

Interjections in French and English: A Comparative Study

Dr. Tawfik Aziz Abdullah^(*)

& Safwan Idrees Thannoon^(**)

Abstract

This research tries to find a classification of interjections in English and French. The data chosen are taken from literary texts, internet, cartoons and children magazines.

We shall show that this universal phenomenon does not necessitate the existence of a certain interjection in other languages. It is found that, though definitions are similar, yet no clear division of the types of interjections is made. Some of the interjections are natural noises whereas some others are human articulated sounds.

1. The Definition of Interjections

It is very difficult to give a precise definition of interjections in both languages in case of considering it as a linguistic sign because it

(*) Assistant Prof.- Dept. of French – College of Arts / University of Mosul.

(**) Lecturer.-Dept. of Translation - College of Arts / University of Mosul.

lacks a conceptual value, the complexity of its forms, the pragmatic value, and its strong relations with the context and cotext. These certainly lead us to face problems in classifying the interjections from morphological, syntactic, and semantic points of view.

The word 'interjection' is a big name for a little word. Interjections which are "short exclamations like oh, um often have no grammatical value but we use them quite often, usually more in speaking than in writing" (Internet1,1). Interjection is a Latinate word which means "throw between" from Latin *inter* (between) and *iacere* (throw) (Internet 2). It has no grammatical relation to other words in the sentences. It is often used to express a strong feeling or sudden emotion (House and Harman,1931:196; Internet 2;see also Lafont,1978:229). The encyclopedic definition of interjections is "English part of speech consisting of exclamatory words such as oh, alas and ouch. They are marked by a feature of intonation that is usually shown in writing by an exclamation point" (Internet 1:1).

In Grammar, an interjection is a brief exclamation often containing only one word: oh!, Gee!, ouch. (Internet 1).

The above definitions, among others, show that there is almost a similarity and agreement upon the definition of interjections. However,

defining them as words which mean ‘throw between’ or inserted in a sentence raises a problem. According to Brown (Internet 3) “This definition, which has been copied from grammar to grammar and committed to memory millions of times, is obviously erroneous, and directly contradicted by the examples”. He argues that although interjections are thrown in between the parts of a discourse, are very rarely thrown in between the parts of a sentence. This is mainly because they more often occur at the beginning of a sentence than anywhere else.

In what follows we shall try to find a method of classifying interjections in both languages: French and English.

2. The noises

The sounds of an object that imitate the noises of nature are not sensorial information that makes spontaneous sonority, but they are a linguistic creation which imitates the reality that submit to the rules of common language. We must know the language because an onomatopoeic word in a language, even if it produces the same noise, differs from language to another.

Also, there is what we call the inarticulated cries of animals such as that of a cow (moo-moo), some birds (tweet-tweet), the red rooster

(cock-a-doodle-do), the cat(meow-meow), the dog (bow-wow-wow), the horse (neigh-neigh), the yellow chicks (peep-peep) and the in articulated cries of human beings. It is important here to discern some natural sounds in our daily life. For example:

Foosh: the sound of launching a missile.

Boom: the sound of an explosion.

p.sst: the sound of air coming out from a tube or puncture.

B-zzz: the sound of electricity.

Click: the sound of turning on a machine.

Crash: the sound of a clash.

Pow-pow: the sound of a plane.

3. The human articulated sounds

Among the human articulated sounds are the sounds that constitute certainly the major ones. The noun interjection has two meanings which are ejaculation and interposition. The first is an abrupt emphatic exclamation expressing emotion whereas the second is the action of interjecting or interposing an action or remark that interrupts. (Internet 2:1).

Zandvoort (208:1972) divides interjections into regular ejaculations such as oh! Ha! and occasional ones belonging to other parts of speech. for Grevis (1997:1270) the two words Ah! And Allo! Are two complete sentences from a syntactic point of view. House and harman (1931:196-98) divide them into primary and secondary interjections.

In this research, interjections will be divided into two groups: the proper and the improper interjections.

4. The proper interjections

The proper interjections can be divided into three kinds according to their function: representatives (onomatopoeic words that imitate natural noises, appellatives (interjections that orientate towards the interlocutor), and expressive interjections that express sensations or attitudes of the locutor.

4.1 Onomatopias

Usually the onomatopias symbolize:

- Cries (for example of pain aie, ouille (French))/ ouch, oh! (English).
- Phonate our noises:

- ☐ The nose which sniff out.
- ☐ The noises of the throat especially when we drink
(French: glou glou).
- physical phenomena:
 - ☐ The sneeze (at choum)
 - ☐ The hiccough (hic)
 - ☐ The sign of relief (ouf)
 - ☐ The laughing (ha ha ha)
 - ☐ The crying (bou hou hou bou)

4.2 The appellative interjections

This kind of interjections is divided into two kinds:

- Interjections addressed to human interlocutor:

dites donc! (French)

dis!

dites!

hein! (English:halt)

stop!

youhou (yahoo)

In English we can also find some interjections

- attention signals: hey,look,you
- greetings/farewels: hi/hello/hullo/bye
- asking for repetition, enquiry: eh ((Internet 1,2):1)

- Interjections addressed to animals:

hue (French)

hoche

4.3 The expressive interjections

This kind of interjections usually carries the effects of a person.

This kind indicates:

- A failure

Zut! (French)

- A surprise

Ho! Ah! (French)

In English: ah!, dear me!, Hello!, hey! Oh! Well I never!
(Internet 1:1-2)

- fear

kai kai (French)

aie

- The pleasure of eating

Miam miam miam

Ah is also used in English

- The desire of affirmation and agreement na (French)

In English we find yes, no, okay, uh, huh (Internet 4)

- Asking for silence

Chut! (French)

Taisez-vous!

Taise-toi!

In English: hush, sh-h-h

- Hesitation

euh (French)

in English: er, hmm,uh...,um..

- The reaction in front of a different situation

oh la la (French)

aie aue

- The happiness

hourrach (French)

in English: Ah

- The lamentation, grief, and pity

Hélas!

In English : Alas, oh dear!

- The suspicion or doubt

Voyons

In English : Hmm (Internet 1:2)

- To show the importance of something

Bah (French)

In English Ah

- The beginning of an action

Allons-y! (French)

Vas-y!

Hop!

- Occurrence of admitting something ma foi

5. Improper interjections

This kind of interjections is less in number than the proper interjections. It falls into two groups according to the orientation of the locutor and interlocutor.

5.1 The Orientation of the locutor:

The elements regroup the oaths and the expression of sensations of the locutor:

- The oaths: An oath is a solemn undertaking with God's help to do something. Sometimes an oath leads a man to a wrongful use of God's name or of sacred words to express a strong feeling swear-words. This may lead to a blasphemy like *par tous les Dieux*(see Benvenise, 1974:254). Certainly, all these forms of oath have only one term in English "God". We can also find such kinds of oath in French literary texts:

Par Jupiter

Par Thor

Par Odin

au nom de ciel

parbleu

sparisti! (sacré Dieu)

According to Benveiste(ibid), these last three interjections have a euphemistic forms.

- The expressions of sensation of the locutor: The improper interjections that translate the sensations of the locutor could express

☐ Surprise

sans blague (French)

ma parole

par exemple

☐ The approbation

Parfait

bon

☐ The worry

Malheur!

Papa!

Mama!

5.2 The orientation of the interlocutor

This kind of interjections could focus on

a. - A group of Known or unknown persons for asking:

- A help

à moi! (French)

au secours!

In English help help

- to draw the attention that a danger is there

alerte! alerte! (French)

attention

in English hey, look, yo

b. - only one person:

- To congratulate

bravo

- To complain of something

Malheureux! (French)

- To encourage someone

Hardi ! (French)

In English :great

- To insult someone

gracheur! (French)

tête de mule

in English :Jackass

we can also say that the French language borrowed a lot of interjections from other languages: English (boom). Sometimes it is written (boum)

to ring

to smash

to dig

to crack

toot

and from Spanish (tunut).

The above mentioned interjections can be found in translated literary texts, on the television, cartoons (Tintin, the runner, Tom and Jerry, etc), children magazines (Sad Sack) and others, and in the internet.

6. Conclusions

The study has shown that interjections are universal for the reason that some natural sounds, animal sounds, and some human sounds are shared among human beings. The sound of hiccough(hic),the laughing(ha ha ha) and some others are found among different peoples of the world.

Some interjections are found in a certain language rather than the others,i.e. hey are peculiar to a specific language. Some others can be used in more than one language. The French interjection (ah!) or (aie) can be used in different situations for indicating either drawing the attention or to approve a saying (ah si), or to revive a conversation (ah!oui!).

In English the same interjection (ah) can be used but in different ways. it is used to express pleasure (Ah,that feels good), to express realization(Ah,now I understand), to express resignation (Ah well,it can't be hoped), and to express surprise (Ah!I have won).

Finally, we would say that not all interjections can be translated from one language into another. This means that rendering such expressions might be a pitfall for translators and interpreters.

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ملخص

الخوالب في اللغتين الفرنسية والإنكليزية: دراسة مقارنة

د . توفيق عزيز عبد الله^(*)

و صفوان ادريس ذنون^(**)

يحاول البحث إيجاد تصنيف لأسماء وحروف الأصوات (الخوالب) الإنكليزية والفرنسية. وقد اعتمد البحث على أمثلة ونماذج مستقاة من نصوص أدبية ورسوم متحركة ومجلات أطفال ولغة المحادثة.

وتبين بان هذه الظاهرة العالمية لا تشترط وجود اسم صوت أو حرف نداء معين موجود في لغة ما في اللغات الأخرى. ورغم تشابه التعاريف فانه لا يوجد تقسيم واضح لأنواع أسماء وحروف الأصوات إذ أن بعض أسماء وحروف الأصوات هي أصوات طبيعية بينما البعض الآخر أصوات ينطقها الإنسان.

(*) أستاذ مساعد - قسم اللغة الفرنسية - كلية الآداب / جامعة الموصل.

(**) مدرس - قسم الترجمة - كلية / جامعة الموصل.