A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO GRAPHEMES

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...language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it. Not only is the world 'world' only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is re-presented within it.[1]

Abstract

The present paper examines the contribution of graphemes to the understanding and interpretation of written texts and analyses the developmental process thereof. My starting point is the historical development of written texts and the changes in the process of comprehension. The paper describes how the reception of written texts changed over time, points out the differences between reading aloud and silent reading, and argues that reading, as a process of reception, influences the development of written texts. Text-internal functions are marked with characters, since in order to understand and interpret a written text, each semantic element has to be self-evident. Based on this theoretical approach, the paper demonstrates how punctuation marks appeared in Hungarian writing, analyses the perspectival nature of characters embedded in written texts, and finally presents the theoretical argument discussed through the development of one textual function and its written form.

1.   Introduction

As a consequence of its diverse symbolic functions and historical development, a punctuation mark is difficult to define in a single technical term.[2] My paper, therefore, examines the role of punctuation marks in understanding and interpreting written texts as it changes throughout its developmental process. This approach makes it possible to examine the character within the developing linguistic medium which created it, in the process in which its dynamic meaning develops.

Given that punctuation marks are inherent parts of written texts, my paper first reviews the motivation behind the development of written texts. Then, it traces the development of written texts from the perspective of the comprehensive and interpretative process and describes the changes in the function of punctuation marks embedded in the texts. I also analyse the difference between reading aloud and silent reading as receptive processes and

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[1] Gadamer 1965/1981: 401.
[2] A technical term is simply "a word, the meaning of which is unequivocally defined, inasmuch as it signifies a defined concept. A technical term is always something artificial insofar as […] a word that is already in use has the variety and breadth of its meanings excised and is assigned only one particular conceptual meaning. […] The technical term is a word that has become ossified" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 375).

the role of punctuation marks in these processes. Based on this theoretical approach, the paper focuses on the analysis of the historical shift that gave rise to the written registers in Hungarian parallel to the historical changes in the way written texts were interpreted. Finally, the paper demonstrates the theoretical argument through the study of expressions of a selected semantic function, namely quotation marks, and how their form and use changed over time.

2. From a historical point of view, spoken language has primacy over written language: "in relation to language, writing seems a secondary phenomenon. The sign language of writing refers back to the actual language of speech" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 354)[3]. Linguistic activity was for a long time exclusively linked to the spoken tradition, given that language ability is basically a biological, anatomical attribute. The sounds man uttered turned into utterances of speech when the sounds, or their combinations, began to function as units of communication carrying meaning. "A common world – even if it is only an invented one – is always the presupposition of language" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 367) for a community. The development of a written language occurred somewhat later and can be explained by the appearance of the need for devising a means of recording linguistic messages that are not directly dependent on the speech organs. As writing developed, written texts became disconnected from the act of speaking and themselves were able to produce texts whose interpretation did not require speech production. So the fact that "language is capable of being written is by no means incidental to its nature" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 334). With written language "a new variant, and a new linguistic relationship, a duality of spoken and written language appears. The duality allows for alteration and choice and a model prompting selection" (Pusztai 2004).

The difference between spoken and written language is evident in their fundamentally differing physical appearance. Spoken linguistic vocalisations are of an audio-acoustic nature and their perception takes place via (external) hearing. Inherent features of acoustic speech are supra-segmental (prosodic, metric) vehicles. The speaker subconsciously or consciously uses intonation, stress, voice inflection, pauses, rhythm and tempo that affect how the listener is able to attribute meaning to what is being said. Moreover, spoken communication may also be accompanied by other paralinguistic instruments, the comprehension of articulated sounds is affected by gestures and mimicry (cf. e.g. Gadamer 1965/1981: 354).

In contrast to the spoken linguistic expressions, written linguistic expressions are of a visual nature, their perception is enabled through vision or – in the case of the blind – touch. The written form, that is to say the form of letters and punctuation marks, their size, colour and spatial arrangement is, on the one hand, characteristic, and on the other, offers possibilities derived from its visual quality. The use of these features in the text contributes to the way the text generates meaning.

When comparing spoken and written language one usually considers that the former is generally direct, while the latter usually takes place by indirect means of interactive communication. In the direct form the time and space of expression and perception are inherently together. That means for one that the discourse partners not only hear but also see each

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[3] For the theoretical approaches to written and spoken language see e.g. Zolnai 1926; Heidegger 1927/ 1976; Wittgenstein 1921/1961; Barthes 1970/1993; Ong 1982; Brown–Yule 1983; Flusser 1987; Vater 1992; Günther–Ludwig 1994; Crystal 1997; Neumer 1998, 2003; Nyíri 1998; Nyíri–Szécsi 1998; Verschueren 1999; Kulcsár Szabó 2002; Benczik 2006; Fehér M. 2006, 2008; Csontos 2009.

other, and in addition to the verbal and audible non-verbal signals they are able to discern the other's gestures and mimicry, which contribute to the comprehension of the discourse. On the other hand, it also means that the speaker does not have as much time to plan and shape his speech as is the case with writing. Of course, the listener, for his part, is not able to return to a page, but he does have the possibility to join the conversation and take the floor and the role of the speaker.

In indirect interaction the unity that characterises the speaker-listener situation is not attained. The process of text production and perception becomes asymmetrical (see Iser 1990), and as a result the text becomes alienated from the situation of its production[4] and origin (cf. e. g. Zolnai 1926; Ong 1982 and Gadamer 1965/1981: 354–355). The producer of a text is hence compelled to take into consideration the lack of possibilities inherent in face-to-face communication in planning his strategy of expression, since in writing he is unable to share the search for words with a partner as he is in conversation. Therefore, he must open up the explanation-comprehension horizon in the writing itself, which the reader must fill in on his own (see Gadamer 1986). At the same time, however, a written text is also a form of discourse, the understanding of "permanently fixed expressions of life" (Gadamer 1965/ 1981: 349 quoting Droysen) that produce a kind of (*hermeneutical*) *conversation* in which the text is one partner in the discourse and the interpreter is the other (see Gadamer 1965/ 1981 and Iser 1990). A written text finds its "voice" only via the interpreter, and it is the reader who attaches meaning to the visual signs. At the same time, "by being changed back into intelligible terms, the object of which the text speaks itself finds expression" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 349, also cf. Iser 1990). In as far as a written text can be interpreted as a (herme-neutical) conversation, – as in direct interaction – both partners have to find a common language, which is not "the preparation of a tool for the purpose of understanding but, rather, coincides with the very act of understanding and reaching agreement" (Gadamer 1965/ 1981: 349–350).

3. In this common language the function of each component is to establish comprehension. Since a punctuation mark appears embedded in a written text, it indeed functions as a sign only there and would lose its role if the text were verbalised. Punctuation marks contribute to the interpretation process of written texts and to the ability of the text to produce meaning. Its contribution, however, is of a different nature than that of the written words of the text.

"It is in the nature of the sign [the punctuation mark embedded in the text] that it has its being solely in its applied function, in the fact that it points to something else. Thus it must be distinguished in this function from the context in which it is encountered and taken as a sign" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 373). A punctuation mark is connected to the meaning and understanding of the text through the meaning initiated by the process of understanding. It functions strictly as a sign only in written texts, where it evolves the contextual dynamic meaning that it can merely imply on its own. Therefore, it is during the comprehension process of a text that it must "be taken as a sign, in order for its own being as an object to be annulled and for it to disappear in its meaning" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 373). It follows that from the point of view of comprehension and interpretation, a punctuation mark can be considered as a reference point

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[4] "What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author. […] For texts do not ask to be understood as a living expression of the subjectivity of their writers" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 356–357).

for understanding the text, that is, for intellect and sentiment. It opens the intellectual/emotional domain it refers to – thereby advancing text comprehension –, and functions as a path that leads the interpreter to the meaning with which it contributes to written texts. What we are seeing here are thus the significance-generating – and comprehension-advancing – elements of the "speech activity" of the author implicit behind written texts, which are designated by punctuation marks (since the text is a written one). Written texts require punctuation marks for elaborating a given perspective in order to contribute with a certain meaning to understanding.[5] For this reason it is worthwhile to examine the development of the process of text comprehension, of which punctuation marks become a part. In this approach, the historically changing reference function of signs may demonstrate the – similarly changing – perspective that the text stresses from the perspective of comprehension, and the linguistic form applied in the text for the expression of the experience of the world (cf. Gadamer 1965/1981: 398; also Langacker 1987, 1991; Tomasello 1999).

The contribution of punctuation marks to a text cannot be examined independently from the text – the time of its writing, function, audience, etc. – in which it exists (Ricoeur 1985), given that punctuation marks may have different meanings as the comprehension process of the text unfolds. The existence of the punctuation mark as a sign is determined by the text and the motivation for its creation, the process of conveying the meaning in which it is embedded, and the decoding/comprehension strategy[6] of its interpreter, in relation to whom its meaning solely exists. Therefore, in the following – by lending the punctuation mark a narrower interpretation – I shall describe the historic developmental processes which gave rise to the appearance of punctuation marks in Hungarian writing. Subsequently the function of the punctuation mark within the text changed along with the changing understanding and interpretation process of written texts.

3.1. The emergence of punctuation marks in Hungarian writing served to indicate a pause in intonation because the texts were read aloud – (ref. Keszler 1995, 2004; Korompay 2000: 292, 593). Punctuation marks were used to help the articulation of the content of speech read aloud to facilitate the process of understanding and interpretation. In this process intonation and pause function as signs (see section 2). Thus, the early use of punctuation marks denoting pauses in intonation was first of all related to the process of speech. As writing spread, written (manuscript or printed) texts flourished, and especially when printing spread and texts were increasingly read in private rather than to an audience, written texts began to develop their own framework for aiding the interpretation process. Along with that, punctuation marks increasingly characterised written texts in the sense that they had to ensure that the texts were unambiguously understood and interpreted by the individual readers, without a speaking reader as an intermediary. From the point of view of perception, the difference between reading aloud and silent reading – albeit both are interpretative, neither produce new content in relation to the text – is that when a text is read out, the dialogue between the reader and the text presents itself to the audience who come into contact with written texts only through the presenting reader, and hence the comprehension process is

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[5] "The experience is not wordless to begin with and then an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word. Rather it is part of experience itself that it seeks and finds words that express it" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 377).

[6] "The author […] reacts to the degree that he writes down: similarly the reader is a full-fledged participant in the production of meaning, and as a mortal is forced to do – that is to act – in order to create the meaning that, although ugly, is still better than meaninglessness" (Said 1979: 317).

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linked to speech rather than the written text itself. When reading aloud the dominance of speech also influences meaning in that the time span of the read text closely delimits the process of understanding, since the words and the interpretation process they trigger flow on, and the meaning of the words is linked to that process (see Wittgenstein 1967: 135 §). Reading aloud in this sense may be compared to the process of translation, where the translator must preserve the meaning, "but since it must be understood within a new linguistic world, it must be expressed within it in a new way" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 346). That means that "reading aloud […] is the awakening and conversion of a text into new immediacy" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 360), and really an interpretation itself.

Silent reading, on the other hand, is a process that "removes the dead graphemic quality of writing, or gives it a new, acoustic life, […] in such a way that it guides it back into language. Thus, silent reading relocates the meaning that lies hidden in a written text into language, dismantling and reconstructing the comprehensive domain of communication" (Kulcsár-Szabó 2005: 165; see also Gadamer 1986; Iser 1990). Understanding a written text via reading – from the perspective of hermeneutical philosophy – depends a great deal on how well one is capable of *seeing* written texts with one's eyes and *hearing* speech with one's *internal ear* (Gadamer 1986; Nyíri 1991: 123). When reading, a dialogue is estab-lished between the written text and the reader and the written text creates its (ideal) reader (cf. Gadamer 1986; also Iser 1990; Ricoeur 1985). Reading is a process in which "the written text is led back into the language" (Kulcsár-Szabó 2005: 166; see also Gadamer 1986). At the same time, and unlike what we find in the process of reading aloud, the reader himself is directly addressed. As writing developed and the so-called *eminent texts*[7] spread, the dominance, function and explicitness of punctuation marks in texts, their quality as an unambiguous reference, also changed and even became distinctive in particular types of texts. In the tradition of Hungarian writing this development can be illustrated by tracing the process from textual functions either not indicated by punctuation marks, or indicated only by a single punctuation mark possibly combined with lower and upper case letters (ref. Keszler 1995: 36–44), through texts where several different textual functions were indicated by similar or the same punctuation mark (ref. Keszler 1995: 44–46), to punctuation marks that indicated certain textual functions unambiguously – also changing their reference function (cf. Keszler 1995: 46–47, 57–66) – so that they evoked such a definite meaning that they were able to contribute to the understanding of *written texts* in the given context. Written texts establish unambiguous meaning by using appropriate punctuation marks as reference points. Here it may be useful to reflect on the appearance of the individual punctuation marks in Hungarian writing (since written texts did not require signs until these signs were needed to carry meaning in order to contribute to comprehension).[8] For example the semicolon, and the exclamation mark from among the group of intonation signs, appeared in the late 16th century (Keszler 1995, 2004); the ellipsis in the mid-17th century; the dash and the three or more points appeared in the late 18th century (Csontos 2007); and quotation marks in the mid-18th century (Csontos 2004). The above considerations illustrate the hermeneutical changes in the Hungarian tradition of writing, where

[7] *Eminent text* "does not refer back to an unrelated, previous linguistic action but essentially stamps it out, and presents itself as the linguistic act that carries its identity within its own materiality, simply put, as a communication that cannot be produced with other words" (Gadamer 1986 summarised by Kulcsár-Szabó 2005: 155).
[8] It should be noted that the appearance of punctuation marks in Western European writing had an influence on Hungarian writing.

functions that contribute to the comprehension of written texts – with its own universe of discourse that characterises it – are unequivocal and recognisable for the reader as a recipient[9]. In texts at this stage of writing, adopting punctuation marks was triggered by the need to indicate functions of written texts as well as by the request to reflect on linguistic activity that is different from spoken linguistic activity[10] (due to the characteristics illustrated in section 2).

Looking at the history of the development of punctuation marks, the degree to which the process whereby the meaning attached to written texts can be retrieved may be regarded as automatic, is an indication of how conventionalized it has become (cf. Gadamer 1965/1981: 367). The more unambiguous a punctuation mark is, the more its existence as a sign with an associated meaning is exhausted, and the more it is a *pure sign* (Gadamer 1965/1981: 374). Therefore, in the subsequent development of the written text and text read aloud a punctuation mark functions as unambiguously as possible as a reference point so that its being a sign should disappear as easily as possible in the process of understanding.

The changing use of punctuation marks can thus be related to the historic transformation that led from reading aloud to silent reading; in written and read texts the lack of punctuation marks or their ambiguousness hence would stand in the way of transmitting meaning (Gadamer 1986).

3.2. In the following I shall illustrate the use of punctuation marks – together with its effects on the interpretation of written texts – through a selected textual function, namely through the changing application of quotation marks, from a historical hermeneutical perspective. From the appearance of the first written texts in Hungarian until the middle of the 17th century, various signs were used to mark the quoting sentence and the embedded direct quotation. In manuscripts – if direct quotations were indicated by punctuation marks at all – combinations of a virgule and lower-case letters, a virgule and upper-case letters, a full stop and lower-case letters, a full stop and upper-case letters, a colon and lower-case letters, and a colon and upper-case letters appeared (Keszler 1995: 49–50). In printed texts several combinations – a full stop and upper-case letters, a virgule and upper-case letters, a comma and upper-case letters, a colon and upper-case letters, a virgule and lower-case letters, a comma and lower-case letters, a colon and lower-case letters, as well as a semicolon appeared (Keszler 1995: 63–64). The punctuation mark separating the quoting sentence from the direct quotation contributed to the understanding of the text in that it separated the parts denoting different viewpoints. The interpretation of passages of direct quotations was not hindered by various markings, because until the mid-19th century they were always embedded in an introductory and closing or interrupting sentence (cf. e.g. Károly 1995: 824–834; Dömötör 2002: 58–59; Gallasy 2003: 569–570, 692; also Csontos 2004: 244–248). That made the perspectivisation linguistically explicit (ref. Langacker 1987, 1991, Sanders–Spooren 1997; see also Tomasello 1999), that is to say that a given passage should be treated as a quote, and that the subject of consciousness (Sanders–Spooren 1997: 87; also Tolcsvai 2002: 243; Tátrai 2005: 220–226) was, for the length of the quote, embedded in the narrator and it was to him that active awareness was connected. Additionally, the entire direct quota-

[9] Since written texts do not repeat a given linguistic act, rather it determines each repetition and linguistic action (Gadamer 1986).
[10] In this sense punctuation marks, in the broad sense, may be considered to be indicators of metapragmatic awareness (Verschueren 1999: 187–198; Tátrai 2006).

tion – with more extensive linguistic indicators for tense and mood in old Hungarian – completely shifted the referential centre from the actual speaker (see Sanders–Spooren 1997: 86, also Tolcsvai 2002: 243; Tátrai 2005: 216–220). This structure was conducive to the perceptive process in texts read aloud, since the quotation was distinguishable when the text was understood as the words were vocalised. Owing to the development of written texts – which may have to do with the advance of reading as a perceptive process –, from the mid-17th century, direct quotations were most commonly denoted by colons and upper-case letters (Fábián 1967: 234; Keszler 2004: 143; Csontos 2004: 244) in an attempt to make them unambiguously recognisable. Moreover, it was increasingly common to supplement this form of designation by setting direct quotations in italics in printed texts and underlin-ing them in manuscripts. For example:

(1) a. az Apoſtol igy ſʒól: *Es felkel őltőznőtők amaz új ember, mely Iſten fʒerén terémtetett az igafʒágra, és a' valoságos Sz: életre.* Eph. 4. 24. (Gyöngyösi 1657: 85)
[the Apostle says: *And the new man shall [?], who was created by God for justice, and a true Holy life.*]

(1) b. OrdÓg tanátsa ez: *Ha Istennek fia vagy, erefʒkedgyel-le a' Templomról, 's meg őriznek az Angyalok* (Pápai Páriz 1701: 1)
[This is the teaching of the Devil: *If you are the son of God, come down from the Temple and the Angels shall save you*]

(1) c. Sólt. 51. v. 13. 14. *A' te Szent Lelkedet ne vedd-el én tölem; az engedelemnek lelkével erösíts-meg engemet* (Bethlen 1726: 1)
[Psalms 51. v. 13. 14. *Do not take your Holy Soul away from me; strengthen me with the soul of obedience*]

(1) d. azért mondgya a' Proféta: *Mint a' víz a' tüzet; ugy meg-óltya a' bünt az alamiſna* (Haller 1751: 109)
[therefore the Prophet says: *As water to fire; so does charity extinguish sin*]

The mode of designation illustrated in (1)a–d. was likely to have been created by the producer of the text or, in case of printed texts, the person contributing to the printing process, wanting to make the perspectivisation more readily recognisable for the reader by way of a visible sign – that had by now become characteristic of written texts. The use of only one mode of designation indicates the development in the comprehension strategy of written texts. At that time the quoting sentence was placed in front of the direct quotation, or it was simply omitted, and as we can see in the examples (1)a–d., the direct quotation appeared in italics. As can be seen in (1)c., the reference mark next to the quote made the location of the text, the intertextual process and perspectivisation explicit.

Conversations produced by several speakers could be indicated in this era in the same way as conversations involving a single speaker (Csontos 2006a). Both could be denoted by punctuation marks and lower- and upper-case letters, and, from the late-17th century on, italics were used as well. Either both the question and the reply were set in italics, or only one of these components of the dialogue.

(2) a.   Igy fʒollittya azért meg feleségét: *Akarnád-é ha mind ez két gyermek miénk*
         volna? Az Afzfzony igy felel: *Bizony akarnám Uram!* (Czeglédi 1659: 4)
         [Therefore he said to his wife: *Would you want both these children to be ours?*
         The Woman replied hus: *I surely would want it my Lord!*]

(2) b.   Kerdes. *Kerefztyén vagyé?* Felelet. KereЈztyén vagyok (Siderius 1690: 1)
         [Question. *Are you a Christian?* Answer. I am a Christian]

It was necessary to formally distinguish – as shown above – either the questions or the answers because rarely – mostly in catechisms – did the questions and answers within the same dialogue begin a new line. Here the italics were a property of written texts, facilitating the comprehension of the marked passages as dialogues.

In the mid-18th century,[11] the quotation mark appeared in Hungarian writing as well, when people began denoting direct quotations (for a history on the development of quotation marks see Csontos 2004). The appearance of this sign was the outcome of the development of written language and concurrently the advance of reading as a process of reception, since the punctuation mark – like the italics – in itself was able to denote perspectivisation in the reading process of the text, that is to denote that the reader had to interpret the given passage as a direct quotation – along with the related shift in perspective. Although the quoting sentence was still there at the beginning or at the end of the embedded utterance or set of utterances, its place in relation to the direct quotation could be varied, because the quotation was directly and easily recognisable by the quotation marks (cf. Csontos 2006b: 573).

A new change in the designation of direct quotations took place when, thanks to the development of written texts, a new type of text, in which the function of the quotation of one or more speakers changed, was developed and spread ever more widely. As the subject matters of narratives became secularised from the late 18th century on, the rigid framework of direct quotations loosened, which had an effect both on the function of the quotations in narrative texts and their designation. From the late 18th century, in novels the primary function of quotations in relation to their hitherto prevailing exemplary nature changed significantly. In such a situation the conversation of fictional characters was mere fiction, quoting them directly was in itself not exemplary; thus to indicate quotations by the italics or by the quotation marks was no longer significant. Such a change in the function of quotations, which contributed to the interpretation of the text, was noticeable in the use of punctuation marks in direct quotations, as the distinction of direct quotations by italics or quotation marks[12] was slowly overshadowed in this historical process (Csontos 2006a: 32–33).

The deliberate use, or rather avoidance, of punctuation marks as reference points denoting direct quotations in written texts became capable of expressing the content that – as can be seen in example (3) – the disuse of fictionality and direct referencialisation demanded (Anderegg 1983). The fictional perspectivisation connected with quotations – extraneous to the quoted sentences and replacing quotation marks – is revealed in the appearance of a new punctuation mark, the dash, which appeared in Hungarian writing at that time (see Csontos 2007). It can be seen in examples (3) and (4).

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[11] I found the first quotation marks in this function in *A Szent Bibliának históriája* [The History of the Holy Bible] by Péter Bod, a Hungarian work printed in 1748.
[12] "Despite the multifariousness of ways of speech we seek to hold on to the indissoluble unity of thought and language" (Gadamer 1965/1981: 364).

(3)   S azt gondolod, hogy a kolostorban jobbá, boldogabbá válik az ember? – szóla az agg. – Oh ne hidd azt; sok bánat lakik e falak között, […] Mi egy kétely annak, ki a világban él? övé a tavasz, s a virágzó természet, s száz öröm, s száz fájdalom, a karthausi csak kételyt birja; ez a világa, melyben él, melyért szenved, mely a valóság szörnyû köntösében elébe lépve, gyenge lelkét lesujtja. – jól sejdíté ezt sz. Brunó, e szerzet alkotója, midõn az istentagadó szenvedéseirõl szólva, így beszélteti öt poklában: „oh adjatok még új kínokat […] csak e borzasztó kíntól szabadulhassak, melyet most szenvedek; csak Istenemet találjam fel ismét." (Eötvös 1871: 22)

[And you believe that in the monastery you will become better and happier? – said the old man. – Oh, do not believe that, much sadness lives between these walls, […] What is a shadow of doubt to him who lives in the world? his is the spring, and blooming nature, and a hundred pleasures, and a hundred pains, the Carthusian has only doubt; this is the world in which he lives, for which he suffers, which, stepping before him in the terrible disguise of reality, strikes down his weak soul. – St. Bruno, creator of this friary, sensed it well when, speaking of the sufferings of the atheist, he has him speak thus in his hell: „oh, give me more agony […] so that I can be free of this terrible agony, which I suffer from now; if only I could find my God again."]

The subject of consciousness in the direct quotation in (3) and the complete relocation of the referential centre are identifiable in the quoting sentence following the embedded utterance and the use of the dash. The quotation from *Saint Bernard,* embedded into the words of the fictional speaker was, however, denoted by quotation marks, thus lending emphasis to the utterance that was intended to be exemplary. Thus, the reader of the text is able to understand the difference between the direct quotations via processing the meanings conveyed by the differing punctuation marks, which means that the different functions in the direct quotations in the text become accessible by means of processing the punctuation marks[13].

At the time of the appearance of the novel, the various turns in the dialogue embedded in the text similarly came to be differentiated by dashes.

(4)   Nincs itthon Uram! azt mondja a' kapus. — Nincs itthon? — Nincs, Uram, kiment falura. ([Báróczy 1814] quoted by Keszler 2004: 144)

[He is not at home, Sir! so says the doorkeeper. — Not at home? — No, Sir, he went into the village.]

This particular function of the dash, otherwise used for different functions (Csontos 2007), appears in example (4), where in the second and third turns – in the absence of a quoting sentence – only the dash renders it perspectivised. The use of the dash – a visible mark – thus directly contributes to the understanding and interpretation of the text.

4. Summary

This paper examined the contribution of punctuation marks to the understanding and interpretation of written texts. Given that the punctuation mark is a feature of the written text, it

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[13] The *manipulation* of punctuation marks (see Flusser 1987) is dominant in this case.

was also necessary to trace the development of writing, its relationship to speech, and the developmental process of written texts. In relation to the latter, it can be surmised that the dominance and the function of punctuation marks in written texts depends on how the reader interprets a written text. Silent reading as an interpretative process – compared to reading aloud – may influence written texts and with it the history and the development of the use of punctuation marks, as well as the degree and quality of the contribution of punctuation marks to the production of meaning. The perspectival nature of punctuation marks was illustrated by an account of the development of their functions and by an explanation of the ways in which direct quotations were noted in selected texts in Hungarian.

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