

# On the status and functions of the hyphen in the German language

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**Abstract**— The article analyzes the status and functions of the hyphen as an element of the written form of communication in the German language. Rhetorical principal, semantic principal and principle of grammar of the functional description are considered in the given article. Also, the justification of the rules of punctuation is considered in the study. It is established that the communicative principle of all the above is decisive for all other principles. It was noted that the status of the hyphen as a punctuation mark is ambiguous among different scientists: some researchers include a hyphen in the list of punctuation marks, others refer to it as the auxiliary character in spelling. It is justified that the hyphen is widely used in modern German while performing various functions. The hyphen is closely related to the dash sign; its similarity is manifested in their functional proximity: dashes and hyphens appear at different language levels as a sign of structural-semantic compression. The hyphen can be attributed to the system of punctuation marks on the level of morphemes and basic graphemes, and the associated with it dash mark is a punctuation mark on the text and syntactic level.

**Keywords**—*hyphen, punctuation, punctuation marks, functions, punctuation principles, dash sign.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of punctuation as one of the elements of the written form of communication is to establish communication between writers and readers. The problems of punctuation are usually the object of studies in linguistic literature on the different languages' material. The well-known point that different languages have the same set of graphic symbols (O.V. Alexandrova[1], V.I. Klassovsky [2]) is reviewed by many authors. Although the distribution of functions between them has some differences. On this basis, we consider it useful to address to the punctuation of other languages when describing the functioning of the German hyphen in the modern German texts.

The study was aimed to determine the status of the hyphen in the German language, identify its functions and similarities with the dash sign.

The importance and relevance of the article is determined by the need to clarify the status and functions of the hyphen from the point of view of the communicative linguistics, in order to further study of punctuation as an important tool in shaping and transmitting the meaning of the written text.

From a practical perspective, the importance of this study is revealed in the need to improve the quality of the written form of a foreign language when it is mastered by students. The practice of teaching a foreign language and the level of proficiency of its written aspect by students prove that unfairly little attention is paid to the important type of speech activity. In this connection, it should be noted that the concept of punctuation literacy is becoming more relevant, which implies the ability to not only correctly place the characters while writing, but also correctly and precisely understand the meaning and function of a punctuation mark, its role in a process of transmitting written text, from perception of which depends effective goal achievement of communication.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS (MODEL)

In the course of the historical development of the written form of the German literary language, the functions of punctuation marks have changed significantly. Initially, the punctuation clearly reflected the rhythmic-intonational elements of the oral language, and punctuation marks were used in the texts that were intended for reading aloud. With the development of typography, the reader already could perceive and process the information that punctuation signaled, bypassing the speaking out loud form. Since then, punctuation marks ceased to be only indicators of the prosodic characteristics of the text and began to operate on the semantics level. These historical changes in the functions of punctuation marks are reflected in the principles of punctuation.

In the scientific literature on punctuation, the following principles of functional description and justification of punctuation rules of are most often highlighted: *grammatical* (syntactic), *rhetorical* (rhythmic-intonational) and *semantic* (logical, semantic). Based on the *syntactic* principle, punctuation marks single out individual sentences and their parts, showing the syntactic structure of speech. The syntactic principle is focused on the "educational needs" and it is widespread in the practice of teaching since the punctuation rules are formulated on its basis.

*Semantic* interpretation of punctuation marks is that from the point of view of this theory, the single principle of punctuation is the meaning, semantics of a statement, refined and specified by means of punctuation marks.

According to the *intonation* principle, punctuation marks are used to indicate prosody of a statement. However, there is not always a direct correlation between punctuation and intonation, both these phenomena serve as means of expressing the meaning of speech (intonation performs this function in oral speech and punctuation in written speech).

The point of view of V. Mentrup [3], one of the scholars of the punctuation in German language, who considers the *communicative* principle decisive and underlying all other principles, is interesting and convincing. Guided by the communicative principle, the writer informs the reader of the following:

- a) he means exactly the syntactic structure that he has chosen (the subordination of the syntactic principle to the communicative one);
- b) he, using a comma, a semicolon or a period, adds to the parts of the text shared by these signs a greater or lesser degree of auto-semantics or completes the sentence;
- c) it indicates the presence of a pause (rhythmic-intonation principle);
- d) he understands the given sequence of words as a whole sentence, accordingly, finishes it and understands it as a statement, question or exclamation, and expects the same understanding from the reader (semantic principle).

These writer's messages to the reader through punctuation marks serve to make the text more visible and understandable, to transmit special writer's intention.

The number of punctuation marks is different for different authors. The following are most often referred to: *dot, question mark, exclamation mark, ellipsis, brackets, quotation marks, colon, comma, semicolon, dash, double comma, pair dash*. Some punctuation researchers label *apostrophes, hanging hyphens (Ergänzungsstrich), hyphens (Bindestrich), slashes, and paragraphs* (in the meaning *new line*) as a part of the punctuation system.

The status of a hyphen as a punctuation mark is ambiguous, it receives various interpretations in the works of different authors. Some scholars include a hyphen in the list of punctuation marks (G. N. Akimova [4], P. Gallmann [5], V. Mentrup [3], L.I. Sluzhivov [6], E.S. Schwarzkopf [7]); others believe that this point of view is incorrect and consider that a hyphen (and an apostrophe) is not used for punctuation purposes, but serve as auxiliary characters in spelling (N.A. Kobrina, L.V. Malakhovskaya [8]).<sup>1</sup>

Thus G.N. Akimova [4] explains the use of a hyphen as a new punctuation mark in correlation with the appearance of new syntactic constructions. For example, a dangling hyphen is a concretion of a syntax group based on composing links: *photo-, movie- and telecameras*. As a new

trend, it also links up the use of a hyphen in its new as indication of proximity and generalization:

*Mothers - fathers - grandmothers write letters, send packages and money*, where *mothers - fathers - grandmothers* have a meaning of relatives in general.

The position of P. Gallmann [5] is interesting in relation to the status of the hyphen. According to the levels of the subsystem established by him, *a standard written language*, (the oral standard language associated with the subsystem), the dash is a border signal on the textual and syntactic level, and a hyphen is a border signal on the level of morphemes and basic graphemes<sup>2</sup>.

Analyzing examples cited by P. Gallmann [5], we were allowed to conclude that the functions of the shortest stroke – the hyphen (*Bindestrich*) – are heterogeneous. The distinction between the functions performed by the hyphen is reflected in the term names. The name *Bindestrich* is derived from the function of linking the morphemes that make up the word. “Binding” and “delimitation” do not contradict each other, they characterize the same phenomenon from two points of view. The linking function of the hyphen can be explained from the point of view of the process of word formation: the main morphemes are linked into a complex word, which is graphically expressed using the link bar, for example:

*500 + Gramm + Packung = 500 - Gramm - Packung*

The delimitation function is justified in terms of the finished compound word since the hyphen delimits the component parts of the compound word of which it consists of:

*500 - Gramm - Packung = 500 Gramm + Packung*

Summarizing the rules for using a hyphen (*Bindendestrich*), P. Gallmann emphasizes that they sum up to three principles:

1. Syntactic-morphological principle: according to this principle a hyphen, on the one hand, breaks up complex words, the internal structure of which is not clearly visible because of the unstructured chain of letters. On the other hand, the hyphen allows complex words, which consist of graphically relatively independent morphemes, to function as a graphic unity:

*Herrenkleiderfabrik - Direktor*

*ein Ich - Roman*

*Nicht-Wissenschaftler*

The hyphen has a similar function in complex substantivized formations consisting of several parts,

<sup>1</sup> In the monograph by N.A. Kobrina, L.V. Malakhovskaya shortened, normal, elongated dash and hyphen are differed, which the authors consider as punctuation marks. So, for example, a shortened dash is used to connect two proper names, which together denote a concept or phenomenon: *the Chicago-Denverexpress*; to connect two numerals denoting spatial temporal or quantitative limits: 1948-50. Instead of a shortened dash in some publications (for example, in newspapers) a hyphen is used, less often a usual dash. An extended dash is used instead of a part of a word omitted for euphemistic purposes. Thus, in English editions a dash of various lengths is used.

<sup>2</sup> Referring hyphen to punctuation marks, P. Gallmann considers unsuccessful the term *Satzzeichen* (literal translation – sentence marks), since its functional connotation prevents to include here hyphens (*Bindestrich*) and apostrophe. He suggests the term *Hilfszeichen* (auxiliary marks). By treating the hyphen as a delimiting signal on the morpheme level, Gallmann believes that very little attention is paid to such mark in school practice. V.Mentrup also refers to punctuation not only punctuation marks with the field of “sentence”, but also with the field of “word”, as reflected in the terminology: *Die Wort - und Satzzeichensetzung (Interpunktion)*

especially in infinitive groups with more than two components:

*das Auf-die-lange-Bank-Schieben, das Von-der-Hand-in-den-Mund-Leben*

In this case, compound words are one of the effective ways to create new concepts. Such complex words can (by virtue of their large extent) present difficulties for reading and, therefore, for perception and understanding of the written text by readers:

*Autobahnraststättenbetreiber-Ehepaar*

The hyphen fragments complex formations, contributing to its better perception and understanding.

2. Grapheme-morphological principle: a hyphen marks the transition between ideographic or almost ideographic writing (abbreviations, letter words, etc.) and ordinary letter writing:

*das Akk. - Objekt*

*eine 4-Zimmer- Wohnung*

*die 5% - Klausel*

*E-Bücher*

*3D-Drucker*

*3D-Kugelschreiber*

3. Pragmatical-morphological principle: in complex words a hyphen separates a proper name, helping to preserve its normal form and recognition in any context:

*der Beethoven - Abend*

*Nordrhein - Westfalen*

*die Doktor - Müllersche Apotheke*

With regard to compound words with a proper name or a geographical name, the following trend is observed: if the name is historically well known, then complex words are written together with this word:

*Marshallplan, Vietnamkrieg, die Helmholtzschule in Frankfurt*

However, some compound words from the same context as the previous example, where the compound part is a proper name *Helmholtz*, are used with a hyphen:

*die Helmholtz-Zentren*

*das GEOMAR-Helmholtz-Zentrum*

*das Leibniz-Institut für Meereswissenschaft*

*der Erwin- Schrödinger-Preis*

*das Helmholtz-Institut*

*die Helmholtz-Gesellschaft*

*die Helmholtz-Medaille*

*die Helmholtz-Gymnasien*

Another possible option is the construction where the proper name is written separately, following another noun:

*der Mondkrater Helmholtz*

*der Marskrater Helmholtz*

In the following examples, where one of the components is taken from English, the hyphen serves to isolate the unknown, the unusual:

*Internet-User, Spiele-Community, Pin-Code, Screening-Dienstleistung*

The hyphen as a means of creating clarity in the perception of the written text is especially important when it is necessary to avoid ambiguous understanding:

*Musiker-Leben u Musik-Erleben*

It should be noted that the hyphen is not used in compound words with a connecting vowel –s: *die Zeitungssente, der Regierungskurs*.

P. Gallmann [5] considers a hyphen, often referred to as *Ergänzungsbindestrich* (hanging hyphen) in this function, to be a special grapheme used as a signal for the reduction of a morpheme. Basic morphemes (*drei - bis viermal, Schulbücher und - hefte*) and word-formation morphemes (*weder sieht - noch hörbar, auf - und abwärts*) can shrink.

Thus, there is reason to believe that the written language may in some cases go further than oral language. Eliminated words (sometimes groups of words) that require complete wording in oral language can be marked with a dash, colon, hyphen in the writing.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A hyphen can be used as a split signal (*Trennsignal*). It testifies that the end of the line, contrary to the usual case, does not indicate a word boundary.

In lists, bibliographies, etc. (in special types of texts) when using a name multiple times, it is indicated only for the first time, and then replaced with a dash (*Geviertstrich, Halbgeviertstrich*):

*Trömel - Plötz, Senta: Linguistik und Frauensprache.*

*In: Linguistische Berichte 57 (1978), 49 - 68. - : Frauensprache in unserer Welt der Männer. Konstanz 1979.*

In lexicons in comments to the black word, the headword is often replaced with a dash. Along with the dash is used a tilde. An example:

*aufdrängen; jmdm. etwas -*

*sich jmdm. -*

We are considering a few more examples of the use of a hyphen, which P. Gallmann relates to special cases. When designating a monetary amount, instead of zero, a hyphen (*Geviertstrich*) is often placed to the left of the decimal point or instead of two zeros to the right of it:

*DM -, 50 Fr. 45 -*

In the digits of the mail account, the provisional digit is separated by a hyphen from the remaining digits of the number:

*82 - 35764*

The dash in the meaning of *gegen* is used almost exclusively in the pair of non-restrictive appositions, and above all in sports texts:

*das Spiel FC Zürich - FC Basel*

(= *das Spiel FC Zürich gegen FC Basel*)

The dash to denote the distance (*der Streckenstrich*), as well as the dash instead of *gegen*, is used only in appositions that are interpreted as abbreviations of prepositional definitions:

*Der Abstand Erde - Mond*

(= *Der Abstand von der Erde zum Mond*)

*Die Beziehung Arzt - Patient*

(*die Beziehung zwischen dem Arzt und seinem Patienten*)

All these cases of the use of a hyphen can be considered as examples of the compression of language material at the expense of repeating elements: zero (0), particles *bis*, prepositions *gegen*, *von*, *zu*, *zwischen*. The wide and rather frequent use of these constructions with a hyphen implying various structural-semantic relations is definitely perceived adequately by the recipient.

In the process of studying the hyphen, we should mention the *dash sign*, which, in our opinion, is closely related to the hyphen. The similarity of these punctuation marks is manifested in their functional proximity: a dash and a hyphen appear at different language levels as a sign of structural-semantic compression (compare: the use of a dash replacing the missing sentence members (1), marking causal and contrastive relations in the statement (2, 3), or a dash marking the change in addressee-addresser (4, 5, 6), and the use of a hyphen with the purpose of contraction of the syntactic group).

(1) *Ach ja, Brügge könnte Tino ein Vater sein. Aber Tino – Brügges Kind? Niemals.* [10]

Restoring the full structure suggests the following statement:

*Ach ja, Brügge könnte Tino ein Vater sein.*

*Aber könnte Tino Brügges Kind sein?*

*Niemals.*

The reason for the reduction of statements, compensated by the dash, is the information redundancy of units of language, the desire to save language resources.

In the following example, a dash is an indicator of a causal relationship in a statement. The peculiarity of statements in fiction literature is their brevity, where the dash plays the role of an indicator of causal semantics:

(2) *Kann sein, ich muss bis zur Entbindung hier liegen. Fast sechs Monate noch. Nie richtig bewegen – der Tropf. Nie ganz tief schlafen – der Tropf. Nie meinen Tino sehen.* [10]

As a result of the transformation, we can see the following statement:

*Nie richtig bewegen, **weil** ich den Tropf bekomme. Nie ganz tief schlafen, **weil** ich den Tropf bekomme.*

Separating parts of the sentence, a dash at the same time unites them, acting as an external grammatical indicator of their internal semantic correlation. In interaction with the linguistic means of other levels, it can express opposing relations in the statement. Analyzing the examples, it becomes obvious that such a meaning a dash acquires only depending on the real content of the parts of the sentence, on their semantic correlation expressed in grammatical forms and in the lexical composition of sentences:

(3) *Und sooft die Mutter in der ersten Zeit sagte: Hier bleib ich nicht, nie und nimmer – sie blieben, an die allgemeine Not und an die unsinnige Hoffnung gefesselt, eines Tages werde doch eine Nachricht vom Vater, der an der Front vermisst war, dieses sichere kleine Haus erreichen.* [9]

The content of the message after the dash is the opposite to the preceding part of the sentence. However, the dash sign itself only signals and strengthens this antithesis, which is built on:

1) the presence of denial in the first part: *Hier bleib ich nicht, nie und nimmer!* (a whole chain of repetitions that emphasize the immutability, the categorical nature of this decision can be noticed) and

2) the absence of denial in the second part of the statement: *sie blieben.*

This opposition is realized not only by punctuation but also by the whole context. The dash does not express the meaning of contrast comparison, but merely indicates the connection between the two opposed messages in terms of content.

A dash can signal a change of a speaker. This function of a dash sign is of great importance in indirect speech; it helps the reader to determine whether a particular segment of speech belongs to a particular person: der Inspizient, der Beleuchtungsmeister.

(4) *Die Souffleuse, der Inspizient, der Beleuchtungsmeister, der technische Leiter und die Regieassistentin. Wobei die Regieassistentin ganz oben steht, obwohl sie meiner Meinung nach das wenigste von allen leistet. Zur Premiere können die anderen stolz von sich sagen: Wäre ich nicht da, die Kollegen auf der Bühne hätten einen Hänger nach dem anderen. Sie kämen nicht zum Auftritt, wenn ich sie nicht riefte. – Sie stünden völlig im Dunkeln oder rutschten in die Versenkung, wenn ich nicht wär.* [10]

A young woman, an assistant director, talks about her work in the theater. She divides all the workers, into two categories. To one belong all those whose names are printed in the performance program on the right side, where usually no one reads the names. These people are prompter, lightning designer, technical director and assistant director. Moreover, the name of an assistant director goes first in the program, although, as it seems to this young woman, he does the least in comparison with other's work. During the premiere, other workers can proudly say about themselves: *If I hadn't been here, then my colleagues on stage would have experienced one problem after another. They would not have gone on stage if I hadn't called them* (These words might belong to the assistant director). - *They would have*

*stood in total darkness or fall into the hatch if it was not for me.* In this particular example the dash separates statements that belong to the lightning designer.

In the next example, dashes 1, 2, 3 separate the “statements” which belong to different people. In the given text, there is no response from the partner (which is expressed by the three signs of a dash 4, 5, 6). The use of dashes 1, 2, 3 allows a reader to clearly see this division: one character addresses another and the latter’s silence response:

(5) *"Wir könnten die Bücher zum Altstoffhändler bringen, Klaus. Oder in ein Antiquariat. Ein paar Mark werden es bestimmt. Was meinst du? – 1*

--- 4

*Na gut. Das "Kapital" können wir ja behalten. Obwohl – gerade das macht vielleicht das Zünglein an der Waage aus. Bei dem Gewicht?! Marx hätte nichts dagegen, wenn wir sein Gedankengut in Brot verwandelten. Er wollte es, glaube ich, sogar so verstanden wissen. – 2*

--- 5

*Vielleicht nicht direkt wörtlich genommen. Im höheren Sinne. – Na, dann eben nicht. Ich habe noch ein silbernes Kinderbesteck. Weißt schon, das Tino von der alten Tante Grete bekommen hat. Tino benutzt es sowieso nie. Und sollte er wirklich mal allein essen lernen, tut es eins aus Alpaka genauso. – Scheißleben! – Sag doch mal'n Wort! – 3*

--- 6

*Also gut. Ich verkauf's. [10]*

In this case it is obvious that a dash is used instead of a new paragraph to save space.

Considering the next example, in which a woman during a conversation with a doctor about the fate of her seriously ill child is feeling sick because she cannot perceive anything anymore. The doctor asks a woman, frightened:

(6) *«Ist Ihnen nicht gut? – Schwester, ein Glas Wasser!» [10]*

Both statements belong to the doctor and are addressed to different people. In the text there is no author's comment explaining to whom they belong and to whom the other phrases are addressed. Only a dash is an indication of their separation.

In all given examples, a dash, separating one part of the text from another, serves as an optical highlighting of these parts of the text and at the same time is a means of uniting individual segments of the utterance into a holistic text.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Analysis of the actual material embodied in this article leads to the following conclusions:

- The hyphen can be attributed to the punctuation marks system, which acts on the level of morphemes and basic graphemes, and the dash mark associated with it is a punctuation mark on the textual and syntactic level.

- The hyphen has a functional similarity with a dash as an indicator of structural-semantic compression. Both marks contribute, on the one hand, to savings of language means, and on the other, they are a marker that allows the recipient of the text to recover the full amount of information.
- The hyphen is widely used in modern German language, and it performs various functions. The differences between the functions performed by the hyphen are reflected in their term names.

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