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## COGNITIVE-AFFECTIVE READING OF PUNCTUATION IN SHORT FICTION

*Мета* статті – визначити когнітивні та емоційні аспекти вживання розділових знаків у малій художній прозі та показати, як вони впливають на сприйняття читача, активізують його базові знання та стимулюють мислення. В основу аналізу покладено теорію образів-схем, доповнену графематичними, описовими, концептуальними та змістовними *методами*. У статті демонструється підхід, що може слугувати корисною основою для вивчення пунктуації з когнітивної та афективної точок зору, а також для розкриття її ролі в процесі створення сенсу. У статті детально розглянуто поняття “авторська пунктуація” і “афективна пунктуація” та показано їхню значущість для вивчення творчого використання розділових знаків у малій художній літературі прози.

У статті стверджується, що з когнітивної точки зору розділові знаки можна розглядати як тригери, що активізують фонові знання читача і допомагають співвіднести їх з новою інформацією, представленою в тексті. Розуміння тексту залежить не лише від лексики та синтаксису, а й від здатності читача обробляти його на основі явних та неявних зв'язків між текстовими одиницями. Що стосується емоційного аспекту пунктуації, то в статті стверджується, що розділові знаки можуть виступати як стимули, що спонукають читача залучитися до процесу осмислення, а також сприяють активнішій взаємодії з текстом через застосування образних схем, пов'язаних ізчерез застосування образних схем, пов'язаних із реальним життєвим досвідом.

*Оси*, оповідання Алісон Луїс Кеннеді зі збірки *Що відбувається* (2010), буде досліджено, перше, для того, щоб продемонструвати доречність поєднання когнітивного і афективного аспектів в аналізі пунктуаційних знаків, і, по-друге, щоб показати, що в обраному тексті пунктуація має двояке значення: вона є засобом реалізації авторського задуму й водночас інтерпретаційним інструментом, який допомагає читачеві зрозуміти сенс тексту.

Вибір автора та сюжету не є випадковим. А.Л. Кеннеді – відзначена нагородами романістка і авторка коротких оповідань, чії твори можна вважати постмодерністськими. Її твори часто порушують теми травми, самотності, відчаю, зради, сімейних стосунків, застосовуючи унікальні нарративні прийоми для залучення читача до емоційного світу персонажів. Оповідання зі збірки, зокрема *Оси*, вирізняються повторюваними мотивами мовчання та недомовленості, де кожен елемент набуває значення для розшифровки сенсу, прихованого за недомовленістю. Дослідження демонструє, що використання розділових знаків в оповіданні є результатом творчого мислення автора та має потенціал залучення читача до процесу осмислення, водночас впливаючи на читача як з когнітивної, так і з емоційної точок зору. У статті зосереджено увагу на використанні крапки, тире, коми та крапок, щоб продемонструвати їхній внесок у розкриття складних сфер емоційного життя персонажів, що існують поза словами. Оповідання має схематичну структуру, і аналіз покаже, що розділові знаки часто активізують образні схеми, які допомагають читачеві заповнити зміст, прихований між рядками. Водночас аналіз продемонструє застосовність понять “авторська” і “афективна” пунктуація до творів А.Л. Кеннеді, а також висвітлить пунктуацію як результат творчого мислення автора, що залучає творчі здібності читачів у побудові сенсу тексту.

*Ключові слова:* авторська пунктуація, когнітивна і афективна пунктуація, тире, кома, крапка, теорія образів-схем, мала художня проза, А.Л. Кеннеді

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## Introduction

Punctuation has been of interest to a wide range of researchers, which resulted in a significant amount of research in the history of punctuation, the principles of standardization, its structural role in the text architecture and the features of functioning [Levinson, 1985; Parkes, 1992; Baron, 2001, among others].

In *Punctuation and the Orthographic Sentence: A Linguistic Analysis* [Levinson, 1985], the author offers a comprehensive examination of the evolution and function of punctuation in English, challenging conventional linguistic assumptions. J. Levinson distinguishes between the grammatical sentence and the orthographic sentence, the latter being a visual construct marked by capitalization and terminal punctuation. She introduces the concept of “informational grouping” to explain how sentence boundaries are determined more by information flow than by strict grammatical rules [Ibid.].

Levinson’s work is pivotal in shifting the perspective on punctuation from a purely syntactic tool to a multifaceted system influenced by historical context, information structure, and reader interpretation. Her insights have implications for fields such as historical linguistics, textual analysis, and computational linguistics, where understanding the nuances of punctuation is essential.

In his seminal work *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*, M. Parkes [1992] explores the historical development of punctuation marks and their significance in written communication. The book traces how punctuation evolved from ancient practices to the contemporary system, emphasizing its role in clarifying meaning and enhancing readability.

A study of punctuation through the lens of the interplay between spoken and written language is presented in N. Baron’s article *Commas and Canaries: The Role of Punctuation in Speech and Writing* [Baron, 2001], published in *Language Sciences*. The author discusses the evolving relationship between speech and writing from the perspective of the history of punctuation in the English-speaking world, and concludes that while before 17<sup>th</sup> century punctuation was used to indicate pauses for reading, while with the advent of the printing press and the increase of literacy, the difference between speech and writing became more diverged hence aligning with the growing emphasis on silent reading and formal written expression, hence the pauses were seen as an indicator of grammatical structures. From 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, punctuation began to reflect conversational rhythms and tones [Baron, 2001]. Baron argues that punctuation is more than a tool for clarifying a written text as it also reveals societal attitudes toward the interplay between speech and writing.

It is noteworthy that the cognitive potential of punctuation and its role in comprehension have been studied from a psycholinguistic perspective. In psycholinguistics, inappropriate punctuation has been proven to impact reading speed and comprehension. Baldwin and Coady [1978] discuss the importance of punctuation in comprehension and its variation depending on the sentence structure. They argue that conventional punctuation rules are “empty conventions” that do not accurately predict or explain reading behaviors. The psycholinguistic approach proposed by Baldwin and Coady defines punctuation as a functional cue system, varying in importance based on sentence structure and reader proficiency. Crucially, this approach emphasizes that teaching punctuation should go beyond rote memorization of rules, focusing instead on how punctuation functions within different sentence structures to aid comprehension.

In *Commas and Spaces: Effects of Punctuation on Eye Movements and Sentence Parsing*, Hill and Murray [2009] investigate how punctuation, in particular, commas and spacing, influence the way readers process sentences. Using eye-tracking methods, the authors argue that punctuation can impact eye movement behaviors, such as fixation durations and saccade lengths. The authors contend that readers tend to fixate longer on words preceding a comma and make shorter saccades, indicating increased processing effort at those points.

The recognition of the cognitive potential of punctuation has made it possible to view it not as a mere set of rules but as a dynamic system of signs deeply intertwined with cognitive and communicative processes. The latter emphasizes the cognitive and pragmatic functions of punctuation in structuring information, conveying meaning, signaling discourse relations, reflecting the writer’s intention, speaker attitude, while also aiding memory and comprehension [Bertucelli, 2017].

While cognitive, prosodic, pragmatic dimensions of punctuation have been subject to numerous studies, little evidence exists regarding the cognitive-affective aspects of punctuation, particularly in the field of text-reader interaction as well as its potential in activating background schemata, triggering creative thinking and embodied experiences.

My focus on the cognitive and affective aspects of punctuation is owing to the specific narrative technique exploited particularly in short fiction which relies on various innovative techniques to engage readers with the narrative. Among other devices, punctuation and graphic elements can be considered marked features of contemporary short fiction. This phenomenon can be explained by the specific nature of short fiction. R. Brosch [2015, p. 93] argues that due to the brevity of the reading experience, short stories tend to use specific strategies that promise cognitive and emotional involvement, and the strategies are also meant to increase and challenge the reader's participatory engagement. B. Korte contends that "short story invites a degree of reader participation not frequently found in other narratives and it is due to those particularities that the reading experience is made significant" [Korte, 2003, p. 5]. This accounts for the potential of each short text to serve a specific aim of challenging the reader's imagination by activating links with the background knowledge, creativity, and affective experiences.

*The aim* of the paper is to define the cognitive aspects of punctuation marks in short fiction and explore how these marks activate background knowledge, influence the reader's perception, and stimulate thinking. Image-schema theory constitutes the *methodological framework* of the analysis, complemented by graphematic, descriptive, conceptual, and content analytical methods. The demonstrated approach to studying punctuation marks accounts for the engagement of the cognitive and affective domains of punctuation. We proceed from the idea that due to the author's specific treatment, punctuation marks can realize both cognitive and affective functions, while the processing of the marks can be complemented with the activation of schemata associated with conceptual metaphors.

First, a brief account of schema and conceptual metaphor theories concerning their role in discussing the comprehension processes both in terms of cognitive and affective aspects will be made. A.L. Kennedy's narrative technique will be outlined in regard to punctuation. Further, the potential of punctuation as a cognitive and affective investment in the text will be elaborated with reference to the concepts of "authorial punctuation" and "affective punctuation". The final part of the paper will present a cognitive-affective analysis of *Wasps*, a short story by A.L. Kennedy, to demonstrate how punctuation marks can contribute to activating schemata and enhancing the reader's cognitive and affective engagement with the text.

The paper concludes that reading with attention to punctuation may promote extensive thinking, help establish links with imagination, trigger visualization and background knowledge and, ultimately engage readers in creating and interpreting textual meaning through embodied experiences.

### **Theoretical background**

Among various methods used to study the intricate relations between textual and intertextual units, a cognitive approach based on the insights of cognitive linguistics and psychology has proved to be an effective method in unveiling the complexities of the reading process.

The application of the schema theory for the interpretation of literature has a long-standing tradition. Extensive theoretical and empirical research shows that reading of literature develops cognitive abilities due to the potential of challenging the existing schemata and modifying them [Semino, 2014, pp. 148–152]. Reading is generally an activity that involves a close interaction between the reader and the text.

According to Rumelhart [1980], schema theory explains how readers use prior knowledge to comprehend and learn from texts. Schema is defined as "all the knowledge that an individual has stored in the mind as a result of the innate capabilities that the human mind is endowed with to organize the experiences that the individual has been exposed to" [Meurer, 1985].

Alternatively, schema is defined as "a collection of an individual's knowledge and experience applied while dealing with and interpreting new information" [Anderson, 1984]. Schema theory concerns how knowledge is mentally represented by individuals and used to interpret new

information [Simpson, 2004, pp 38–41]. It can be inferred that in the framework of cognitive analysis the use of schema theory is crucial for the interpretation of literary texts since the understanding of the explicit and implicit information in the text heavily depends on the reader's prior experience and background knowledge.

Schema theory has provided evidence of cognitive processing occurring in the reader's mind. However, the theory is limited in terms of the emotional aspect of the process of reading. The theory, as noted by E. Semino, "neglects the affective dimension of schematic knowledge and its role in comprehension" [Semino, 2014, p. 149]. It can be argued that both cognitive and emotional activities equally matter in the process of both creating and reading a text. The mood and the emotional state of the writer influence the choice of textual units, while the emotions generated in the process of reading and their impact on the reader's mood are important in terms of facilitating comprehension.

The limitations of schema theory are complemented by the conceptual metaphor theory originated with G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's seminal work [1980]. Conceptual metaphor, one of the central domains of cognitive stylistic, provides an insightful framework for interpreting the images based on mappings from a source domain to a target domain. Empirical data support that the knowledge of conceptual metaphor and its mechanisms contributes to the understanding of how people produce and comprehend language. In fiction and poetry, also, it is established that conceptual metaphors can be manipulated by the authors to engage readers with the text's message, while readers, relying on their ability of conceptual mapping, retrieve the authorial message and reach the text meaning. Thus, understanding the processes of production and mapping contributes to the emergence of the text meaning and comprehension of textual meaning. To understand the two processes, apart from language material, it is essential to refer to the graphic level of the text as well.

Studies to date have provided extensive evidence that metaphors are both cognitive and affective; the full comprehension of the latter is achieved through interactions between the cognitive and affective meanings that in broad terms consist in "the positive or negative valence" attached to the target and source domains [Sopory, 2005, p. 437]. The integration of the cognitive and affective domains in the comprehension of metaphors gives reason to think that affective experience cannot be disregarded in the text processing, as reading and comprehension involve the activation of schemata, mappings, and conceptual integration. This consideration can be applied to text processing at all levels, including the graphic level.

### **A.L. Kennedy: On Punctuation**

A. L. Kennedy's narrative style and her unique method of conveying both the vision of reality and the inner lives of her characters have been subject to numerous studies [Bell, 1998; March 2002; Dunnigan, 2000; Norquay, 2005; Kaye, 2008, among others]. Notably, one of the most intriguing elements of her narrative is the punctuation that can be considered as a fundamental basis for the text-reader interaction. Commenting on her technique of punctuation, Kennedy admits that punctuation is the tool that allows her "to control the reader's breath": "The thing is, you have to be understood. If your writing can't achieve that basic level of interaction with someone other than yourself then none of the other miracles of literature will be at your command" [Kennedy, 2018].

Punctuation marks hint at the necessary pauses, show when to breathe, in this way keep the reader's breath under control by unifying his breathing with that of the author or the character [Kennedy, 2018]. Commenting on her own style of expression in an interview, A.L. Kennedy mentions: "Everything is expressed in a manner that is appropriate to the ideas within and the extent of the form and those interact with each other and with the characters involved. You can express anything through anything, but the relationships between all the variables you have in a specific set of inspirations that will form one story will govern form" [Mieszkowski, 2013].

In nearly all her works, Kennedy's skillful use of punctuation is discernible. The visual elements are intricately woven into the plot and even more informative and provoking than the words themselves: "It is a measure of Kennedy's greatness as a writer of pyrotechnic comic prose that the fireworks display also manages to show us the deeply tenebrous spaces that lie just outside the edges of words. She can change the emotional weather radically with a punctuation

mark, or the strategic positioning of a single word. Her sentences have a habit of sending one back to the everyday reality one inhabits, to touch everything in it, to savour it again, because she has altered its entire landscape and recreated it anew" [Mukherjee, 2004].

This brief overview of punctuation in Kennedy's narrative supports the objective of this paper: to study the functioning of punctuation marks in text processing and explore in what ways they affect the reader, activate background knowledge and stimulate thinking. Our study will be based on a selected story *Wasps* from the collection of *What Becomes* [Kennedy, 2010]. The collection comprises 12 stories that explore the themes of trauma, alienation and frustration. Each story, including *Wasps*, give room for the exploration of the mentioned themes and related issues through a close analysis of the text structure, underlying relations and intra-text relations. Silence is one of the recurring techniques used by Kennedy to "deal with trauma" [Mitchel, 2008, p. 51] and explain characters' innermost feelings that are hard to write about. The use of silence accounts for the versatile uses of punctuation marks, particularly the frequent occurrence of the period, dash and ellipsis in the collection helps us hypothesize that punctuation marks operate as active narrative tools triggering mental representations and emotional engagement with the text.

### **Authorial punctuation: cognitive and affective dimensions**

It is generally agreed that the printing press brought about the transition from an oral society to a literate one, which came to be largely characterized by silent reading [Baron, 2001, p. 36]. Besides enabling readers to rapidly process written texts [Gray, 1955, p. 13], silent reading contributed to establishing an individual relationship with the text. The shift to a written text brought about the necessity to introduce breaks and spaces between words. In this respect, punctuation became an "essential force behind silent reading" [Baron, 2001, p. 36].

As far as the processing of fiction is concerned, the role of punctuation should not be underestimated. Our argument, however, does not aim to diminish the role of other crucial features, such as ideology, symbolism, motifs, characters, style, etc. Being a special semiological instrument, punctuation, besides its major function of organizing the utterance syntactically, plays other important roles. It is of vital importance not only for text production but also comprehension. In his seminal work *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*, Parkes [1992] gives a historical account of the need for standardization of punctuation to assist the reader's comprehension of Latin writing. Punctuation marks have long been recognized as symbols that helped readers navigate texts and "recognize the boundaries of not only the sentence but also those of the embedded constituents which functioned within it" [Parkes, 1992, pp. 21–22]. E. Leventson contends that "to some extent punctuation marks relate *directly* to features of the flow of speech as many of the pauses in natural speech correspond to a punctuation mark." Further, the author argues that punctuation marks "provide only *indirect* information about the flow of speech, actual or potential, that underlies a written text [...]. The direct relationship is between the punctuation marks and grammatical and semantic aspects of the text. It is only when we have interpreted the grammatical and semantic clues that punctuation provides that we can guess what a written text is meant to sound like" [Leventson, 1992, pp. 63–64].

Thus, we may safely conclude that, although initially vague and lacking specific semantic content, punctuation marks in written texts acquire meaning and function as significant narrative elements.

Leventson identifies "three distinct ways in which punctuation operates: phonological, grammatical and semantic, the first two directly or indirectly relating to the flow of speech, the last — to the meanings of the text unavailable to the reader" [Leventson, 1992, p. 65]. However, research in this field provides evidence on a wider range of functions that punctuation marks can perform. According to Beregovskaya, punctuation marks can compensate for facial expressions and gestures [Beregovskaya, 2004, p. 18]. Moreover, punctuation marks can enhance the emotional and evaluative content of the message. Gutzmann and Turgay [2024] discuss the distinction between grammatical and expressive punctuation and suggest that pragmatic punctuation marks are expressive, they can occur rather freely inside a sentence, they can be repeated to intensify their effect functioning in that way similar to emojis.

Summing up the above considerations, we may conclude that punctuation is essential not only for text formation, but it is also an expressive means of enhancing the written message. Therefore, punctuation marks perform phonological, grammatical, semantic, and expressive functions.

Punctuation marks have been considered as a poetic device. Alan Golding suggests that “Punctuation in poetry is a matter of artistic choice” [Golding, 1981, p. 71]. It was claimed that punctuation in poetry should by no means be regarded as a “peripheral part of the poet’s work as it is central to our understanding of poetic meaning because of its ability to influence prosody,” as punctuation marks help to ensure that the text sounds the same way as intended by the author [Helms, 1980, p. 177].

Yet an interesting potential of punctuation marks is considered by A. Sigler [2014] in the article *In Between the Sheets: Sexy Punctuation in American Magazines*, where the author draws comparisons between punctuation and sexuality and demonstrates how in the *Two Worlds* and *Little Review* that serialized J. Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Work in Progress* editors used punctuation for many “versatile and surprisingly erotic ends”. At the same time, punctuation was important for the editors’ repertoires in their attempts to censor *Ulysses*, in doing so making the punctuation more provocative [Sigler, 2014, p. 43]. For instance, Sigler mentions the combination of the inverted commas, dots and asterisk (“ . . . . . \*”) for deleting the erotic pairing found in the original: “Sons with mothers, sires with daughters, nephews with grandmothers, queens with prize bulls” [Sigler, 2014, p. 58].

In several works, punctuation in fiction and poetry is referred to as “authorial”. Authorial punctuation is defined as a special structuring of the reflected reality: “a set of hierarchically organized positions, marked or unmarked by punctuation, designed to ensure the unity of the text and its parts, textual links of semantic units of the same language level, as well as inter-level links” [Koltsova, 2007, p. 5]. Authorial perspective of punctuation suggests an extension of its functions.

Authorial punctuation has also been considered as a conscious deviation from the conventional use of punctuation marks. However, there is no unanimous approach as to whether the deviation is a creative process or a violation of the accepted rules of a certain language [Leech, 1969, p. 57; Crystal, 2003, p.134]. G. Leech and M. Short consider a deviation as a form of “artistically motivated deviation” [Leech, Short, 1981, p. 48], or otherwise foregrounding, when language means are brought to a marked position to attract attention. Nevertheless, foregrounding is regarded as a violation of socially accepted norms that “invokes the analogy of a figure seen against a background” [Leech, 1969, p. 57].

However, our argument takes the premise that the authorial (idiosyncratic) use of punctuation marks should not be regarded as unorthodox or as a deviation. In the context of our study, we consider authorial punctuation a special, creative use of the marks, the aim of which is to enhance the text visibility and emphasize the embedded idea. Of course, in practice, while dealing with a particular mark, it is extremely complex to differentiate whether one is dealing with a conscious deviation of the norms or a case of special use, hence the term “authorial punctuation” is assumed to be the term that might cover all of the aspects of punctuation in fiction.

In the writer-reader relationship, punctuation is the means by which authors express certain meanings and nuances they put into the written text. The reader, in turn, either by spotting the marks or noticing their absence, perceives the shades and meanings expressed by the author. In other words, the reader, with the help of the punctuation marks, can understand the text (the meaning of the text) as the author intended it. That is, punctuation marks function as language codes that, like any other code in the text, embed the message that is subject to processing.

The term “affective punctuation” is mentioned by E. Ivanchikova [1979, p. 180] in her discussion of the case “dash after ‘and’” (and —) in Dostoyevsky’s punctuation style. By “affective punctuation” the author refers not only the figurative expressivity, but also the graphic expressivity through which the most significant units stand out in the text. Although no comprehensive work has been found that elaborates on affective punctuation per se, however, there are studies on ellipsis in English literature where the marks are considered along with their affective potential as well [Toner, 2015].

Ivanchikova's determination of affective punctuation can be complemented with the consideration of the role of the reader in creating the meaning and of the impact the punctuation marks may have in facilitating text processing through mental simulation and affective impact [Ivanchikova, 1979].

When people read stories, they imagine the events occurring in the stories and in the story world in which these events are happening. The process underlying the imagination has been called mental simulation which has been defined as "...the reenactment of perceptual, motor, and introspective states during experience with the world, body, and mind" [Barsalou, 2008, p. 618].

The most essential indicator of punctuation is the pause. Pauses act as signals that draw attention to gaps, prompting the reader to construct meaning. While identifying the implicit meanings hidden behind the marks the reader will heavily depend on many factors: imagination, interactive processing with the account of the context and the relations between the units. In doing so, the cognitive and affective experiences get interwoven to facilitate the meaning-making process. In this sense, punctuation marks can also be regarded as one of the influential modes of expression aimed at increasing the reader's participatory engagement with the text by requiring the body to adopt various image schemas through interactions with the real-life experience.

Adding of cognitive and affective dimensions to punctuation leads to reconsidering its role in text comprehension. These aspects, as will be shown later, may reveal contextual relationships, enhance text-reader interactions, engage the reader in the meaning building process and shape attitudes and generate emotions shared with the author. We assume that the consideration of the cognitive and affective aspects of punctuation can add to the understanding of the process of text creation and the processes accompanying the production of mental representations while reading. This point will be elaborated on in the following part which will provide a cognitive-affective reading of punctuation in *Wasps*.

### **'Pause and affect': a study of cognitive and affective aspects of punctuation in A.L. Kennedy's *Wasps***

The short story *Wasps* deals with the themes of betrayal, the sense of inevitable parting and deprivation, though, at first sight, the story runs as an account of an ordinary day from the life of a family with children. The story presents an episode of a family's life on the day of father's departure and tells about a female protagonist and her children, who are about to go through the parting with the father of the family, feeling at the same time uneasy and abandoned in their cottage house. The events of the day unfold around a seemingly unrelated leitmotif — the dead bodies of wasps, at first glance, vaguely related to the plot. The symbolic meaning of the wasps and their connection with the emotional state of the protagonist and the atmosphere in the house are revealed gradually.

The story is the one among the rest of stories in the collection where authorial punctuation plays a significant role in revealing the patterns of creativity in the use of punctuation. Here, punctuation and textual units are tightly interwoven in the text structure and function as plot developing elements.

Below, I will examine the punctuation marks which are essential for the story processing. The understanding of the story events is highly schematic. Our focus will be the *FORCE* image schema, which, as will be argued below, plays a much broader role in the story comprehension. It helps conceptualize the story events in terms of a force-dynamic scenario [Talmy, 1998, 2000]. It is noteworthy that there are considerable works by now which show the applicability of force dynamics to various types of discourses, including fiction [Turner, 1991; Kimmel, 2011; Oakley, 2005, among others].

The story is narrated from the perspective of a woman, a wife and mother of two sons, and is set during the morning hours. The story opens with a compound sentence consisting of two quite unadorned simple sentences, where the first sentence presents an event, with the following sentence summarizing its implications.

(1) *Their da going away again, that's all it was* [Kennedy, 2010, p. 25].

Here the comma deserves special attention; syntactically, it separates two simple sentences connected with each other asyndetically reinforcing the force dynamics between the two events. Due to the choice of the comma (instead of a conjunctive word) the significance of each sentence is maintained and the clash between events provides ominous foreshadowing. The comma reinforces the small emotional battle captured in deceptively simple phrases. The relationship between the sentences helps activate the *FORCE* schema extended into *causes are forces that bring forward changes*. It can be inferred that the force dynamics entails psychological and emotional changes. The comma appears after the word *again*, pointing to a repeated experience, deepening the emotional impact by suggesting a cycle of disappointment and hurt. Also, from the affective perspective, the highlighted significance of the second sentence makes the implications of the father's leaving more painful and poignant, evoking a sense of resignation and emotional repression.

The father's leaving acts on the family, in particular, the children, exerting emotional pressure and potentially causing chaos. The second sentence, *that's all it was* can be interpreted as a counterforce attempting to neutralize the pressure. There is an evident struggle between the disruptive force of father's leaving and an opposing emotional resistance trying to neutralize it.

The sentence is followed by a paragraph showing the boys' behavior which requires to be viewed in the light of the force dynamics. Implicitly, the verbs "thumping, squealing and shouting" [Kennedy, 2010, p. 25], describing their rushing out of the house and their behavior outside, hints at the protest, the resistance and the immanent conflict loaded with tension that are revealed gradually as the narrative unfolds.

The noise and the conflict of the opening paragraph are followed by the description of the morning and the protagonist's fantasy nightmare which provide the setting for the events to follow.

The setting of the story, and which is the case with the genre of short stories in general, deserves special attention and is crucial for cognitively challenging the reading process. S. Fergusson points out that "the significance of the setting in story is greater than in novel explaining that by the proportion of discourse space allotted to it" [Fergusson, 1994, p. 226]. R. Brosch [2015, p. 99] observes that "space and place are highly experiential aspects of the literary medium producing embedded response." In other studies, it is observed that "the coordinates of the fictional space help map the trajectories of agents and objects across the narrated path" [Herman, 2003, p. 8]. Description is acknowledged among those means that maps such trajectories. These observations fit for the consideration of the setting of the story.

The setting in *Wasps* contains implicit references to conflict and the *FORCE* image schema. The description of the stormy morning foreshadows the protagonist's emotions and the charged atmosphere within the house. The description, foregrounded by punctuation marks, can be argued to be intended for cognitively and affectively challenging the reader and leading the reader to hypothesize about the narrative development by activating the *FORCE* schema:

*(2) And the morning was out of its balance already, aggressive. Orange-pink light had been creeping forward and threatening by four, summer pushing everything earlier and earlier whether you wanted it to or not, and the bed too hot and what might be called a real gale had been rising outside until her sleep was full of its pressure against the corner of the house, air leaning so hard at the window glass that she felt breathless and unsettled, searched by a hunger that needed, that pried [Kennedy, 2010, p. 25].*

The punctuation in the passage is noteworthy for several reasons. The first full stop after "aggressive" makes the sentence impactful, sharply highlighting the mood. The following sentence is a long single sentence containing a series of asyndetically connected clauses, divided by commas, creating the feeling of breathlessness and pressure experienced by the female protagonist of the story, which remains unnamed throughout the story. The comma in the final part (*a hunger that needed, that pried*) emphasizes the continuing nature of the pressure, as if adding urgency to handle with.

The processing of the above passage is an explicit reference to the existing conflict in the family and requires to be analyzed from the force dynamics perspective. Also, we note the

conjunction *and* at the beginning of the sentence, which establishes a link with (1) by activating the *FORCE* schema, reinforced by personifying the weather and the time of the day as relentless forces pushing against the body and mind. The asyndetic coordination imparts a specific rhythm and tone to the passage, which draws the reader into the oppressive atmosphere of the house. The intentional omission of the conjunction heightens the tension, by speeding up the rhythm, adding emphasis and propelling the reader toward conclusions. Kennedy's preference for asyndetic, overrunning connections over structured narrative engages the reader into a fever dream — a storm which is about to burst. We may conclude that the tone of the sentence, achieved due to the asyndetic connections, would fail to set the intended tone in case the connections were introduced by conjunctive words.

Following Sopory's argument that "a common property of affective experience is the valence that is the perceived degree of positivity and negativity of the feeling states" [Sopory, 2005, p. 438], it is possible to conclude that a tension is a negative event implying a negative valence associated with the underlying experience. The negative connotations accompanying the word "aggressive" and the rhythm along with the atmosphere of tension evoke an unexpected, affectively laden schema *MORNING*, which is conventionally associated with "a new beginning". The complete meaning of the sentence consists of both the cognitive and affective meanings that foreground the role of the setting in building trajectories. This leads to the inference that the comma, besides its function of informing or making the statement more detailed, is laden with cognitive and affective meanings, triggering a mental representation attributed by a negative valence challenging the conventional associations with the *MORNING* schema. The processing of the above passages leads to the following observation: punctuation marks contribute to foregrounding the *FORCE* schema, which functions as part of "the basic spatial, temporal, and causal-intentional conceptualization [Herman, 2002] of the story world in *Wasps*."

The processing of the above passage also demonstrates its deeply affective overload. The tone of the passage, the destabilizing experience of the morning and the harsh weather, acting as forces, create an embodied experience of a feeling of suffocation, making the reader feel the character's physical and psychological disturbance not as a distant observer, but by psychologically merging with the environment.

A more elaborate case of comma usage is observed in the following sentence, which details on the description of the atmosphere of the house. The processing of the sentence is related to the activation of the *HOUSE* and *FORCE* schemata:

(3) *The house grew disturbed, doors pestering at their frames whenever the weather drew breath: clatters on the roof, something twisting, scouring overhead, and meanwhile she dreamed a little of being underwater, swimming the length of an assault course, both a game and an assault course, in some kind of terrible amusement park* [Kennedy, 2010, pp. 25–26].

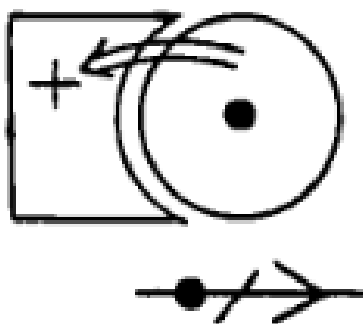
As in the previously analyzed passage, here again we note a rhythmic structure representing the weather due to the asyndetic coordination in separating the main sentences, enumerating and inserting secondary information about the dream experience of the character. The use of commas in the passage is heavily cognitive and affective as they operate toward fusing environmental disturbance with psychological unrest and blurring boundaries between the external and internal chaos facilitating the reader's experience of a sense of intrusion, as "home," usually a safe space, is turning restless and unreliable. The commas, within the overrunning structure, create a flowing effect and give a tone of unsettledness. The suspense is also powerfully manifested with the period coming at the very end of the long cumulative sentence.

Initially, during the processing of the sentence, asyndeton and the intentional use of commas assist to create a specific rhythm entailing associations with a flowing and intensifying tension. This is what Kennedy calls "controlling the breath of the reader" [Kennedy, 2018] which can be interpreted from the perspective of trajectory building. The implications of the associations extend beyond the description of the house besieged by wind. This lends itself to be read as *HOUSE IS A PERSON* featuring the female protagonist. Further, the rhythm accompanies the reader into the protagonist's dream; the commas keep controlling the breath of the reader as *she swims the length of an assault course*. The *HOUSE* schema, conventionally a place providing

protection and comfort to its dwellers, undergoes figurative interpretation providing a clue to draw inferences about its dwellers. The interactive processing calls for referring to the force schema to be interpreted in terms of changes in the atmosphere of the house.

According to Talmy, force dynamics can extend beyond physical interaction to ideational structures — for example, that of a narrative plot. The force-dynamic system can characterize such relationships as two entities opposing each other, a shift in the balance of strength between the entities, and an eventual overcoming of one entity by the other. This system can then apply as well to such plot patterns as a conflict between any two factors and an eventual resolution of the conflict [Talmy, 2000, p. 439].

In the force dynamics scenario, all involved entities are endowed with intrinsic force tendency, either toward rest or toward motion [Talmy, 1988, p. 54]. The force dynamics discussed in the story shows how entities (children, wife, husband) interact. The father's leaving the house, and his betrayal (Antagonist force) are the moving forces which meet the psychological resistance of children, expressed in their violent behaviour, and the female protagonist's internal unrest, metaphorically reinforced by the external conditions (Agonist force). The family is traumatized; despite the psychological resistance, the family is overcome by the stronger Antagonist force. In this respect, similarities can be drawn between the interactions of force entities in the story event structure and the balance-of-strength pattern as illustrated by Talmy [1988, p. 59]:



**Fig.1. The interaction between the force entities in the event structure of *Wasps***

The comprehension of the *FORCE* schema is crucial for drawing implications about the main protagonist, as mentioned above, a not unintentionally unnamed woman. Her character's psychology is revealed in the following passage, where punctuation functions in a more nuanced and layered way:

(4) *She dressed in a T-shirt and cardigan, what used to be good jeans — as if she were someone who could be stylish, but was presently relaxed — the weekend was when you relaxed — and then she went to the windowsill so she could check on the wasps* [Kennedy, 2010, pp. 26–27].

The entire passage is a single, extended sentence without periods, which suggests a stream-of-consciousness narration. The comma in "*She dressed in a T-shirt and cardigan, what used to be good jeans*" separates two loosely connected clauses introduced with dashes, making a grammatically incomplete construction. It blurs the boundaries between narration and thought and reflects a psychological interiority—as if the reader overhears the character thinking aloud. The dashes create a layered, introspective tone and slow the rhythm, appropriate for a scene set during a weekend and introduce a reflective aside on her self-image and mood. The parenthetical insertion into the syntactic structure of the sentence focuses the reader's attention on the choice of clothes which might be taken quite for granted. However, the long, ironically laden pause, introduced by means of the dashes, along with a matter-of-fact tone, shifts the attention to a new message that calls for rethinking over the previous message and attaching a corresponding valence to it. The pause transfers the attention to the clothes calling for a metonymic mapping between the clothes and the owner, where a piece of garment might be interpreted as a part of identity. A matter-of-fact tone of narration strongly indicates the independence of the

parenthesis clashing with the message in the main sentence by activating the schema *ROUTINE*, which is closely correlated with the *FORCE (ROUTINE IS FORCE)* schema. The latter may be linked to oppressive forces that evoke negative emotions, such as frustration or anxiety. The schema *ROUTINE* is reinforced in the final part of the sentence which introduces another routine action: regularly checking the wasps on the windowsill. It is unclear where they come from. The force source is unknown, the protagonist contemplates the possibility that the house was attracting them and then killing them. The wasps serve as an analogy for the people living in the house who are being affected negatively, most significantly they symbolize the feelings of shame and helplessness the protagonist experiences time the husband leaves. The persistent appearance of wasps on their bedroom windowsill represents ongoing infidelity, even though the force that brings them in remains ambiguous throughout the story.

The following passage is made prominent with the scrupulous expansion on the wasps, the creatures, which haunt the house through the closed windows. The following passage uses punctuation to create a tone that is both reflective and subtly ominous:

(5) *There always were wasps. Always dead — or else weak and sleepy, crawling off to a permanent halt behind the chest of drawers. Five today. All goners. As if the house drew them and then destroyed them. Ridiculously fragile wings, perfect stripes and tapered bodies altogether finely worked — they were like very tiny toys* [Kennedy, 2010, p. 27].

The processing of the passage brings the attention to the grammatically incomplete, detached sentences (*Always dead; Five today. All goners. As if the house drew them and then destroyed them.*) with each observation made significant due to the brevity which creates a sharp tone and tension. The affective potential of the passage is complemented with the elaborate use of the dashes introducing observations instilled with a feeling of horror. The second dash shifts from the physical description of the wasps to imaginative reflection (*they were like very tiny toys*), sounding as if a childlike wonder yet instilled with creepiness. Describing the wasps as “*ridiculously fragile*” with “*perfect stripes*” and “*finely worked*” elicits aesthetic appreciation of the moment of unexpected beauty. The tension between death and beauty enhances the affective complexity: the reader feels simultaneous discomfort and wonder.

The processing of the passage can be fulfilled in the light of the *FORCE* and *HOUSE* schemata that help establish a figurative transfer. The dashes enhance and help visualize the semantic sphere of the descriptive words “*dead, weak and sleepy, crawl off, fragile, like tiny toys*” figuratively associated with the identity of the character implying the state of morbidity (*dead*), the lack of motivation (*weak and sleepy*) and the feeling of insignificance (*like very tiny toys*).

As the story unfolds and unfolds toward its climax, ellipsis and dashes become more significant for completing the text meaning. We can note that the affective aspect of punctuation becomes significant in the use of ellipsis. As noted by Toner, “ellipsis marks are strongly associated with the affective” [Toner, 2015, p. 13]. According to Summey, ellipsis marks are “vague and emotional” [Summey, 1919, p. 183] and the dash is defined as “the sob, the stammer, the mark of unutterable emotion, and the mark of ignorance” [Ibid., p. 225]. The vagueness and the emotional aspects help ellipsis in extending the boundaries of text-reader interaction in filling in the gaps. This being said, the three dots function as a means of activating cognitive and affective experiences by engaging the reader in the meaning building process. Additionally, we can note that ellipsis also triggers “visual configuration” that captures attention and increases the participation of the reader to complete the text meaning [Brown, 1989]. Visualization, defined as the production of mental images in the process of reading [Esroch, 2015, p. 633], increases the reader’s participatory involvement. This can be observed while processing the following cases of the use of ellipsis when the female protagonist mentions the wasps the night before the husband goes away. The conversation gives the first impression of an innocent small talk:

(6) ‘*What are you going to do about the wasps ...*’

[...]

(7) ‘*I’m sorry — What?*’ His expression was polite. Yes, that was the word for it — polite. ‘*Wasps...*’

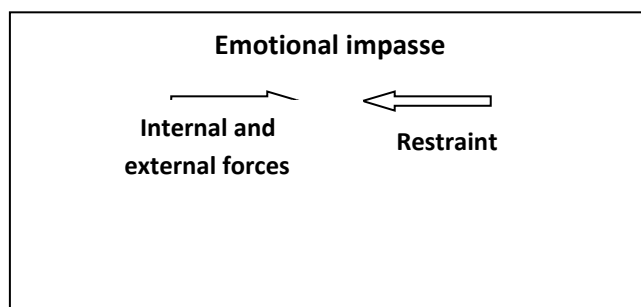
[Kennedy, 2010, p. 31].

The first thing capturing attention in (6) is the absence of the question mark that contributes to the extension of the functional capacity of the ellipsis. On the one hand, the absence of the question mark softens the question to avoid confrontation and suggest that the female character does not expect to be heard or taken seriously. On the other hand, ellipsis puts an emphasis on *wasps*, to revoke the prominence of the image. The ellipsis in (6) introduces an emotional pause, a silence, suggesting emotional restraint and discomfort. In (7), we can observe a more suggestive use of the ellipsis. Ray’s reaction bears a distinct tone of aloofness and a sense of not belonging to the family. The dash in *I’m sorry — What?* visualizes the gap that exists between the speakers. His turn in the conversation ends with a polite utterance of “wasp,” followed by an ellipsis, again introducing a silence. From the affective perspective, the ellipsis imparts a feeling of emotional dissonance as the subject matter of the conversation contrasts with the emotional tone, making the exchange feel heavier than it first appears.

Their conversation, though sounding like innocent small talk, reveals the reason Ray often left the family.

(8) *“And this the point where it had happened again— still they get in at me— a safe conversation becoming unwieldy, changing its face”* [Kennedy, 2010, p. 31]

The conversation, confined to dots and dashes indicating the silence, vagueness, and incompleteness in the interaction of the force entities, implies the impasse and unutterable emotions. Figure 2 illustrates the emotional impasse of the female protagonist under the pressure of the internal and external forces:



**Fig. 2. The relation of forces reflecting the female protagonist’s emotional impasse**

The emotional impasse evokes the *CONFINEMENT* schema, associated with the curtailment of physical movement; curtailment of the freedom of movement by means of containment in an enclosed space and the subjection to the rules of the institution [Fludernik, 2019, p. 6], which in the story can be related to the institute of marriage. The confinement is also evident in the female character’s suppressed feelings, because she has many things to tell him but she is silenced because of her inability to face the trauma of being betrayed.

## Conclusions

The study aimed to highlight the graphic level of a short fiction from the perspective of its contribution to the text production and interpretation. Specifically, the study examined the cognitive and affective aspects of punctuation, emphasizing the limited exploration of this topic and providing evidence of its importance through a cognitive-affective analysis of A.L. Kennedy’s *Wasps*. The approach proposed in the paper is multilayered and has been completed within the framework image-schema theory, complemented by graphematic, descriptive, conceptual and content methods of analysis. This approach has enabled us to provide a cognitive-affective reading of a highly schematic text. The schematic property of the text is due to operation of the punctuation both as a means of embedding text message and creating specific atmosphere, on the one hand, and a means of facilitating text experiencing.

The cognitive-affective reading of *Wasps* has revealed the cognitive and emotional investment of the period, the comma, the ellipsis and the dash into the narrative, where, in combination with the neighboring units, they contribute to activating schemata, which help in the meaning making process. In the story, the punctuation marks operate as narrative elements triggering cognitive and affective experiencing of the text and facilitating text processing. The reading of the story has revealed that the mentioned punctuation marks due to their functional capacity contribute to activating *FORCE*, *MORNING*, *HOUSE*, *ROUTINE*, *CONFINEMENT* schemas which facilitate both cognitive and emotional engagement with the text on the part of the reader. In particular, punctuation marks function as tools to observe the force dynamics of the story event structure, which is crucial for conceptualizing the event structure of the story. This extensive use of punctuation can be explained by the use of silence as an authorial narrative technique where punctuation marks get endowed with the potential to complete the gaps. From the affective perspective, the study has revealed that the rhythm and the tone of the utterance, along with the suspense and the pauses created by punctuation establish an **atmosphere of insecurity**, dissonance, suffocation, anxiety and fear. The reader experiences the physical and psychological turmoil of the characters, feeling it intimately rather than merely observing it from a distance.

The analysis revealed that punctuation marks are endowed with extended functional abilities. While the comma is essential for imparting a specific rhythm to the narrative and foreshadowing the unfolding of the conflict, the ellipsis and the dash are associated with the unsaid, vagueness, confusion or unutterable emotion, the period is used toward creating an atmosphere of suspense and increasing tension. From the cognitive-affective perspective, punctuation contributes to shifting the reader's attention to the intricate areas of the emotional life of the characters existing beyond the boundaries of the words. Such a technique of the use of punctuation marks can be argued to be both authorial and affective, the specific features of which are integral meaning building blocks.

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#### COGNITIVE-AFFECTIVE READING OF PUNCTUATION IN SHORT FICTION

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**Key words:** *authorial punctuation, cognitive and affective punctuation, period, dash, comma and ellipsis, the image-schema theory, short fiction, A.L. Kennedy*

The aim of the paper is to define the cognitive and affective aspects of punctuation marks in short fiction and demonstrate how these marks influence the reader's perception, activate background knowledge, and stimulate thinking. Image-schema theory forms the framework of the analysis, complemented by graphematic, descriptive, conceptual, and content methods of analysis. The paper presents an approach that provides a useful framework for studying punctuation from cognitive and affective perspectives and disclose its role in the meaning-making process. The paper elaborates on the concepts "authorial punctuation" and "affective punctuation," demonstrating their relevance for the study of a creative use of punctuation marks in short fiction.

The paper argues that, from a cognitive perspective, punctuation marks function as triggers that activate the reader's background knowledge and facilitate the knowledge with the new information embedded in the text. Text comprehension depends not only on words and syntax but also on the reader's ability to process the text based on explicit and implicit relations between textual units. Regarding the affective aspect, the paper argues that punctuation marks serve as triggers that engage the reader in the meaning-making process and enhance participatory engagement with the text by activating various image schemas linked to real-life experience.

*Wasps*, a short story by A.L. Kennedy, from the collection *What Becomes* (2010), will be analyzed, first, the value of integrating cognitive and affective dimensions in the analysis of punctuation, and second, the twofold significance of punctuation in the text: as a means of conveying the authorial message and as an interpretive tool that guides the reader toward meaning.

The choice of the author and the story is deliberate. A.L. Kennedy is an award-winning novelist and a short story writer, produces work that invites postmodern interpretations. Her fiction frequently explores themes of trauma, loneliness, despair, betrayal, family relationships, by using unique narrative techniques to engage the readers into the emotional world of the characters. The stories in the collection, in particular *Wasps*, is noteworthy for the recurring motifs of silence and the unsaid (Mitchel, 2008), where

each element gains significance in deciphering the meaning hidden underneath the unsaid. The analysis of *Wasps* reveals that the use of punctuation in the story is a result of the author's creative thinking and is endowed with a potential of engaging the reader into the meaning making process, at the same time, impacting the reader both from cognitive and affective perspectives. The paper focuses on the use of the period, the dash, the comma and the ellipsis to demonstrate their contribution in revealing the intricate areas of the emotional life of the characters existing beyond the boundaries of the words. The reading of the story is schematic, and the analysis will illustrate how punctuation marks contribute to the activation of image schemas which help the reader to infer meanings embedded between the lines. At the same time, the analysis will show the applicability of the concepts of "authorial" and "affective" punctuation to A.L. Kennedy's narrative technique, as well as consider punctuation as a result of the author's creative thinking which triggers the readers' creative abilities in building the text meaning.

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