VĂLEU, VĂLEU, VĂLELEU! TRANSLATORS' PROBLEM-CENTRED STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFERRING INTERJECTIONAL MEANING

Olivia Rusu, Assist., PhD Candidate, "Gh. Asachi" Technical University of Iași

Abstract: This paper deals with the translatability of interjections, pragmatic markers that encode discoursive emotional replies. Although it is considered part of speech with universal linguistic characteristics and a primordial element of human language, although it defies the fundamental principle of language - the Saussurian arbitrary –, being often located at the periphery of the linguistic system, paradoxically, the interjection may encode, in its meaning, cultural and historical connotations that require idiomatic competences in order to be translated.
Thus, we intend to approach theoretically both semantic and pragmatic meaning of this 'disgraceful' part of speech, from the perspective of problem-centred translation strategies. The study is illustrated with contrastive examples from children's literature, as we want to discern and exemplify translation strategies that correlate with certain types of interjections. We will particularly emphasize translator's functional creativity in rendering the most appropriate significance conveyed through interjections.

Keywords: pragmatic markers, interjection, idiom, functional equivalence, translation strategies.

Introduction

The mediating process of translating between cultures may prove to be quite challenging, as the pragmatic meaning of texts cannot be unveiled without a proper consideration of their social, cultural, contextual and affective functions. In this paper we will consider this aspect only from the perspective of spoken language. To be exact, spoken interaction includes a variety of linguistic items and processes (Sweet, 1892, denotes them as *language formulae*, while Carter, 2006, as *pragmatic markers*) that encode speakers' intentions and interpersonal meanings, operating "outside the structural limits of the clause" (Carter, 2006:208). These items include discourse markers, stance markers, hedges and interjections. They are fully operational only in a given context; otherwise, they could neither be wholly understood, nor transferrable into another language. In addition, the context they belong to often transmits specific or universal cultural components which are frequently highlighted by their very presence in the text, as we shall see further on.

The problem of spoken language

Spoken language, together with its spontaneously produced forms and structures, has been regarded until more contemporary approaches as having a lower importance as compared to the written expression considered the standard of language adequacy. It is also important to mention that the meaning of spoken utterances is strongly chained into the enunciation context and experience and has the strong tendency to convey subjective information, highlighting the relationship between speaker and auditor. Thus, expressions that are inherent to formal or informal verbal communication have not been sufficiently highlighted in dictionaries and grammars (Carter, 2006:9). Nevertheless, these complex phenomena prove both powerful illocutionary force with expressive (emotive, affective), conative and phatic functions, and a high degree of creativity in the transmission of information, which requires careful attention to understanding the deep structure of the speakers' linguistic choices. For instance, from the perspective of transformative grammar, the following utterances have the same deep structure, in a context in which a person shouts after hitting by mistake his finger with a hammer:

"(1) Ouch!

BDD-V118 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:10:40 UTC)

(2) a. It hurts!
b. It hurts a lot/so much!
c. My finger aches!
d. My finger aches a lot/so much!
e. I feel pain in my finger!
f. I feel a rather intense pain in my finger!" (Cruz, 2009:243)

Obviously, the probability that s/he would use version *f.* from the above is very low, if not inexistent. Hence, the semantic examination of these pragmatic markers requires, in our opinion, a theoretical review, in the light of translation theories. We shall focus solely on the interjections, "exclamative utterances" that "express positive or negative emotional reactions to what is being or has just been said or to something in the situation" (Carter, 2006:224).

Semantic and pragmatic meaning of the interjection

The interjections significance itself represents a classification criterion. Various taxonomies in the literature state that interjections have no meaning according to the Saussurian concept of "linguistic sign" as they "do not denote objects (...) through a concept or a generalized image and have no logical-semantic structure (configuration)" (Croitor Balaciu, 2005:663). However, their non-conceptualized meaning puts forward the pure expression of emotions, attitudes, affect and acts of will. We distinguish thus interjections with one meaning and interjections with multiple meanings that depend on the context. Depending on the referential source interjections can be internal to the speaker: expressive / emotive; directive / injunctive / persuasive (+ / - emotive); appellative (+ / - emotive); ostensive, in deictic or discursive contexts (examples from English and Romanian include *there!; ia, iată, uite*), discourse markers (e.g. *well, anyway*; *îhî, păi, zău*); expression forms of politeness – greetings, thanks, apologies -; informative, without emotional content (e.g. *amen, alleluia; hosanna!*; *pas* (for board games); with an euphonic role, in choruses (e.g. *la-la-la*) or vocalic "filler" sounds (e.g. *mm, uh, um*; *ăă, îî)*. With a referential source external to the speaker, but seldom also internal, onomatopoeia are sounds imitating noises produced by animals, birds, insects, sounds produced by the contact between objects, tools or movements, sounds that accompany various physiological processes, or sound effects of different actions. Both in spoken language and written texts there are context-linguistic and circumstantial props that strengthen the interjectional meaning and enhance the degree of spontaneity. The derivative productivity of interjections is a very widespread aspect to be mentioned (by suffixation or final transformation – e.g. *to wow*, *to buzz*; *baubau*, haină de *fiş, scîrţ - scîrţîitoare*).

Moreover, it is important to mention that the interjection has a significant role and function in expressive speech acts – including in the expression of humour and irony -, as well as in directive speech acts (where interjections offer intensity to the enunciation). Accordingly, we shall deepen communicative forms and structures of the interjection, emphasising especially descriptive (contextual and discursive) grammar issues, concurring to the opinion of Ferdinand Brunot and Charles Bruneau who stated that :

„l'interjection proprement dite, aussi peu intellectuelle que possible, toujours claire grâce aux circonstances et au ton, est donc en quelque sorte dépourvue de forme. Mais on peut voir, par l'étude des *interjections*, le passage du cri au signe, le passage du réflexe animal au langage humain. L'*interjection* est devenue … un procédé, parfois élégant et littéraire, d'exprimer une grande variété de sentiments différents." (in Sarfati, 1995:238).

Pragmatic implications and associations

The predominantly oral and deictic interjections, the stringent dependence of their signifier on the situational or linguistic context, their communication values (emotive, phatic, conative, presentative, suggestive, etc.), and their illocutionary and perlocutionary

BDD-V118 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:10:40 UTC)

features have contemporary pragmatic implications. To exemplify, both in the language of preschool children and in children's literature interjections support / illustrate their definition, being used as "*linguistic signals*" that "do not *denote*, but *express* different emotions, feelings, volitional impulses or mimic (or suggest) various sounds and noises. "(Croitor Balaciu, 2005:657, own translation). An anaphoric figure of speech, the interjection offers both an additional subjective and emotional explication, either positive or negative, and an element of naturalness and spontaneity to direct speech, free indirect style or familiar, colloquial style. These characteristics near it to the language of small children, as an egocentric, expressive and spontaneous reflection of the thinking process. Cognitive understanding of the physical world manifested by a child at a preverbal age occurs, like in the case of interjections, by holophrases. Although they contain only one word, holophrases have the effect of complete sentences on the listener[1]. Another aspect which is related also to linguistic universals and that approaches even more interjections to the language of young children is the common special phonological nature. Thus, their consonant chain is impossible to be spotted within other parts of speech (for instance, the English and Romanian interjections: *psht! / pşt!*, and a personal, not-understandable-by-grown-ups example of children language: *mnpc!*). In fact, the language used to talk to children, that Elliot (1981:151) names *motherese*, or *baby talk*, also reveals universal linguistic features similar to interjections. Specifically, the phonological features refer to syllable repetition or to the falling of the initial consonant group. Syntactic features are related to the average duration of expression which is lower, the small number of subordinates and to utterances without verbs. Moreover, common paralinguistic features are high pitch and exaggerated intonation. Finally, discursive features imply an addition of imperative and interrogative, as well as a fluent speech, with a larger number of repetitions.

Examples and translation challenges

This special type of communication may be exemplified by nursery rhymes. These simple little poems with short and easy to remember rhymes have obvious instructive purposes for preschool children. For example, the rhyme „Baa, Baa Black Sheep" associates wool and wool goods with the animal that produces them. In addition, the child is accustomed to the sound a sheep would bleat. A child or a baby cannot build up images and sounds that do not have a direct connection, a clear correspondence, with his/her surrounding reality. Therefore, onomatopoeias help toddlers with their first grasp of language, as they are words that sound precisely like their meaning.

However, these humble rhymes raise translation challenges, as their original meaning seem to be rooted in the United Kingdom historical events. So, in addition to musical and educational aspects, a translation should also offer, if possible, historical clues of the source culture. In the 16th and 17th centuries these easy rhymes used to be an important communication tool for commoners who were not able to read or write. Different types of messages were orally transmitted from person to person in order to publicly lash political events and actions of the age. For instance, an historical connection for the *Baa, Baa Black Sheep* is suggested by Alchin (2014) – "a political satire to refer to the Plantagenet King Edward I (the master) and the export tax imposed in Britain in 1275 in which the English Customs Statue authorised the King to collect a tax on all exports of wool in every port in the country".

So, in order to unravel the concealed meaning of Nursery Rhymes and to transcode them into another cultural and linguistic system, it is necessary to comprehend history, culture and people of the source text.

[1] Passim Elliot (1981:49): In the spoken interaction of a small children the noun *biscuit* can mean, depending on the context, *I want a biscuit*; *the dog ate the biscuit* or *where are the biscuits*. One personal example: *pala-pala* may mean that either the child or the doll is to to take a shower ;

BDD-V118 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:10:40 UTC)

Functional creativity in finding equivalence

Linguistic and pragmatic approaches in the translation studies literature of the 20th century consider the operation of translation as a transcoding operation in which the concept of *equivalence* plays a crucial role. From this perspective, we believe that in the translation process the interjection must have an equivalent. We do consider interjections as keywords in interpreting the implications of a text to be translated and in decoding its overall message, due to their entropic and autonomous nature. Consequently, the approach and description of translating interjections should be based on language (phonetic, morphologic, semantic, syntactic levels) and cultural grounds. The careful analysis of the source text interjections, taking into consideration geographical, historical, temporal or social class aspects, as well as the level of language use is therefore essential. To highlight this point of view, we propose our own translation of the aforementioned nursery rhyme:

"Baa baa black sheep, have you any wool? / Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full! / One for the master, one for the dame, / And one for the little boy who lives down the lane."

Be-behe oaie neagră, ai tu lână? / Da, dom'le, da, dom'le, am trei saci plini! / Unul pentru stăpân, unul pentru coană, / Și-unul pentru băiețelul ce stă printre arini.

Besides the musical aspects of rhyme and rhythm, as well as the educational ones we referred to above, we also tried to transfer a cultural connection related to the manufacturing of wool and wool products. Namely, we have translated the phrase " (...) who lives down the lane" with "who lives among alders", *arini*, in Romanian, due to the following reasons: in terms of rhyme, we preserved the alveolar liquid consonants, the lateral [l] – from *lane* - and the vibrant [r] – in *arini*. In terms of significance, we tried to suggest the educational implicature from the initial source text: countrywomen paint black wool using the bark of black alders (lat. *Alnus glutinosa*).

Translation strategies

Remarks on transcoding strategies will be drawn according to linguistic translation taxonomies proposed by J. P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet in *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* (1958, in Dimitriu 2002:32). We will deepen this classification using the very detailed one proposed by Andrew Chesterman in *Memes of Translation* (1997). Chesterman distinguishes between three major classes of problem-centred translation strategies[2]: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic strategies. Translation strategies that we consider appropriate for transcoding the interjection are direct and indirect.

Direct strategies include loan, namely direct transfers of exotic terms that evoke the atmosphere of the source language into the target language which does not have a correspondent (examples of interjection loan in Romanian: *aferim!*, *bonjur!*, *buzz!*, *chapeau bas!*, *evrica!*). The calque or the "double perspective" (Pym, in Dimitriu, 2002:32) is the literal transfer of SL culture-bound terms (examples of interjection calque in Romanian: *mii şi milioane de fulgere!*) According to Chesterman, loan, or calque, is a strategy linked to the borrowing of both individual items and phrases, as in the following example, where the translator borrowed the graphical writing, if not the whole compound interjection: "A head-two heads, at tooth – two teeth, / A foot – two feet, *pok-a-pok-a-pok*." – "Un cap – două capete, un dinte – doi dinți, / un picior – două picioare, *poc-a-poc-a-poc*." (Firuță, 2003: *The Plural*). Literal translation, from a purely linguistic point of view, is a one-to-one transfer of the SL structures; in other words, it is a perfect linguistic equivalence (examples from Romanian: *bună ziua!, ha-ha-ha!*). In Chesterman's opinion, literal translation maximally respects the SL form and the TL grammatical correctness. Thus, in the following children song, the translator preserves rhythm, register, punctuation and final stressed syllables in

[2] "If a goal is the end-point of a strategy, what is the starting point? The simple answer is: a problem. A strategy offers a solution to a problem, and is thus problem-centred. (…) the translation process too starts with problems and requires both strategic and intuitive processing. (id.:89)

BDD-V118 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:10:40 UTC)

rhymes, although slightly modifies their scheme (ABBA in English into ABAB in Romanian): «The stork clatters its beak: "Flop-flop, / I'd like swallowing a frog!" / But the frog laughs: "croack-croak-croak", / Jumping fast into the pond» - «Barza clămpăne din cioc "Toc toc / Aş înghiiţi un brotac!" / Dar brotacul râde „Oac-oac-oac", / Ascunzându-se în lac.» (Firuţă, 2003: *The Stork*)

Indirect translation strategies include transposition (it refers to any change between word classes, without differences in meaning) which, for interjections may be closely related to adaptation (the replacement of some SL communication structures that do not exist in the TL with familiar ones - e.g. *Hell, no! – Cu siguranţă nu!*). The technique of modulation is used to reveal different perceptions on the surrounding world without significantly affecting the message (e.g. *see you! - hai pa!; by Jove! – în numele lui Dumnezeu!*). Equivalence is a translation procedure that transcodes the meaning of the source text into the target language by different stylistic and structural means (e.g. *Sfinte Sisoe! – holy Moses!*). In our opinion, Chesterman includes within the strategy of equivalence numerous semantic subclassifications (such as: synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, paraphrase, converses, abstraction, distribution, emphasis and trope changes). In the following example, the English interjection *why,* used to express surprise, disagreement, indignation is turned in Romanian into an independent utterance, the interjection *Hm!*, for the translator wanted to fully transfer into the target language the character's annoyance:

«Ungrateful! said the girl. "I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. *Why*, I don't believe you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain's nephew has"» (Wilde, 1966:40)

"- Eu, ingrată!? Atît pot să-ţi spun că eşti rău-crescut. Şi la urma urmei, cine eşti dumneata ? *Ia*, un simplu student. *Hm!* Nu cred că-ţi va da mâna să porţi vreodată pantofi cu catarămi de aur, cum poartă nepotul şambelanului." (Wilde, in Văduva-Poenaru & al. 1991:24)

The communication strategy of explicitation (implicitation) resorts to linguistic, cultural or pragmatic addition (either optional or mandatory), omission or compensation. Chesterman states that these are pragmatic strategies, and distinguishes among cultural filtering, explicitness, information, interpersonal, illocutionary, coherence and visibility changes, and partial translations. To illustrate, in the following text, Romanian interjections *ei, măi* and *ia* are completely omitted in the target text. Their deictic character is emphasized in the target language only by the adverb *now*. Moreover, the deictic affection expressed in Romanian through *măi* is rendered in English by the nonstandard employ of the pronoun *us* used reflexively as the indirect object of the verb *let*:

„*Ei, măi* băieţi, *ia* amu trageţi la anghioase, (…)" – "**Now**, boys, let **us** lie down and sleep it off, (…)". (Ion Creangă, traducere A. Cartianu şi R. C. Johnston, in Dimitriu, 2002:80).

Another example is the addition of the interjection *Ia* in the Romanian version of the above example, from Oscar Wilde. By doing this, the translator highlights even more the girl's bad – and shallow – impression of the modest student.

Furthermore, in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965), J.C. Catford differentiates between restrictive equivalence, as opposed to total equivalence (in Dimitriu, 2002:28). Illustrative for interjections, the first case occurs when only one language level is translated, and equivalence is established only at that level – phonological or graphological, for instance. For example, the famous phonological transposition of the nursery rhyme *Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall* in French. Wanting to maintain and re-create the same acoustic effect and to functionally transfer English sounds, translators offered just a phonological shift: *un petit d'un petit s'étonne aux Halles* (idem).

BDD-V118 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:10:40 UTC)

Concluding remarks

To sum up, in our study we have emphasized that in the process of linguistic mediation between cultures interjections are essential speech elements in maintaining the strength of educational and pragmatic connotations. Up to recent literature, interjections have been poorly studied compared to other linguistic categories, although they express a variety of interpersonal tones, as illustrated above with examples from children speech and literature. Furthermore, we exemplified functional, problem-centred strategies used to translate interjections. The omission of interjections in translation weakens the communicative values of the source text. Occasionally, translator's task is eased, as some interjections are universal – obviously with slight graphical or phonetic differences. For instance, the Romanian *văleu,* with its variant *văleleu,* a creative interjection of (serious or ironic) pain, wonder or admiration, seems to have the same etymological origin with the Old English mixed interjection *wālā! wālāwā!* (found in Sweet, 1892:1543), namely *walaway* or *welaway* in contemporary English, used to express sorrow, grief, concern. Nevertheless, as languages and cultures define reality differently, some interjections may represent real challenges for translators, as they carry culture-specific components.

Bibliography:

Primary sources:

Alchin, L. (2014). *Nursery Rhymes lyrics, origin and history*. http://www.rhymes.org.uk/, accessed on 17.03.2014;

Firuţă,C.(2003). *Let's Sing and Learn English*. Consilier pentru limba engleză: Augusta Caterina Grundbock, Bucureşti: Casa de producţie şi editură Corifeu;

Văduva-Poenaru, I., Goci, A. (ed.). 1991. *5 povestiri nemuritoare. Lev Tolstoi, Voltaire, Oscar Wilde, Alphonse Daudet, Wilhelm Hauff*, traducere de Const. I. Bondescu, Bucureşti: Geneze;

Wilde, O. (1966). *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică.

Secondary sources:

Carter, R., McCarthy, M. (2006). *Cambridge Grammar of English, A Comprehensive Guide, Spoken and Written English, Grammar and Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 10-15, 58, 207 – 240;

Chesterman, A. (1997). *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*. Amsterdam : Benjamins Translation Library;

Contraş E. (1966). „Interjecţia". *In: Gramatica limbii române, I.* Bucureşti: Ed. Academiei RSR, pp. 421-429;

Croitor Balaciu, B. (2005). „Interjecţia". *In: Gramatica limbii române, I, Cuvântul*. Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti", Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Române, pp. 657-687;

Cruz, M. P. (2009). Might Interjections Encode Concepts? More Questions than Answers. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* [online], 5.2, 241-270. doi: 10.2478/v10016-009-0015-9 [accessed on: 23.04.2013];

Dimitriu, R. (2002). *Theories and Practice of Translation*. Iaşi: Institutul European, Colecţia *Cursus*, Seria *Engleză*;

Elliot, Alison, J. (1981). *Child Language*. Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics, London: Cambridge University Press;

BDD-V118 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:10:40 UTC)

Sarfati, G.-E. (1995). La tautologie et l'usage : les interjections dans le dictionnaire. *Faits de langue* [online], 3/6, pp. 231-238. http://www.persee.fr/web/revues, [accessed: 15.04.2013] ;

Sweet, Henry. 1892. *A New English Grammar Logial and historical, Part I, Introduction, Phonology, and Accidence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 37, 62, 151-153.

BDD-V118 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 19:10:40 UTC)