

## EXPLORING POE'S IDIOLECT: A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF GRAMMATICAL PREFERENCES

### ІДІОЛЕКТ Е. А. ПО: ЛІНГВІСТИЧНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ГРАМАТИЧНИХ ПРЕФЕРЕНЦІЙ АВТОРА

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The study of unique linguistic and stylistic features of texts by the American poet and prose writer Edgar Allan Poe is an important stage of unpacking his poetics, which involves analysing the key components, namely his idiolect, idiosyncrasy, and idionarration. This article examines the grammatical level of Poe's idiolect by analysing his poetry and prose, particularly in the context of Poe's numerous revisions of his texts. It is suggested that the author's idiolect differs from his idiosyncrasy as an independent and unique element of his poetics, although the boundary between these two terms is blurred. Results demonstrate that the most characteristic grammatical features of Poe's idiolect are unconventional (de)capitalisation and punctuation, sentence fragmentation, and syntactic inversion, and these grammatical deviations represent intentional linguistic choices rather than accidental violations of language norms. Thus, a comparison of early and later editions of his poem "Tamerlane," in combination with the analysis of his short stories "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," "The Masque of the Red Death," to name just a few, reveals the consistency of these grammatical preferences represented equally in Poe's poetry and prose. These techniques not only convey emotional and psychological tension but also contribute to a distinctive estrangement effect that the reader might experience. Additionally, the findings show that the grammatical level of Poe's idiolect, defined by a coherent system of grammatical preferences, goes beyond genre boundaries. Finally, the study suggests that future research may explore how real readers perceive and respond to these linguistic features in Poe's works.

**Key words:** E. A. Poe, poetry, prose, idiolect, (de)capitalisation, sentence fragmentation, unconventional punctuation, inversion.

Дослідження унікальних мовних та стилістичних особливостей текстів американського поета та прозаїка Едгара Аллана По є важливим етапом розвідки його поетики, що передбачає аналіз її ключових компонентів, а саме ідіолекту, ідіостилю та ідіонаративу. У цій статті розглядається граматичний рівень ідіолекту Е. А. По за допомогою аналізу його поезії та прози, зокрема в контексті численних авторських рецензій власних текстів. Висловлюється припущення, що ідіолект автора відрізняється від його ідіостилю як самостійний та унікальний елемент його поетики, хоча межа між цими двома поняттями є розмитою. Результати лінгвостилістичного аналізу демонструють, що характерними граматичними особливостями ідіолекту автора є атипове використання великої літери і навпаки написання окремих загальних іменників з маленької літери, неконвенційна пунктуація, фрагментарність речень та синтаксична інверсія. Важливо, що ці граматичні відхилення є свідомим стилістичним вибором автора, а не випадковістю чи помилкою. Таким чином, порівняльний аналіз ранньої та пізньої версії поетичного тексту Е. А. По "Tamerlane," у поєднанні з аналізом його оповідань "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," "Berenice," та "The Masque of the Red Death," виявляє поспідовність цих граматичних преференцій, що однаково представлені в поезії та прозі автора. Такі прийоми не тільки передають емоційну та психологічну напругу, але й сприяють особливому ефекту очуднення, який може відчувати читач. Результати дослідження показують, що граматичний рівень ідіолекту Е. А. По, який визначається цілісною системою граматичних уподобань, виходить за жанрові межі у творчості автора. Нарешті, перспективний напрямок дослідження вбачається у вивчені реакції реальних читачів на ці лінгвістичні особливості у поетичних і прозових текстах Е. А. По.

**Ключові слова:** Е. А. По, поезія, проза, ідіолект, (де)капіталізація, фрагментарні речення, неконвенційна пунктуація, інверсія.

**Introduction.** Edgar Allan Poe is an American poet and prose writer who paved the way for American Romanticism in the second half of the 19th century as one of its most prominent representatives. He is known as the founder of detective fiction and one of the first American writers to contribute to the growth of science fiction [8; 9; 22; 23]. Both Poe's poetry and prose skillfully explore such themes as obscurity, fear, death, madness, and many more [12; 17; 18]. The author's unique narrative style is charac-

terised by a combination of Gothic motifs with profound psychological insight, offering a compelling and thoughtful examination of human experience.

**Literature review.** Poe's literary career has been categorised primarily by his genre [3; 5; 6; 7]. This makes a comprehensive understanding of his authorial style impossible and thus justifies our chosen perspective. Following Bezrebra [1], we view Poe's poetics as a "system of linguistic and conceptual authorial preferences, whose systematicity is revealed through

analysing the linguistic and stylistic configuration of his texts, plot-realisation techniques, and their correlation" [1, p. 15]. An essential aspect of studying Poe's poetics is identifying the features of his idiolect, idiosyncrasy, and idionarration [4; 14; 16] through linguostylistic analysis of his poetry and prose. Poe's idiolect is characterised by three levels of deviation ("departure from what is expected in the linguistic code or the social code expressed through language" [13, p. 3]): graphological [16], lexical [14; 16] and grammatical. That said, in what follows, we will offer a detailed linguistic analysis of the grammatical level of the author's idiolect.

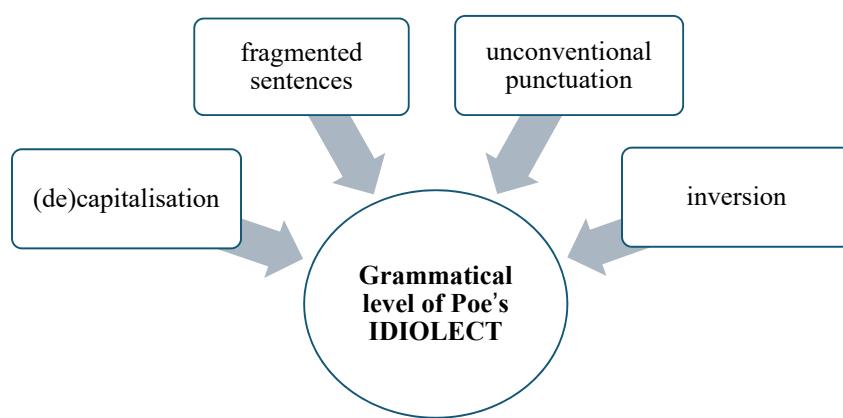
Idiolect (from Greek "idio" – "personal, individual", and "lect" – derived from "dialect", meaning "an individual's speech") is a personal way of using language [10]. The Oxford Dictionary [11] defines idiolect as a form or variety of language that is unique and characteristic of an individual, that person's own use of language. Although in linguistic theory there is a view that an author's idiolect forms a constituent part of their idiosyncrasy, the latter is defined as a unique personal language system shaped by innate, acquired, individual, and group characteristics [2, p. 31]. Thus, it develops through the interplay of an individual's inner world, consciousness, life experience, and external social or personal factors.

**This research aims** to examine Poe's grammatical choices, enabling us to identify and generalise the specific characteristics of his idiolect. To define the author's individual preferences for utilising specific grammatical elements, the study provides a detailed analysis of the grammatical level of Poe's idiolect in both his poetry and prose, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Problem statement.** Poe's texts (both poetry and prose) are distinguished by a specific authorial usage of grammar, which is one of the characteristic features of their verbal structure and, consequently,

of the author's idiolect. Poe's use of abstract images significantly impacts how thoughts are expressed through the grammatical structure of sentences when analysing his texts. Among the features that attract the reader's attention, we distinguish capitalisation, namely the use of common nouns with a capital letter and, vice versa, decapitalisation of words at the beginning of sentences, thereby violating orthographic rules; sentence fragmentation; the use of punctuation (such as dashes, exclamation and question marks, etc.) in unconventional positions; and inversion. We suggest comparing the characteristics of grammatical structure in Poe's texts, looking at both his poetry and prose. Such a comparison becomes even more relevant when considering the evolution of his works over time.

**Results and discussion.** An example illustrating the dynamics of Poe's writing process is the history of publications of the poem "Tamerlane," which was continuously edited (with lines deleted or added) by Poe himself. Let us look at the 1827 (the first publication, henceforth – *A*) and 1845 (the eighth and last edition of the text, henceforth – *H*) versions, which are provided in the most comprehensive collection of the author's works, edited by T. O. Mebbott [19; 20; 21]. In its richness, this collection covers the author's preferences regarding certain grammatical features within a single text at different periods of his life. For example, in edition *A* the unconventional capitalisation of common nouns in "Tamerlane", such as *Nature*, *Beauty*, *Fortune*, *Earth*, etc. is traced in the following lines: (76) "The child of Nature, without care," (211) "Of Beauty, which did guide it through," (263) "Familiarly – whom Fortune's sun," (312) "With Nature, in her wild paths; tell," (325) "For the flight on Earth to Fancy giv'n," (347) "When Fortune mark'd me for her own" [19, p. 29–38]. In its turn, in edition *H*, capitalised nouns *Victory*,



**Fig. 1. Characteristic features of Poe's idiolect: grammatical level**

*Love, Fantasy, Hope, Death, Eternity* were added to the ones mentioned above: (54) “*The battle-cry of Victory!*,” (102) “*Young Love’s first lesson is — the heart,*” (157) “*Yet it was not that Fantasy,*” (166) “*Is she not queen of Earth? her pride,*” (186) “*Farewell! for I have won the Earth,*” (223) “*I know — for Death who comes for me,*” (228) “*Are flashing thro’ Eternity —*” [19, p. 55–60]. Thus, we assume that Poe’s unconventional capitalisation is not accidental but is a conscious choice by the author.

Now let us look at lines 328–332 from the same poem in edition A: “*Is she not queen of earth? her pride / Above all cities? in her hand / Their destinies? with all beside / Of glory, which the world hath known? / Stands she not proudly and alone?*” [19, p. 37]. Their difference from lines 166–170 in edition H lies in the capitalisation of the noun *Earth* in the latter as well as the replacement of the adverb *proudly* with *nobly*. In contrast, the punctuation and the division into lines in this fragment remain unchanged. In view of the poetic device of enjambement, the main technique of which is the transfer of part of a sentence to the following line, then the words *her*, *in*, and *with* should have been capitalised after the question marks. Thus, in both versions of the poem, Poe resorts to grammatical deviation and violates orthographic standards by using a lowercase letter instead of an uppercase one. In addition, the combination of these grammatical features renders the sentence fragmented, making it difficult for the reader to perceive the author’s text comprehensively.

Comparing the frequency of capitalisation in Poe’s poetry and prose, it is noticed that this technique is less common in the latter. For example, in his short story “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the author uses the lexeme *Death* with the capital letter: “*Yes, he has been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him...*” [21, p. 794]. In his short story “The Black Cat,” the capitalized common nouns, underlined in the following quote, intensify the psychological horror, experienced by the narrator, and add emotionality to the words highlighted in this way: “*It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name — and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster had I dared — it was now, I say, the image of a hideous — of a ghastly thing — of the GALLows! — oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime — of Agony and of Death!*” [21, p. 855]. More examples of unconventional capitalisation can be found in Poe’s short story “The Masque of the Red Death”: “*But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death*” [20, p. 675];

“*And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death*” [20, p. 676]. Foregrounded in this way, the phrase *Red Death* stands for the death being personified and presented as a character. Additionally, the text contains individual capitalised words: “*There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the ‘Red Death’*” [20, p. 671]; “*And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all*” [20, p. 677].

Poe’s violation of orthographic rules is also a peculiarity of his prose, which often adds emotionality and expressiveness. For example, in the last sentence of the short story “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the author breaks grammatical norms and uses lowercase words *tear*, *here* and *it* after an exclamation mark (which are usually used to mark the end of a sentence), thereby emphasising the narrator’s unstable emotional state, the chaos of his thoughts and the psychological horror that overwhelms him: “‘*Villains!*’ I shrieked, ‘*dissemble no more! I admit the deed! — tear up the planks! — here, here! — it is the beating of his hideous heart!*’” [21, p. 797]. Additionally, in this example, the author uses six exclamation marks inside what seems to be a single stream-of-consciousness sentence, which contradicts the principles of sentence construction (exclamatory sentences in particular).

A similar manifestation of grammatical deviation can be seen in the short story “The Masque of the Red Death,” where Prince Prospero shouts aggressively and contemptuously at the crowd in attempt to find out who is horrifying the guests trying to ruin his party: “‘*Who dares?*’ he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him — ‘*who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery?*’” [20, p. 675]. Additionally, the underlined word *who* should have been capitalised as the beginning of a new sentence. Similarly, in the short story “Berenice”, Poe, on the one hand, uses exclamation marks and dashes in unconventional places. On the other hand, he uses lowercase words after end punctuation marks, which together reinforce the psychological state of the narrator at the moment when he finds his cousin’s teeth in his possession: “*The teeth! — the teeth! — they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them, as in the very moment of their first terrible development*” [20, p. 215].

A strong grammatical emphasis can be seen in Poe’s use of other punctuation marks. For example, a frequently inserted dash, its unconventional position in the text, or simultaneous use of two dashes in a

row lead to the fragmentation of sentences, disrupting syntactic structure and imitating the disordered flow of thought. Such fragmentation opens the text to multiple interpretations, reinforcing the psychological tension and emotional instability of the narrator.

For example, in edition *A* of “Tamerlane,” in the line “*Laurels upon me – and the rush*” [19, p. 28], Poe uses a dash between *me* and *and*, while in edition *H*, the two words are divided by the colon, while the dash is moved to the end of the line: “*Laurels upon me: and the rush –*” [19, p. 55]. Among the new lines that appear as a result of the author’s editing, particularly in edition *H*, we find the following unusual construction: “*Young Love’s first lesson is – – the heart*” [19, c. 57]. Here, attention is drawn not only to the unconventional use of the dash, but also to its doubling, which prompts the reader to pause and, probably, reread the line. Some lines from edition *A* were subsequently deleted or changed by the author; new variations appeared in later publications of this poem, but the dashes remain consistent. Let us compare the following lines from versions *A* and *H*: “*The world – its joy – its share of pain. / Which I felt not – its bodied forms*” (*A*) [19, c. 32], “*The world, and all it did contain / In the earth – the air – the sea – / Its joy – its little lot of pain*” (*H*) [19, c. 57]. In version *H*, Poe not only adds another line but also increases the number of dashes from three to four, separating the words *earth*, *air*, *sea*, and *joy*, thereby fragmenting the sentence structure and reinforcing the meaning of the detached words in the text, which results in potential additional attention from readers to them.

Poe’s prose is also full of unconventional punctuation marks, particularly dashes. For example, the first sentences in the short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” grab the reader’s attention with four dashes, which, together with the exclamation mark after the capitalised word *TRUE*, make the sentences seem even more fragmented: “*TRUE! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses – not destroyed – not dulled them*” [21, p. 792]. Similarly, there is density of dashes in the short story “The Black Cat,” when the narrator reflects on his attitude and emotions towards the cat: “*It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name – and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster had I dared – it was now, I say, the image of a hideous – of a ghastly thing – of the GALLows! – oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime – of Agony and of Death!*” [21, p. 855]. The dashes here promote a fragmented, erratic sentence structure that reflects the narrator’s unstable men-

tal state and increases the emotional intensity of the moment described, drawing readers deeper into the narrator’s psychological turmoil.

Another characteristic of Poe’s idiolect is the author’s frequent use of inversion, which violates the usual grammatical order of words in a sentence and ultimately causes an effect of estrangement. For example, in edition *A* of the poem “Tamerlane,” there are such inversion constructions: “*In mountain air I first drew life*” [19, p. 28], “*Would seem to my half closing eye / The pageantry of monarchy!*” [19, p. 28], “*And as it pass’d me by, there broke / Strange light upon me, tho’ it were*” [19, p. 29], “*There met me on its threshold stone / A mountain hunter; I had known*” [19, p. 39]. Comparing these examples with the lines in edition *H*, we note that, despite numerous authorial corrections, inversion remains one of the grammatical features of this poem: “*On mountain soil I first drew life*” [19, p. 54], “*Appeared to my half-closing eye / The pageantry of monarchy*” [19, p. 55].

Inversion is also a hallmark of Poe’s short stories. Thus, the author uses this technique in his “Berenice”: “*But as, in ethics, evil is a consequence of good, so, in fact, out of joy is sorrow born,*” “*Here died my mother. Herein was I born*” [20, p. 209], “*In that chamber was I born*” [20, p. 210], “*On the table beside me burned a lamp, and near it lay a little box*” [20, p. 218]. A similar regularity is observed in the story “The Tell-Tale Heart”: “*Above all was the sense of hearing acute,*” “*Object there was none. Passion there was none*” [21, p. 792], “*Never, before that night, had I felt the extent of my own powers – of my sagacity*” [21, p. 793]. Similarly, in “The Black Cat,” Poe uses inversion to draw the reader’s attention to specific sentences, such as at the beginning of the story, when the narrator convinces himself that he is not mad and is not dreaming: “*Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not – and very surely do I not dream*” [21, p. 849].

**Conclusion.** The analysis of Edgar Allan Poe’s poetry and prose demonstrates that his grammatical choices are a systematic element of his idiolect. As features of his poetics, these linguistic preferences, including (de)capitalisation, sentence fragmentation, unconventional punctuation, and inversion, significantly influence the promotion of both the aesthetic quality and conceptual depth of his texts. By examining both Poe’s poetry and prose, including canonical texts such as “Tamerlane,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Black Cat,” alongside less popular texts like “Berenice” or “The Masque of the Red Death,” to name just a few, we unpack the grammatical level of Poe’s idiolect.

The research into both early and later editions of his works reveals a consistent use of grammatical deviation as the author's intentional stylistic choice rather than a coincidence or mistake. The comparison of different versions of "Tamerlane" shows that the recurrence of capitalisation, even though the poem underwent substantial authorial revisions, suggests that it is his stable grammatical preference. A similar tendency, although less frequent, appears in Poe's prose, where capitalised nouns additionally acquire personified or symbolically intensified meanings.

Another salient marker of Poe's idiolect is the author's violation of orthography and punctuation norms, resulting in sentence fragmentation. These features reflect and strengthen the emotional instability and psychological tension characteristic of Poe's narrators (both in his poetry and prose). Additionally, their persistence across both genres and throughout different periods of the writer's career indicates their strong individual nature.

Inversion likewise emerges as a consistent grammatical technique that contributes to the estrangement effect, which appears in Poe's texts. Its use in both his poetry and prose highlights the author's tendency to break up standard syntactic patterns, foregrounding them to amplify the emotional intensity in the stories.

To sum it up, the grammatical features discussed above demonstrate that Poe's idiolect is characterised by a deliberate and coherent system of linguistic preferences that expands genre boundaries. The results of the analysis lend support to the idea that the grammatical level of Poe's language use is key to understanding his idiolect and, more generally, his poetics, laying the foundation for further investigations into the stylistic and narratological dimensions of his writing. The next step in studying Poe's idiolect could involve analysing, in line with the tenets of Empirical Stylistics [15; 24], reactions of real readers to foregrounded elements discussed above. We believe that looking at readers' responses to Poe's poetry and prose is a prospective direction of research into his poetics.

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