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## PROPOSING A NEW PUNCTUATION MARK – THE CONTINUUM (~)

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### Abstract

The punctuation marks associated with grammar connect or separate words or phrases, serving to separate or group related ideas respectively. Herein, we have proposed the introduction of a new punctuation mark– The continuum, represented as '~'. The punctuation can be used between two sentences that have one or more words in common such that the words appear at the end of the former sentence and the beginning of the latter. An important advantage of using the continuum would be a reduction of the word count by eliminating the repetition of words. It would also improve the presentation of the sentences and make the text more pleasant to read.

**Keywords:** Punctuation; Writing; Linguistics; Grammar.

### Introduction

It was stated by Leonard Bloomfield that "Writing is not a language, but merely a way of recording language by visible marks." [1] In a sense, written language is just a symbolic representation of its spoken counterpart. Punctuations have been an inseparable part of writing and yet, not much literature has been focused on them.[2] This is supported by the fact that one may not even find a mention of punctuation in books related to linguistics. A proper definition of punctuation is also missing from most of the books or articles on linguistics; while most of them only focus on their function or rules for their usage.

Richard Lauchman appropriately defined punctuation as "A code, used in writing, that is often necessary for meaning and emphasis. The code originated in attempts to capture, in text, the various

stops, pauses, and inflections of speech. Today it is logical in application." [3] Metaphorically, punctuation is analogous to notations from a music sheet. Most of the punctuation such as commas and full stops represents intonations used in speech, representing pause, pitch, and stress.

In actuality, grammar serves as the model for punctuation. Grammar, *per se*, is defined as "A description of the form of words and how they combine to form phrases, clauses, or sentences,". In this sense, punctuations mark boundaries of syntactic units, mainly based on criteria of form.[4]

The punctuation marks associated with grammar connect or separate words or phrases, serving to separate or group related ideas respectively.[5] In the context of connecting sentences, we propose the introduction of a new

punctuation mark– The continuum, represented as '~'.

### The new proposed punctuation

The punctuation can be used between two sentences that have one or more words in common such that the words appear at the end of the former sentence and the beginning of the latter. The symbol is to be added at the beginning and end of the words common between the two sentences.

### Examples

#### Example 1:

Original sentence:

It was a common trait found in some women. In some women, the opposite was noted.

With the use of a continuum:

It was a common trait found ~in some women~ the opposite was noted.

#### Example 2:

Original sentence:

They were always together. Together, they would achieve great heights.

With the use of a continuum:

They were always ~together~ they would achieve great heights.

#### Example 3:

Original sentence:

The tumor had attained a large size in 3 out of 18 cases. In 3 out of 18 cases, it had spontaneously regressed.

With the use of a continuum:

The tumor had attained a large size ~in 3 out of 18 cases~ it had spontaneously regressed.

### Discussion

The most important function of punctuation is to make grammar graphic by providing information about structural relations among elements of a text. A 'continuum' literally means 'a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, but

the extremes are quite distinct,' or 'a range or series of things that are slightly different from each other and that exist between two different possibilities.'<sup>[6]</sup> Herein, it serves as a common connector between two distinct sentences.

In the third example, although the words are common, the cases being referred to in both sentences are not the same. In such cases, the continuum is but a grammatical connector and does not imply that the words mean the same for both sentences. An important consideration when using a punctuation mark is its relation with other graphical features of text such as font/face alterations, capitalization, indentation, and spacing, all of which have their specific purposes.<sup>[7]</sup>

The use of continuum here eliminates the capital letter at the beginning of the second sentence. Generally, there would also be a comma after the set of words in the latter sentence, which also gets removed along with the full stop between the two sentences. Thus, the 'continuum zone' comprises the common words, the full stop between the two sentences, and the comma in the latter sentence after the common words. While a single space is maintained outside the continuum zone, the words inside are immediately in contact with the punctuation. These could be considered as some of the 'rules' while practically employing the continuum in a sentence.

The repetition of the same words at the end of one sentence and the beginning of the other may seem redundant or unpleasant. The use of a continuum would eliminate the repetition of words while also reducing the word count. This is of particular importance in writing scientific research. Modern-day journals restrict the number of words to a certain count owing to the limited number of pages and a greater number of articles being submitted to them.<sup>[8]</sup> The allowed word count for abstracts is much lower and the authors are expected to present their information in a very concise manner.

Although the standard word count ensures uniformity in the quality of the publication, it could be determinantal at times, wherein the authors would have to omit words of importance at the time

of submission.<sup>[9]</sup> The benefit of using a continuum is, thus, more appreciable when much information is to be conveyed in a very limited number of words such as titles, abstracts, taglines, news headlines, and newspaper articles.

### Conclusion

The novel proposed punctuation mark would serve to connect two consecutive sentences having similar words at the end of the former sentence and the beginning of the latter. An important advantage of using the continuum would be a reduction of the word count by eliminating the repetition of words. It would also improve the presentation of the sentences and make the text more pleasant to read.

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