Abstract

The aim of the present research is to reveal and describe the regularities in the use of the colon in modern German. The primary concern of this thesis is to identify the grammatical context of the colon and to establish the conditions within a sentence or text that enable the use of this punctuation mark. On that basis, the functions of the colon in a given context will also be derived.

The investigation is based on a corpus that consists of text examples from various sources, which are mostly from the press and literature. In all, the corpus contains approximately 3 000 colon occurrences. The context of the colon is defined syntactically, semantically and text-linguistically. The methods applied in the study are of a qualitative nature.

The study shows, that the use of the colon depends on a combination of several grammatical factors. The colon is related to grammatical distinctions, primarily to the type of the particular relationship between the units separated by a colon and to the position of the relation elements. The fundamental function of the colon is to graphically separate linguistic units that are closely associated and at the same time indicate relations between the separated units. Quite often the colon interacts with other linguistic means such as the lexicon and word order. These functions are closely connected to its role as a means of economy of language. As a sign of stylistic saving, the colon can be used to replace various lexical units in order to emphasize certain relation elements or make the text easier to understand. Sometimes the colon has several functions at the same time.

As the results show, the most conventional use of the colon is its function as indicator of direct speech and as a signal for the existence of semantic relations between two sentences. However, quite frequently other punctuation marks can be used instead of a colon in the same grammatical context, for instance a comma, dash or semicolon.

Generally, the colon can be used in much more different ways that assumed at first. Despite the numerous contextual restrictions, there is a great deal of flexibility possible in the use of the colon. Only a little part of the complex system of rules in the usage (implicit norm) is codified.