



Examining the Written Standard of English Punctuation in News Media Discourse

Karina Muratovna Amirkhanova^{1*}, Anna Viktorovna Zorina²

¹ Department of European Languages and Cultures, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia; carrie11@yandex.ru

² Department of European Languages and Cultures, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia; azorina@mail.ru

Abstract

The peculiarities of English punctuation in news media discourse are the main topic of the article. Punctuation must be regarded as an extremely important set of usage norms since it is a component of the written standard and a tool that helps make writing make sense. The study presents the findings of a thorough examination of 60 news texts from The Guardian pieces. The punctuation marks were examined from the perspective of accepted usage conventions. Both standard uses and instances of standard deviation are thoroughly described in the study. The findings demonstrate that a range of punctuation rules are adhered to in news articles; however, because news media discourse serves an expressive purpose, there may be instances of nonstandard punctuation, including misuse and overuse of marks. The article aims to expose patterns in punctuation usage in contemporary news media discourse.

Keywords: Media Discourse; English Punctuation; English Language.

1. Introduction

It is thought that written English has evolved a logical and consistent conventional punctuation system where each punctuation mark serves a specific purpose (Trask, 1997). Although punctuation is a phenomenon that has been defined in a variety of ways, attempts to define it are typically very general or couched in metaphorical language, according to Krahn. Punctuation is viewed as a highly developed system that modifies linguistic forms on phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic strata in written texts. It is considered an essential component of written discourse, serving to bind elements of a text (Qadir & Padar, 2022).

According to Krahn, punctuation is "a system of symbols and graphic features used to protect the integrity of the sentence in the English writing system and make it visible." We follow this definition of punctuation. In his thorough analysis of the development of punctuation, Krahn notes that, by the turn of the 20th century, a relatively stable set of symbols had emerged; nonetheless, opinions on how well those symbols functioned in a text varied. There were two controversial approaches to punctuation up until the turn of the 20th century: the grammatical approach and the rhetorical approach. Krahn refers to the 20th century as "the Century of Little Progress" because it did not significantly advance our understanding of punctuation (Krahn, 2014). In addition to reflecting speech, punctuation is used to help make writing comprehensible (Crystal, 2006). According to Crystal, there are two extreme perspectives on punctuation: the first addresses the idea that knowing and using punctuation is not really necessary because any text can be understood without it; the second viewpoint supports the idea that punctuation is necessary because it improves legibility and allows people to reflect speech melody, pauses, and rhythm.

Looking back, Ben Jonson's English Grammar (17th century) was the first to recognize punctuation's central role in grammar. He was the one who approached the topic with great seriousness and considered it in the context of grammar. Since then, writers have become more conscious of the presentation of their work and have never before paid as much attention to punctuation. In order to assess punctuation, one must consider both semantic and pragmatic viewpoints, which indicate the author's intention and the effect they wished to achieve, as well as the meaning they wish to express and make evident to the reader. Studies view punctuation marks as indicators or tools that authors leave for readers to help them navigate and provide guidance as they read (Scheible, 2015). Punctuation in written discourse is viewed as a system that deals with decisions that must be made from a range of options provided by a language. According to Krahn, a written

sentence has two dimensions: static and dynamic, and it is projected orthogonally. Static punctuation (vertical or capital letters, underlining, bold, italics, hyphens, apostrophes, etc.) modifies the phonological and morphological properties of graphemes in a semantic way. Additionally, terminal punctuation is semantic and static.

2. Literature Review

Numerous NLP scholars have studied headlines, including Banko et al. (2002) for headline creation and Ono (2016) for NH translation. Intertextual analysis has been done for linguistic analysis by Fairclough (1995). Shie (2010) has concentrated on the differences in lexical features between the Time Supplement and New York Times news headlines. In order to comprehend how online NHs depict the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, Lombardi (2018) conducted a critical discourse analysis of these materials.

Numerous writers have noted different aspects of news headlines, such as Nordlund's (2003) work on news reporting, Ono's (2016) work on "Linguistic Analysis of Newspaper Discourse in Theory and Practice," Agu's (2015) study on the linguistic and stylistic analysis of newspaper reportage, and Ono's (2016) analysis on tense in NHs. There is no denying that the grammar in these headlines is distinct from that of regular sentences. It encompasses linguistic elements like purposeful ambiguity and odd tensile usage. As was already mentioned, these pieces are all sublime. However, there isn't much research on the inventive use of punctuation in newspaper headlines. We have attempted to close this gap in this paper (Roy & Singh, 2022). A binary relationship between spoken and written language has been assumed in traditional discussions of speech and writing (Coulmas, 1989). For instance, speech has been described as dialogic, interpersonal, ephemeral, spontaneous, loosely structured, and informal. Writing, on the other hand, has been characterized as formal, objective, monologic, long-lasting, and highly structured. Studies with an ethnographic focus have recently argued (Besnier, 1995) that the relationship between writing and speech is spectral rather than binary. A written text may be more traditionally speech-like than a typical conversation, or vice versa, depending on the social context. Similarly, research in linguistics and literacy has shown that linguistic representations can share traits with spoken and written language (Naomi, 2001).

3. Methodology

We have examined 60 articles from The Guardian newspaper that were published between 2020 and 2022 in order to track the quirks in the usage of punctuation in Modern English. The standard rules outlined in contemporary punctuation book manuals were used to analyze the punctuation marks. Every instance of inconsistency was documented and examined in light of contemporary standard guidelines.

4. Results

The most common mark is the period (stop, full stop, point, full point), which can be used to both join and divide items. At the top of the punctuation hierarchy, everything is much more obvious. A period is used, first and foremost, to divide sentences; it comes after fully declarative sentences. The period is also used in abbreviations and decimals (the R rate in the UK is currently estimated to be between 1.1 and 1.2).

There were no instances of a period in contractions or abbreviations that the researchers could find because, despite its historical usage, there is a current trend to do away with it in favor of speed, economy, and typography: Some, though, applauded the shift in strategy. Norwich general practitioner Dr Ed Turnham told the MHRA (King, 2004). Another instance of a period is in relation to electronic addresses; the various components that comprise a URL are now included in this dividing use of the period, which is now known as "dot": Check out data.gov.uk. The period allows the reader to distinguish between numerals with different values: ... spending billions to safeguard jobs, investing £2.4bn each year for disadvantaged pupils...

Typically, the question mark is used to ask a question (What countries are currently being hit the hardest?) in place of completing a sentence. However, there are some quirks that help convey annoyance and irritation, such as rhetorical questions (20% of all question sentences): "Why is there no national strategy?" There were no instances of exclamation marks in any of the articles that were examined, supporting the claim that they are either discouraged or outright prohibited in contemporary newspapers (King, 2004). Instead, the question mark helps to expose annoyance, irritation, and irony: When people stop testing, how can we determine the prevalence of cases?

The term "inverted commas," which originated in the eighteenth century in Great Britain, was subsequently renamed "quotation marks" and is used to quote direct speech, including complete statements such as "That partly stems from government policies and announcements but by no means all of it - it would have happened anyway." and a portion of it (The Law Society of New South Wales warned that many of the thousands of Covid fines imposed on the state's most vulnerable citizens were invalid, unfair, and had led to the accumulation of "debt they are unable to pay," calling on the premier, Dominic Perrottet, to "urgently" review the fines).

According to researchers, semicolons make up only a small percentage of punctuation marks—90% of all marks are either periods or commas. Nevertheless, we discovered a few semicolon instances in the papers we were looking at. The semicolon can convey a wide range of ideas. It is most frequently used to break up word groups with lots of commas so that the meaning is clear and a lot of information can be crammed into one sentence: "Some people might not choose to be tested even if they knew, or suspected, they had symptoms because they would lose their income; at times, tests were difficult to get." "Some people had jobs that required frequent testing, and those requirements changed over time."

The semicolon can occasionally address grammatical parallelism: Included in these were 213 "dangerous occurrences," or situations with the potential to cause serious harm; 5,753 cases in which a staff member contracted Covid-19; and 41 fatalities among individuals who had contracted the illness at work. The semicolon has the ability to both unite and divide, as demonstrated by the following examples: "I have not spoken to a single doctor who does not want to participate in the vaccine rollout; medical professionals are acutely aware of the importance of vaccinations."

A nice example of using a semicolon to make a sentence readable is the one that follows: Immunocompromising conditions, cancer, inflammatory diseases, chronic lung, liver, cardiac, or neurological diseases, diabetes, severe chronic kidney disease, severe obesity, or being severely underweight are among the qualifying medical conditions. The fact that there are so few instances of semicolons in newspaper articles indicates that they are becoming less common in news media discourse. The colon serves a variety of purposes, some of which are most frequently observed in discourse within the news media: the introduction of a list (Australia is nevertheless behind) that includes New Zealand (229), China (231), Singapore (239), Korea (244), and some nations with much smaller populations in order to draw the reader's attention to the topic of vaccination rollout: national and state progress.introducing a direct speech (Duncan Cook, the Covid-19 infection survey's deputy director, stated that "today's release is a valuable piece of the puzzle for understanding the impact of the pandemic across the UK"); introducing a conclusion (But let's be clear: even though these numbers are encouraging, they do not paint the whole picture.); information sources and photographer names (Source: data.gov.uk). Image courtesy of Phil Noble. One of the most frequently used punctuation marks in news discourse is the colon because it can be used for a number of purposes and convey a wide range of meanings. It can also be used economically, as in article headlines where it's crucial to convey crucial information in a way that grabs the reader's attention quickly: Chief medical officers support rescheduling second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

5. Discussion

The current study reveals that there are many different interpretations that writers apply to punctuation marks in news media discourse. For instance, authors may choose to use square brackets in place of round brackets, substitute a single quote for an inverted comma, or place a comma anywhere between two main clauses without necessarily doing so. The results indicate that exclamations are uncommon in these kinds of texts; all abbreviations are rapidly moving toward eliminating the period; colon and semicolon serve a wide range of purposes, but semicolons are becoming less common; the comma is the most contentious mark because it frequently results in inconsistencies and can be overused or misused. Using commas to prevent improper modification, dynamic (horizontal) punctuation aims to maintain the canonical (SVO) sentence's integrity and make it visible. Quotations, parentheses, brackets, and dashes are all interpolations; they are not a part of the original sentence. The colon and semicolon are adjuncts to sentences. One type of intraquotation punctuation is ellipsis. Conflicts with right closure punctuation are resolved by the absorption rule. Markedness is involved in punctuation. A common observation is that semicolons make up only a small percentage of punctuation marks, with periods and commas accounting for 90% of all marks.

In addition to serving a mechanical purpose and being an essential component of written discourse, punctuation is significant from a pragmatic standpoint as well because it joins sentences and gives texts coherence. News media texts, which are thought of as a reflection of media communicative practices, have a significant impact on a variety of modern

language practices; they represent trends in the development of any language system, including punctuation, which has an ever-increasing potential for global expansion (Zorina & Amirkhanova, 2022).

6. Conclusion

As Crystal notes, "punctuation is much more than a grammatical afterthought" (Crystal, 2015), and many of its rules are subject to change or become outdated. Punctuation has always been a matter of style. There isn't a single set of guidelines that can describe how to utilize every punctuation mark. The analysis of punctuation in news media discourse reveals that most regulations governing the use of punctuation marks are adhered to in this type of discourse, though researchers' methods for doing so vary. The articles under investigation demonstrate that a range of rules are followed, but because news media discourse serves an expressive purpose, there may be non-standard or alternative punctuation usage. We follow the pragmatic approach, which demonstrates the significance of making sure punctuation is presented within a single genre and entirely dependent upon it.

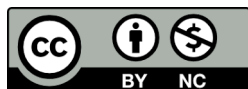
Acknowledgements

This paper has been supported by the Kazan Federal University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.

References

- Agu, I. E. (2015). A linguistic-stylistic analysis of newspaper reportage. *International Journal*, 20.
- Banko, M., Mittal, V. O., & Witbrock, M. J. (2000, October). Headline generation based on statistical translation. In *Proceedings of the 38th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics* (pp. 318-325).
- Baron, N. S. (2001). Commas and canaries: The role of punctuation in speech and writing. *Language Sciences*, 23(1), 15-67.
- Besnier, N. (1995). *Literacy, emotion and authority: reading and writing on a Polynesian atoll* (No. 16). Cambridge University Press.
- Coulmas, F. (1989). *Writing Systems of the World*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Crystal, D. (2006). *The Fight for English. How Language Pundits Ate, Show, and Left*. Oxford University Press, 239p.
- Crystal, D. (2015). *Making a Point: The Pernickity Story of English Punctuation*. St. Martin's Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Harlow: Longman.
- King, G. (2004). *Good Punctuation*. Published by New York Harper Collins Publishers, 240p.
- Krahn, A. E. (2014). *A new paradigm for punctuation* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee).
- Lombardi, D. (2018). Critical Discourse Analysis of online News Headlines: A Case of the Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting.
- Nordlund, M. (2003). *Linguistic Manipulation: An Analysis of How Attitudes are Displayed in News Reporting*.
- Ono, K. (2016). Translation of news headlines. In *Proceedings of Machine Translation Summit IX: Papers*.
- Qadir, E. M., & Padar, H. H. (2022). Punctuation in English and Kurdish: A Contrastive Study". *Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 41-61. doi:10.14500/kujhss.v5n1y2022.pp41-61.
- Roy, S., & Singh, A. K. (2022). Constructive use of punctuation in Indian English news headlines. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(2), 817-826.
- Scheible, J. (2015). *Digital Shift: The Cultural Logic of Punctuation*. University of Minnesota Press, 176 p.
- Shie, J. (2010). Lexical feature variations between New York Times and Times Supplement News headlines. *Concentric: Studies in Linguistics*, 36(1), 79-103.
- Trask, R. L. (1997). *The Penguin Guide to Punctuation*. Penguin Books, 162.

Zorina, A. V., & Amir Khanova, K. M. (2022). English-Language Tourism Media Discourse: Stylistic Features. *Res Militaris, 12(3)*, 200-208.



© 2023 by the authors. Licensee Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0 license). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).