
The role of interjections in discourse

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Desde hace tiempo los lingüistas han considerado a las interjecciones como una categoría sin importancia, sin contenido de referencia, y, por lo tanto, casi olvidada por ellos; aquí se trata de demostrar su verdadera Importancia tanto para el hablante como para el escucha.

For a long time linguists have considered interjections as an unimportant category, without referential content. Therefore, they have almost been forgotten. The purpose of this paper is to show their true importance both for the speaker and the hearer.

Depuis longtemps les linguistes ont considéré les interjections comme une catégorie sans importance, sans contenu de référence et, par conséquent, ils les ont presque oubliées: nous essayons Ici de montrer leur véritable importance pour le locutaire et l'allocutaire.

Lange Zeit haben die Linguisten angenommen, dass die Interjektionen eine sprachliche Kategorie ohne Bedeutung seien, ohne Stellenwert Bezug auf den Inhalt. Deshalb wurden sie praktisch ausser Acht gelassen.

Hier geht es darum, ihre wahre Bedeutung aufzuzeigen, und zwar sowohl für Sprecher als auch für den Zuhörer.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interjections have been long regarded as a wastebasket category by linguists, a category containing purely emotive words devoid of any referential content. Consequently they have; been almost forgotten. For linguists' primary interest was concentrated upon the description of sounds and words on one hand and on the other upon the combination of these words into sentences, trying at the same time to account for their relationships within sentences. However with the tremendous development brought into linguistic science, linguists have decided to enlarge their sphere of investigation and take in larger segments of verbal behaviour, that is to say, to expand their horizons beyond the description of the sentence in order to explore the whole mechanism of verbal behaviour which is known as discourse.

At this point it is imperative to formulate the notion of discourse as it should be understood in the context of the treatment of interjections, considering that there is much literature on the market about discourse. Thus, discourse in the present paper will refer to a stretch of language, be it spoken or written, analysis of which will take into account, not only various aspects of sentence relations, but also some phenomena such as those under consideration, i.e. interjections, which tend to mark a certain kind of interaction between people and to carry quite a wide range of information as will become apparent later on.

Interjections, though long ignored, have aroused the interest of some linguists early in the seventies. Lakoff's article "questionable answers and answerable questions (1970)" published in 1973 and James's articles "Some aspects of the syntax and semantics of interjections (1972)" and "Another look at, say, some grammatical constraints on. Oh, Interjections and Hesitations (1974)" seem to be the only sound discussions about interjections which have been preceded to date.

Lakoff's paper explores in the first instance the appropriateness of an answer to a question and at the same time touches upon meaning of those answers prefaced by interjections such as well and why. James's papers on the other hand make on investigation of some aspects of the syntax and semantics of interjections. But in perspective of the speech act theory, it must be agreed that a syntactic-semantic analysis of these utterances known commonly as interjections, is deemed to be insufficient as their meaning in the actual discourse tends to change from one speech situation to another. It is therefore visible to investigate their communicative functions in speech situations wherein stress, intonation contour and facial expressions, gestures, in short kinesics come into play.

It is my intention in this study to make an attempt to re-examine the previous studies and propose a further analysis which might care to consider different extraneous elements susceptible of accounting for the meaning of interjections acknowledged both by the speaker and the hearer.

1.1 DEFINING INTERJECTIONS.

By Interjections, traditional grammar books have referred to a class of words that have neither referential substance nor syntactical link to the sentence but serve to express emotion. They are characteristically used in syntactic isolation and are composed of not more than two syllables. Some of the commonest interjections are: Oh (pain, suprise), Ah (satisfaction, recognition), Uh, er (hesitation), Hurrah (joy), well) initiating, introducing, resumption) Aha (agreement), What (astonishment), Ouch (pain), Goodness (surprise), Why (indignation, disagreement), Indeed (doubt), etc. To these must be added some phrases which result from the combination either of two interjections or two or three words such as Oh God, Oh gosh, Oh dear, Dear me, Oh bother, Jolly good, What a pity, Bless my soul, to mention but a few.

As this study is set in the realm of speech act theory, it stands to reason that traditional grammarians' definition proves unsatisfactory and needs reconsideration. Interjections will be then provisionally defined as pragmatic operators which establish relations between speech acts. Provisionally, simply because we feel that it is rather loose and vague when it comes to thinking that either the same interjections have different uses or else different functions happen to be rendered by the same interjections. Which makes it differ from the classical semantic use of interjections. Clearly, the pragmatic use of these interjections is accompanied by various phonological and syntactical constraints. To account for the pragmatic function or use interjections will be often used either in isolation or in a sentence-initially followed by a pause and uttered with a specific intonation pattern. It is this intonational aspect that will be exploited mostly in this paper, for the syntactical one has been discussed at some length by James (op. cit.)

One might ask why it is possible to assign meanings to interjective operators if they are devoid of any referential substance. The answer is provided by arguing that if we admit that uttering something like Oh! equates the expression of a proposition and that when a proposition is expressed it is always expressed in the performance of an illocutionary act as Searle (1969) states it, then we may also admit that Oh! refers to something identifiable, though the utterance Oh! itself does not have a propositional content. I hope to show that interjections may perform a wide range of illocutionary acts resulting from the use of different intonation patterns -- an aspect which was neglected by Lakoff and James.

1.2. LIMITING THE SCOPE OF STUDY .

With the aim that we would like to shed some light on previous studies, I will limit myself to considering three interjective morphemes: Oh, Ah and Well.

So to account for the pragmatic use of these interjections I exploited the tape-recorded spontaneous dialogues compiled into a book by Crystal and Davy (1975). I did not limit myself to spoken discourse only, I took a glimpse at the written discourse as well. And I haphazardly chose a collection of FIVE PLAYS by John Mortimer.

These materials have permitted me to collect instances which contained interjections to be analyzed. I believe that they would provide evidence upon which to base a description of interjections.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. OH.

They are one or two essential points to bring out about spoken discourse before we undertake the actual analysis of interjections. These points are closely linked to the relative difficulty of handling spoken discourse as an easily analyzable piece of language. First, I find rather embarrassing to delineate with exactness the boundaries of a sentence within spoken discourse. Secondly there seems to be an apparent difficulty also in determining the various positions or loci of interjections.

A partial solution to this state of affairs will be to treat temporarily a stretch of language marked off by tone-units as constituting a sentence. In this respect it might be possible to say whether an interjection occurs initially, medially or "finally" depending certainly upon one's judgement about what may likely be the

boundaries of the sentence.

To begin with, we would like to consider the following exchange where the interjection Oh has been noticed:

- A. ...How much does it cost to get in down the road now?
- B. I think it probably is the money for what you get... I was reading in the paper this morning a chap he's a director of a big company in Birmingham and he's been to America to watch West Bromwich playing in America he's...he's been to the la...to Oh...the last two or three world cup... (Crystal et al. 1975:19).

There is little doubt that Oh in B is a mark of hesitation used intentionally by the speaker as he tries to make a decision or choice about what comes next. Clearly the Oh seems to precede a definite statement, which is the position "he has been to the last world cup" no matter the exact number of times. What is essential in the speaker's eyes is that he makes the hearer understand and believe that Mr. X has done Y for n-times but he is unable to state how many times it was; Mr. X has certainly been at the World Cup tournaments more than twice. To perceive the meaning of Oh as it stands in B, I think it interesting to compare the Oh-type hesitation with what I may call "true hesitations", that is, hesitations characterised by er (also transcribed as mm or uh) the omission of hesitation signal.

Let us take the important part of the sentence:

B₁. ... He's been to the la. ..the last two or three World Cup tournaments.

(1) Uh is the American transcription for er in British English.

B₂. . He's been to the la...er the last two or three World Cup tournaments.

It goes without saying that the first meaning to come out of B. is that the speaker is trying to remember perhaps the number of times the person he is talking about has been at World Cup tournaments. James (1972:162) with regard to this, points out that the omission of a hesitation signal could be interpreted as the speaker's intention to create suspense in his hearers. This is indeed true, but I preclude its possibility to apply in the sentence under discussion. Whereas B₂ would account for a temporary forgetfulness on the part of the speaker as he makes an effort to remember the number of times Mr. X has been to World Cup tournaments. A further possible meaning - which does not concern the case in point - is one in which the speaker is deliberately hesitating because he tries to avoid creating a negative attitude in one way or another.

The reason for this comparison has been to show the semantic differences that might result from the use of the simple pause or hesitation signal er in the context in which it was not intended to be used. The choice of these operators is unlikely to be made at random. It is, we should think, inherent to the speaker's intuition as far as the meaning is concerned.

There is, however, another use of OH inside a sentence which seems to be different from the one described hitherto. Characteristically, it is preceded by a long pause and is then said rapidly, while the OH in B has the tendency to be drawn out and in the sentence examined it carries the falling tone. Illustrative of the second OH is the sentence:

B. "...about as wide as that and about thirty thousand have to

go out through there you know, I
mean er - OH it's terrible.

(Crystal et al. op. cit. p.23)

The tone carried on OH is rising and steps down as the speaker passes it on to the nuclear syllable - terrible - which carries the falling tone. The meaning brought out by this intonation pattern would indicate that "the speaker has just remembered" that there is something rather appalling. In other words, this sentence-internal OH stands for the underlying proposition the speaker has just remembered. To corroborate this interpretation, take for a further illustration this sentence:

A. OH and one pig died because it
ate to much. (p.40)

Here the position of OH is different, but the meaning is still the same. OH is sentence-initial. The speaker, it is said, has been telling B about her family's summer holiday, when they went to stay on a farm. Her children had been very much impressed with the pigs and suddenly with a sharp rising tone A remembers that there exists P (P standing for the proposition) which means that there is a further point to make about the pigs. That point concerns the death of one pig, which constitutes the whole proposition the speaker S has remembered to express. In such a context the hearer H could react by uttering an expression which inspires compassion or shows surprise. In this case the hearer H has shown surprise using the same interjection.

B. OH really!

Obviously, the OH is slightly drawn out just to indicate that the first prominent syllable starts there and that the final element of the tone-unit carries a rising tone which, with great probability may challenge A's information and consequently call on further evidence.

These are, in fact, some general semantic aspects of the interjection OH which few people are aware of. However, it has been noticed that interjections in general, viewed as pragmatic operators, convey some clearly defined semantico-pragmatic information which need to be brought out. This information is perceived by the hearer in the form of speech acts being performed while using interjections. On these grounds, we could easily subscribe to Searle's thought according to which "in the case of speech acts performed within a language, it is a matter of convention that the utterance of such and such expressions under certain condition counts as "the doing of something" (1969:37)." It appears that some difficulty may emerge in the attempt to define these conditions in a water-tight way. Therefore, I would tentatively determine by way of examples some overall meaning that could hold generally.

Let us consider OH in isolation. In isolation, the utterance OH usually stands for a proposition. Take for example the following piece of discourse between A who is sitting in the living-room watching the television programme on the return of the American Space Shuttle and B who enters in the room as the commentary finishes.

A. John, The Space Shuttle has just landed.

B. OH!

Another situation. Imagine that John is asked by his father to read the first paragraph of the text his teacher taught in class. While he is reading he mispronounces twice a word which keeps recurring throughout the text. The third time he gets it wrong and says Oh! Notice that Oh! could have been uttered by John's father as well, using a low key of secondary tone five in order to show either surprise or disappointment as he stares at the son.

The first point I would like to drive

home by giving these examples is that for all situations falling in this category i.e. the category in which an interjection, by standing alone, expresses a proposition, it should be suggested to bear in mind one or two general tendencies about interjections in isolation.

First the utterance Oh (and incidentally Ah, Well) should be considered as a reaction to a fact or a situation the speaker has just experienced and secondly this reaction should also be regarded as a response to that situation. This argument could be refuted by those who believe that the primary function of an interjection is confined to the omission of sounds which express a feeling of some kind. But in the scope of this paper as was stressed at the outset, we view an interjection as a pragmatic operator. As such the argument is to be taken, for Oh in these two examples gives the hearer some kind of information or response which may comfort and reassure A that his intention has been recognised.

Obviously the dialogue consists of two distinct phrases: giving the information (The Space Shuttle has just landed) and replying (indicated by a simple interjection). A's question might arise, however: what would have been implied in uttering the sound Oh? The answer will by and large depend upon some factor on the part of the responder's interests. In the first, place, a more obvious meaning that comes to mind is a surprise, in which case Oh is uttered with a rising falling tone. The responder, though surprised, shows a certain degree of commitment to the event and consequently he agrees with A. Usually in such a context, the responder may have Oh followed by one of these phrases: very good, great, splendid, etc..But it should be said that the expression of surprise is often linked to some bad or good reasons behind it. Here it is due to the fact that the crew of the Space Shuttle Columbia was facing serious problems with their heatshield and other sophisticated equipment of

the craft.

However, uttered on a more falling neutral tone, say tone one, Oh expresses a proposition which would mean that the responder notifies the speaker that the information is received and acknowledged as true. In terms of speech functions, both cases may be said to convey one illocutionary act: agreeing and ultimately may be paraphrased respectively as:

- a) I say (state) to you that,
 though suprised, I agree with
 what you are saying; and
- b) I state to you that
 (I take for granted your in-
 formation
 (I concede or agree
 (I note what you are saying

Furthermore, if the Oh is emitted with a rising tone, that is tone 2, the responder is likely to doubt the speaker's information and seeks confirmation accordingly. And this is the point I have already touched upon (see p. 7). To put it another way, the responder is "disagreeing" momentarily with the speaker's intention until further evidence is produced.

On the other hand, the interjection Oh as it is used in the second situation has its own peculiarities. Uttered by John, it carries a blameful function whereas it shows disappointment when it comes out of the father's mouth. It would correspond to an expression like "what a pity". John's father regrets that his son displays some memory deficiency, i.e he is not able to remember once for all a bit of information, a correction without difficulty; which may bear out an evidence according to which his son John might not be doing well in class.

It must be noted that the set of meanings or illocutionary acts to be assigned to one

speech act (here the utterance of Oh) is far from being exhaustive. For these are generally bound to appear in specific semantic/pragmatic contexts. It might be suggested that the speaker should rely upon the intonation contour which generally disambiguates the situation. Indeed, intonation plays an extremely important role in discourse, but it is less possible to cover all semantic differences extensively. The same intonation contour may convey a variety of speech functions as may be noted in the sentences below where the pragmatic Oh used sentence-initially could yield a host of illocutionary acts. To illustrate the assumption we are making, consider the fragment of discourse below:

- C... but there was an interesting programme on these grounds the way it showed talked about the continental ones that one it was it in Madrid they're superb.
- B. Oh they're tremendous. (Crystal, op. cit p. 21)

The feeling is that Oh in B fits in the category of communicative illocutionary acts labelled constatives (cfr. Bach and Harnish, 1979: 41) which express the speaker's belief and his intention that the hearer have or form a like belief. There seem to be many subcategories falling under this heading; therefore it is to be specified which subcategory the example I am considering goes in. Oh in B's utterance clearly indicates that the speaker has just found out that the information received is significant, i.e. is true and ipso facto he recognises the hearer's (C) intention for him to confirm his proposition. Consequently Oh in B is rather confirmative, a subcategory of the constatives. This is even justified by the use of adjectives of degree by both speakers: superb and tremendous.

On the contrary, if the expression was uttered on a falling-rising tone, Oh would indi-

cate that the speaker is disputing the claim made by the other interactant. However, this possibility is excluded in the present situation. Had it been in the speaker's mind, i.e. S he would have supposedly repeated the same adjective: superb to show and clarify his situation.

A further evidence in support of our claim can be seen in this sentence:

Oh, President Reagan has been shot.

Like the above example, this utterance should be treated as constative. Their possible difference consists in the value offered to the utterance with respect to intonation and attitude of the addressee.

Leaving apart its confirmatory aspect in case of doubt, the utterance would be at one level identified as an act of informing and at the other as an act of condoling. The latter illocutionary act constitutes a subdivision of the expressives, category of communicative illocution. One of the characteristics of condoling is to say that we sympathize with a person; that is, we feel sorry for what happened to him. But the primary social function of condoling seems to be intended to alleviate the addressee's pains or sufferings. In the context under consideration, the speaker expresses regret for not having been informed that some misfortune happened to President Reagan. In other words the speaker is deeply affected.

2.2. AH

Although the interjection Ah in essence, presents a close relationship with Oh we hope to demonstrate in the following lines that the former still has its own meanings. As was pointed out in the introductory part Ah is said to be used to indicate satisfaction or recognition. Illustration of this may be noted in this exchange below:

- A. Yes Oh yes because the when they fed the pigs they all had to stand well back and they were allowed to take the buckets but they weren't allowed to get near the pigs.
- B. AH (Crystal et al. p. 41)

It is unquestionable that the speaker in uttering Ah associates A's proposition (i.e. children are positively forbidden to get near the pigs) with her own experience. For after she had uttered Ah substantiated it with a similar situation:

- B. ...we took some children on a visit to er Enfields environmental study centre the other day and they have various animals around there one of which is a pig -er Pinky Pinky that's right and all the children stood round the outside etc... (p. 41)

Hence: Ah stands for a proposition whose content is intended to recognise A's proposition. In other words, in uttering Ah, B has found out that A's proposition is true and therefore subscribes to it. There would be no doubt to match here recognition of a statement or proposition with the speech function "agreeing". Ah will express satisfaction in the case the speaker thinks it is good for something to happen or the happening of some event will be significant because of some reason which is hidden in the pragmatic universe of two speakers engaged in genuine discourse or communication. Examples which can support this argument abound; however we feel that it is of little use to multiply instances for fear of being anecdotal. The most important point to keep in mind is that there seems to be some systematic relationship between these interjections in that they nearly perform the same kinds of illocutionary acts. In spite of this fact, another significant semantic aspect to consider emerges, as far as Ah

is concerned: used sentence-initially, Ah appears to be used when the speaker has momentarily forgotten the matter he was talking about which he remembers at last; it may also be used when the speaker finds out something for the first time, say in a newspaper or a book or in the thick of a discussion. The same view is expressed by James (1972), note 4).

2.3. WELL

This interjection, unlike Oh and Ah discussed above presents interesting dimensions which require a careful attention.

Crystal et al. (1975:101) state that "the primary use of this word is initially in utterances within discourse." 'Is such it has three distinct pronunciations and meanings:

(1) slowly said, drawled, with a falling-rising or rising tone, it implies reservation or doubt;

(2) quickly said and in a clipped manner, well leads to an impression of abruptness, impatience or business-like attitude and finally

(3) drawled with a level tone, well appears to be an exponent of hesitation, indicating indecision etc. ..They also mention that it may occur sentence-internally. In this use its meaning does not differ from other hesitation operators I referred to previously.

Although not exhaustive in their analysis, they have laid down some fundamentals which can serve as the basis of the meaning of the word well.

So well is to be first of all regarded as a connector which enables the speaker to fit in his expression or utterance in a given situation. To put it another way, the speaker reacts

to that situation as result of some foregoing action by saying: well P. And it is from this angle that well ranges itself with interjections. Secondly by uttering well, the speaker seems to do two things:

- (1) express his point of view and,
- (2) communicate it to the hearer so that the hearer suscribes to it.

A look at a few examples extracted from spoken discourse will throw some light upon these considerations.

- A. Well what's the failure with the football?
(Crystal and Davy, 1975).

The superficial syntactic structure of this sentence shows that A's utterance is a question. The question is prefaced with well.

The use of well in A's question is directly connected with a situation which has previously occurred during the exchange that took place between A and B. The situation is that B has been complaining about the poor standards in football. Suddenly A gets interested in the topic and says well which has been said with a rising tone --intonation pattern inherent to any question --tn make B understand that the statement he is making is incomplete, insufficient and unclear It needs substantiation. In other words the speaker is impatient to know the reasons for the deterioration of football. I think that it would be interesting to point out some difference that may exist between a question prefaced with well and one which is not. Compare then:

A₁Well what's the failure with the football?

A₂What s the failure with the football?

The major difference between these questions

lies in the presupposition the speaker may be making. Quite clearly, the questioner A_1 and the responder B_1 are assumed to share the same pragmatic universe. By asking his question A_1 knows and believes that the hearer (in this context the possible responder B_1) knows the answer and is ready to furnish the questioner with it. The assumption we are making is justified by the use of well which, in the situation under consideration, refers to some previous point which touched upon sport. Whereas, the questioner A_2 poses his question innocently with the hope of receiving a satisfactory answer. The answer may be negative in the case the question has not been put to the "appropriate" (right) person.

Well is characteristically used in answers to questions. As for the conditions under which an answer may be prefaced by well the reader might care to read Lakoff, R (1973). In any case, the general meaning that is given to well in such uses is incompleteness of the information sought by the questioner. The responder refrains from giving the complete information for some reason (may be due to ignorance, mood, not entitled to do so, fear, etc...in short some (un) known external factors acting directly or indirectly upon him.)

Consider again, an exchange from the same dialogue:

- C. ...in what way have conditions deteriorated, Gerry?
 - B. Well the grounds are scruffier than they used to be.
- (Crystal et al. op. cit. p. 20).

Uttered on a falling-rising tone (tone 4) well indicates that the speaker fears to "spill the beans" going around this matter, but offers the superficial aspect of the problem to the questioner. Hence the attitude of reservation alluded to earlier by Crystal and Davy (1975). And well

would be paraphrased as "I'm sorry or I'm afraid I'm not entitled to supply the information necessary for you to understand the whole situation however here are some facts you might keep in mind". Generally, in these conditions the questioner obtains the approximate correct answer only by deduction, which is a device to help him to construct a global idea about the "so-called" poor conditions. On the other side if the speaker i.e B says well with low pretonic rising tone (tone 3 in Halliday's terminology), I suspect that it will considerably affect the rest of the utterance as far as the meaning is concerned. Though giving only a part of the information the speaker will tend to express his view of the information as being unimportant.

As has been stated before, there is another type of well which the speaker says as he expresses his point of view. An example has been taken from John Mortimer's "What Shall We Tell Caroline?"

Tony: Look, Headmaster, this shock I was referring to, it's made me think - well I feel we shall have to face things they are at very long last. Now I know this business has been a source of considerable interest and excitement to us all over a long period of years. It's kept us going as you might say, when the results of the squash rackets competition and the state of the weather and the suspicion about who pinched the nail brush off the chain in the downstairs loo have been powerless to quicken the pulse. But .it's gone too far, you know - we should never have started it. (Scene 2, p. 89).

The passage is certainly self-explanatory. The statement Tony is making is enclosed

between two dashes. Tony opens up his statement with a well which, we assume, has been said slowly with a falling-rising intonation, after the speaker has gathered his thoughts and made a deliberation about what he was going to say.

So far, I have discussed then some general trends about the meaning of well as it is used sentence-initially. Let us turn now to well which stands alone in a given piece of discourse. To distinguish it from the other usages, I will refer to it as well₃. So, the data I have examined for the present study have shown that unlike well₁ (the one preceding an utterance) and well₂ functioning as an hesitation operator, i. e. used sentence-internally), well₃ would normally correspond to a deep structure sentence in which the speaker makes use of an appropriate performative verb depending upon the situation he is involved in. More explicitly, the deep structure sentence the speaker might come up with could have the form of "I say that. ..or I order that..." It is worth noting at this point, one important feature of well₃. It is generally followed by a question mark which indicates a rising intonation to be adopted by the speaker.

So, for example well in the dialogue below:

Tony: I couldn't for the life of me remember what it was. But if you don't tell children anything...

Arthur: Well? (Mortimer, ibidem p. 89)

would certainly represent something paraphrasable like: "I order that you supply further information for a better understanding" or "I ask/invite you to supply further information for a better understanding. These performatives which all belong to the category of directives make prominent the speaker's intention toward some prospective action to be taken by the nearer. There is however a difference between ask and invite on one side and on the other order, although the

apparent goal to achieve remains the same. The former are requestives and the latter is part of the requirements category (cfr. Bach and Harnish, op. cit.). All in all, the decision to be made will depend upon the relationships between the speaker and the hearer. The assumption is that Arthur, considering his rank (headmaster) orders that Tony - in virtue of his authority over him - clarify the situation he has just created. The illocutionary act will be performed only if Tony understands Arthur's intention in saying Well?

The last point to make about well concerns its phatic function. Well in its phatic function aims at maintaining contact or communication between interactants. This use is very common in daily speech. Take for example the following exchange:

- A. ...we were in the thick what is called Paki bashing Did you get that in Cyprus Did you hear about it.
- B. ...No well there are well I yes I read about it in the newspapers.

The dialogue proves that B has no idea about Paki bashing, which is however confirmed in his response. But he keeps talking, using well continually while he is searching for something to complete his sentence with or simply he uses it as a device to fill in time and perhaps handle disconrrriuity.

3. CONCLUSION

The analysis of Oh, Ah and Well has shown that interjections have a meaning potential which should be the major concern of linguists and philosophers interested in the phenomena of any human language Denaviour. I have also shown that to account for the different meanings, one should take into consideration a couple of factors such as stress, intonation, facial expres-

sions and relationships between the speaker and the hearer. And these meanings are always context-bound. Contexts need to be specified every time an illocutionary act is to be performed in accordance with the speaker's intentions. Examples provided have borne evidence of this fact and it has been demonstrated that interjections convey speech functions such as agreeing, disagreeing, condoling, confirming, requesting, ordering, to mention but a few. The analysis has permitted us, however to note that interjections are characterised by three important features: referentiality, performativity and unpredictability.

(1) Interjections are referential in that they refer the speaker/hearer to some part of the preceding utterance. Failure to use an interjection with reference to some previous situation, the speaker generally breaks up a fundamental rule of discourse which Sirdar-Iskandar (1980:182) calls "grammaticalite pragmatique."

(2) Interjections are performative in that they are represented in deep structures by an hypersentence containing one of the performative verbs: say, state, order, etc.

(3) Interjections are unpredictable in that no one is able to state clearly when Oh, Ah and Well can be used appropriately. Their use is bound to the topic.

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