This punctuation is used to signal meaning conveyed naturally through prosodic features (pauses, stress words, and pitch) of child speech. Children's transition from oral to written persuasion is a complex act that has had limited attention in the child linguistic development research literature but is vital for developing persuasive writing. Furthermore, we know children across the world naturally and frequently use arguments when speaking to convey their thoughts, needs, and emotions to make requests. In Abdul-Baki et al., 2016, we presented samples of six-to-eight year olds speaking and writing to persuade a parent to make a purchase for a *Kiddi Zoom Smart Watch*, arrange a trip to *Disney World*, or to indulge in the joy of frozen yogurt at *Orange Leaf*. However, we do not know how emerging writers advance in their development of argumentation, move from lower-level arguing (whines, begs, trades) to more advanced strategies of arguments (appeals to audiences, social benefits for another), and use punctuation to signal meaning and arguments in writing. Some research has examined prosody in argument writing with older students 11- 14 year olds in Brazil (Horowitz, 2017; Soncin and Tenani, 2017). Other research has identified the use of

prosodic features for expression in oral reading of young readers but does not take into account the use of prosody in writing (Schwanenflugel et al., 2004). This use of prosody in reading is a hallmark of the achievement of reading fluency; similarly, use of prosody with intonations is also a hallmark of achievement of writing fluency and effective written persuasion. We hypothesize that the use of prosody in writing develops over time and is essential for elevating the arguments presented in persuasive writing, but this is a form of writing long neglected in American education. In other words, effective presentation of prosody in writing elevates and distinguishes the arguments in persuasive writing. In this research, we report on six-to eight-year olds' use of arguments and punctuation. Horowitz (1995, pp.51-55) provided examples of how children transformed oral expression to writing. In addition, hierarchical set of categories of persuasion used in oral and written argumentation was developed for preservice teacher use in the classroom. These categories of arguments were *Simple Appeals* (Requests, Pleas, Beggings—sometimes accompanied by vocalizations such as whines, begs, pouts, temper tantrums, screams); **Higher Level Appeals with Reasoning** including Normative Appeals, Appeals beneficial to Persuader, Higher Level Appeals (task related statements) **Audience Directed Appeals**—Negative Trades, Normative Trades, Audience Specific Trades, Appeals to Offset Counter Arguments; Complex **Creative Logical Arguments**. We asked the following questions:

1. How do children six-to-eight years of age translate prosodic features of speech into written punctuation in persuasion? How might writing persuasion enhance awareness of prosodic features in speech—in the case of children and/or teachers?
2. How does punctuation function in child writing? What purposes does this punctuation serve for these beginning writers?

3. What types of arguments do these young children use to convey their needs and emotions? When and how do children use punctuation in written texts? When are errors logical and meaningful or illogical but still conveying a meaning?

*Procedures:* Undergraduates enrolled in RDG 3803 Writing Development and Processes at UTSA obtained samples of writing from 10, six-to-eight year olds. The children attempted to persuade a parent/guardian to purchase a popular toy, arrange a trip, or plan an event. The study was conducted in a small classroom with only a graduate student present with the child. The task required the child to think about a request, imagine a parent/guardian present, and to speak or write their request for the adult. The speaking was, then, tape-recorded and later analyzed for prosodic features; the text produced in handwriting was later analyzed, a) for punctuation marks and b) arguments presented. We looked at the types and locations of the punctuation, the types of arguments rendered based on Horowitz's hierarchy of categories of arguments, and how the punctuation was related to the arguments presented in writing. The ten children were from a rural community in South Texas and attended a public elementary school. They were selected by their teachers to participate in the research.

*Findings:* Our study revealed there were a wide range of performance in the oral expressions and use of prosodic features of language—when conveying a point of view and making a request. First, our study showed a range in degree and type of prosodic features—use of pitch, word stresses, pauses, and rhythm/pacing used among the children studied. There were individual differences in vocalization (whining, begging, pouting, “throwing a temper tantrum, screaming) to make requests. Second, some children performed better, more dramatically and persuasively in the oral mode while others were simply better writers. Personality differences and interests were present in the speaking and writing. Third, the oral language the children used included

voicing of arguments (begs to trades) and gestures which children practice in everyday conversation when persuading but are lacking when writing. Many children did not know how to signal arguments with punctuation in writing that were expressed as arguments in speaking. Fourth, the study reveals that some of what seemed to be illogical errors in punctuating had logic to them, when the reader probed more deeply into the text.

*Discussion:* Translating speaking into writing is a complex activity and usually is not taught in schools. This translation act warrants teaching. Michael Halliday (1987), the distinguished linguist, argued that writing is a distinctive mode of meaning that is significantly different from speaking. Interestingly, he has also argued that speaking is linguistically more complex than writing and that writers must learn the conventions of writing which require a condensing and tightening of language to convey a message. To advance in school, the writer must become skilled in academic writing and ways of persuading an audience of readers. Thus, new standards for schools pay high attention to argumentation and persuasion across the grades and disciplines.

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