

COMPARATIVE THEORIES ON PUNCTUATION MARKS: CONVENTIONS, OPTIONS, OR RULES

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Abstract: The article deals with the characters that are considered punctuation marks are defined, and described the function they serve within written language. The aim of this study is to highlight the significance of punctuation in English language, conventions, and options. Before, the reader will be given an introduction about the difference between writing and speech and how each depends on the other. This difference is also at the root of the ambiguity about what punctuation marks are and what purpose they serve.

Key words: punctuation marks, written text and speech, sentences, clauses, phrases

Annotatsiya: Maqolada tinish belgilari hisoblangan belgilarning ta'riflari berilgan va ular yozma nutqda bajaradigan vazifalari tavsiflangan. Ushbu tadqiqotning maqsadi ingliz tilidagi tinish belgilarining ahamiyatini, uning konventsionalari va variatsiyalarini ta'kidlashdir. O'quvchiga yozish va nutq o'rtasidagi farq va biri boshqasiga qanday bog'liqligi haqida tushuncha beriladi. Bu farq, shuningdek, tinish belgilarining nima ekanligi va ular qanday maqsadda xizmat qilishi haqidagi chalkashliklarga asoslanadi.

Tayanch so'zlar: tinish belgilari, yozma matn va nutq, gaplar, ergash gaplar, iboralar.

Аннотация: В статье даны определения символов, которые считаются знаками препинания, и описаны функции, которые они выполняют в письменной речи. Цель данного исследования — подчеркнуть значение пунктуации в английском языке, его условностях и вариантах. Читателю будет

дано представление о разнице между письмом и речью и о том, как одно зависит от другого. Это различие также лежит в основе неясности относительно того, что такое знаки препинания и какой цели они служат.

Ключевые слова: знаки препинания, письменный текст и речь, предложения, придаточные предложения, словосочетания.

Punctuation has a significance role in English texts. They play an important role in marking off sentences, clauses, phrases, and separate items. They, further, play a grammatical role in indicating the type of relationship between clauses. The main function of punctuation is to separate phrases and clauses into meaningful units of information. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the basic structure of sentences – phrases and clauses – to understand the proper uses of punctuation. When punctuation is missing or incorrectly used, the reader may get a completely different message than the one intended.

By dividing the text into units based on meaning, punctuation in English facilitates reading and understanding. Similarly, by setting off the grammatical or logical units, punctuation marks help the reader's mind (through his eyes) to distinguish these units and the relations holding between them. The aim of this study is to highlight the significance of punctuation in English language, conventions, and options.

In this article, the characters that are considered punctuation marks are defined, and described the function they serve within written language. Before, the reader will be given an introduction about the difference between writing and speech and how each depends on the other. This difference is also at the root of the ambiguity about what punctuation marks are and what purpose they serve.

The role of punctuation marks in the Latin writing system is ambiguous in several ways. Historically they changed from written 'additions' to part of the character set of written language. Their form and coverage was not necessarily bound to a fixed set of rules, but rather depended on the habits and taste of the reader and

later writers who inserted them into the text. Within the linguistic field, they are a difficult topic when it comes to the issue of the relationship between written and spoken language, which will be the focus for this article.

The topic of punctuation marks is discussed on two separate levels by linguists. Until recently viewed as a means to transmit pause and tonality in spoken language, punctuation slowly developed into a discrete part of written language. The discussion is bound to the broader question of the interdependence of writing and speech. In more traditional linguistics, where writing was seen as dependent on speech, the role of punctuation was vague and questionable. In recent decades, new theories have acknowledged the growth of written language and thus, within this separation, have found room for punctuation marks. However, the differences between the older view (e.g. of Saussure in the 20th century) that writing is merely a depiction of speech, of limited importance [1, 28], and new ideas of punctuation as a subsystem within written language, is only recently being discussed [2, 3].

Talking about comparative theories, historically, punctuation marks were added by readers to manuscripts to help them recite the written text aloud. This can be seen as the origin of the comparative theory: Some linguists, for example Leonard Bloomfield who contributed to the development of linguistics in the 1930s, consider punctuation marks as a means to encode in writing the tonality and pauses of spoken language. “Writing is not language, but merely a means of recording language by means of visual marks” [3,21]. This more traditional view is the comparative theory; structures are transferred from one system into the other (in this example, from speech to writing). This theory often assigns the following punctuation marks . , ; : to different lengths of pauses of speech, while ? ! are treated as transmitters of tonality.

Nunberg’s sub-system for punctuation. The linguist Geoffrey Nunberg argues that the system of written languages developed an independent existence once the act of reading liberated itself from the practice of voiced articulation, and silent reading, the act of reading without articulation of the written, became established [2,12]. One of the earliest witnesses of the distinctions between written and spoken language is

Isidore de Seville. In his view, written letters are signs without sound that can convey the expressions of those not present (including the dead). Further, the act of silent reading allows the reader to concentrate on the written and interpret it more efficiently than, if it were read aloud [4, 21].

As reading changed from oral recitation to silent reading, the role of the punctuation marks changed from a handwritten addition – put in by the reader to structure the text for himself to aid his interpretation of the reciting – to an interpretation of the text as the author intended it to be read, in silence. With silent reading, the marks became part of the Latin character set to be printed directly into the text for structural reasons.

In *The Linguistics of Punctuation* (1990) Nunberg questions the comparative theory. Although distinguishing between the written language system and the spoken one is now becoming more respected by linguists, it is still being legitimized by referring to the properties of spoken language. He means that the spoken language is still often set above the written one, to draw a conclusion [2, 23]. This is visible for example in how writing is taught; children learn to set punctuation according to the length of pause they would make while reading aloud. From this example, we can see how intertwined writing and speech are. It is true, we do assign the marks with a certain length when speaking aloud, however that is not the only function the marks serve. The comparative approach to writing is still in evidence when discussing punctuation and favors the idea of its transcriptional purpose. The argument of the linguists shows the ambiguity surrounding punctuation marks. Punctuation marks are assigned different roles in the system of written language: on the one hand, they are supposed to transmit the pauses made in oral transcription and on the other hand to convey structure to written communication. In simplified terms, the difference between the comparative theory and the more recent approach is the distance between writing and speech.

Nunberg believes that over at least 400 years of development, writing has lived a separate life from speech; this starts with the age it is learned, the media it is used in,

and the content it transmits. He suggests that under these circumstances unique structural features are developed in each system. Particularly the graphical constructions around writing have been ignored in the comparative approach [2, 3]. The “various systems of figural conventions” surrounding the texts are connoted with meaning and customs that apply to the written text only. He argues that the punctuation system is a linguistic subsystem that has some functional overlap with the devices of speech [2, 3].

The duality of the discussion around punctuation marks derives from their original role as manually inserted marks to mark pauses for speaking text, to one of conveying a certain interpretation that the author imposes already within his text as part of the alphabetic character set.

Understanding on which level of reading the marks occur helps the designer to support each individual function better. The marks that have their function within the processing part of reading convey the meaning of the sentences structure. They need to be clearly visible for a fast processing of the meaning. The marks with their function in the scanning of the graphic information, on the other hand, influence the overall text appearance.

Reference

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