THE PRAGMATIC VALUE OF ROMANIAN INTERJECTIONS

Florentina Gisela CUMPENAŞU*

***Abstract*:** *The article intends to identify the pragmatic values of interjections in Romanian starting from the theories elaborated by the linguists John Austin and John Searle concerning the speech acts and from the taxonomy elaborated by the latter. This analysis led to the identification of two types of speech acts where the interjections are integrated: the expressive and directive acts. The present paper concentrates only on the expressive acts rendered by the interjections that express emotional values, such as feelings, emotions, etc. This approach, from the pragmatic point of view of interjections in Romanian, constitutes a real contribution to the understanding of this complex issue, and, at the same time, it may be a new element in the present linguistic research.*

Keywords: *speech acts, interjection, expressive acts.*

1. The Speech Acts with Austin and Searle

Pragmatics developed once the notion of *speech act* was introduced by the English linguist John Austin. He introduced the concept about language as action. He also introduced the notion of *performative utterance* , as opposed to the *constatative utterances* , considered to represent states of affairs.

For the English linguist, *saying* means *doing.* According to this statement, one may distinguish between the *locutionary act*, the act of saying something, not taking into account what the speaker does when saying something (e.g. *to promise, to thank, to congratulate*, etc.); *the illocutionary act*, the intentional act (saying something), and the *perlocutionary act*, the act of causing effects on the listener (e.g. *to convince, to cause fear, etc.)*

1.1 John Austin's speech acts

John Austin distributes these speech acts into five fundamental classes, as follows:

- the *verdictives*, represented by the judicial acts and it corresponds to such verbs as: *to acquit, to convict, to pronounce, to ordain, etc.;*
- the *expositives*, used when stating, corresponding to such verbs as: *to state, to deny, to remark, etc;*
- the *exercitives*, that correspond to a judgment on something that should be done, rather than on something that exists and it corresponds to such verbs as: *to dismiss, to command, to order, to forgive, to bequeath, etc.*
- the *comportatives*, that involves an attitude or a reaction towards the others' behaviours and it corresponds to such verbs as: *to excuse, to thank, to sympathize, etc;*
- the *promissives*, that makes the speaker adopt a certain attitude or perform a certain action.

All these types of speech acts will know a reorientation with John Searle (Dragan, 2004: 53) who will elaborate his own classification of speech acts, because he considered those proposed by Austin were not quite precise and complete. The classification made by Searle is more analytical than that of Austin's, therefore, this will constitute the basis for a more detailed analysis on interjections.

* University of Pitesti, necu_gisela@yahoo.com

BDD-A5964 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:42 UTC)

1.2 John Searle's speech acts

a. *assertives* ,(the speaker asserts about a state of affairs: true or false);
b. *directives*, (the speaker tries to get his listener to do something);
c. *commissives* , (make the speaker adopt a certain future conduct);
d. *expressives*, (speakers express their feelings towards a certain state of affairs);
e. *declarations*, (the speaker's utterance brings about a new external situation).

The interjection is massively included in the two types of speech acts: the *expressive* (the most important inclusion, because here there are included the most important values of the interjection) and the *directive* ones.

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, the expressive acts are those presented further on. The expressive acts are rendered, according to *Gramatica actuala a limbii romane (GALR)*, by the emotional/expressive interjections.

2. The expressive acts

The expressive acts aim at the speaker and express his affective state through different linguistic means, such as the interjections. They report to the present moment, to what the speaker feels at that moment, having a high degree of subjectivism.

There is, though, the possibility that some expressive acts such as feelings, be communicated to the listener, only after a certain period of time when they occurred, because they represent accumulations in time of emotions. For instance, the love feeling supposes accumulations of emotions, of various mental states during a longer period of time; emotions, instead, do not imply such long-lasting experiences, but they report to the present moment experiences, though, with a high degree of intensity.

The expressive acts are accompanied by non-verbal elements (mimics and gestures) and by paraverbal elements (intonation, tone) which led to a clearer and more precise transmission of the message from the speaker to his listener. They have a very important role because, in their absence, the intentional tendency can change. The intonation has the force to change this intentional tendency, the mimics and gestures contributing to a better rendering of the speaker's affective states.

The illocutionary tendency of the expressive acts takes into account more aspects. The intentionality of the expressive act means to express a certain psychological state of the speaker which may be whether true or false, thus, implying the conditions of sincerity of the act: the presence or the absence of sincerity.

The direction of reporting the words to the world is not present when talking about the expressive acts, instead, there are certain ways of rendering the intentionality of the act: by the performative verbs, with minimum intensity, or by interjections, with maximum intensity.

The psychical component means to express such states as: joy, sadness, satisfaction, pleasure, indifference, etc. and it depends on the sincerity condition.

The way in which the speaker and the listener report themselves to the intentional tendency is extremely important, both participants to the speech act should mutually recognize the statute they have. As regards the expressive acts, it is necessary the position of the interlocutors to the utterance, based on this, one can detect their orientation towards the speaker or the listener. The style, the attitude and the vision of the creator of an expressive act may present the relation between the interlocutors, the speech situation and the speaker's attitude towards the content of the sentence.

The sincerity condition may hold a decisive role concerning the expressive acts but, it is difficult to establish taking into account the fact that the speaker can have various attitudes.

BDD-A5964 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:42 UTC)

2.1 The emotional value of interjections when accomplishing expressive acts

Interjections present various expressive speech acts, because here they present the most numerous types of values.

The expressive acts can be rendered in Romanian by means of the following interjections: interjections that present one or two meanings: *au* (for physical pain), *pfu* (for pressure, weight), *ptiu* expresses both contempt and admiration; *tii* may express both admiration and regret, *tiu* expresses both regret and wonder, etc. and also interjections that present more meanings, such as: *a, ah, e, ei, ehei, o, of, oh, vai,* etc.

This type of primary interjections with expressive value are considered spontaneous utterances .,,les interjections primaires émotives sont, au moins à leur origine, des cris naturels et spontanés comme le sont les cris et les bruits que reproduisent les onomatopées" (Kleiber, 2006 : 12). The degree of spontaneity may lead to the ideea that the expressive acts, accomplished by means of interjections, are expressed with a higher degree of sincerity.

The interjections included in this category are deprived of informational content and they leave the impression that they are used unconsciously by the speaker. One considers that, by using them, the affective states of the speaker are better expressed than using other structures, and their degree of intensity is increasing.

Plângea şi în ciuda mâniei ochii ei rămâneau mari şi curaţi şi se uita când la omul cocoţat în căruţă, când la caii lui graşi şi voinici, aburiţi de gerul sănătos al muntelui.

*,,**Ptiu**, lovi-te-ar moartea cu ochii tăi! a exclamat Moromete furios. Apoi a strigat: Bălosule, opreşte!* (M. Preda, *Moromeţii*, p.79).

Nae (aparte): A murit francul!

*Pampon: **Tii!** păcat!* (I.L.Caragiale, *D-ale carnavalului*, p. 210)

***Of!** de-ar veni iarna, să te mai dau odată la şcoală undeva, zicea mama şi să cer dascălului să-mi deie numia pielea şi ciolanele de pe tine*". (I. Creangă, *Amintiri*, p. 31)

***Vai!** osândi-v-ar Dumnezeu să vă osândească, soiuri ticăloase, ce sunteţi*. (I. Creangă, *Amintiri*, p. 65)

*,, **Ah**! – zise el suspinând- de ce nu mai e Sida aici*?!" (I.Slavici, *Mara*)

***Ei**! Nu vreau! grăi Ana rece, şi se dete înapoi*. (I.Slavici, *Moara cu noroc*, p. 164)

The secondary interjections acquire expressive values in certain contexts:

***Fir-ar să fie**! am uitat numărul ei de telefon*!

These psycho-affective states can be spontaneous reaction to certain stimuli.

2.1.1. Interjections presenting one or two expressive acts

In the following utterances, the interjection ***uf!*** renders an expressive act, expressing the feeling of release :

- *Cocoana Caliopi, în culmea fericirei, a sărutat cu toată căldura pe iubitul ei Prâslea cu examenul căruia s-au încheiat deocamdată palpitaţiile ei de mamă*.

- ***Uf!** mi-a zis nenorocita matroană română, oferindu-mi un pahar de şampanie; am scăpat! Am dat şi bacaloriatul ăsta*! (I.L.Caragiale, *Bacalaureat*, p. 130)

***Uf!** să mă văz odată scăpat de canonul ăsta, care a ajuns de la o vreme nesuferit...* (I.L.Caragiale, *Dascăl prost*, p.117)

2.1.2. Interjections presenting more expressive acts

The interjections that present more meanings are difficult to decode in the absence of the context, the speaker sending various feelings and emotions through them, which the listener should be able to understand them. Thus, most of the times, the context, the intonation and the non-verbal elements are those that help the listener

BDD-A5964 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:42 UTC)

decipher the message conveyed by the speaker. The mimical and gestual language also represent an additional means to decode the variety of emotional states that an interjection expresses.

In Romanian, the interjection ***a!*** is one of the interjections that conveys the most numerous affective states, such as: surprise, admiration, enthusiasm, pleasure, satisfaction, but, at the same time, sorrow, sadness, regret, indignation, sudden recall of a missed thing. (cf. *DEX*).

This primary interjection is issued spontaneously and can also be used to express physical pain, although, in Romanian, another interjection is specialized in order to realize this expressive act.

When one hustles someone physically or when one is at the dentist's for an extraction, one inevitably uses this interjection spontaneously, the pain itself is that which causes such a linguistic manifestation.

Nae (*care după o luptă a reuşit să vâre mâna în gura Candidatului*) : *Vezi binişor*!

Candidatul (gemând cu gura înfundată şi zvârcolindu-se): ***A!a!a!.....***

Nae (trăgând cu putere): Nu mişca!

Candidatul (văitându-se cu mâna la falcă): ***A!a!a****! Mi-a scos alta! Măsea nevinovată, domnule!...*(I.L.Caragiale, *D-ale carnavalului*, p. 178)

However, the pain itself is that which leads to such a linguistic manifestation. The condition of sincerity is accomplished because the speaker does not simulate this act and he does not lie. He really experiences such a state and expresses it truly and spontaneously. The extra-linguistics elements (mimics, gestures, tone) are very important in order to decode the speaker's message.

To express wonder or surprise, one can use the interjection, which represents a conventional act from the part of the locator in the following utterance. The extra-linguistic elements represented by the mimical and gestual language contribute largely to the accomplishment of the respective act.

„Veta (intră cu lucrul în mână; coase galoanele la un mondir de sergent de gardă civică; este obosită şi distrată, vorbeşte rar şi încet): Cine-i aici? (Văzând pe Ziţa.) ***A****! tu erai? Mă miram cine-i.* (I. L. Caragiale, *O noapte furtunoasă*, p.52-53)

In this utterance, the interjection *a!* is followed by a paraphrase with the help of a semantic equivalent, the verb "to wonder", which explains the interjection and creates the idea of sincerity from the part of the speaker when this expressive act is conveyed.

In the following utterance, one can notice the presence of a paraverbal element that certifies this feeling of surprise:

*Didina(****dând un ţipăt de surpridere****, se întoarce)* ***A!*** *(Aparte.) O femeie! E republicana!* (I. L. Caragiale, *D-ale carnavalului*, p. 206)

The interjection *a!* may appear alone in the respective utterance, as a reaction to a certain stimulus, in order to express the speaker's surprise when seeing a certain person. In this context, this interjection appears isolated instead, the intonation, as well as the other non-verbal elements, contribute to the setting up of this linguistic reaction.

Rică (se opreşte pe prag, cede pe Veta în spate, răsuflă din adânc...cade în genunchi şi începe cu putere): Angel radios!

Veta (dă un ţipăt, se scoală şi fuge în partea cealaltă a scenii, făcându-şi cruce şi scuipându-şi în sân): ***A!*** (I. L. Caragiale, *O noapte furtunoasă*, p. 39)

One can notice as well, that there is a gap between what was expected and what happened, the consequences not being so positive.

BDD-A5964 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:42 UTC)

A way of certifying that this manifestation of the speaker is sincere or not, is constituted by the use of certain verbs, such as "to say" or "to do" after an interjection, which can make this state credible.

In the following utterance, using the emotive interjection *a!*, the speaker expresses his sorrow towards a certain stimulus.

- Mă, Niculae, păi n-am cu ce, taicule! zise Moromete cu duioşie şi blândeţe, dar totodată cu gravitate şi hotărâre. Era pentru întâia oară când îi vorbea astfel. Trebuie cheltuială şi de unde să luăm noi banii?! Spune şi tu! Mai adăugă Moromete.

*A!...**făcu Niculae stins** şi chipul lui se lungi şi se îngălbeni.* (M. Preda, *Moromeţii*, p. 336).

- Nu, frate! zice cocoana, nu vezi că vrea să se-mprietenească? Aşa e el: numaidecât simte cine-l iubeşte...

*- A! **zic eu**, având o inspiraţie infernală; **a!** simte pe cine-l iubeşte....vrea să ne-mprietenim?...Bravo!* (I.L.Caragiale, *Bubico*, p. 156)

The interjection *a!* is used as well in order to convey the feeling of disappointment which the speaker experiences as a reaction to a certain stimulus. The condition of sincerity is accomplished, but the intonation has an important role when transmitting such a state.

*Trahanache (intră prin fund, fără să ia seama la Ghită, care se ridică răpede la intrare. Trahanache e mişcat): **A!** ce coruptă soţietate!..Nu mai e moral, nu mai sunt prinţipuri, nu mai e nimic: enteresul şi iar enteresul…*(Caragiale, *O scrisoare pierdută*, p.80)

In this case, the interjection *a!* is followed by an exclamative utterance in order to express more intensively, the state of disappointment experienced by the speaker. This leads to realize the condition of sincerity and makes the expressive act be more plausible.

The interjection *a!* is used to express joy, an expressive act that includes the psychic component that coincides with the propositional content already conveyed.

A: Haideţi să mergem la picnic.

*B: **A!** sună interesant.*

A: De acord. Să mergem la picnic acum.

The speaker, as well as the listener, shows their joy that they have met and agreed with this proposal. The acceptance of this proposal represents the core element for establishing the relation of sincerity and co-operation between the two interlocutors.

To express regret, the speaker often employs the interjection *a!* adjacent to an exclamative utterance. The propositional content refers to a passed action, performed by the interlocutor and failed.

As to the condition of sincerity, one can talk about a sincere presentation of the speaker's state of frustration through the propositional content, and the exclamative utterance intensifies the intensity degree of the message.

Zoe (înecată): Nu ştiu…alaltăieri seara, când am plecat de la tine, îl aveam; când am ajuns acasă, nu ştiu dacă-l mai aveam...

*Tipătescu: **A!** ce nenorocire!* (I.L.Caragiale, *O scrisoare pierdută*, p. 86)

The boredom feeling can be conveyed by means of the expressive interjection *a!*, the speaker using an upward pitch in order to render an expressive act. This interjection can appear by itself in the utterance, being independent syntactically, only intonation and other explanatory formulae are those that make the difference between the variety of the affective states which this interjection possesses.

*Iordache (plictisit): **A!*** (I.L.Caragiale, *D-ale carnavalului*, p. 164)

BDD-A5964 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:42 UTC)

References

Alexandrescu,V., *Chois de textes*: *Pragmatique et Theorie de l'enonciation*, University of Bucharest Publishing House; Bucharest, 2001 ;

Ameka,F., *Interjections: The Yet Neglected Part of Speech*, 1992, Journal of Pragmatics (18);

Anscombre,J., *Onomatopées, délocutivité et autres blasblas*, 1985, in Revue romane, nr. 20;

Austin, J., *How to do Things with Words*, Calderon Press, Oxford, 1962;

Austin, J., Performatif- Constatatif , 1962 in Alexandrescu Vlad (2001), *Choix de textes: Pragmatique et Théorie de l'énonciation*, University of Bucharest Publishing House, Bucharest;

Austin, J., *Quand dire, c'est faire*, în Alexandrescu Vlad (2001). *Choix de textes, Pragmatique et Théorie de l'énonciation*, University of Bucharest Publishing House, Bucharest;

Bacha, J., *L'Exclamation*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2000 ;

Barbéris, J.M., *L'interjection: de l'affect à la parade, et retour*, 1995, Faits de langues, no. 6, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris;

Benveniste, E., *Problemes de linguistique generale,* Gallimard, Paris, 1966;

Bidu-Vrânceanu, A.,*Structura vocabularului limbii române contemporane*. *Probleme teoretice şi aplicaţii practice*, Bucharest, 1986

Bres, J., << - *Hou! Haa! Yrrâ"*>>*: interjection, exclamation, actualisation*, 1995, in Faits de langues, no.6, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris;

Buridant, C., *L'Interjection: jeux et enjeux*, 2006, in Langages, vol.40, issue 161, Larousse/Armand, Paris;

Coteanu, I., *Probleme de lingvistică generală*, vol. IV, Editura Academiei, Bucharest, 1962;

Danon-Boileau, L., Morel, M.A., *Présentation générale*, 1995, in Faits de langues, no.6, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris;

Demonet, M.L., *Eh/hé: l'oralité simulée à la renaissance*, 2006, in Langages, vol.40, issue 161, Larousse/Armand, Paris;

I.Coteanu, L. Mareş (coordonatori), *Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 1996;

Dicţionarul limbii române moderne, Editura Academiei, Bucharest, 1958;

Dominte, C., (coordonator), *Introducere în teoria lingvistică* (Hjemslev: *Expresie şi conţinut*), University of Bucharest Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003;

Drăgan, A., *L'Interjection. Étude pragmatique*, Cartea Universitara Publishing House, 2004;

Eluerd,R., *La pragmatique linguistique*, Nathan, Paris, 1985;

Guţu-Romalo, V. (coordonator), *Gramatica limbii române I Cuvântul, II Enunţul*, Editura Academiei, Bucharest, 2008;

Graur, Al., *Studii de lingvistică generală*, Editura Academiei, Bucharest, 1960;

Kleiber, G., *Sémiotique de l'interjection*, 2006, in Langages, vol.40, issue 161, Larousse/Armand, Paris ;

Krieb-Stoian, S., *Sensuri implicite ale interjecţiilor de adresare*, 2003 in Annales Universitatis Apulensis, series Philologica;

Manu Magda, M., *Elemente de pragmalingvistică a românei vorbite regional*, Editura Dual Tech, Bucharest, 2003;

Maingueneau, D., *Pragmatică pentru discursul literar*, Institutul European, Iasi, 2007;

Martinet, A., *Elemente de lingvistică generală*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, Bucharest, 1970;

Sala, M., Dănăilă, I., (coordonator) – *Micul dicţionar academic*, vol.I-IV, 2001-2002;

Moeschler, J., *Théorie pragmatique et pragmatique conversationnelle*, Paris, Armand Colin, Paris, 1986;

Păduraru, C., *Eugeniu Coşeriu. Contribuţii la pragmatica lingvistică*, Iaşi, Editura Lumen, Iassy, 2009;

Reboul, A., Moeschler, J., *Pragmatique du discours*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1998;

Récanati, F., *Qu'est-ce qu'un acte locutionnaire*?, 1980, in Alexandrescu Vlad (2001) *Pragmatique et Théorie de l'énonciation. Choix de textes*, University of Bucharest Publishing House, Bucharest;

Récanati, F., *Les énoncés pérformatifs*, Minuit, Paris, 1981;

BDD-A5964 © 2013 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:42 UTC)

Rosetti, Al., *Asupra valorii expresive a sunetelor vorbite*, 1965, in SCL, no.5, Editura Academiei, Bucharest;
de Saussure, F., *Cours de linguistique générale*, Payot, Paris, 1916;
Searle, J., *Les actes de language. Essai de philosophie de language*, 1972, Paris, Hermann, Paris;
Searle, J., *Une taxinomie des actes illocutoires*, 1975, in Alexandrescu Vlad (2001) *Pragmatique et Théorie de l'enonciation. Choix de textes*, University of Bucharest Publishing House, Bucharesti;

Electronic Bibliography
www.scribd.com, July, 2010
Sources
Theatre:
Caragiale, I.L., *O noapte furtunoasă*, Editura ErcPress, Bucharest, 2009;
Caragiale, I.L,. *Conul Leonida faţă cu reacţiunea*, Editura ErcPress, Bucharest, 2009;
Caragiale, I.L., *O scrisoare pierdută*, Editura ErcPress, Bucharest, 2009;
Caragiale, I.L., *D-ale carnavalului*, Editura ErcPress, Bucharest, 2009;
Caragiale, I.L., *Năpasta*, Editura ErcPress, Bucharest, 2009;
Caragiale, I.L., *Momente şi schiţe*, Editura Tedit FZH, Bucharest, 2010;
Prose:
Creangă, I., *Amintiri din copilărie*, Bucureşti, Editura ErcPress, 2009;
Creangă, I., *Poveşti. Povestiri*, Editura ErcPress, Bucharest, 2009;
Ibrăileanu, G., *Adela*, Bucureşti, Editura ErcPress, 2009;
Petrescu, C., *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război*, Editura CurteaVeche, Bucharest, 2009;
Preda, M., *Moromeţii*, vol.I, II, Editura Curtea Veche, Bucharest, 2009;
Rebreanu, L., *Pădurea spânzuraţilor*, Editura Dacia, Cluj, 1985;
Rebreanu, L., *Răscoala*, Editura Curtea Veche, 2009;
Rebreanu, L., *Adam şi Eva*, Editura Jurnalul Naţional, Bucharest, 2009;
Slavici, I., *Moara cu noroc şi alte nuvele*, Editura Erc Press, Bucharest, 2009.

BDD-A5964 © 2013 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:42 UTC)