

Interjections

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Interjections are words which constitute an independent and complete utterance and express a conventionalized linguistic signal of the speaker's reactions. Since interjections are linguistic units in which the distinction between word, →sentence and →utterance is neutralized, the term 'interjection' can refer to a part of speech as well as to a type of utterance.

As a part of speech, an interjection has several characteristics: it can be phonologically anomalous (e.g. *eîhen* 'well!', *euhoí* 'good!' with the internal →aspiration or *ᾠή* 'avast!', with the final occlusive), it is non-derivational and cannot take inflectional or derivational affixes (though some delocutive verbs can derive from an interjection, e.g. *euázein* 'to cry evoe!' from *euhaí*, *aiázein* 'to cry aiai!' from *aiái*), and it is diachronically and synchronically isolated in Ancient Greek (since it has mainly an →onomatopoeic origin). These characteristics define what is called primary interjections, i.e., lexical items specialized in interjectional utterances (e.g. *feû* or *ioú* 'alas!'). Primary interjections derive from lexicalized onomatopoeias, but they differ from onomatopoeias in that they conventionally express the speaker's state of mind or verbal reaction: the onomatopoeic transcription of the frogs' croak *brekekekex koax koax* (Aristoph. *Frogs* 209) or that of laughter *hâ hâ hâ* (Eur. *Cycl.* 157) are only the verbal transcription of a sound, and not the lexicalized form of the speaker's mental state.

As a type of utterance, an interjection has the following characteristics: it is syntactically independent (cf. the term 'interjection', from *particula interjecta*, given by Latin grammarians such as Varro), a specific →intonation probably differentiates it from the co-text, and it expresses the current reaction or state of mind of the speaker (without any form of modalization, temporal distinction, or reference to the hearer). That is why there are also secondary interjections, which do not have an onomatopoeic origin: for instance, the imperatives (→Orders) *áge* or *phére*, both 'come!', can be used as true verbal forms, with the syntactic and semantic characteristics of verbs, but they are also widely used as interjections. The distinction between primary and secondary interjections lies in a diachronic difference (onomatopoeic vs non-onomatopoeic origin), but is also synchronically valid: primary interjections are not used otherwise and secondary interjections are morphologically and semantically motivated. The distinction is sometimes difficult (e.g. does *soû* 'shoo!' stem from a verb *sówemai*, hence *soústhe*? Or is *soústhe*

a secondary reinterpretation of the primary interjection as a verb?).

The most controversial point in the description of interjections concerns the respective roles of semantics and pragmatics: do interjections have a conventional meaning which can be described, or are they so context-bound that they function as a special sort of deictics (see Ameka 1992, for a discussion from a theoretical point of view)? The two main descriptions of interjections in Ancient Greek differ in their answer to this question: implicitly, Labiano Ilundain (2000) adopts the pragmatic point of view, and according to his description, interjections can have a wide variety of meanings depending on the linguistic and extra-linguistic context; Biraud (2010), in contrast, argues that each interjection has a main and general meaning, often a rather abstract one, which has to be linked with the pragmatic context for a complete semantic description.

Ameka, Felix, ed. 1992. *Journal of Pragmatics* 18/2-3:101-308.

Biraud, Michèle. 2010. *Les interjections du théâtre grec antique. Etude sémantique et pragmatique*. Louvain-la-Neuve.

Labiano Ilundain, J. L. 2000. *Estudio de las interjecciones en las Comedias de Aristofanes*. Amsterdam.

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