

Punctuation and text segmentation in 15th-century pamphlets

Marko Neumann

University of Gießen

marko.neumann@germanistik.uni-giessen.de

Mittwoch,
04.03.2020
14:45–15:15
VMP5 2098/2194

Looking at German incunabula from an inter-textual or an intra-textual perspective, one can easily detect irregular usages of punctuation marks. The inventory and the frequency of characters are variable, the usages do not follow distinct linguistic principles, and the punctuation patterns in templates differ significantly from their respective target texts (cf. Voeste 2018, Neumann & Voeste forthcoming). The idiosyncratic handling of punctuation of the time suggests that it did not fully function as a graphematic subsystem yet. Rather, we can observe clear correlations with other features, such as capital letters, width of spaces, pilcrows, indentations and line or paragraph breaks. This leads to the assumption that punctuation is one of several interacting means of text segmentation and should therefore be primarily considered to be part of the layout.

The aim of my presentation is to identify different types of text segmentation and their specific use of punctuation marks. My investigation is based on a corpus of so-called *practicas*, a popular and wide-spread genre in German-speaking territories, containing astrological predictions for the following year. They were written by the Bohemian astrologer Wenzel Faber von Budweis (1455–1518) and printed annually since 1481 in different printing shops in both German and Latin. As Wenzel Faber was one of the most widely printed authors of his time, these pamphlets allow us to investigate and to compare the actual, expedient practices of early typographic systems. In this way, we may be able to retrace the emergence of a consolidated, relatively consistent practice of text segmentation, which is an essential prerequisite for the implementation of a syntactic punctuation system. The relevance of different factors (printer-specific practices, orientation on Latin templates) will also be discussed.

References: Voeste, A. (2018). Interpunktion und Textsegmentierung im frühen deutschsprachigen Prosaroman. Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur (PBB) 140, 1–22. Neumann, M. & Voeste, A. (forthcoming). Text Segmentation in Manuscripts and Incunabula. In Rössler, P. (ed.). Interpunktion international. System, Norm, Praxis. Internationale Fachtagung, Universität Regensburg, 3.–4. Mai 2019.

AG 5