

## Some Tendencies in the Sphere of Punctuation from the Viewpoint of Optionality (Based on the Russian and English Languages)

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**Abstract:** The study is devoted to the analysis of some tendencies in contemporary punctuation from the viewpoint of optionality. The analysis is based on the Russian and English languages. In the article the brief description of the optionality phenomenon is given. The analysis of active trends in punctuation allows to speak about the formation of new regulations involving the usage of variants according to linguistic and extralinguistic situations. The researcher states that optionality in the given aspect is found out in the parallel use of variants of using of punctuation marks in the written form of language and draws a conclusion that optionality should be regarded as a natural way of existence of punctuation norm in the Russian and English languages.

**Key words:** Russian language, English language, punctuation marks, optionality, standard norms, variation

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### INTRODUCTION

Modern punctuation in different languages is a complex and historically constituted system. Main characteristics of punctuation marks are reflected in their definitions given in linguistic literature. As a rule, the definition of “punctuation” includes several aspects, namely, the qualitative composition of punctuation, punctuation system function, the types of punctuation. So, the punctuation in a broad sense is the area of graphic linguistics, representing a system of descriptive marks in the written language as well as an integral part of the graphic writing system including descriptive tools for creating graphical models of the text. Punctuation in a narrow sense is a set of punctuation marks, the area of linguodidactics as well as writing rules governing punctuation rules (Bilyalova, 2011).

There are a lot of scientific papers devoted to the problems in the sphere of punctuation (Christensen *et al.*, 2001). It must be recognized that in the punctuation as in the developing system some new tendencies in the use of punctuation marks have emerged. These tendencies are primarily related to new events in the syntax but it must be emphasized that the punctuation marks system has its own changes in functioning and meanings of the signs themselves. The emergence of new tendencies is the cause of variation in the usage of the punctuation marks which implies the possibility of choice in the use of one or another mark. In its turn, a free choice of a punctuation mark, depending on the intentions of the writer, creates a

wide field of optionality. The aim of our work is the analysis of the optional use of certain punctuation marks. Before proceeding to the presentation of the problem we consider it necessary to give a brief description of the optionality phenomenon.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the dictionary of foreign languages the word “optional” (French “facultative”) has the following meanings: “optional” an elective, free, provided to make a choice, variative. The national scientific arsenal has accumulated some experience in the optionality description but in the linguistic literature there is a great lack of consistency in the understanding and interpretation of the considered linguistic phenomenon. Some scientists treat the optionality as the ability to replace one synonymous concept by another with no significant changes in the content while others see it as an ellipse or an optional compatibility. Moreover, some linguists generally inclined to deny the possibility of an optional use of linguistic means because they believe that the recognition of optionality causes the need to revise the general theory in the field of separate grammatical categories and word.

Thus, the scientist-sinologist A. Semenas considers the optionality on the background of redundancy and saving of language means. He concludes that the phenomenon of optionality in the Chinese language can be manifested at the level of phonemes, morphemes and

tokens (Semenas, 1982). As the example A. Semenas takes functioning of grammatical indicators that provide the expression of the form, time, number and etc. having the optionality feature. This feature lies in the fact that in the certain grammatical and semantic conditions the presence or absence of an indicator does not change the meaning.

A significant contribution to the explanation of optionality methodology was introduced by L. Kisileva. The study “a few comments on the question of an optionality” is examining the problem of the optional use of language means in Dari she draws attention to the fact that the optionality should be spoken about in connection with the linguistic units variants (phonemes, morphemes, words, language structures) arising in the process of their implementation in speech (Kisileva, 1982). Thus, the scientist interlinks optionality with variation, referring to the definition of optionality given by such scholars as O.S. Akhmanova who defining the terms “optional phoneme” and “optional variant,” opposes them the concepts of non-free, position dependent option (Akhmanova, 2007).

The optionality problem in Russian linguistics is drilled down in the works of prominent researchers of isolating languages, especially Chinese, scientists-linguists and spouses V. Solntsev and N. Solntseva. Phenomenon optionality definition given by V. Solntsev is perhaps the most complete and deployed. He writes: “under the optional character can be understood the freedom (or the possibility) of omission or on the contrary, the use in the speech chain within the word, a phrase or sentences of one or another language element, its change or changing the order of the language elements under two conditions) absence of grammatical relations changes between linguistic elements in the speech chain and) the absence of significant changes in the expressed meaning or sense”.

Article regulations does not permit us to review the scientific literature on this issue in full volume but even the above-mentioned works allows us to observe a high diversity in the definition of optionality. However, with all the diversity of existing treatments it is possible, based on the definition of optionality given by S.M. Solntsev to add that the optionality itself can appear only in the presence of the variation which causes obligatory and optional variants. So, under the optional version we understand a functioning language modification which exists alongside with a codified literary obligatory option in the certain linguistic and extra-linguistic terms (Bilyalova and Lubova, 2014). As stated above, the purpose of this article is to analyze the optionality in the field of punctuation marks use, namely the review of optional variants of punctuation marks use in the Russian and English languages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Russian punctuation:** Modern Russian punctuation is a regulated system. Punctuation norm has such properties as stability, obligingness, academism but it should be noted that a punctuation norm has properties of communicative and pragmatic one and is adaptive in nature. In this regard, an important concept in the description of the punctuation rules specificity is variation. According to some researchers, the concept of variation is connected with a language system and the linguistic sign asymmetry, category of redundancy. On the one hand, deviation (variation) of norm can be viewed as a manifestation of instability in the implementation process of the language system, a form of instability of the expression plane and on the other-as “dictated by the asymmetry of a linguistic sign fluctuation associated with redundancy in an expression plane can be implemented both as intraunit and as interunit isofunctionality and it can be represented a variation as well as a synonymy”. As a result, the gap between the punctuation norms and the established practice of the actual use of punctuation marks is found. This is partly due to the widespread use of the concept of the “optionality” in punctuation. N. Valgina in one of her works made an attempt to clarify the meaning of the term “optional marks”. According to the researcher, “if we talk about optionality and obligingness in relation to the punctuation principles functioning it seems we should recognize that marks of “grammar” (= fixing structural division of the speech) should be obligatory and the “notional” and “intonational” ones should be optional so as they are individualized by an author use”. This thesis is a bit disputable taking into consideration the fact that there are some cases when the grammar marks are not always obligatory, examples of that kind of manifestation will be presented below.

Analysis of the extensive language material gives grounds for the assertion that the optionality in punctuation can be manifested in norm deviations, associated, firstly with a contextual dependence and secondly with deviations common in the practice of printing of the given historical period when there is a discrepancy between the practice of printing and regulated punctuation rules. We will consider two aspects of deviations in details.

**English punctuation:** As it has been stated above, English punctuation is characterized by the typical creative beginning and the possibility of alternative use of signs in a number of language situations. Indeed if we refer to the above works, it is possible to find out that in the description of the functioning of almost all signs some

differences are observed. Perhaps, the only thing where the researchers agree it is the recommendation on the use of such punctuation marks as a point (marking the end of the sentence), exclamation and question marks. All this characterizes the English punctuation as a system which is marked by a clearly-marked optionality. To prove the above statement we'll demonstrate the recommendations of some manual researchers for example, regarding the use of semicolons.

H.U. and F.G. Fowlers believed that the semicolon indicates an inappropriate rhetoric and offer a maximal use of a comma instead of a semicolon in front of coordinative conjunctions and but or so, sometimes for as well as in cases where the second sentence is not common in the CS or if the two sentences are closely related in terms of content. T. Kane points out that the semicolon is a conventional sign between the predicative parts in a conjunction less sentence. In the case of *sindesis* semicolon is optional and is used for a greater clarity of the sense or emphasis, so as in this case it is a comma the conventional sign.

But here is possible the interchangeability of signs that is the main and subordinate sentences can be divided not only by a comma that is conventional (general) rule but by a semicolon which signals the optional use of these signs (Kane, 1988).

E.D. Johnson developed the idea that if the predicate parts in the CS are joined by unions and and but it is a comma to be used. Comma is preferred to semicolon to emphasize the opposition between sentences (he not was not twenty he was twenty one) or to emphasize the absence of the opposition (the problem was simple, the solution was simple). But if parts are extended to a great degree or even to any other reason comma seems an insufficient signal to the reader it is better to use a semicolon (Johnson, 1991).

Thus, the obvious imbalance between a theoretical and practical interpretation of the English punctuation system functioning and the lack of the strict rules of common punctuation are the main causes of optionality manifestation in the use of certain punctuation marks.

**Optionality in Russian punctuation:** Deviance from the norm associated with the intrinsic properties of a text and communicative-pragmatic tasks of a writer is called an unregulated punctuation (not to be confused with the author's punctuation where marks characterize the author's personality expressed by a fondness for certain marks with the aid of which one author or a poet can be distinguished from another, for example, Marina Tsvetaeva from Anna Akhmatova). Thus, non-regulated punctuation includes various deviations from the norms

of punctuation (existing along with the regulated options) aimed at an identity and emotional color creation of written speech. Studies on the unregulated punctuation use indicate to the functional purpose increase of the marks in the texts of different genres and stylistic orientation. We emphasize that context dependent author's symbols used in the text to achieve the objectives of a particular speech act are not formally represented in the references.

Strongly pronounced distinction of an unregulated punctuation from regulated one is that it is able, along with lexical and syntactic means to give pragmatic text characteristics the additional stylistic nuances. For example in the sentence: *cat-like in shoes on the fallen leaves, autumn stepped in the nature* (A. Platonov) punctuation mark "comma" is not provided by the rules of use, its use in this case is optional in order to express more shades of meaning, namely the strengthening of perception of the important details of the narration. Such optional use of comma we can see in the following examples; *a grandfather was imprisoned, under Stalin's regime and she married Stepan Nikolkin* (A. Chervinsky); *then about half a dozen armored vehicles went to the village and Russian battalion was set off on foot, through the field* (V. Aksenov); *one evening, Mitya and Goshka drugged on the mound of earth, next to that house where they took up quarters...* (V. Aksenov).

Semantic, syntactic, intonational function of a dash, graphic expressiveness of this mark make it popular among writers, novelists in whose works we often find the optional use of this punctuation mark: *like a sheaf he fell from the previous worry-impossible to awake* (Boris Pasternak); *torture fire which never frightens him, later will clean an image of Volynskii and he will brake upon us in its true light as a patriot as a citizen* (V. Pikul). In these examples, the dash having a maximum separation function which is enhanced by visual effect organizes theme and rheme dismemberment of the text. It is obvious that the dash as a delimiter is more significant and visible in comparison with a comma this explains its optional use in comparative phrases, dependent parts of a sentence and sometimes in vocatives: *but the knife was broken as if it hit a stone* (Gorky); *if you be caught won't rebute* (A. Aleksin); *Goshka did not listen to he had already went full bat to the blown up dugouts* (V. Aksenov); *friends of him do not disturb him! Servants of him-do not alarm him!* (M. Tsvetaeva).

In the following example, the optional use of a semicolon is justified from a pragmatic point of view as this it is not only a punctuation mark separating two internal dependent parties but also emphasizes the weight of parcelling: *knife binds is opened by pressing a button with roughish bang* (V. Makanin).

So, unregulated use of punctuation is in extension of the boundaries and conditions of their application in order to increase the expression of phrasing and feelings in the written text which leads to a higher degree of development and flexibility of punctuation. Creation of an emotional and expressive orientation, dynamic speech flow or its fluidity is achieved by selecting the optimal for each case variant due to such Russian punctuation characteristic as optionality. Note that in this case, optionality, manifested in the freedom of choice of punctuation and the possibility of deviation from the norm can exist within certain limits, so as optionality in the use of punctuation marks is not in an individual violation of rules for their use but in expanding the boundaries of their use and reasonable limit sense like one of the indicators of culture and literacy of a speller.

A further aspect in which we can observe optionality, allows a possibility of punctuation marks and their combinations choice, reflecting the current trends taking place in the written text structure. In contrast to the unregulated punctuation in the new trends an optional use of one or another mark is registered by Russian punctuation rules that govern the position of a punctuation mark not so, rigidly and formally; often their formulations include such phrases as use is permissible... punctuation mark is possible ... punctuation mark may be placed, etc., ...similar trends are primarily related to new phenomena in the syntax of written language and mainly concerns language constructions of expressive syntax for example segmented and parceled structures, structures with weak syntactic relations as well as elements of spoken syntax. Having the diversity of these trends we intend to consider some changes in the functional significance of punctuation marks that lead to the optionality of their application. The use of certain marks in the examples below varies, so a speller is relatively free in their choice what actually manifests the optionality in this area. In other words, the optionality is manifested in the presence of deviation within the communication standards, consisting of obligatory and optional variants.

Between the subject and the nominal predicate in the place of the missing ligament a dash is put if the subject and predicate are nouns in the nominative case, however, the rules allow the absence of dash, causing the optional use of the mark: my sister a teacher; my sister is a teacher.

The dash is placed between subject and predicate if they are numerals (or phrase with numerals) and if one of the principal members of the sentence is numeral: three times three-nine; The depth from the boat there-four "makhovykh" that is 6 m (Sholokhov). However, in a special literature while numeration a dash is not

necessary, i.e., its use is optional: the weight of such a distance gauge is 23 kg; the maximum range of the considered laser radar is 10 km.

When the nominative case is followed by an interrogative sentence, a point is placed: research potential. How to use it? (newsp.); concerts in Moscow. What do they mean? (newsp.); mind on other planets. What is it? (journ.). It is permissible an optional use of a colon: student's life: what will it be?

If the nominative case is followed by the interrogative part of the construction which also has a form of the nominative case, then a dash is placed: scenario a piece of work or semi-finished product? (newsp.); normalizing practice allows an optional use of writing with a colon before the interrogative construction in the printing practice. For example: a literary work: a symbol or a model? (newsp.).

In a place of the traditional colon before the enumeration after generalizing word an optional use of dash is observed: everything was in this room-love, children, their hanky-panky and antics, long wait (newsp.) There's all wonderful the mountains, the moon, the palm trees of the south (N. Rubtsov). Love everything-dew and mist, ducks and other birds and animals (V. Tendryakov).

Along with commas the extended clauses can be pointed out by a dash, thereby forming an optional variant of the use of these marks: Novelist Beskudnikov-quiet, well-dressed man with attentive and at the same time elusive eyes-took watch (M. Bulgakov).

There are cases when a dash replaces a colon in the conjunction less sentences with the object meaning adjunction, containing in the first part verbs of action meaning, for example: waited, waited and now in the dead hour of the night the sounds are heard again (Vladimir Nabokov); Malinin touched a shoulder under the quilted jacket was warm (K. Simonov).

In a complex sentence the meaning "in particular" is usually denoted by a colon but the optional use of dash is allowed: but it was O.K. up to one case a barrel rolled from the truck and hit Sharaf just in the weak spot (A. Solzhenitsyn).

Optional use of a dash is possible in complex sentences in cases when there are words warning of clarification in a major part: but one thing is important that they put the question of poetic language point-blank (B. Eyhenbaum); ... and I thought of only one thing-when he would spread his arms to me (V. Zernova).

In the following example, instead of the dash, recommended by reference books you can often observe a colon: this raises another aspect of the problem which we have already discussed: the responsibility of the manager (newsp.).

**Optionality in English punctuation:** Here, we present the results of analysis of the current English punctuation practice which revealed the presence of stable oscillations in the use of comma which clearly indicates the optionality in the given field.

If one of the Composed Sentences (CS) has a complicated structure, in order to separate the parts of CS, a semicolon should be used but in practice we can find the optional use of a colon and even a comma. Compare: you had better go on horseback because it seems likely to rain and then you must stay all night (J.A.) while he was deep in his thoughts, Mr. Verloc woke up with a breezy little laugh: but it was stricken dead upon her lips and a grown followed it (J.C.); these words had drawn Genevieve's gaze to his face and she had pleased in the clear skin, the clear eyes, the cheek soft and smooth as a girl's (J.L.).

Optional use of a comma is observed before the last of the homogeneous parts of the sentence in the presence of conjunction and. Even in the similar construction sentences of the same author the comma may be used and may be absent. Compare: wet through with darkness rapidly descending he became alarmed, lit his carbide lamp with difficulty and again consulted the map (J.Ch.); towards morning he dismounted, stretched out on a patch of heath by the roadside and closed his eyes (J.Ch.).

If more than two homogeneous members are connected by means of conjunction and or they are usually separated by a comma for example: distinctions doesn't consist in the facile use of a contemptible set of conventions but in being numbered among those who are true and honest and just and pure and lovely and of good report (Th.H.).

However, at the present stage of English punctuation development the lack of comma is often observed in cases like this and it also indicates the optionality of its use in the structures of similar type sentences: it was the ring on Monday and the registry office on Tuesday and London that night and Paris on the next Thursday (J.Ch.) and women and girls and young children and men put their heads on their doors and windows (A.H.).

Optional use of the semicolon occurs in cases where the subordinate clause includes a homogeneous or separate members or structures, as well as if there is a subordinate clause inside (use of a comma in such cases is not regulated by grammar: what had saved him from becoming a cross between a lap dog and a little prig had been his father's adoration of his mother (F.S.); how it came to be known that he sought the secret of perpetual notion is beyond me (K.M.).

In the case when a subordinate clause entered by a conjunction includes some homogeneous members or a

whole subordinate clauses there is also the optional use of a comma: the first ground is that he has but a penny in his pocket which is needed for his chair in Kensington Gardens (T.Th.); the almost universal belief was that the emperor would divide the Prussian and English armies, annihilate and after another and march into Brussels before three days were over when all the movables of his present masters, who would be killed or fugitives or prisoners, would lawfully become the property of Monsieur Isidor (E.S.).

In the case when one or more prepositions are referred to the same noun or pronoun after each of them comma should be used, including the last one, separating it from the noun. However, in the recent literature there is a tendency to treat these cases without commas, thereby enabling the writer to use them optionally. Compare: even in this conditions the fountain has established itself a unique center for treatment of and research into, mental deficiency (C.L.); turn seam edge under and machine-stitch on a labric (A.H.).

Setting a comma is optional in the case where the few preceding definitives are referred to one and the same member, the latter of which is extended: in Kensington gardens you will find romance. Many a real, many a legendary, person has found it there (T.Th.); a profitable but quite legal racket in repairs is now being worked by landlords under the 1957 Rent Act (F.S.).

## CONCLUSION

Observations and analysis of active trends in Russian and English punctuation and graphic design of writing described above, allow to speak about the formation of new regulations involving the unequal probability of options use. Optionality in this situation is due to the fact that there are in the modern practice of writing new trends of the punctuation marks use and what is extremely important these trends are reflected in grammar references. Concurrent use of options indicates the possibility of choosing the mark while an optional variant gradually, taking into account the quantitative accumulation (referring to the practice of the use) prepares the ground for change or at least for clarifying the rules themselves. Based on the above it can be assumed that those options of punctuation marks use which are currently conceived as optional, indicate an emerging of new Russian punctuation functions in the formation of semantic and information text area. We would like to add that the classification of punctuation rules to communicative and pragmatic causes the need and justification of a broad approach to elective options which reflect the deviations from the norm, since the optionality

is a characteristic feature of the Russian punctuation and a source of enrichment of its new functions for transmitting the most subtle semantic language situations. In accordance with the above considerations we can probably state that the optionality should be regarded as a natural way of Russian punctuation rules existence.

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