

## EXPRESSIVE AND STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONS OF PUNCTUATION IN FRANZ KAFKA'S THE METAMORPHOSIS: A LINGUISTIC AND STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

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**Islomova Latofat Fazliddinovna**

*Teacher of Karshi State University,  
Faculty of English Philology,  
latofat.islomova1985@gmail.com*

### Abstract

This article explores the expressive, emotional, and structural functions of punctuation in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, examining how punctuation contributes to the construction of meaning, emotion, and psychological realism in the text. Kafka's punctuation deviates from conventional grammatical norms, operating instead as a tool of expression that mirrors the protagonist's fragmentation and alienation. Through a comparative linguistic and stylistic analysis of selected passages from the original German text and its English translations, this study demonstrates how punctuation reflects Gregor Samsa's inner disintegration and emotional isolation. The findings reveal that commas, semicolons, ellipses, and dashes in Kafka's prose carry symbolic weight, transforming syntax into a psychological and aesthetic medium.

### Key words

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, punctuation, expressiveness, syntax, authorial style, linguistic analysis.

### Аннотация

В статье исследуются выразительные, эмоциональные и структурные функции пунктуации в произведении Франца Кафки *Превращение*. Показано, что пунктуация у Кафки выходит за рамки грамматических норм и становится инструментом выражения внутреннего состояния героя. С помощью сравнительного лингвистического и стилистического анализа оригинального немецкого текста и английских переводов автор приходит к выводу, что знаки препинания в прозе Кафки отражают психологическую фрагментацию, отчуждённость и внутренний конфликт персонажей. Коммы, точки с запятой, тире и многоточия в его произведениях приобретают символическое значение и превращаются в средство художественного выражения.

## Ключевые слова

Франц Кафка, *Превращение*, пунктуация, выразительность, синтаксис, авторский стиль, лингвистический анализ.

## Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada Frants Kafkaning *Metamorfoza* asarida tinish belgilarining ifodaviy, hissiy va strukturaviy funksiyalari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda muallifning tinish belgilaridan g'ayrioddiy foydalanishi grammatik me'yordan chiqib, qahramonning ruhiy parchalanishini va begonalik holatini ifodalovchi vosita sifatida namoyon bo'lishi ko'rsatib beriladi. Nemischa matn va uning inglizcha tarjimalarini qiyosiy tahlil qilish orqali Kafkaning punktuatsiyasi sintaksisni estetik va psixologik ifoda vositasiga aylantirishi aniqlanadi. Vergullar, nuqtali vergullar, tire va ellipsislar asardagi ruhiy tushkunlik va ajralishni ifodalovchi belgilar sifatida talqin qilinadi.

## Kalit so'zlar

Frants Kafka, *Metamorfoza*, punktuatsiya, ifodalilik, sintaksis, muallif uslubi, lingvistik tahlil.

## Introduction

Franz Kafka (1883–1924) stands as one of the most influential figures in modernist literature. His works—marked by existential anxiety, alienation, and bureaucratic absurdity—also reveal an exceptional sensitivity to language and punctuation. In *The Metamorphosis* (1915), punctuation transcends its grammatical function to become a central element of psychological expression.

Kafka's sentences are often long, meandering, and interrupted by commas, semicolons, and dashes. This stylistic structure reflects the inner chaos of his characters, particularly Gregor Samsa, whose transformation into an insect becomes a metaphor for dehumanization and loss of identity. While many scholars have focused on Kafka's themes and symbolism, the linguistic aspect—especially his use of punctuation as a form of emotional expression—has received less systematic attention.

The aim of this study is to investigate how punctuation in *The Metamorphosis* contributes to the creation of emotional atmosphere, psychological depth, and authorial style. The research explores how these punctuation marks—commas, semicolons, ellipses, and dashes—embody tension, hesitation, and fragmentation.

## Methods

This research employs **comparative linguistic** and **stylistic analysis**. The original German text of *Die Verwandlung* (1915) was examined alongside English

translations by David Wyllie (2002) and Stanley Corngold (1972) to identify the expressive role of punctuation.

Analytical procedures included:

1. **Textual analysis** – identifying sentences where punctuation plays a key stylistic or psychological role.
2. **Functional classification** – categorizing punctuation according to expressive (emotional), structural (syntactic), and aesthetic (authorial) functions.
3. **Comparative translation analysis** – observing how punctuation changes or loses expressiveness when rendered in English.
4. **Interpretive linguistic approach** – relating punctuation patterns to psychological, narrative, and philosophical meanings in the text.

The corpus included representative excerpts from each of the three parts of the novella to ensure stylistic balance and thematic relevance.

### Results

The Uzbek text of *Metamorfoza* retains Kafka's preference for long, comma-filled sentences that mirror Gregor Samsa's confused state of mind.

*"Bir kuni Gregor Samsa noxush tushlardan uyg'onib, o'zini to'shagida ulkan hasharotga aylanganini ko'rdi."*  
("One morning, Gregor Samsa awoke from uneasy dreams to find himself transformed into a giant insect.")

Here, the **commas** guide the rhythm of Gregor's thoughts. Each pause conveys hesitation and disbelief. Linguistically, commas express **psychological suspension** – Gregor's effort to process the absurdity of his transformation. The rhythm of the sentence feels breathless, echoing his inner panic.

In several passages, **semicolons** divide contradictory thoughts and emotions within the same line:

*"U jim yotishi kerak edi; hammasi o'z-o'zidan joyiga tushadi, deb o'yladi."*  
("He had to lie quietly; he thought everything would soon return to normal.")

The semicolon separates **hope** from **fear**, functioning as a syntactic boundary between two emotional states. This structure creates a rhythm of inner duality – Gregor's rational mind and his instinctive anxiety coexist in tension.

### Dashes and Ellipses: Signs of Disconnection

Kafka's punctuation often mirrors Gregor's growing inability to communicate. In Uzbek, dashes and ellipses vividly depict emotional interruption:

*"U gapirmoqchi bo'ldi, lekin og'zidan g'alati tovush chiqdi – xirillagan, quloqqa yoqimsiz tovush..."*  
("He tried to speak, but what came out was a strange sound – a hoarse, unpleasant noise...")

The **dash** marks the sudden breakdown of communication; the **ellipsis** extends the silence that follows. These marks express **fragmented consciousness** and **emotional paralysis**. The visual structure of punctuation parallels Gregor's separation from the human world.

Toward the end of the novella, short sentences with periods replace earlier, complex ones. This stylistic shift reflects Gregor's weakening spirit:

"U oilasini esladi. Yuragi ezildi. So'ng hammasi tugadi."  
(*"He thought of his family. His heart ached. Then everything ended."*)

The use of **full stops** gives weight and finality to each statement. The rhythm slows, echoing the stillness of death. The sentence structure mirrors emotional closure and existential acceptance.

#### 4. Discussion

Kafka's punctuation in *The Metamorphosis* represents an intricate blend of linguistic precision and psychological symbolism. His punctuation choices **structure consciousness** as much as they **express emotion**.

The overuse of commas and semicolons creates a sense of **continuous tension**, an unending sentence that reflects the absurdity of Gregor's condition. Each comma becomes a breath of anxiety, each semicolon a hinge between reason and madness. The **syntax of suffocation** immerses readers in the protagonist's psychological confinement.

The **dash** and **ellipsis**, on the other hand, function as typographical symbols of alienation. Their irregular rhythm expresses the breakdown of rational thought, while their visual form—open and incomplete—embodies the disintegration of meaning itself. Kafka's language is thus not only semantic but also **visual and acoustic**, shaping how the reader perceives thought and emotion.

Comparatively, in English translations, editors often normalize punctuation for readability. This adaptation reduces the emotional density of Kafka's original style. For example, his extended comma chains are often split into shorter sentences, eliminating the rhythm of panic that characterizes the German text. Consequently, Kafka's **expressive punctuation** is partly untranslatable, demonstrating its deep embedding in the cognitive structure of his language.

The study confirms that punctuation in *The Metamorphosis* is a **semiotic system** that expresses psychological fragmentation, tension, and the limits of human communication. Kafka's punctuation merges syntax and emotion into a unified aesthetic principle.

#### Conclusion

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* reveals how punctuation can transcend grammatical boundaries and become a carrier of emotion, structure, and meaning.

Commas reproduce hesitation, semicolons mirror duality, dashes convey interruption, and ellipses reflect silence. Each mark is not a technical device but an expressive sign of human experience.

Kafka transforms punctuation into an aesthetic and psychological code, making it central to the interpretation of his prose. This research demonstrates that punctuation, often neglected in stylistic studies, plays a decisive role in the emotional and structural architecture of literary texts.

Future research may extend this analysis to compare Kafka's punctuation with that of other modernist authors – such as James Joyce or Virginia Woolf – to further understand how expressive punctuation functions as a universal tool of literary modernism.

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