JOURNAL OF ADVANCED LINGUISTIC STUDIES
VOL. 13, NO. 2, JUL-DEC 2026 – PART 2 (ISSN 2231-4075)

The Use of the Exclamation Mark for Communicative-Pragmatic Purposes in Traditional Written and Virtual Texts

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the communicative-pragmatic functions of the exclamation mark in traditional written texts and contemporary virtual communication. The study focuses on the ways in which the exclamation mark functions not only as a punctuation device but also as a means of expressing the writer's communicative intention, emotional attitude, emphasis, and interpersonal stance. Particular attention is paid to its use in social media texts, where repeated exclamation marks such as "!!" and "!!!" frequently occur and may convey different degrees of emotional intensity. The study employs descriptive, comparative, contextual, and pragmatic methods to analyze examples from English traditional and virtual texts. The findings demonstrate that the exclamation mark performs both conventional grammatical functions and expanded pragmatic functions in digital communication. In virtual texts, its repetition and combination with other punctuation marks may intensify emotions, attract the recipient's attention, emphasize particular information, express surprise, enthusiasm, anger, warning, or disagreement, and contribute to the construction of interpersonal meaning. The study concludes that the exclamation mark has acquired additional communicative-pragmatic functions in virtual discourse while retaining its conventional punctuation functions.

Keywords: Exclamation mark, punctuation, virtual text, social media discourse, communicative function, pragmatic function,

emotional expressiveness, digital communication, punctuation marks.

INTRODUCTION

Punctuation is an essential component of written communication. Although punctuation marks are traditionally regarded as graphic devices that organize written language and indicate syntactic and semantic relationships, their functions extend beyond purely grammatical organization. In many contexts, punctuation marks contribute to the expression of emotions, attitudes, communicative intentions, and interpersonal relationships between participants in communication. Among punctuation marks, the exclamation mark occupies a particularly significant position because of its close relationship with emotional and expressive meaning. In traditional written texts, the exclamation mark is commonly associated with exclamatory sentences, strong emotions, commands, warnings, surprise, admiration, and emphasis. Its use enables writers to convey meanings that may otherwise remain implicit in written communication (Crystal 2006; Parkes 1976).

The development of computer-mediated communication and social networking platforms has significantly transformed the ways in which people use written language. Digital communication lacks many prosodic and non-verbal resources characteristic of face-to-face interaction. Consequently, users frequently employ punctuation, capitalization, emojis, repeated letters, and other graphic devices to compensate for the absence of intonation, facial expressions, gestures, and voice quality (Herring 2004; Baron 2008; Yus 2011).

Within this context, punctuation marks acquire additional pragmatic functions. The exclamation mark provides an illustrative example. In virtual communication, expressions such as “Great!”, “Really?!”, “Congratulations!!!”, and “Stop!!!” may communicate different degrees of emotional intensity and interpersonal attitude. Therefore, the number, position, and combination of exclamation marks may contribute substantially

to the interpretation of a message (Herring 2004; Baron 2008; Yus 2011).

The relevance of this study is determined by the growing importance of virtual communication and the necessity of examining punctuation as a multifunctional linguistic resource. While traditional punctuation rules generally prescribe the contexts in which an exclamation mark should be used, social media discourse demonstrates considerable flexibility and creativity in its application.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the communicative-pragmatic functions of the exclamation mark in traditional written and virtual texts.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What communicative-pragmatic functions does the exclamation mark perform in traditional written texts?
2. How does the use of the exclamation mark differ in virtual communication?
3. What pragmatic meanings are conveyed by repeated exclamation marks in social media texts?
4. How does the use of the exclamation mark contribute to emotional and interpersonal meaning in digital discourse?

METHODS

The study employs descriptive, comparative, contextual, functional-pragmatic, and discourse-analytical methods.

The research material consists of examples containing exclamation marks from two major types of written communication: traditional written texts and virtual texts. Traditional written materials include literary texts, journalistic discourse, dialogues, and other forms of conventional written communication. Virtual materials include social media posts, comments, online messages, and other forms of computer-mediated communication.

The analysis focuses on the position, frequency, repetition, and contextual use of the exclamation mark. Particular attention is paid to examples in which the exclamation mark occurs

independently, repeatedly, or in combination with other punctuation marks.

The pragmatic interpretation of the examples is based on their communicative context. The analysis considers the relationship between the writer and recipient, the communicative situation, the intended emotional effect, and the semantic content of the utterance.

For comparative purposes, the exclamation mark is examined according to several functional categories, including emotional expression, emphasis, command, warning, surprise, admiration, attention attraction, disagreement, and interpersonal positioning.

RESULTS

The analysis demonstrates that the exclamation mark performs several communicative-pragmatic functions in both traditional and virtual texts. However, its pragmatic potential becomes particularly evident in digital communication.

Expression of emotion

One of the primary functions of the exclamation mark is the expression of emotional states. For example: “What a beautiful day!”

The exclamation mark strengthens the emotional content of the utterance and indicates that the speaker is expressing a positive emotional reaction rather than simply providing information. In virtual communication, the same function can be intensified through repetition: “What a beautiful day!!!”The three exclamation marks create a stronger impression of enthusiasm and emotional involvement.

Expression of surprise

The exclamation mark may indicate surprise or astonishment: “You are here!” In a virtual context, repetition can increase the intensity of the reaction: “You are here!!!”

The repeated punctuation suggests a stronger emotional response and may indicate that the information is unexpected for the writer.

Emphasis

The exclamation mark is frequently used to emphasize an important element of a message: "This is very important!"

In social media discourse, repeated exclamation marks may function as a graphic intensifier: "This is VERY important!!!" Here, punctuation works together with capitalization to increase the pragmatic force of the statement.

Commands and warnings

The exclamation mark can strengthen commands and warnings: "Stop! Be careful!"

In virtual communication, repetition may further increase the urgency of the message: "Stop!!!" The repeated exclamation marks indicate that the writer intends to attract immediate attention and increase the force of the command.

Attention attraction

Another important function of the exclamation mark is to attract the recipient's attention: "Look! Listen!" In digital discourse, this function may be particularly important because users often communicate in rapidly changing information environments.

Repetition and emotional intensification

One of the most characteristic features of virtual communication is the repetition of punctuation marks.

The following sequence illustrates increasing graphic intensity:

Form	**Possible pragmatic effect**
!	emphasis or emotion
!!	increased emphasis
!!!	strong emotional intensity
!!!!	very strong emotional involvement
!!!!!	extremely intensified reaction

However, the number of exclamation marks does not have a fixed meaning independent of context. The pragmatic interpretation depends on the content of the message, the relationship between participants, and the communicative situation.

For example, “Congratulations!” may express ordinary positive politeness, whereas “Congratulations!!!” may indicate a much stronger degree of enthusiasm or emotional involvement.

Combination with other punctuation marks

The exclamation mark can also occur in combination with other punctuation marks: *What happened?!*Such combinations are particularly common in informal digital communication. The question mark indicates interrogative meaning, while the exclamation mark adds emotional or emphatic force. Another example is: “No!!!”

Here, the repeated exclamation marks intensify the negative emotional reaction.

The findings therefore suggest that punctuation in virtual communication may operate as a multifunctional pragmatic resource rather than merely as a system of grammatical markers.

DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate a clear distinction between the conventional and expanded functions of the exclamation mark. In traditional written texts, its use is generally more closely associated with established punctuation conventions. It may mark exclamatory sentences, commands, warnings, strong emotions, and emphatic expressions.

Virtual communication, by contrast, provides users with greater graphic freedom. The exclamation mark can be repeated, combined with other punctuation marks, or used in contexts where conventional punctuation rules would normally require a different form. Such practices are particularly characteristic of informal social media discourse.

The repetition of exclamation marks is especially significant from a pragmatic perspective. In face-to-face communication, emotional intensity can be conveyed through intonation, voice volume, facial expressions, gestures, and other non-verbal resources. In written digital communication, these resources are unavailable or limited. Consequently, repeated punctuation may function as a graphic substitute for certain aspects of prosody and non-verbal communication (Baron 2008; Herring 2004; Yus 2011).

The exclamation mark may therefore contribute to several layers of meaning simultaneously. At the grammatical level, it can mark an exclamatory or imperative construction. At the semantic level, it can contribute to the interpretation of the utterance. At the pragmatic level, it can reveal the writer's attitude, emotional involvement, communicative intention, and expected effect on the recipient.

This multifunctionality is particularly visible in social media discourse, where linguistic economy and emotional expressiveness frequently coexist. Users often employ short messages combined with graphic intensifiers to communicate a relatively complex interpersonal meaning.

Thus, the exclamation mark in virtual communication should not be considered merely a deviation from traditional punctuation norms. Rather, its innovative use can be interpreted as an adaptation of written language to the communicative requirements of digital interaction (McCulloch 2019).

CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated that the exclamation mark performs a range of communicative-pragmatic functions in both traditional written and virtual texts. In conventional writing, it primarily serves to express strong emotion, emphasis, commands, warnings, surprise, and admiration.

In virtual communication, however, its functional potential becomes considerably broader. Repeated exclamation marks can intensify emotional meaning, emphasize information, attract attention, express enthusiasm or disagreement, and strengthen the interpersonal effect of an utterance.

The analysis also indicates that the pragmatic meaning of the exclamation mark cannot be determined solely by its graphic form. Its interpretation depends on the linguistic and communicative context in which it occurs. In particular, forms such as "!!" and "!!!" should be analyzed in relation to the content of the message, the relationship between participants, and the communicative purpose of the writer.

Therefore, the exclamation mark in virtual discourse can be regarded as a multifunctional graphic-pragmatic resource. Its use demonstrates how punctuation adapts to the changing conditions of digital communication and participates in the expression of meanings that traditionally depend on prosody and non-verbal communicative resources.

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