

THE SPECIFICS OF PUNCTUATION IN THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE NATIONAL GRADUATION EXAM PAPERS

Summary

This article deals with the punctuation in the papers (essays) of the Lithuanian language and literature national graduation exam, covering a scope of forty essays from the 2014 Lithuanian language and literature national graduation exam and sixty, from the 2016 exam; all essays were graded between 80 and 100. The study aimed to find out which of the punctuation mistakes were the most typical in student papers, attempting to dissect their causes and specifics and disclose the typical punctuation qualities of student texts.

Statistical analysis of punctuation mistakes covering a period of five years has shown that punctuation is a rather significant problem, with a substantial group (21 per cent) of students still receiving 0 grades for their punctuation (which means they make 15 mistakes and more).

A more thorough investigation of the punctuation in the top-graded papers has revealed that most of the punctuation mistakes present in them relate to punctuation of secondary clauses. Another large group of mistakes is found in the punctuation of extended attributes. These attributes structurally resemble extended adverbial modifiers a lot, leading to confusion in punctuation. On the other hand, in terms of the punctuation of extended adverbial modifiers as such, it is evident that the possibility of using no punctuation at all does not always help either. As far as intonation is concerned, it is natural to want to stress either the beginning or the end of this modifier, and mistakes are only made in punctuating the adverbial modifiers on one side. Changes in the punctuation of modal words have expanded the list of particles that can be punctuated, and students do not always memorise this list and tend to mix these particles up with others, punctuating them. Mistakes are made in punctuating cases of listed uniformity as well. There is a clear inclination towards punctuating such uniform parts of the sentence on both sides instead of separating them. Other cases of punctuation mistakes

covered only point to individual characteristics of punctuation, with students sometimes using unmotivated punctuation marks, showing confusion in terms of hiatus punctuation, repeatedly making mistakes in punctuating quotes, elements of coordinate clauses, and so on.

The overall analysis of statistical data and separate punctuation mistakes shows that punctuation is difficult to a lot of school students. The difficulty is most likely caused by various reasons: the understanding of the rules, the teaching of punctuation, the confusion in choosing optional and mandatory punctuation cases, the failure to understand the grammatical composition of the sentence and the connections between individual words, and so on. To be able to narrow down the specific causes for making punctuation mistakes and potential methods of avoiding them, it is critical that analysis of the papers by other students continues and the most complicated cases of grading punctuation by teachers, those that even the teachers themselves are dubious about, are investigated separately.

KEYWORDS: essay, punctuation, punctuation mark, national graduation exam.

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