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**DASH: EVOCATIVE POTENTIAL IN CONTEMPORARY  
GERMAN BELLES-LETTRES DISCOURSE**Alevtina Plisenko (a)\*, Vera Merkurjeva (b), Nadezhda Efimova (c), Marina Violina (d),  
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**Abstract**

The paper analyses the evocative-stylistic punctuation phenomenon with the dash in contemporary German belles-lettres discourse chosen as an example. This phenomenon has not been given sufficient consideration in the existing publications. The concepts of expressive and emotional are explored and differentiated; expressivity is defined. We found that the choice of the dash sign with the integrity of the information implied, including semantic, emotional and modal aspects, is a function of the author's communicative intention and may be accounted for by the context, or by the author's preference to use this particular punctuation sign as a constituent of personal style. The primary factors that ensure expressive and stylistic effect are identified: conscious deviation from the norm prescribed by punctuation rules; enhancement of the sign position; connection with the constructions of expressive syntax. Deviation from the norm is the separation of the article by means of a dash from the noun, to which the article refers; the subject from the predicate. The strengthening of the sign position consists in replacing less expressive signs with a more expressive dash sign, or in combining three dash signs with an exclamation mark, creating the effect of emotional tension and incompleteness of statements. The dash serves as means of expressive division of the text and contributes to creation of expressive information, being a marker of expressive syntactic constructions.

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*Keywords:* Artistic discourse, dashes, deviation from the norm, expressive and stylistic potential, punctuation, punctuation marks



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## 1. Introduction

Many linguists showed interest in the stylistic functions of punctuation marks. Expressive and stylistic potential of punctuation was analyzed on the material of different languages. These studies are devoted to the description of stylistic functions of punctuation marks preferred by individual authors (Shevtsova, 1998), or to the research of the stylistic aspect of punctuation in connection with expressive syntactic constructions (Alexandrova, 1984; Akimova, 1990; Budnichenko, 2004; Dzyakovich, 1995; Emmott et al., 2006; Plisenko, 1993; Schwarzkopf, 1988). Some of the research works focus of specific features of certain styles and genres (Azarova, 2001; Evtushenko & Butuzova, 2014; Dahl, 2018; Stone & Ford, 2017). Interesting findings concerning stylistic significance of individual author's punctuation marks are summed up in the works of Valgina (2001). Extensive attention to stylistic significance of orthographic means including punctuation marks explains appearance and evolution of graphostylistics as a specific sub-discipline of stylistics (Riesel, 1978). Dzyakovich (1995) in his research uses the concept of punctuation stylistics, which studies the stylistic resources of punctuation marks associated with the phenomena of expressive punctuation.

## 2. Problem Statement

Extensive and detailed description of expressive and stylistic significance of punctuation marks on the material of the German language has been hardly ever performed, thus, it might be viewed as a relatively new trend of linguistic studies. It should be noted that publications on the punctuation of the German language in the stylistic aspect are restricted to just a few individual articles (Baudusch, 1980, 1981; Riesel, 1978), or are considered in passing in connection with the description of other necessitated by the requirements of methodology.

Researchers of punctuation of various languages attach great importance to punctuation marks as the most subtle expression means available at the graphic level of the language. Punctuation marks are a powerful tool in the repertoire of the creator of a written text, they serve to express its beauty and harmony, and ensure clarity of the author's message. Riesel, in an article devoted to the stylistic possibilities of graphic tools, quotes as an example the repeatedly cited, now classical, excerpt from chapter XII of the book by H. Heine "Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand». It consists of 6 lines of dashes that frame, as if by chance, the remaining individual words:

*“Die deutschen Censoren*

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----- *Dummköpfe*“. (Riesel, 1978, p. 121)

*“German censors*

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----- *Fools.*” (Riesel, 1978, p. 121)

Such a large number of dashes (96 characters) create a certain connotation: they symbolize the suspicious fragments crossed out by the Prussian censors in the literary and journalistic text of Heine. The phrase divided by ninety-six dashes explicitly points out to the fact that German censors are fools. Therefore, what remains of the sentence subjected to the censorship satirically characterizes the censors who did not notice the new meaning that had arisen.

### **3. Research Questions**

#### **3.1. The object of the research**

The object of this study is the stylistically marked dash sign in the texts of modern German belles-lettres discourse.

#### **3.2. The subject of the research**

The subject of the study is the cases of dash sign use associated with the creation of a certain stylistic effect.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of our investigation is to study and analyze the expressive and stylistic potential of the dash sign in the texts of modern German belles-lettres discourse.

In compliance with the goal, the following tasks are set out:

- 1) to identify the conditions that affect the atypical use of the dash sign or their combination in belles-lettres discourse;
- 2) to describe the types of unregulated use of dashes;
- 3) to study the relationship of stylistically marked dashes with the constructions of the expressive syntax of modern German belles-lettres discourse;
- 4) to determine the role of the dash sign in the transmission of the author's communicative idea of belles-lettres discourse and the creation of an expressive and stylistic effect.

### **5. Research Methods**

The research is based on the methods of semantic-syntactic, contextual and discourse analysis: the analysis of an extended context, a communicative situation, a mentally presented verbal situation, subtext; the method of linguistic description.

## 6. Findings

To solve these problems, we turn to the concept of expressive syntax. Many linguists dealing with the problems of expressiveness attempt to distinguish between the expressive and the emotional. We share the opinion of Galkina-Fedoruk (1958), who considers the concept of the expressive to be broader than that of the emotional. The emotional is always associated with expression, while the expressive is not always emotional. In addition, according to Akimova (1990), the most important point in distinguishing between the emotional and the expressive is the involuntary, unintentional emotion, since it is associated with feelings, and introduction of the expression as a means of influence, when the speaker (writer) is aware of the deliberate use of certain language means.

In our article, we rely on the following definition of expressiveness: "Expressiveness – a set of semantic and stylistic features of a language unit that ensure its ability to act in a communicative act as a means of subjective expression of the speaker's attitude to the content or addressee of speech" (Linguistic Encyclopedia, 1990, p. 685). One of the means that contributes to the creation of expressiveness at the graphic (punctuation) level is the dash sign.

The division of the text by signs that carry certain information – semantic, emotional and modal – determines the context. We will demonstrate this by examples from Geppert's novel "Die Last, die du nicht trägst" ("A burden you don't carry").

The marriage of two young people has been in severe crisis since the moment they learnt that their child was seriously ill. Disagreements about the fate of the child affect the most fundamental attitudes and decisions of both parents. – Maybe we should send Tino (that's the boy's name) to a boarding school? How does the world react to a person with deviant behaviour? The author, speaking on behalf of the main character, with great sincerity and tact depicts the spiritual conflict of a young woman who is facing a difficult decision. Based on the general context, we will comment on the following case of the dash use:

*“Tino habe ich besucht. Am Mittwoch. Er kann sich nicht in die Gruppe einfügen. Er ist der – Dümme da. Das beste wäre es, die behielten ihn gleich dort. Aber solche wie ihn nehmen die nicht”.* (Geppert, 1978, p. 216)

*“I went to see Tino. On Wednesday. He can't adapt to the group. He's the – most stupid one out there. It would be best if they left him right there. But they don't take people like him”.* (Geppert, 1978, p. 216)

Deviation from the norm is the separation of the article with a dash from the name of the noun to which the article refers. A child with physical and mental disabilities cannot adapt to a group of normal children, because he is far from being smart compared to them. The dash helps to highlight and underline an unexpected inference. In the following statement, the dash separating the subject from the predicate emphasizes the importance of the action that is contained in the predicate *laufen* (*run, move, walk, etc.*). The young woman makes a lot of effort to ensure that her child develops normally. And so Tino made two steps – and this event had to be celebrated. At first, the parents hide their joy from the others – what if this is just accidental? But the text emphasizes several times: *Tino läuft... Unser Junge läuft... Er läuft... (Tino walks... Our boy walks... He walks...)*. The mother hopes that from this moment

on, her child will develop like other children. Parents want to share their joy with the friends who have been invited to visit. The mother gives Tino a gentle push. But Tino – *läuft nicht* (Tino – does not move). The importance of the last sentence, which is closely related to the entire previous context, is also emphasized by the fact that it is placed at the beginning of the next paragraph:

*Langsam löse ich meine Hand von Tinos Hüften: Warte nur, mein Lieber, staunen wirst du noch. Wir sind ganz normal. Wie andere. Ich gebe Tino einen Schubs.*

*Tino – läuft nicht* (Geppert, 1978, p. 203).

*Slowly, I release my hand from Tino's hips: You'll see, my love. You'll see. We're normal. Just like the others. I nudge Tino.*

*Tino - doesn't move* (Geppert, 1978, p. 203).

Deviation from the norm prescribed by the rules of punctuation results in a pragmatilistic effect, which corresponds to the intentions of the author of this message of the belles-lettres discourse.

A dash marks out elementary sentences in the composition of a complex one, for example, a subordinate clause from the main one:

*Du denkst wieder nicht so weit, wie ich dich kenne. Siehst erst mal nur den kleinen Jungen. Und dass er allein ist. Aber er wird einmal erwachsen. Was dann? – Du musst auch an uns denken. An später. Außerdem: Im Heim hat er seine Ruhe. Da sind alle wie er. Da fällt er nicht auf. Wenn er hier bleibt – dann werd ich verrückt* (Geppert, 1978, p. 126).

*Again, you're not looking to the future. You only see a little boy. And that he is lonely. But one day he will grow up. What's next? – You must think of us. About the future. Besides, he will be comfortable in the boarding school. Everyone there is like him. He will not stand out. If he stays here – I'll go crazy* (Geppert, 1978, p. 126).

A dash separates the main sentence from the subordinate clause, thus graphically highlighting both parts of the sentence, while emphasizing the meaning of each part: *Wenn er hier bleibt – dann werd ich verrückt* (If he stays here – I'll go crazy). Communication with the child with mental and physical disabilities negatively affects the mental state of the parents. Klaus (the father) groans, he sobs incessantly. Crying without tears, repeating that he will go mad, that he can no longer see their son becoming more stupid. He believes that the boy can not continue to live in their house, otherwise he will ruin their lives. The use of the dash sign is also explained by the context of the whole work, the characters of which are facing a difficult decision – a choice: to leave a sick child at home or to send him to a boarding school. Mentally and physically disabled children left behind by their parents in a boarding school and suffering from the lack of attention, arouse pity and sympathy. And when one of the employees of the boarding school takes Simone in her arms, talks to her, the girl, feeling warmth and affection, changes, acquires a normal human appearance (closes her always open mouth). This idea, expressed verbally, is accentuated by the dash before the subordinate clause and after the conjunction und:

*Seitdem nehme ich sie aus dem Bett und setze sie ins Spielzimmer. Jeden Tag. Manchmal bleibt sie schon ohne Fessel auf dem Stuhl sitzen. Es ist wohl eine Frage der Übung. Simone mit den zärtlichen Augen – wenn ich sie im Arm halte und leise mit ihr spreche oder singe. Sie schmiegt sich an mich, hält meine Hände und – schließt den Mund* (Geppert, 1978, p. 262).

*Since then, I've been taking her out of bed and bringing her to the playroom. Every day. Sometimes she sits in a chair without a leash. I think it's a matter of training. Simona with tender eyes – when I hold her in my arms and speak softly to her or sing. She snuggles up to me, takes my hands, and – closes her mouth* (Geppert, 1978, p. 262).

The dash sign can separate simple sentences united by a compositional conjunction:

*Klaus und ich blickten uns an. Ungläubig. Da lag Mensch, der so wenig Menschliches in seinem Wesen hatte – und man tat nichts, um sein Menschsein zu fördern* (Geppert, 1978, p. 241).

*Klaus and I looked at each other. Incredible. There lay a human being who had so little of the human – and nothing was being done to develop the human in him* (Geppert, 1978, p. 241).

Some authors are known for their preference of certain punctuation signs, which represent peculiarities of individual style. This is may be exemplified by the dash sign in Lark's works before the conjunction *und*, which does not correspond to the norm registered in the reference books on punctuation. Sarah Lark is the author of bright memorable books full of profound emotions. In her works, punctuation marks successfully emphasize the passions, which go high, tragedies and dramas that fall to the lot of the characters. In the following example, the text fragment before the dash sign contains a picturesque description of the sea coast, while emphasizing the peace and tranquillity of nature, and the dash sign makes a reference to another world, the world of war – the emphasis is on drying blood (a symbol of war) on neutral territory between the fronts:

*Der 7. August war ein weiterer, strahlender Hochsommertag an der türkischen Küste. Das Meer lag tiefblau und friedlich in der Sonne, das Gestrüpp an den Berghängen war ausgebleicht – und auf dem Niemandsland zwischen den Fronten trocknete das Blut* (Lark, 2009, p. 456).

*August 7th on the Turkish coast was another splendid midsummer day. The sea was dark blue and peaceful in the sun, the bushes on the hillsides were faded – and blood was drying on the no-man's land between the fronts* (Lark, 2009, p. 456).

These examples of deviations from the punctuation norm are not uncommon in natural language and are a subtle tool in the hands of writers and poets when working on a text. The ability to recognize and interpret the subtext created by the dash sign is an important prerequisite for a complete and correct understanding of the meaning of the text specified by the author.

A special case of use that is not regulated by punctuation rules is the three dashes that create the effect of emotional tension and incompleteness of statements in the following communicative situations.

*„Die Sache spricht, tönt doch für sich selbst!“ sagte der Dichter. Da musste er Selbstmord begehen.*

*"He does speak sense, it shines through itself!" said the poet. Then he had to commit suicide.*

*„Herr XX von Redakteur, Sie sind doch ein so genialer und einflussreicher Mann – – –!“.* (1)

*"Mr. Editor XX, you are so brilliant and influential – – –!".* (1)

*Da bekam der Dichter den – – –Preis!* (Altenberg, 1979, p. 73) (2)

*Then the poet won the – – –prize!* (Altenberg, 1979, p. 73) (2)

(1) The combination of three dashes with final exclamation marks conveys the author's attitude to what is being said, a hint of subtext, an implication of the emotional reaction that is expected from the reader.

(2) The separation of the article from the noun by the use of three dashes *den – – – Preis (prize)* is even more unusual in comparison with the above example of *der – Dummste (the most stupid)*. In this situation, we are talking about "enhancing the sign position" (Valgina, 2001, p. 280), where three signs instead of one have an increased dissecting power and intensify the expressive and stylistic effect of the dash.

Via three dashes in the following example, the author intrigues the reader, focuses his/her attention on the subsequent fragment of the statement:

*Zwei Kerle wie wir zwei sollten zusammenschreiten, wie Danton und Robespierre mit der Guillotine des – – –! Du wirst natürlich glauben, des Geistes. Nein. Denn der Geist ist immer milde, verständnisvoll, mitleidig und versöhnlich. Nein. Mit der Guillotine: Hass und Verachtung. Das taugt für die Herde* (Altenberg, 1979, p. 59).

*Two guys like us should perform together, like Danton and Robespierre with the guillotine – – –! You will, of course, think of the guillotine of reason. No. For the mind is always gentle, understanding, compassionate, and forgiving. No. With a guillotine of hatred and contempt. Just right for the herd* (Altenberg, 1979, p. 59).

The author of the following text using a dash invites the reader-interlocutor to reflect on the morality of this small episode, gives him/her the right to draw any conclusions. Such use of a dash is a way to transmit the overwhelming wealth of the individual inner world:

*B e e t h o v e n, ganz, ganz tief in dich hinein horchtest du, Tauber, vernahmst so die Geräusche der ganzen Welt: Das Konzert des Sturmes, das Konzert der Stille, das Konzert der Klagen, das Konzert des Kicherns! Und du gabst es einfach wieder, wie Bergwände das Echo – – –. So wurde es die Musik der Welt* (Altenberg, 1979, p. 151)!

*B e e t h o v e n, somewhere very, very deep inside you, the deaf one, you listened, you heard the sounds of the whole world: the concert of the storm, the concert of silence, the concert of lamentations, the concert of giggles! And you just play them like mountain gorges produce echo – – –. So it became the music of the world* (Altenberg, 1979, p. 151)!

The author affected by reflection, an influx of feelings - admiration and sadness at the same time – does opt for just a point to end the phrase. The three dashes serve a dual purpose in this communicative situation: on the one hand, they prepare the reader for summing up what has been said, on the other – they are a sign of endless continuation, variability of the process of reflection. It should be noted that to emphasize the importance of the great composer, the author uses such graphic means as letter space and underscore – B e e t h o v e n.

The expression of silence and at the same time emotional tension are conveyed by three dashes in the following communicative situation: Bruges appears before the interlocutor – a young lady who takes a liking to him and tries to arouse his reciprocal feelings – a person who is really competent in painting and music. At the same time, he shows interest in the opinion of a young woman, asks her questions about a particular artist. Unfortunately, his interlocutor can't keep up the conversation – she knows only one Dutch artist. Three dashes in both cases convey a sense of uneasiness, and also indicate the lack of a response from the woman, i.e. they replace verbal means of communication.

*Brügge berichtete mir nun, durch mein Interesse angeregt, von seiner Zuneigung zu Tieren, zur Malerei und Musik.*

*„Waren Sie hier schon in der Galerie? Was halten Sie von Granach? Diese fleischfarbigen Töne!*

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*Und die holländischen Maler? Sagen Ihnen die mehr zu?»*

*Ich kannte nur Dix.*

--- (Geppert, 1978, p. 83)

*Bruges, encouraged by my interest, told me about his love of animals, painting, and music.*

*"Have you been to the gallery here? What do you think about the Grenade? Those flesh tones!*

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*And the Dutch artists? Are they more to your taste?"*

*I only knew Deeks.*

--- (Geppert, 1978, p. 83)

It should be noted that the above strategies of applying the combination of punctuation marks were not mentioned by linguists dealing with punctuation problems.

A dash marking such an expressive construction as an attachment contributes to semantic and positional segmentation. The conjunctive connection is characteristic mainly for the colloquial style and manifests itself in the intonation-semantic and positional segmentation of some part of a simple or a complex sentence.

*Aber er rührte mit seinen Worten an den entscheidenden Punkt – einen wunden* (Thurm, 1985, p. 125).

*But with his words, he touched on a very important point – an old bleeding wound* (Thurm, 1985, p. 125).

*Die Ärztin ist unsere große Chance – die letzte* (Geppert, 1978, p. 131).

*This woman doctor was our chance, – our last chance* (Geppert, 1978, p. 131).

The dash in the following statement contributes to the expressive dissection of the text, it highlights an important detail in the form of isolation:

*Noch sicherer – und auch romantischer – wäre natürlich ein Treffen außerhalb der Stadt gewesen* (Lark, 2009, p. 470).

*Of course, a meeting in the country – would be even safer – and more romantic* (Lark, 2009, p. 470).

It is noteworthy that graphic stylistic means do not ensure expressiveness by themselves; they participate in this process in tandem with the elements of other levels – lexical and syntactic. Emotional-evaluative connotations arise under the influence of contextual factors, but graphic highlighting reinforces them, attracts the reader's attention, and facilitates understanding of the meaning.

The pragmatic purpose of graphic stylistic means is, first and foremost, to equip the writer with the tools that enhance the verbal effect of the message via graphic highlighting and help achieve mutual understanding, which is a primary goal of communication.

## 7. Conclusion

The article analyses the expressive and stylistic functions of the dash in the modern German belles-lettres discourse in the functional and communicative aspect. The results of the study allow us to draw the following conclusions.

The dash sign is actively used in belles-lettres discourse in order to create an expressive and stylistic effect; it has great opportunities to increase the expressiveness of the text. The choice of this punctuation mark, which carries semantic, emotional and modal information depends on the author's communicative intention and can be explained based on the general context, or as a preferable and most favored element of the author's individual style. All the phenomena of expressive-stylistic use of dashes described in the article accounted for by the following factors: deviation from the norm and connection with the constructions of expressive syntax. A certain expressive and stylistic effect, which is consistent with the intentions of the message addressor, is created, as our analysis shows, as a result of conscious deviation from the norm prescribed by the rules of standard dash sign use. Deviation from the norm is the separation by means of a dash of the article from the noun, to which the article refers; the subject from the predicate; the enhancement of the sign position. The latter consists in replacing less expressive signs, for example, a dot, with a more expressive dash sign, or in combining three dash signs along with an exclamation mark, creating the effect of emotional tension and incompleteness of statements.

The dash contributes to expressive disjointedness of the text and the creation of expressive information; the dash being a marker of so-called expressive syntactic constructions (inserts, separations, introductory constructions, attachments, parenthesis, etc.). The number of the examples analyzed is limited by the scope of the article. The involvement of other texts of contemporary German belles-lettres discourse will certainly broaden the domain of the dash expressive and stylistic potential.

Along with dashes, other punctuation marks have expressive and stylistic potential: colons, points of ellipses, and quotation marks, which also require careful study.

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