

DEFINING THE INDEFINABLE? INTERJECTIONS

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Interjections are usually defined as an anomalous grammatical class in most levels of analysis. This paper presents an alternative account of interjections within the frameworks of prototype theory, on the one hand, and grammaticalization, on the other hand. Adopting a prototype approach to grammatical categorization, interjections are better seen as peripheral instances of sentences, since they behave as maximal units of syntax but do not exhibit a subject plus predicate structure. On the other hand, grammaticalization theory accounts for the distinction between primary and secondary interjections and allows to establish the limits between interjections and phrases.

1. INTRODUCTION*

Just a quick glance at some references concerning interjections shows that they are held to be a 'peculiar' grammatical class. They are sometimes referred to as «those little words, or 'non-words',» whose main characteristic is being «(phonologically and morphologically) anomalous.» Moreover, they are assumed to be «rather peripheral to language,» that is, interjections are supposed to be «loosely integrated into the linguistic system.» These are some quotations from Ameka's introduction to a volume of *Journal of Pragmatics* (1992) devoted to these mysterious items. These remarks are quite representative of the 'state of art' about interjections and illustrate why, in Ameka's words (1992a: 101), «this class of items has eluded description.» At this point, the question that arises is: Are interjections indefinable?

The claim made in this paper is that the difficulties in definition are due to the fact that interjections have always been considered within a traditional model of categorization, i.e., one that imposes necessary and sufficient conditions as means of defining category membership. As Wilkins (1992: 123) points out:

...it is precisely because interjections are a 'peripheral' phenomenon that they throw up issues which strike at the heart of widely held assumptions that are current within linguistics.

However, if we adopt a cognitive perspective, the main handicaps to their definition fade away. Assuming the peripherality of interjections, I will discuss a definition based on prototype theory (see, for example, Ungerer & Schmid, 1996: chap. 1), on the one hand, and on grammaticalization (see, for example, Hopper & Traugott, 1993), on the other hand.

2. INTERJECTIONS AS PERIPHERAL INSTANCES OF SENTENCES

The first question (but not the only one) that interjections call forth concerns their categorial status. There are four main hypotheses on the nature of interjections (see Ameka, 1992a: § 2, for a brief summary of the history of interjections from Greek grammarians, and also Almela, 1982):

- (i) They are not grammatical nor even linguistic items.
- (ii) They can be grouped together with other categories, namely adverbs or particles.
- (iii) They are sentences or sentence-equivalents.
- (iv) They constitute a separate grammatical category.

An optimal treatment of interjections should account for these hypotheses although they are apparently incompatible, and should also allow to select one of them as the starting point for the analysis.

The first proposal has been put forward by linguists such as Burger (1980), Goffman (1981) and Trabant (1983). For example, Goffman develops an interesting description of interjections as «response cries», that is, «nonword vocalizations» that «are to be interpreted as bearing on a passing event, an event with a limited course in time» (1981: 90). He argues that interjections are ritualized acts more similar to gestures than to linguistic expressions, and states:

These cries are conventionalized utterances which are specialized for an informative role, but in the linguistic and propositional sense they are not statements. (Goffman, 1981: 108)

On this line of reasoning, Goffman claims that an interjection is a «condensed, truncated form of a discretely articulated, nonlexicalized expression» (1981: 100) and a «not full-fledged word» (1981: 99).

Although some interjections, especially those based on onomatopoeia and back-channeling, resemble nonlinguistic items and could be thought of as non verbal, it is difficult to extend such a view to all the items usually treated as interjections. Interjections vary from one language to another. This means that they are linguistically encoded and, thus, better seen as linguistic elements. Their form and their lack of so-called lexical meaning do not directly imply that they are not words; it is just that they do not constitute a prototypical word class.

Assuming that interjections are grammatical items, the problem can be treated considering family resemblance between interjections and the categories to which they are related, namely adverbs, particles and sentences.

Interjections are similar to adverbs because both are morphologically invariable and can manifest subjective values. However, invariability is not a crucial feature in establishing category limits since it is a common feature of prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs in many languages. The possibility of encoding subjective values is not definitory of all items traditionally labeled as adverbs (although it is for prototypical ones) and, furthermore, characterizes a whole range of elements that fall under the concept of *evidential*.

Additionally, interjections and adverbs have a different distribution and syntactic behavior, given that interjections, unlike adverbs, are syntactically independent, that is, they can stand on their own as utterances. Therefore, they are not sentence constituents, but sentence equivalents.

Interjections also resemble particles and, more precisely, discourse markers. But it must be born in mind that, even though interjections are morphologically invariable and some of them serve to organize the discourse, they exhibit a peculiar syntactic behavior. When linguists use the term *discourse markers*, they are referring to a function («bracketing units of talk» in the words of Schiffrin, 1987) which can be developed by items belonging to different categories (see Evans, 1992: 227). In this sense Ameka (1992a: 114) points out:

the interjections that can be discourse markers constitute just one set of a number of other linguistic elements such as verbs, deictics, adverbials and connectives which can perform this function [...]. Thus this discourse function by itself does not define the class of interjections nor should the two terms be deemed to be coterminous.

In fact, interjections behave like sentences: they correspond to communicative units (utterances) which can be syntactically autonomous, and intonationally and semantically complete. Consider the following example:¹

- (1) Man: You haven't seen Carrie, have you?
 Charles: Who?
 Man: Carrie. American girl. Lovely legs. Wedding guest. Nice smell.
 Charles: Oh, no. *Sorry*.
 Man: *Damn. Blast*. I thought she was. (FW, 27:58)

The expressions *sorry*, *damn* and *blast* are complete units. *Sorry* is equivalent to a full sentence such as *I regret I haven't seen Carrie*, and *damn* and *blast* can be considered emphatic versions of the sentence *I am very disappointed*. Like sentences, interjections can also combine with other constituents, as in the case of *oh* (*oh, no*) also in (1), but they do not have to.

However, interjections do not consist of a subject plus a predicate, which seems to be an outstanding feature to define sentences. In addition, they are highly context dependent as, strictly speaking, they do not have so-called lexical meaning but express pragmatic meanings such as surprise, joy, pain, etc. Let's consider these two aspects in turn.

The concept of sentence can be defined by means of a cluster of features, namely, showing a 'subject plus predicate' structure, having distributional autonomy, and being an intonation unit, a semantic unit and a communicative unit. Interjections share with (prototypical) sentences all features but the first one. Therefore, they share more features with sentences than with any other category.

The second main feature claimed to differentiate interjections from sentences is context dependency. Again in the words of Ameka (1992a: 108), interjections "...are all produced in reaction to a linguistic or extra-linguistic context, and can only be interpreted relative to the context in which they are produced." But are sentences excluded from this characterization? Obviously, they are not. This feature, which is crucial to understand the discursive use of interjections, is also relevant for sentences, specially for those containing deictics. How can one interpret (2) without considering its context?

- (2) I will not give you this until tomorrow

Consequently, context dependency does not differentiate interjections and sentences neatly.

We can conclude that the nature of interjections and their syntactic and discursive behavior is best understood if they are considered a peripheral class of the category «sentence». Their specific attributes (i.e., invariability, possibility of encoding subjective values and dependence on context) are shared with other word classes. Therefore they are too broad to imply the existence of a different word class. On the other hand, their overall behavior does not fit in any of the generally accepted word classes. Interjections behave like sentences but are peripheral thereof since they formally correspond to words or phrases:

- (3) –I have one million dollars
–Wow! / Good heavens!
- (4) – Let's go to the beach
– Great!

The interjections *wow* and *good heavens!* in (3) exhibit the same behavior and meaning as a sentence like *I am really surprised*. *Great* in (4) is also equivalent to a sentence like *That's a wonderful idea*. Although so-called secondary interjections such as *good heavens* and *great* formally correspond to phrases, they no longer function as phrases, as I will discuss later on (§ 5).

In summary, a prototype approach to categories makes it possible to account for the special nature of interjections, which could not be understood assuming a necessary and sufficient condition model of categorization. Moreover, it also reconciles the main grammatical hypotheses on the nature of interjections pointed out at the beginning of the section: interjections share attributes with adverbs and particles, and behave like sentences, but they have specific features too.

3. CHARACTERIZATION OF INTERJECTIONS

Categorial adscription is just one step in the process of defining interjections. A definition which brings together four interrelated levels of analysis, namely, syntax, pragmatics, phonology and morphology, is also required.

An important fact to be recalled is that most accounts of this category focus on its anomalous nature rather than on the regularities that can be found among its members. Let us summarize the most frequently described 'anomalies':

- As I have already argued, interjections do not develop any syntactic function nor need to enter into construction with other elements:

...interjections are a class of words which can stand on their own as utterances and which refer to mental acts. (Ameka, 1992a: 11)

- Some of them do not seem to fit in the phonological system of the language they belong to:

Primary interjections [...] tend to be phonologically and morphologically anomalous. They may thus be made up of sounds and sound sequences that are not found in other parts of the language. In English the interjection spelt *tut-tut* is phonetically a series of dental clicks –sounds which are not used otherwise in the language. Some English interjections do not contain any vowels, for instance, *psst!*, *sb!*. From the point of view of the main sound system of English these are 'non-words'. (Ameka, 1992a: 105-106)

- They do not encode any precise lexical meaning, at least not in the traditional sense:

Interjections are purely emotive words which have no referential content. (Quirk *et al.*, 1972: 413)

- Interjections are a heterogeneous class including onomatopoeic words, one word elements (*ouch*, *oh*, *wow*, *oops...*), and phrasal elements (*thank you*, *good heavens*, *for God's sake...*):

The only thing that these elements have in common is their ability to stand alone as a complete utterance; otherwise they may be assigned to various word classes. (Jespersen, 1924: 90)

- Although they are claimed to be a universal word class, they are language specific:

Most languages display this mixed-bag category with expressions such as 'y&', 'm', 'hey', 'oh', 'hi', 'mm', 'ouch', etc. or their functional equivalents. It is not a unified category functionally, morphologically or syntactically and it is highly language specific. (Givón, 1984: 84)

These characteristics make it difficult to propose a unified and non-negative definition of interjections, as Givón's quotation clearly shows. It

is not surprising that some linguists have even questioned their linguistic nature, and have proposed to group them together with vocal articulations or gestures (see §1).

At this point of analysis, the choice is between giving up the subject (or even linguistics!) or changing perspective, which certainly seems less traumatic. Linguists like Wilkins have tried to describe interjections as a unified category:

Using a formal definition of interjection [...], it is possible to identify cross-linguistically, a form class of items which are simple lexemes that are conventionally used as utterances. [...] it is clear that this is a unified category both morphologically and syntactically, given that interjections host no inflectional or derivational morphemes, and given that they do not enter into construction with any other lexemes. Furthermore, it has been shown that the class of items thus identified share important semantic and pragmatic features. They are all context-bound items which require referential arguments to be provided by the immediate discourse context. (Wilkins, 1992: 153)

Taking a similar approach, I will try to define interjections by means of a cluster of features not to be treated as necessary and sufficient conditions. As a matter of fact, a framework like Cognitive Linguistics, in which peripherality and heterogeneity are not considered a handicap, makes it possible to overcome the difficulties in definition.

To support my point, four levels of analysis will be considered:

- (i) Syntactically, interjections are emphatic focal items that behave as a unit and can be distributionally autonomous. As I have discussed previously, although interjections can be seen as 'sentence equivalents', they cannot be identified with prototypical sentences because they do not consist of a subject plus a predicate. In a cognitive categorization framework, interjections can be thought of as peripheral instances of sentences, since they do not have this structural feature but share all the rest with them.
- (ii) Discursively, interjections typically encode pragmatic meanings while their so-called lexical meaning is weak, and, strictly speaking, they have no referential content. In addition, they are sensitive to context in that they can only be interpreted in relation with the context of production.

- (iii) Phonologically, as mentioned above in the quotation from Ameka, some interjections show 'anomalous' phonetic patterns with respect to the general phonological system of the language considered. For instance, some of them do not have any vowels or, on the contrary, they exhibit a prolongation of a vowel; others contain phonemes or syllable patterns which are strange to the general phonological system of that language.² Besides, they are pronounced emphatically, and changes in intonation can imply modifications in their interpretation.³
- (iv) Finally, interjections tend to be morphologically invariable, and constitute a semi-open class: it is possible to integrate new items by means of a grammaticalization process which results in secondary interjections. Interjections, and especially secondary ones, instantiate word-formation processes such as reduplication, intensive prefixing, truncation and word synthesis.⁴ Some also suffer variations in form generally derived from taboo and euphemism in imprecations.⁵

Let us briefly discuss some examples.

- (5) Matt: It's his first time. He's a friend of the family.
Charles: *Ab. Excellent.* (FW, 38:13)

The primary interjection *ab* in (5) means *I understand*, while the secondary interjection *excellent* means something like *I thank you for the information* or *I find the information interesting*. They both let the speaker express the basic information that he wants to convey with the minimum linguistic effort, which implies substituting a whole sentence structure by a word or a phrase.

One of the most used interjections in English, *oh*, shows the nature of the meaning typically associated with these elements, that is, their context dependent interpretations and the important role that intonation plays.

- (6) Carrie: I was just wondering where you're staying tonight.
Charles: *Oh.* Well, I was staying at some pub, called the Lucky... the Boat, or something like...
Carrie: Boatman.
Charles: Right. But now I'm going to stay at some friend's house with some friends. Well, I say 'house' –I think 'enormous castle' is a more accurate description.

Carrie: *Ob*, that's too bad 'cos I'm at the Boatman.

Charles: *Ob*. (FW, 21:48)

Sensitivity to context is made explicit by the differences in meaning of the first instance of *ob* as opposed to the other two instances. The first *ob* expresses surprise at Carrie's question, while the two final examples of *ob* indicate disappointment. The differences in meaning match differences in pronunciation, the vowel in the first instance of *ob* being shorter than the other two.

This characterization leaves open at least two crucial points: (a) the meaning of interjections, and (b) the status of secondary interjections given that they do not seem to fit completely the definition resulting from some of the prototype attributes.

4. THE MEANING OF INTERJECTIONS

The meaning of interjections has become a controversial point of discussion in the literature. The general assumption about their lack of lexical meaning has been recently criticized by some linguists:

...they are neither universal nor meaningless. On the contrary, they are language-specific, and they are meaningful. [...] We can capture the subtlest shades of meaning encoded in interjections relying exclusively on universal or near-universal concepts such as 'good' and 'bad', 'do' and 'happen', 'want', 'know', 'say', or 'think'... (Wierzbicka, 1992: 163)

All in all, it would be rather uncontroversial to assume that the pragmatic meaning of interjections is more prominent than their lexical one. As a consequence, their interpretation depends to a large extent on the context in which they are uttered. Specifically, they can make explicit any of the linguistic functions defined by Jakobson, except for the poetic function:

- referential, which corresponds to onomatopoeic words;
- expressive, which is used for manifesting feelings and includes most prototypical interjections, such as *oh*, *ouch*, *wow*, *hooray*, *shit*, *thank God*, *damn*...;
- conative, which accounts for interjections «directed at an auditor» (Ameka, 1992b: 245), e.g., *psst!*, *sh!*...;
- phatic, which defines interjections that «are used in the maintenance of social and communicative contact» (Ameka, 1992b: 245), e.g., *aha* (= 'I understand') and other elements used for backchanneling

- (*mhm*, *uh-huh*, *yeah*), and also formulae and routines like *hello*, *goodbye*, *hi*, *sorry*, etc.;
- metalinguistic, which corresponds to those interjections used as discourse markers like *right*, *buh*, *eh*, etc., which sometimes can also have a conative or a phatic component.

A similar proposal (although not completely identical) is assumed by Ameka, Wierzbicka and Evans in the *Journal of Pragmatics* monographic volume (1992). Wierzbicka differentiates emotive, volitive and cognitive interjections. Ameka includes emotive and cognitive in the group of expressive interjections, and adds conative and phatic ones. Evans proposes a new type, «organizing interjections», which «serve to organize the overall move structure of a discourse, but also a basically non verbal interaction» (1992: 227). The cognitive account presented here, in addition to the advantages of being based in a general classification of linguistic functions, allows to integrate all the distinctions proposed by these (and other) authors in an overall schema, and also incorporates onomatopoeic words, which could not fit in those proposals.

5. SECONDARY INTERJECTIONS AND GRAMMATICALIZATION

The difficulties to define interjections are not only due to their 'anomalous' nature, but also to their formal heterogeneity. Interjections can be divided into two groups: primary interjections (*oh*, *ouch*, *hey* and so on) and secondary interjections (*sorry*, *Good Lord*, *God*, *damn* and so on).

Grammaticalization is crucial to the understanding, definition and identification of 'secondary' interjections. Some linguists have left them a part claiming that they belong to other categories (noun, verb, adjective phrases...) which are used emphatically. Wierzbicka, for example, defines interjections as follows:

An interjection can be defined as a linguistic sign expressing the speaker's current mental state (1) which can be used on its own, (2) which expresses a specifiable meaning, (3) which does not include other signs (with a specifiable meaning), (4) which is not homophonous with another lexical item that would be perceived as semantically related to it, and (5) which refers to the speaker's current mental state or mental act (for example 'I feel...', 'I want...', 'I think...', 'I know...'). (1992: 164)

And she goes on to say:

By these criteria, exclamations such as *Good Lord!*, *Good heavens!*, *Christ!* or *Hell!* are not interjections, whereas those like *gee*, *wow*, *oops* or *ha* are. (*ibid.*)⁶

Goffman (1981: 112) suggests just the opposite: secondary interjections must be considered response cries like primary interjections, that is, semiwords or even non-words. Commenting on the imprecation *Shit!*, compared with a sentence like *I knew it*, which is equivalent to the former in a certain context, he says:

...although *I knew it!* follows grammatical constraints for well-formed sentences, *Shit!* need not, even if one appeals to the context in order to see how it might be expanded into a statement. *Shit!* need no more elide a sentence than need a laugh, groan, sob, snicker or giggle [...]. Nor, I think, does it help understanding very much to define *Shit!* as a well-formed sentence with NP as its structure. Here, of course, imprecations are exactly like response cries.

A third researcher, Ameka (1992a: 105), adopts an intermediate position:

...secondary interjections are forms that belong to other word classes based on their semantics and are interjections only because they can occur by themselves non-elliptically as one-word utterances and in this usage refer to mental acts.

We seem to be deadlocked once again. And once again we have to look further. A different hypothesis based on the concept of grammaticalization can be more explanatory. Now, it is a fact that the phrases identified as secondary interjections are the result of a grammaticalization process. Look at examples (7) and (8):

(7) Fiona: My name's Fiona.

Gerald: I am Gerald.

Fiona: What do you do?

Gerald: I am training to be a priest.

Fiona: *Good Lord*. (FW, 13:25)

(8) Charles: Is there room for Scarlett?

Tom: Oh, *absolutely*. 137 rooms actually. (FW, 21:02)

The noun phrase *good lord* in (7) and the adverb *absolutely* in (8) do not behave as complements, like they usually do when integrated in a sentence. Instead, they are equivalent to sentences. This syntactic change –from sentence constituent to sentence equivalent– is associated with a semantic change: Saying *good lord!* does not mean that we are invoking God and *absolutely* is just an emphatic way to say *yes* (it is unlikely that one could say *there is absolutely room for Scarlett*).

In summary, secondary interjections result from a process of syntactic reanalysis –from sentence constituent to sentential expression– and semantic change –from a literal meaning to a more abstract, pragmatic one–. In fact, reanalysis and pragmaticization of meaning are the main features of grammaticalization.

Secondary interjections show different degrees of fixation and meaning change, and regardless of their categorial origin exhibit a common behavior identifiable with prototypical interjections. Briefly:

- (i) They are used as utterances, not as sentence constituents. Thus, they do not have to be integrated in another construction, although they might.
- (ii) Their lexical meaning bleaches as the pragmatic meaning increases. Secondary interjections instantiate the subjectification process as propounded by Traugott (1989, 1995). The original objective –‘literal’– meaning changes to a subjective –more ‘pragmatic’– one.
- (iii) The changes in function (i) and meaning (ii) are often accompanied by phonetic weakness and word integration (e.g. *Goddammit*).
- (iv) They tend to become syntactically and morphologically invariable, but whenever the process is not accomplished some syntactic features can persist (e.g. *Good for you/her*), and some can show inflection morphemes. That is the case of French *tiens* (2nd. person singular), Spanish *mira/mire*, Catalan *mira/miri* (2nd/3rd person singular), Catalan *entesos* (masculine plural), etc. However, these morphemes do not imply morphologic alternation, like they do when used as verb or adjective, in the previous examples. As Ameka (1992a: 106) indicates in relation to examples like *tiens*,

...some interjections which evolve from verbs could carry a particular inflection but they do not obey the agreement rules of the language in question. In other words, the inflections together with the verb stem have become frozen and form a completely new word.

In short, the defining features of secondary interjections (namely, increase of the pragmatic meaning over the lexical meaning, instability and variation in phonetic form, morphologic fixation, and peripheral syntactic behavior) can easily be accounted for in the frameworks of grammaticalization theory. From this perspective, secondary interjections are peripheral members of the (peripheral) class of interjections.

The grammaticalization approach erases the incompatibility between their original categorization—as noun, adjective, verb or adverbial phrases—and the final one as interjections. Secondary interjections are intermediate elements between phrases (which correspond to their original form and meaning) and primary (prototypical) interjections (their target form which has a subjective meaning). The grammaticalization process is often in progress, which explains the different degrees of fixation that secondary interjections show, and the persistence effects derived.

This claim is also consistent with Wilkins' hypothesis (1992: 125):

The crucial claim that I am making is that all the elements identified by the broader definition [of interjections], regardless of apparent surface complexity, would be understood to head an entry in the lexicon. The hedges are added (optionally) in recognition of the fact that (i) a conventional lexical form may have other uses besides its use as an interjection (e.g. *God*); (ii) phrases may become conventionally fixed and used as interjections (e.g. *«Bloody hell!», «Thankyou!»*); and (iii) it is not always clear whether, for instance, interjections in certain languages 'host' imperative and/or vocative inflections or whether these 'inflections' are fixed as part of the interjectional form.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As it has been said before, the levels of analysis considered in the definition of interjections are interrelated. As a conclusion, I will try to make this interrelation explicit, and relate it to the grammaticalization process, too.

First, primary interjections are usually short words (often unique segments). Correspondingly, secondary interjections tend to reduce their phonetic form in the process of grammaticalization, and some of them go through morphological processes of truncation or word synthesis. These phenomena can be traced back to iconicity: the 'weakness' of their lexical meaning has its counterpart in their morphological and phonetic reduced form, inherent in primary interjections and derived in secondary ones.

Second, interjections, in contrast with other particles –i.e., conjunctions and prepositions–, are a semi-open class. The derivational and compositional processes affecting interjections are highly related to their intensive focal character, both intonationally and syntactically (as in the case of reduplication or intensive prefixing) or to grammaticalization (as in the case of truncation and word synthesis).

Third, since interjections encode subjective meanings, it is clear that subjectification is at play when a phrase is reanalyzed as an interjection (see Traugott, 1989, 1995). The conventionalization of a discourse inference allows the literal objective meaning to evolve into a subjective one. Whenever this semantic change co-occurs with modifications in the syntactic function and distribution, the lexical item tends to be used as a complete utterance whose pragmatic meaning has strengthened while the semantic content becomes weaker. These phenomena trigger the categorial change which is typically accompanied by the changes in form that I have just mentioned.

Fourth, context dependency is related to the main features defining interjections (namely, reduced form, pragmatic meaning and distributional autonomy). They rely on the context for their interpretation because they are ‘simple’ short elements, do not have a referential content and are not necessarily integrated in another construction.

These facts show iconicity between form, use and meaning, in the sense pointed out by Wilkins (1992: 153):

...interjections are the most reduced form an utterance can take, and [...] the motivation for such reduction is to be found in the functional principle which determines that the more information that is recoverable directly from context the more reduced an utterance will be.

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1. The corpus examples are from the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. They are indicated by the initials FW followed by the time of appearance.

2. In Catalan, for instance, the forms *ba!* and *oob!*, which include aspiration and vowel lengthening respectively, illustrate these phenomena, which seem to be frequent (maybe universal) since they are commented on by linguists working on different languages.

3. Because of their emphatic character, associated with an exclamative intonation, they have often been studied together with exclamative phrases.

4. In Catalan, there are reduplicated forms *he, he!*, *tic, tac!*... intensive prefixing with *re-* (*redéu, redénia...*), truncation (*osti* instead of *òstia*), and word synthesis as *adéu, sisplau, aviam*. The same phenomena can also be found in Spanish interjections.

5. For example, in Catalan *òndia* instead of *òstia/hòstia*, or in English *darn it!* instead of *damn it!* Fries (1990: 11) includes some interesting examples of word synthesis and modification in German as *supperlot!* < «sacre nom».

6. As a matter of fact, Wierzbicka rephrases condition (4) in order to allow some kind of homophony (polysemy?), but the formulation is very timid and, in my opinion, does not clarify the status of these «secondary exclamations». Literally, she adds:

Tentatively, we might propose the following: (4) which not homophonous with another lexical item whose meaning would be included in its own meaning (that is, in the meaning of the putative interjection). (Wierzbicka, 1992: 165)

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