ELLIPSIS IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION, FRIEND OR ENEMY IN EMAILS AND MESSAGES

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Abstract: The ellipsis has become one of the most frequently used yet controversial punctuation marks in digital communication. This article examines the role of ellipsis in emails, instant messaging, and social media, addressing whether it functions as a friend that enhances expressiveness and conversational tone or as an enemy that creates ambiguity, misunderstanding, and negative impressions. Drawing on pragmatics, computer-mediated communication (CMC) research, and generational linguistics, the study analyzes how the ellipsis is used to signal hesitation, trailing thoughts, politeness, or passive aggression.

Findings reveal significant generational and contextual differences: younger users often perceive frequent ellipses as passive-aggressive or unclear, while older users employ them as natural pauses or thought separators carried over from pre-digital writing habits. The article discusses the pragmatic functions of ellipsis, its impact on professional email communication, and the potential risks of misinterpretation in cross-generational and cross-cultural exchanges. It concludes with practical recommendations for effective digital writing in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

Keywords. ellipsis, digital communication, computer-mediated communication, pragmatics, punctuation, generational differences, email etiquette, instant messaging, passive aggression, linguistic ambiguity.

RAQAMLI ALOQADA ELLIPSIS, ELEKTRON POCHTA VA XABARLARDA DO'ST YOKI DUSHMAN

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Annotatsiya: Ijtimoiy tarmoqlar platformalarining tez sur'atlar bilan o'sishi zamonaviy ingliz tilidagi aloqaga, xususan, to'liqsiz gaplar va ellipsislardan foydalanishga sezilarli ta'sir ko'rsatmoqda. Ushbu maqola Instagram, Twitter (X), TikTok va WhatsApp kabi platformalar kundalik raqamli nutqda ellipsiv konstruktsiyalarning qabul qilinishi va chastotasini qanday tezlashtirganini o'rganadi. An'anaviy ravishda yozma ingliz tilida norasmiy yoki hatto grammatik jihatdan noto'g'ri deb hisoblangan to'liqsiz gaplar va strategik qisqartirishlar hozirgi paytda onlayn aloqaning asosiy xususiyatiga aylangan. Tadqiqot ushbu o'zgarishni keltirib chiqarayotgan asosiy omillarni, jumladan, tezlik, qisqalik, emotsional ifodalilik talabi va belgi chegaralarining ta'sirini ko'rib chiqadi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, ijtimoiy tarmoqlar og'zaki va yozma til o'rtasidagi chegaralarni qayta shakllantirmoqda, ellipsislarni nafaqat qabul qilinadigan, balki auditoriyani jalb qilish uchun to'liq jumlalarga qaraganda ko'pincha samaraliroq qilmoqda. Ushbu rivojlanish yanada tabiiy va dinamik

aloqani rag‘batlantirsa-da, yosh foydalanuvchilar orasida aniqlik, professionalizm va rasmiy yozuv aloqada eng ko‘p qo‘llaniladigan, ammo eng ziddiyatli tinish belgilaridan biriga aylandi. Ushbu maqola elektron pochta xabarlari, tezkor xabarlar va ijtimoiy tarmoqlarda ellipsisning rolini o‘rganadi hamda uning ifodalilik va suhbatdoshlik ohangini oshiruvchi “do‘st” yoki noaniqlik, tushunmovchilik va salbiy taassurotlar keltirib chiqaruvchi “dushman” sifatida ishlashini muhokama qiladi. Pragmatika, kompyuter vositasidagi aloqa (CMC) tadqiqotlari va avlodlar lingvistikasiga asoslanib, tadqiqot ellipsisning ikkilanish, fikrning davom etmasligi, xushmuomalalik yoki passiv tajovuzkorlikni bildirish uchun qanday ishlatilishini tahlil qiladi.

Natijalar avlodlar va kontekst bo‘yicha sezilarli farqlarni ko‘rsatadi: yosh foydalanuvchilar tez-tez ishlatiladigan ellipsislarni ko‘pincha passiv tajovuzkorlik yoki noaniqlik sifatida qabul qilishadi, keksa foydalanuvchilar esa ularni raqamli davrgacha bo‘lgan yozuv odatlaridan kelib chiqqan tabiiy pauza yoki fikr ajratuvchi sifatida qo‘llashadi. Maqolada ellipsisning pragmatik funktsiyalari, professional elektron pochta aloqasiga ta’siri hamda avlodlararo va madaniyatlararo aloqalarda noto‘g‘ri talqin etilish xavfi muhokama qilinadi. Maqola akademik, professional va shaxsiy kontekstlarda samarali raqamli yozuv uchun amaliy tavsiyalar bilan yakunlanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: ellipsis, raqamli aloqa, kompyuter vositasidagi aloqa, pragmatika, tinish belgilari, avlodlar farqi, elektron pochta odobi, tezkor xabarlar, passiv tajovuzkorlik, lingvistik noaniqlikmalarining pasayishi ehtimoli haqida savollar tug‘diradi.

ЭЛЛИПСИС В ЦИФРОВОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ: ДРУГ ИЛИ ВРАГ В ЭЛЕКТРОННЫХ ПИСЬМАХ И СООБЩЕНИЯХ

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Аннотация: Многоточие стало одним из наиболее часто используемых, но при этом спорных знаков препинания в цифровой коммуникации. В этой статье рассматривается роль многоточия в электронной почте, мессенджерах и социальных сетях, анализируется вопрос о том, функционирует ли оно как знак дружелюбия, усиливающий выразительность и тон разговора, или как знак врага, создающий двусмысленность, недопонимание и негативное впечатление. Опираясь на прагматику, исследования в области компьютерно-опосредованной коммуникации и лингвистику поколений, исследование анализирует, как многоточие используется для обозначения нерешительности, затягивания мысли, вежливости или пассивной агрессии.

Результаты показывают значительные различия в зависимости от поколения и контекста: молодые пользователи часто воспринимают частое использование эллипсиса как проявление пассивной агрессии или неясности, в то время как пожилые пользователи применяют его как естественную паузу или разделитель мыслей, перенятое из письменных привычек доцифровой эпохи. В статье обсуждаются прагматические функции эллипсиса, его влияние на профессиональную электронную переписку, а также риски неправильной интерпретации межкультурном общении. Статья завершается практическими рекомендациями по эффективному цифровому письму в академическом, профессиональном и личном контекстах.

Ключевые слова: неполные предложения, фрагменты предложений, анализ разговора, прагматика, вежливость, лингвистическая экономия, сравнительная лингвистика

Introduction: In the era of digital communication, punctuation has transcended its traditional grammatical role and evolved into a powerful pragmatic tool. Among all punctuation marks, the ellipsis has emerged as one of the most frequently used and hotly debated elements in emails, instant messaging, and social media platforms. Once primarily used in formal writing to indicate omitted words or unfinished thoughts, the ellipsis now performs a wide range of communicative functions in everyday digital interactions.

The rapid shift toward informal, fast-paced online communication has dramatically increased the use of the ellipsis. What was once considered a simple typographical device has become a versatile marker capable of expressing hesitation, trailing thoughts, politeness, suspense, or even passive aggression. A single depending on context, can soften a request, imply doubt, suggest disappointment, or create dramatic effect. This multifunctionality makes the ellipsis both highly useful and potentially dangerous in digital discourse.

The central question this article addresses is whether the ellipsis serves as a friend that enriches digital communication by making it more expressive, conversational, and emotionally nuanced, or as an enemy that introduces ambiguity, misunderstanding, and unintended negative impressions. This question has become particularly relevant as communication increasingly moves from face-to-face and telephone interactions to text-based platforms where non-verbal cues are absent.

Significant generational differences further complicate the issue. While older users often employ ellipses as natural pauses or thought connectors carried over from traditional writing habits, younger generations frequently interpret frequent use of ellipsis as passive-aggressive, evasive, or unprofessional. Such differing perceptions can lead to serious miscommunication in professional emails, academic correspondence, and personal messaging.

Despite its widespread use, the pragmatic functions and potential risks of ellipsis in digital communication remain relatively underexplored in linguistic research. This article aims to examine the role of ellipsis in contemporary digital discourse, analyze its pragmatic functions across various contexts, and evaluate its impact on clarity and effectiveness of communication. By drawing on pragmatics, computer-mediated communication studies, and generational linguistics, the study seeks to provide a balanced understanding of this ubiquitous yet controversial punctuation mark.

The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for students, professionals, and educators who navigate the complex demands of digital writing in both personal and professional spheres.

Literature Review

The ellipsis has long been recognized in traditional grammar as a punctuation mark used to indicate omitted material, unfinished thoughts, or hesitation (Crystal, 2003). However, with the rise of digital communication, its functions have expanded significantly, transforming it into a complex pragmatic tool. This literature review examines key scholarly contributions regarding the use of

ellipsis in computer-mediated communication (CMC), its pragmatic functions, and the emerging generational tensions surrounding its interpretation.

In conventional written English, the ellipsis primarily serves syntactic and stylistic purposes, such as showing omissions in quotations or indicating trailing off in dialogue (Quirk et al., 1985). In digital contexts, however, the ellipsis has acquired new roles. Raclaw (2006), in his seminal paper "Punctuation as Social Action: The Ellipsis as a Discourse Marker in Computer-Mediated Communication," argues that ellipsis frequently functions as a conjoining marker. Instead of merely indicating omission, it is used to connect ideas, segment turns in chat, replace periods or commas, and create a more conversational flow. This shift demonstrates how punctuation in CMC often serves social and interactive rather than purely grammatical purposes.

Researchers in pragmatics and CMC have identified multiple functions of the ellipsis in emails, instant messaging, and social media. It can signal hesitation, politeness, suspense, or emotional nuance (Vahtera, 2018). Herring (as cited in various CMC studies) notes that digital punctuation often compensates for the absence of paralinguistic cues such as tone of voice and facial expressions. The ellipsis, in particular, allows writers to soften statements, imply unspoken meaning (implicature), or invite the reader to co-construct the message.

Gretchen McCulloch (2019), in her influential book Because Internet, explains that punctuation in digital writing has taken on new "tonal" roles. She highlights how the ellipsis can create a sense of trailing off or openness, which some users find friendly and others find vague or unsettling.

One of the most discussed aspects in recent years is the generational divide in ellipsis interpretation. Multiple studies and linguistic commentaries (McCulloch, 2019; Tannen, as cited in Time, 2025) point out that older users (Baby Boomers and older Generation X) tend to use ellipses as natural pauses or thought separators — a habit carried over from letter writing and pre-digital typing. In contrast, younger users (Millennials and Gen Z) frequently interpret heavy use of "…" as passive-aggressive, hesitant, or indicative of negative emotions (PureWow, 2021; NDTV, 2024).

This phenomenon, popularly termed "Boomer ellipses," has sparked widespread discussion on social media and in linguistic research. Younger communicators often prefer line breaks, emojis, or full stops for clarity, viewing excessive ellipses as ambiguous or rude.

Ellipsis in Professional Communication

In professional email etiquette, the use of ellipsis remains controversial. Some scholars warn that its overuse can reduce perceived professionalism and create miscommunication, especially in hierarchical workplace environments (NetManners, 2021). Others argue that when used consciously, it can make messages warmer and more relational.

Despite growing interest in digital punctuation, there remains a significant research gap. While studies such as Raclaw (2006) provide strong foundational analysis, relatively few empirical works have systematically compared the perception and effectiveness of ellipsis across different platforms (email vs. instant messaging), age groups, and cultural contexts.

Research Methodology. This research methodology investigates the dual role of the ellipsis in digital communication—often functioning as a "friend" by facilitating conversational flow and "speech-like" informal expression, or an "enemy" by causing ambiguity or appearing passive-aggressive (Raclaw, 2006; Jelić, 2021).

The proposed framework utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining corpus linguistics to analyze frequency and placement with a sociolinguistic perception study to understand how different demographics interpret the mark (Malyuga & McCarthy, 2021).

Research Design: Mixed-Methods: a convergent parallel design is recommended to compare objective usage patterns with subjective user interpretations.

Quantitative Phase: Corpus analysis of real-world digital texts. Qualitative Phase: Surveys or semi-structured interviews focusing on "pragmatic failure".

Data Collection and Corpus Selection: to capture the "friend vs. enemy" dynamic, data must be gathered from two distinct digital environments: Professional (Emails): A corpus of workplace emails (e.g., the Enron Corpus or a contemporary internal business dataset) to observe "text-specific ellipsis" in formal contexts (Jelić, 2021). Informal (Instant Messaging): WhatsApp or Discord logs to study the ellipsis as a "discourse marker" used for turn-taking or signaling speechlessness (Raclaw, 2006). Criteria for Inclusion: Messages must contain at least one instance of a three-dot sequence.

Analysis and Results. Ellipsis in digital communication—those three dots "…"—can act as both a friend and an enemy in emails and messages, depending on context, tone, and relationship. Properly used, ellipses create nuance, soften requests, and invite reflection; overused or poorly placed, they can signal hesitation, vagueness, or even passive aggression.

Below is a ready-to-use "Analysis" and "Results" section you can paste into your article.

Psychological and emotional function

In texting and messaging, an ellipsis often functions as a form of "digital silence," marking a pause filled with unspoken emotion rather than a grammatical omission. It may signal hesitation ("I'm choosing my words carefully"), uncertainty ("I'm not sure how you'll react"), or emotional withdrawal during conflict.

Rhetorical and stylistic role

From a rhetorical perspective, ellipsis helps reduce verbosity and heightens impact by inviting the reader to mentally complete the thought. In professional emails, it can mark a deliberate break ("We need to focus on… security") to build anticipation or soften a sensitive request.

Generational and stylistic differences

Younger users often treat ellipses as cues to "read between the lines," expecting the reader to infer implications or tone. In contrast, older professionals may use them more sheepishly, to shift

topics gently or to replace exclamation points for a less "cloying" tone. These differences can lead to misinterpretation across age and workplace cultures.

Ambiguity and miscommunication

Because ellipsis leaves meaning partially open, it risks ambiguity. A simple "I'm fine…" can be read as calm reflection or as veiled resentment, depending on the relationship. In emails, repeated or inconsistent use ("Please check this… and that… and also…") can feel cryptic or disorganized rather than elegant.

Power and manipulation

Some studies frame ellipses as tools of "behavioral engineering," where strategic omission nudges the recipient toward a desired interpretation. When used manipulatively—such as "You should really… (never mind)"—the ellipsis can feel like emotional bait, inviting the receiver to fill the gap in a way that benefits the sender.

Conclusions and Recommendations. Conclusions

The ellipsis in digital communication acts as a double-edged tool: it can enrich tone and nuance, but also invite doubt and misinterpretation. When used sparingly and intentionally, it helps soften messages, create pauses, and signal thoughtfulness; when overused or poorly placed, it can convey hesitation, vagueness, or even passive aggression. Its impact depends heavily on context, relationship, and generational reading habits, which means the same three dots can be read as friendly, ambiguous, or hostile by different recipients

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6. -Thesaurus.com – "What Are Ellipses and How Do You Use Them?"
7. -"Overuse or Misuse of Ellipses and Dashes in Emails and Texts" – ProfessorscottsEnglish (Udemy-linked article)
8. -Focuses on how ellipses can unintentionally sound unsure, sarcastic, or annoyed in digital messages, offering practical punctuation tips.
9. -"Understanding Ellipses in Digital Communication" – YouTube video/series
10. -Explains how ellipses convey emotion, pause, or suspense in social media and messaging, including basic etiquette for digital communication.
11. -Reddit discussion – "Why do people end their emails with ellipses?"