LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS IN A COMPARATIVE CLASSIFICATION OF INTERJECTIONS. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO THEIR TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The functions of linguistic units labelled as 'interjections' are both to express affection, to share emotive or will emphasis between the participants at the conversation, and/or to monitor and organize the discourse. Folding traditional interjection classifications on language functions, this paper proposes a taxonomy that tries to maintain both idiomatic shades offered by Romanian grammars and discursive, spoken-performance features emphasized by English grammars classifications. The most important characteristic that makes a word an interjection is considered its inner referential source, the fact that through an interjection the speaker transmits something of the idiomatic inner self. Due to phonological resemblance, to frequent pragmatic gains of expressivity, the open-class of onomatopoeia is also included within the area of research of this paper, together with those discourse markers that are not conventionalized, with an inner referential source. This classification proves useful in conveying as precisely as possible the overall message of an utterance in translations.

Keywords: interjection, comparative classification, language functions, translation, children's literature

1. Introduction

"The more the context contributes to the communicative force of an utterance, the less need there is for the utterance to be grammatically explicit". In view of that, *directives* and *exclamations* are to be considered from a pragmatic point of view rather than from a grammatical one, as their particularities are strongly related to their "pragmatic roles as utterances which relate specifically to the hearer's and the speaker's participation in the act of communication: a directive is 'hearer oriented', whereas an exclamation is 'speaker-oriented'" (Quirk, 1985:88). LGSWE resumes the same idea of minimal grammaticality of utterances that do not affect the propositional meaning of a clause, having purely pragmatic - particularly illocutionary - functions (1999:140, 1069-82). Romanian standard grammar, GALR I 2005, concurs to this opinion, stating that the understanding of meaning and of referential sources of interjections (non-conceptualised elements without a logical semantic configuration) implies a description of their contextual uses and values.

Nonetheless, on the one hand, for the meaning to be fully articulated, the interaction between all linguistic levels of the communication needs to be considered, as there are numerous interconnections between linguistic elements on the semantic and discourse levels. On the other hand, the literature seems to be clear on the fact that in terms of classification, the

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boundaries between these pragmatic categories are fluid in conversation, and most of these words prove discursive multi-functionality.

2. Contextual values : communicative functions of interjections

Interjections have been described by English and Romanian traditional standard grammars in terms of the emotion they expressed and of their imperative force. However, establishing the semantic meaning of interjections all by itself proves to be insufficient. For these reasons, but still on a semantic basis of classification, interjections should be differentiated according to the **language functions** they perform (Ameka, 1992: 259). In the same line of thought, Croitor Balaciu differentiates between the **referential sources** of the interjections (GALR I 2005:657). Thus, referential sources may be internal to the speaker for the following types of interjections: expressive, conative, phatic and metalinguistic, and exterior to the speaker, for onomatopoeia and informative interjections. Consequently, considering Jakobson's taxonomy of language functions, and the specificity of verbal communication acts described by interjections, this paper proposes the following holistic classification, for both English and Romanian:

2.1. Referential interjections that relate to the communication factor *context* and "describe" a situation, object or mental state. These include **onomatopoeia** and **informative interjections**.

With a referential source external to the speaker, and seldom 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. English grammars and dictionaries seem to include onomatopoetic words within the categories of nouns and verbs. For example, in CCAD (2009:206) for the word *boom* there are six detailed entries that treat it either as a countable noun, or as a verb. As for the case of *atishoo*, no word class is mentioned: "/ ətiʃu: / **Atishoo** is used, especially in writing, to represent the sound that you make when you sneeze" (ib.:85, bold as in original). Romanian grammars are more detailed concerning onomatopoeias and usually place their description after the account on all other types of interjections. The classification here is made according to the referential source and is linked to the [+ / - animate] and [+ / - human] characteristics:

i. The class **[+animate], [+ human]** includes onomatopoeic words which mimic physiological sounds, as in:

(1) "'Don't be frightened, Teddy,' said his father. 'That's his way of making friends.'

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'*Ouch*! He's tickling under my chin,' said Teddy." (Kipling)

(2) "Iară Setilă, dînd fundurile afară la câte o bute, *horp*! ţi-o sugea dintr-o singură sorbitură (…)" (Creangă)

ii. The class **[+animate], [- human]** includes onomatopoeic words which mimic sounds of animals, birds or insects, as in:

(1) "(…) and the moon shone into the mouth of the cave where they all lived. '*Augrh*!' said Father Wolf. 'It is time to hunt again.' (Kipling)

(2) 'Şi numai ce-o auzeai vara: *Pu-pu-pup*! *Pu-pu-pup*! dis-dimineaţă, în toate zilele, de vuia satul. (Creangă). *Pu-pu-púp* and its variant *pu-púp* is a sound imitating the song of a hoopoe.

iii. The class **[+ / -animate]** includes onomatopoeic words which mimic noises from nature or environment, sounds produced by the contact between varied objects, or sounds effects of some action, as in:

(1) "And still holding her hands he drew her right out of the street, away from the iron railings and the lamp-posts, into the very middle of the picture. *Pff*! There they were, right inside it! (Travers)

(2) "bătea pământul, sau peretele, sau vrun lemn, de care mă păleam la cap, la mînă sau la picior, zicînd: *Na, na!*, şi îndată-mi trecea durerea." (Creangă).

(3) *"Na!* satură-te de cireşe!" (Creangă)

(4) "Şi, *na*! părintele Duhu şi Teofan şi-au prăpădit papucii, fugind mai mult pe brînci decît în picioare; chiar după tipic! (Creangă)

'*Na*', from the familiar register and with a verbal value, means 'to offer / take something', equivalent to *Poftim*! *ia*! *ține*!, as in (3); if repeated, *na-na* accompanies the gesture of a hit, a scrap, usual in child language, with a nominal value, as in (2). The same meaning appears in (3), but with a violent connotation. *Na* can also express an exclamation that implies annoyance, surprise, deception, or marks the lack of agreement with the words of someone, as in (4). *Na* can also suggest a cheerful shout in games or (folk) songs.

Informative interjections

Described as referential due to their informative value that lacks emotional content, informative interjections are used in precise situations, therefore they are rather few in number (GALR I). For instance, some international examples that belong to religious LSP

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comprise the international words *amen* / *amin, alleluia* / *alleluia, and hosanna* / osana. These items used to have strong affective religious connotations, but in time only their informative value was kept.

(1) "*Amin*, bleştesc eu cu jumătate de gură." (Creangă)

The interjections *aleluia* and *amin* are used in religious texts or practices of the Christian Church as fixed formulas. *Amin* concludes prayers, meaning 'true!, So be it!'. In a familiar register *amin* means 'farewell! it's over'.

2.2. Expressive / emotive **interjections** orient the message towards the listener and convey some inner (positive or negative) emotion of the speaker. These items can also function as discourse markers. Theoretically, all emotional reactions can be externalized using interjections. According to their emotional meaning, they can be divided into: 1. Interjections with one meaning; 2. Interjections with at least two meanings; 3. Ambiguous interjections; 4. Interjections with multiple meanings impossible to decode outside an explanatory context. For instance:

He and *hei* used repeatedly in Romanian are exclamations which give the impression that things are more complicated than they seem or than someone thinks, as in:

(1) "- *He, he*! să fie sănătos dumnealui, om bun; d-apoi chiteşti dumneata că nu ne cunoaştem noi cu Ştefan a Petrei? zise moşneagul;" (Creangă)

The same is expressed in English by means of *ha*!:

(2) "*Ha*!" said Mr Banks, drawing in his head very quickly. "Admiral's telescope says East Wind. I thought as much. (Travers)

There is a multitude of feelings conveyed by interjections, but a detailed consideration of all exceeds the purpose of this paper. Examples, therefore, will include only expressions of **pain**, **regret** and **threat**, as in:

(1) "(…) Baloo, gravely shaking one leg after the other. '*Wow*! I am sore. Kaa, we owe thee, I think, our lives—Bagheera and I.' (Kipling)

(2) He knew he could never be a real human again, and scarcely wanted to be one, but *oh*! how he longed to play as other children play, and of course there is no such lovely place to play in as the Gardens. (Barrie)

(3) "Însă *vai de* omul care se ia pe gînduri!" (Creangă)

(4) "*Vai*! osîndi-v-ar Dumnezeu să vă osîndească, soiuri ticăloase ce sunteţi!" (Creangă)

The Romanian interjection *vai* outwards intense feelings, such as: a) pain, depression, despair, as in (3) and (4); b) sympathy, pity, regret, grief and vexation, as in (3); c) joy,

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pleasure, admiration, enthusiasm; d) impatience; e) surprise. The phrase '(*ca*) *vai de* (*lume*)' suggests a very bad condition, as in (3).

2.3. Conative interjections (alternatively called **imperative interjections)** focus on the *addressee* (receiver) directly and share several features common to the imperative and vocative. It is possible for them to appear isolated in the phrase. They are spoken with a special intonation, and used to address someone, either asking him to perform something (injunctive interjections), or simply to address a call (appellative interjections).

2.3.1.Injunctive

Different categories of orders or incentives, from orders to offers and requests are expressed or intensified by means of injunctive interjections. These may be addressed to different categories of [+/- human] receptors. Often these interjections can play both emotional and volitional mental states, for example the Romanian *bre!* can express both surprise and appeal, and the Romanian *nani*! conveys both an affectionate incentive and a tender caressing. These interjections may express desire or will, i.e. a command**:** *Behold*! *Never mind*! *Now then*! *Sh*!, an incentive**:** *Come on*! *Wo*! *Gee*!, or a request**:** *oh*! *Sh* ! *hush* ! *tsst* ! (GALR I, 1966:426, Gheorgiţoiu, 2011:128). Nonetheless this is inconclusive as often mere voice tonality shifts a usual enjoyable request into a harsh order. Therefore, in this paper the general term used will be *incentives*. Incentives are also grouped according to whether they are used to a) start an action, e.g. (1), (2); b) stop an action, e.g. (3), (4); c) address [-humans] [+ animated] in order to express calls, urges, casts away or out, e.g. (5), (6):

(1) "Gata sunteţi? *Haidem*! că eu vă aştept cu caii înhămaţi." (Creangă)

(2) "Ne întovărăşim cu dînşii, de frica lăieşilor din Ruginoasa, şi *hai-hai*, *hai-hai*, pînă-n ziuă, iacă-tă-ne în Tîrgul-Frumos, (…)." (Creangă)

Haide - and its variant *hai* - is a Romanian word that expresses an urge to action, as in (1). With an imperative function, it corresponds to movement verbs: *Vino*! *Veniţi*! ('Come!'). Used repeatedly, with the stress on the second element, it conveys the idea of a slow, cumbersome movement, as in (2). With a particular intonation, it may also convey regret, admiration.

(3) "*Hush*!" said Jane, as Mary Poppins took out a large bottle labelled "One Teaspoon to be Taken at Bedtime." (Travers)

(4) "- *Ho*, mă! ce vă este? zise Zaharia sărind ca un vultur între dînşii." (Creangă)

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Hush resumes an English request for silence, while *ho* is a Romanian shout used to stop cattle and horses; used for [+human], *hush* means 'enough, stop!'. In the following example, the Romanian *hi* is a shout that urges horsed to move, and *shoo* denotes a cast away in English.

(5) "*Hi*, căluţii tatei, să ne întoarcem cît mai degrabă acasă!" (Creangă).

(6) "That dreadful dog!" said Miss Lark, looking at Andrew's companion. "*Shoo*! *Shoo*! Go home!" she cried.(Travers)

2.3.2.Appellative interjections **(+ / - emotive)** express an appeal, a call. Items referred to as *attention signals* or *attention seekers* in standard English grammars are included here. Appellatives can be divided according to their [+ / - human] characteristics.

(1) **"***Hey*!" called Mary Poppins softly. (Travers)

(2) „Nu, *bre*, răspunse Zaharia şi mai încet; şi, Doamne, ce bine-ar fi să trîntim una lui Mogorogea!" (Creangă)

English *hey*! and Romanian *bre* belong to the familiar register and are used to address someone in order to draw his attention. These words establish a relation of informal equality between speakers.

2.4. Phatic interjections are associated with the *contact* factor, with opening, maintaining, verifying or closing the communication channel between utterer and auditor. GALR I 2005 mentions that interjections with phatic value show the speaker's emotional involvement and are few in number: *alo*, *aha*, *îhî*; *mmm*, *Doamne*!, *ei*. Therefore, all categories of discursive markers - politeness markers, response forms, response elicitors, euphonic fillers, ostensive markers - that fulfil these functions are included within the class of phatic interjections.

2.4.1.Politeness markers

Expressions used as forms of politeness are mainly borrowings or loans and refer to greetings and farewells, thanks, apologies, congratulations. In this paper only the most familiar and non-conventional ones are considered interjections. Although standard courtesy formula are close to secondary interjections, they are not involuntary speech acts and – most importantly – their referential source is external to the speaker, therefore, it does not include the interjectional inner component. Interjections used as politeness markers have different degrees of familiarity and can be divided into: greetings, as in (2), farewells, as in (1); thanking formula; apologizing, offering formula, congratulations, wishes, etc.

(1) "He darted up to the windowpane, brushed down his breast feathers with his beak and then, "*Cheerio*!" he said perkily, and spread his wings and was gone. . ." (Travers)

(2) "*Muni* dimineaţă, moş Nichifor! (Creangă)

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(3) "Gătit, cinstite părinte; *poftim* de ne blagosloviţi casa şi masa şi *poftim* de mai şedeţi." (Creangă)

Cheerios are used in English for greeting or parting. The Romanian *poftim* is a politeness formula used to: a) offer something to somebody, similar to *ia*, *na* (*take*); b) invite somebody action; c) preceded by the interjection *ei*, *poftim* expresses indignation, resentment, criticism, dissatisfaction, distress, revolt.

2.4.2. Interjectional **response forms** are used as short responses to a previous remark made by a different speaker. These consist of **affirmative** and **negative responses** – familiar variants of *yes* and *no*, as in (1) -, and **backchannels** – or **cognitive** interjections, as in (2), 3), (4) – that offer feedback to the speaker that his message has been understood and accepted. By means of backchannels the speaker attests his knowledge of what has been previously said, as in (3).

(1) Where was I? *Oh*, *yep*. (Travers)

(2) "am să-l cinstesc, *zău aşa*, cînd l-oi întîlni; că şezi lipcă unde te duci şi scoţi sufletul din om cu obrăzniciile tale, uşernic ce eşti!" (Creangă)

Sometimes accompanied by *aşa*, *zău* strengthens an affirmation or negation.

(3) "Oh! But I didn't see you in the picture," said Mary Poppins.

"*Ah*, I was behind the tree," explained the Waiter.

(4) *Ei*, *ei*! ce-i de făcut, Ioane? (Creangă)

The Romanian interjection *ei* introduces, accompanies, backchannels the utterance, as in (4).

2.4.3."Generalized question tags", **response elicitors** have a speaker-centred role, seeking not a proper answer, but rather a signal that the message has been understood and accepted. Accordingly, normally they do not seek for a verbal response from the speaker (LGSWE: 1089).

(1) "I call this really friendly of you – bless my soul, I do! To come up to me since I couldn't come down to you – *eh*?" (Travers)

(2) Why don't we go there – right now – this very day? Both together, into the picture. *Eh*, Mary?" (Travers)

The Romanian *Ei* can also express a question, asking for an opinion, eliciting a response, as in:

(3) *Ei*, apoi?! Ştiutu-v-am eu că şi voi mi-aţi fost de-aceştia? zise moş Luca, mergînd pe lîngă cai, plin de năduh; nu mă faceţi, că ia acuş vă ard cîteva jordii prin ţolul cela, de v-a trece spurcatul! (Creangă)

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(4) *Ei*, amu, ce-i de făcut? Hai să intrăm ici, în ograda asta (Creangă)

2.4.4.Euphonic fillers – alternatively called **hesitators** - refer to a period of silence in which the speaker seems to plan what to say next, indicating hesitation. Pauses can be silent or filled. Filled pauses consist of a chain of vowel sounds [+/- nasalisation] with idiomatic transcription in both English and Romanian.

(1) "Very well, then. We won't bother about them. I only asked, of course, in case *you* – *er*– required it. The nursery is upstairs—" (Travers)

2.4.5.Ostensive interjections

This category, also called **presentative** or **prefatory expressions**, appear in deictic or discursive contexts, and draw attention of a person over a thing or over a fact, orienting thus the listener towards the utterance. **Deictic ostensive interjections** are utterance launchers that present 'objects' or 'situations' from the situational context.

(1) *Well*, that's all settled, then." A sigh of relief came from the children's Mother. (Travers)

(2) "*Iaca* de ce nu: drăgăliță Doamne, eram şi eu acum holtei, din păcate! Mort-copt, trebui să fac pe cheful mamei, să plec fără voință şi să las ce-mi era drag!" (Creangă)

By using *Uite*, *Io(i)te*, and *Ia* and its variants *Ian*, *Iată*! *Iaca, Iacă* a speaker draws the listener's attention on a directive addressed to him. *Ia* also introduces an answer or shows indifference to what follows.

Discursive ostensive interjections introduce a fragment of an utterance. Included in standard English grammars among other ***discourse*** / ***pragmatic markers***, these elements are also called **prefaces**, **utterance launchers** and / or **hedges**, and consist of more than one orthographic word. Usually these are similar in form to **comment clauses** (LGSWE: 1073-5, my bold, my italics). These expressions might as well be qualified as verbal tics. One-word expressions include w*ell*, *now*, *look*, *listen*, *oh* for English, and *ai*, *aş*, *dă, de*, *deh*, *ei*, *hm*, *iată*, *îhî*, *nț*, *păi*, *uite*, *zău* for Romanian. Multi-word expressions comprise *I mean*, *look* (*here*), *mind* (*you*), *see*, *you know*, *you see* for English, and zău *aşa*, *ei aş*, *ei na*, for Romanian.

(1) "But if it were me – I mean I – *well*, I should get somebody to put in the *Morning Paper* the news." (Travers)

(2) „ – Apoi dar, *dă*! cu bine să dea Dumnezeu, jupîne Strul! (Creangă)

(3) „*Ei*, băieți, de-acum liniștiți-vă!" (Creangă)

2.5. The poetic function considers the *message*, the code itself, and how it is used. Although it has been stated that interjections "can make explicit any of the linguistic functions defined

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by Jakobson, except for the poetic function" (Cuenca, 2000:29), it is considered in this paper that euphonic refrains are examples of language that focus on the 'message for its own sake'. Similar to fillers, the meaning of **poetic interjections** is highly attenuated or inexistent (GALR I 1966:426). Usually used in songs, these are fixed formulas by means of which joy is expressed and attention attracted. In Romanian poetic interjections usually appear in carols: '*ler* de măr' or in folk songs. In English, these tend to appear in nonsense poetry, nursery rhymes included.

(1) Isn't it funny / How a bear likes honey? *Buzz*! *Buzz*! *Buzz*! / I wonder why he does? (Milne)

(1) "Ură tu, măi Chiriece, zic eu lui Goian; şi noi, măi Zaharie, să pufnim din gură ca buhaiul; iar iştialalţi să strige: *hăi, hăi!* Şi-odată şi începem." (Creangă)

2.6. Metalinguistic interjections are oriented towards the code of the language. For example, Romanian onomatopoeias such as *tura-vura* ('to chatter'), *treanca-fleanca* ('to prate'), *tronca-tronca* ('to tattle'), suggest chit-chatting, useless talk, acquiring therefore a metalinguistic function (GALR 1 2005:671). Similarly, the English *blah-blah*, lexical equivalent to the Romanian *bla-bla-bla*, is both an actual interjection and an onomatopoeia. Cuenca includes within metalinguistic interjections discourse markers such as *right, huh, eh,* etc., which sometimes can also have a conative or a phatic component (2000:38).

(1) "Of course Peter should have kept quiet, but of course he did not. He immediately answered in Hook's voice: '*Odds, bobs, hammer and tongs*, I hear you'." (Barrie)

(2) "De inima căruţei atîrnau păcornița cu feleștiocul şi posteuca, care se izbeau una de alta, cînd mergea căruța, şi făceau: *tronca, tranca*! *tronca, tranca*!" (Creangă)

Of course, *odds, bobs, hammer and tongs* is an unusual expletive of surprise, usually used in Barrie by a pirate character. Ironically paraphrased by the pirate's most fearful enemy, the phrase acquires here a metalinguistic function. The Romanian example fulfils a metalinguistic function regardless of its characteristics [-animate] and [-human].

3. Conclusions and preliminary considerations to the translation of interjections

The attempt of a comparative classifications of interjections according to language functions that they perform emphasises semantic instability, peripheral syntax and protean pragmatics of interjections, in both English and Romanian. The following translation examples try to illustrate the importance of a correct lexical understanding and of an accurate contextual integration in transferring functional meaning in children's literature. It is obvious that the same semantic reference, either exterior or interior to the speaker, is to be conveyed for all

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classes of interjections in translation. Therefore, in most cases, a lexical literal translation seems optimal, as in:

(1) "Winnie-the-Pooh hadn't thought about this. If he let go of the string, he would fall-*bump*-and he didn't like the idea of that." (Milne)

„Ursuleţul Winnie nu se gîndise la asta. Dacă ar fi dat drumul sforii, ar fi căzut – *buf* – şi această perspectivă nu-l încînta." (Milne, translation in Romanian)

In this case direct word correspondence prevails, as *bump* and *buf* belong, indeed, to the same class of referential interjections (more specifically, onomatopoeia) in both English and Romanian.

However, of various reasons, it is also possible for the translator to use in the transferring process an interjection with a different meaning, and from a different class of interjections, as in:

(2) „ (…), and one bee sat down on the nose of the cloud for a moment, and then got up again.

'Christopher - *ow*! – Robin', called out the cloud." (Milne)

„O albină s-a aşezat pe nasul norului o clipă, după care s-a ridicat din nou.

- Christopher – *hei*! – Robin, a strigat norul." (Milne, translation in Ro.:30)

If it were to consider the meaning of the interjection *ow*, CCAD (2009:1119) resumes that it is usually used in response to sudden or intense pain. The ST suggests, indeed, an inner negative emotion by means of the affective interjection, *ow*. The Romanian appellative *hei!* primarily directs towards the receptor, aiming at drawing somebody's attention on something. Changing in translation the emotive *ow* into an appellative interjection – *hei!* - is not a case of *transposition*, and the translation loses part of the intensity of *Pooh the cloud*'s fear – that of being stung by a bee. Classifying interjections according to the language functions they perform turns therefore to be promising in capturing the overall message of an utterance.

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