

Variability of Punctuation Marks in English

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Punctuation, like all elements of language is characterized by certain pragmatic and interpretive potential. Punctuation is an important text-forming means, as it contributes to the implementation of communication between the author of the text and the reader. Interacting with each other in a specific situational context, they affect the reader only in the text; in a particular text structure (Demidova 2003:4).

Punctuation marks form a semiotic system, which is a means of adequate organization of a written text. The semiotic character of punctuation becomes apparent due to the conditions of their functioning, the register of the text in particular. In addition, the semiotic nature of punctuation, its system, as well as the principles, rules and regulations shaping the text and, as a consequence, the functions of punctuation have undergone considerable changes for many centuries.

The functions, pragmatic and interpretive potential of punctuation first of all depend on the historical period and the type of discourse in which they function, as the choice of the punctuation marks is conditioned by the properties and specific features of the discourse. Besides, a number of other no less important factors affect the functioning of punctuation: the variety of the language (British or American), the style and the substyle of the text, the author's individual style and even the features of a particular text.

Thus, a comprehensive analysis of the characteristics of functioning of punctuation system takes into consideration a number of factors, both linguistic and extra-linguistic, such as: 1) the historical era, 2) the functional style, 3) the domain of the text, 4) the author's style, 5) the syntactic structure of the text, 6) the semantic structure of the text. In the case of fiction the literary trend to which a piece of literature belongs should also be taken into account.

60 works in British English have been analyzed with the aim of singling out the specific usage of punctuation marks in three functional styles: fiction, drama and scholarly writing. The comparison of the system of punctuation marks used in these styles shows that fiction and drama mainly employ the signs of the primary punctuation system. Unlike fiction and drama, the signs of both the primary and peripheral punctuation systems are used in scholarly writing. The functioning of the following punctuation marks has been compared in these styles: the parentheses and the ellipsis.

The word "parentheses" appeared in English towards the end of the 14th century from Latin via Greek. The parentheses mark the inclusion of additional information in a sentence and separate insertions from the main text so that its flow should not be interrupted. Eric Partridge mentions that "... without them, the sentence is grammatically and logically complete: they explain or modify, but they do not determine the sense" (Partridge 2005:65).

Insertions can be included with the help of three types of the sign: parentheses, or round brackets; square brackets and curly brackets. The latter sign is used in scientific

writing, mostly in mathematics. Round and square brackets are used both in fiction and drama, and in scholarly writing; but their functions and distribution depend on the stylistic affiliation of the text.

In drama, square brackets are used to separate stage directions from the characters' speech. This function of square brackets has greatly increased in the course of time because lengthy stage directions have become a characteristic feature of drama at the turn of the 19th century, e.g., in "Hamlet" the number of square brackets comprises 0.52%, whereas in "Pygmalion" by Bernard Shaw it reaches 10.3%.

Fiction avoids using square brackets and employs round brackets instead. But, on the whole, the percentage of round brackets in fiction is very low unless it is the specific feature of the author's style, e.g., James Joyce uses 4.6% of round brackets in his *Ulysses* to insert grammatical units of different grammatical structures to indicate a number of functions such as:

- **concomitant actions:** *Bringing his host down and kneeling he heard twine with his second bell the first bell in the transept (he is lifting his) and, rising, heard (now I am lifting) their two bells (he is kneeling) twang in diphthong.* (Joyce 1922: Episode 1)
- **clarification:** *Cantrell and Cochrane's Ginger Ale (Aromatic).*
- **the author's or the character's attitude:** *Excuse, miss, there's a (whh!) just a (whh!) fluff.*
- **contrast:** *He wore a loose neckcloth and altogether he looked (though he was not) a dying man.* (Joyce 1922: Episode 1)

The functions of round brackets used in scholarly writing are mostly specific, not met in fiction and drama. Among these functions the following can be mentioned:

- **defining the terms:** [...] in both spoken and written **DISCOURSE** (any continuous use of language which is longer than one sentence). (Thorne 1997:1)
- **exemplifying:** New words are rarely added because pronouns (e.g. *I, you, she, he* [...]), [...] (ibid:4)
- **introducing symbols:** **Nouns (N)** are traditionally known as **naming words;** [...] (ibid:4)
- **mentioning alternatives:** Identify the main **lexical verb(s)** and mark the main **clause(s)**. (ibid:41)
- **enumerating the section of the text:** In **Received Pronunciation (RP)** – see Section 5.2) ... (ibid:50)

S. Greenbaum includes these functions in the group of minor functions of the round brackets, but for scientific writing they can be considered major functions because of a great frequency of their occurrence (Greenbaum 1996:539). Besides, it is seen from the examples above that the specific feature of scholarly writing is the use of a great number of typographic means (italics, bold, capitalization, etc) that facilitate the perception of the information.

The ellipsis is used to indicate 1) the omission in the quotation, 2) hesitation and suspense, and 3) something left unsaid, 4) interval and hiatus, and 5) reflectiveness. In its

former function the ellipsis is used in scholarly writing and does not correspond to any prosodic feature.

E.g.: *A liturgy should be as self-explanatory as possible and, above all, readily intelligible: "the rites ... should be within the people's powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation".*
(Crystal 1964:151)

The latter four functions of the ellipsis prosodically correspond to a complete break in the phonation, especially if it occurs at the end of the passage; or a filled hesitation pause. In these two functions the ellipsis is met in declamatory style, especially in drama.

e.g. (1) *For old Mary Ann*
She doesn't care a damn,
*But, **his**ing up her petticoats...*
He crammed his mouth with fry and munched and droned.
(Joyce 1922:Episode 1)

(2) *JACK. I never knew you when you weren't . . .*
ALGERNON. What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?
(Wilde 1895:Act 1)

It is worth mentioning that before the 19th century ellipsis was not used either in fiction, or in drama; in the 19th century it was used only in drama.

N.D. Azarova (Azarova 2001:1) mentions that the scientific discourse reveals a steady tendency towards a unified use of punctuation (and therefore their unambiguous interpretation), which results in increased semiotic nature of punctuation (in other types of writing it is decreases). The analysis of the texts of scholarly writing discloses the fact that the unified character of the punctuation system in this register is overestimated. Punctuation marks are of multifunctional character not only in declamatory style, but in the scientific discourse as well.

Thus, we may conclude that:

1. The variability of punctuation marks in English is accounted for by the historical, stylistic, structural and other linguistic and extralinguistic factors.
2. The comparative analysis of the punctuation marks used in fiction, drama and scientific prose has proved that scientific prose makes use of a much larger system of punctuation marks than fiction and drama. Not only primary punctuation marks, but also punctuation marks belonging to the periphery of punctuation, typographical signs and formula are excessively employed in scientific prose, which enables the author to make the material presented more illustrative.
3. The functions of the types of discourse under study considerably differ both in the volume of their functions and the frequency of their occurrence and distribution. In this respect scientific prose is opposed to fiction and drama.

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Կետադրական նշանների փոփոխականությունը անգլերենում

Հոդվածը նվիրված է անգլերենի կետադրական նշանների, մասնավորապես փակագծի և բազմակետի, կիրառման առանձնահատկությունների վերլուծությանը խոսույթի երեք տեսակներում՝ արձակում, դրամայում և գիտական ոճում: Կետադրական նշանների գործաբանական արժեքը պայմանավորված է մի շարք գործոններով, որոնց թվում կարելի է նշել պատմական դարաշրջանը, խոսույթի տեսակը, հեղինակային ոճը և այլն: Փակագծերը և բազմակետը, որպես կանոն, տարբեր գործառույթներ են իրականացնում խոսույթի նշված երեք տեսակներում: