

Interjections in English and Arabic

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1. Introduction

Language is a means of communication i.e. communication between people. It expresses the emotions and attitudes of the speaker who uses it to influence the learner's attitudes and behaviours. In English and Arabic, certain forms and expressions are used to show emotions. **Inserts** in English and **Al-khawalif** الخوالف in Arabic are used in both spoken and written language.

Leech and Svartvik (1975: 86-7) introduce certain forms of emotive emphasis in English:

1. Exclamations: these are often shortened to a noun phrase or an adjective phrase:

- (1) **What a wonderful time we've had!**
- (2) **How nice she is!**
2. Emphatic **such** and **so**; usually stressed:
- (3) He's **such** a nice man!
- (4) Don't upset yourself **so!**
3. Repetition:
- (5) It's **very very** awkward.
4. Stress on the operator:
- (6) That **will** be nice!
5. Nuclear stress on other words:
- (7) **I'm terribly sorry!**
6. Interjections:
- (8) **Ah**, that's just what I wanted!
- (9) **Oh**, what a beautiful present!

The structure of sentence elements consists of units which are referred to as parts of speech or word classes. These can be grouped into three major classes: **lexical words**, **function words** and **inserts**, (Quirk et al. 1972:18).

Lexical words are, in speech, the stressed words that carry the meaning in a text. They belong to the open system and have a complex internal structure. Four classes of lexical words are recognized: nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Function words are usually unstressed in speech and have a wide range of meanings. They indicate relationships between lexical words or larger units and serve the way in which a lexical word or larger unit is to be interpreted. They are the member of the closed system which includes: articles, demonstratives, pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions.

The third class is that of inserts. They are considered as more marginal than lexical and function words.

Quirk et al. (1985:73-4) state that there is a kind of difficulty in whether to consider inserts as a closed or open class. They justify that they are of a closed class on the grounds that those which are in common use are few in number. But unlike the closed classes, they are grammatically peripheral since they do not enter into constructions with other word classes, and are only orthographically or phonologically connected to sentences. Inserts may form an open class on the grounds that they can be freely created by 'onomatopoeia'. Thus, comic-strip cartoons often contain expressions like: **yuck**, **gr-r-r-r**, **blaat**, etc.

On the other hand, **Al-khawalif** in Arabic is used to describe certain forms that have no syntactic relationships to other word classes. Wright (1971:294) makes no clear distinction between interjections and the other forms of Al-khawalif. He refers to them as 'sounds' or 'tones' having, by origin or use, a certain verbal force and are, therefore, called **أسماء الأفعال** (interjections). Such forms are used to express emotive emphasis. They include:

1. **خالفة التعجب** khalifa of exclamation.
2. **خالفة المدح والذم** khalifa of praise and blame.
3. **خالفة الأصوات** khalifa of sounds.
4. **خالفة الإخالة** interjections.

Exclamatory forms **صيغ التعجب** are usually shown with the article 'ما' (how) as in: (Al-Ansari, 1963: 325)

- (45) **ما أحسن زيد** How handsome Zayd is!

Or with 'كيف' (how):

(46) كيف تكفرون بالله" البقرة/28 How can ye reject the faith in Allah!

Praise and blame forms أفعال المدح والذم can be represented by certain verbs as: 'نعم' and 'حيداً' (yes, indeed, certainly, etc) for praising and 'بنس' and 'ساء' (what a bad, how bad, etc) for blaming:

(47) نعم الرجل زيد What an excellent Zayd is!

Those forms of verb are uninflected for number and gender and are used for expressing emotions only. (Al-Jurjani, n. d.: 269-74)

Wright (1971: 294) states that **sounds** الأصوات are utterances produced by animate creatures as those uttered by human beings like 'أه' (O! 'for pain'), 'أف' (ugh 'for disgust'), etc. Some are uttered in driving animals: 'هلا' (for horses), 'هيد' (for camels). They can also be produced by animals: 'غاق' (the croak of a raven), 'شيب' (the sound made by camels in drinking). Others are inanimate utterances: 'طبق' (the sound of a falling stone), 'قبة' (the stroke of a sword), etc. Interjections are emotive expressions carrying the meaning of verbs but are not verbs. Al-Ansari (1980: 81) argues that most of them are 'hearsay'. The only regular form (فعال) can analogically be used to form 'نزال' (from 'نزل' to fight), 'تراك' (from 'ترك' to leave), 'حذار' (from 'حذر' to warn), etc.

2. Interjections in English

Traditionally, interjections were considered as the only type of inserts; hence, the terms 'interjections' and 'inserts' were used as alternatives. Grammar books include a variety of forms which are mostly used in conversation texts. This shows that the term 'inserts' is inappropriate to describe them. Biber et al. (1999:93-4) point out that inserts include:

1. Greetings like: **hi, hello, 'good' forms, hiya, wotcha, hey, howdy**, and farewells: **bye, see you, goodbye, tata, cheers, cheerio**:

(10) **Good morning.** Can I help you?

2. Discourse markers like: **well, right, now, I mean, you know, you see, mind you, now then**:

(11) Yeah, **well** it's just different.

3. Attention signals as: **hey, yo, say** and **hey you**:

(12) **Hey** look – that's the way to do it.

4. Response elicitors: **huh, eh, alright, okay, right** and **see**:

(13) Come over here, **okay**?

5. Responses: **typically, yes, yeah, yep, no, nop, unh, eh, uh, huh, mhm, sure, certainly** and **really**:

(14) A. Did you enjoy your day off?

B. **Yep**, lovely thank you.

6. Hesitators: (uh, er, um, erm)

(15) A. How am I going to get it back to you?

B. **Um**, I'll come over to your house.

7. Politeness including: thanking: **no problem, you're welcome, thank you** and **thanks**, apologizing: **sorry, pardon, pardon me, beg your pardon**, and **excuse me**, requesting: **please** and **pardon** and congratulating: **good luck, good wishes** and **congratulations**:

(16) Here's your book, **thanks**. (thanking)

(17) **Sorry**, I didn't mean to scare you. (apologizing)

8. Expletives: **my God, bloody hell, hell, damn, shit, fuck, my gosh, Jesus, geez, gee, heavens, good lord, goddammit, goddamn assholes, good grief** and **heck**:

(18) Oh **Jesus**, I didn't know that.

9. Interjections are mostly sounds expressing emotions and feelings like: **oh, ah, ugh, aargh, urgh, tt, oops, hm, ouch, ha** and **ow**, (See also 2.1):

(19) **Tt oh! Ouch** my neck hurts, (Ibid: 1082-95).

Inserts, including interjections, are a relatively newly recognized category of words. They are not a part of a syntactic structure. Quirk et al. (1985:88) state that interjections refer to quasi-linguistic noises which have either an exclamatory or imperative force. Certain statements and questions can serve as interjections when they are reduced, like: **Yes, No, Ready**, etc.)Crystal (2003:239) refers to them as unproductive forms whose function is purely emotive. He adds that there is an unclear boundary between 'interjections' and other types of exclamation where some referential

meaning may be involved and where there may be more than one word, e.g. **Excellent!**, **Lucky devil!**, **Cheers!** **Well well!** He also suggests 'minor sentence' and 'formulaic language' as notions to recognize and analyze them. Trask (1993:144) defines interjections as 'lexical items', stating that a few of them specially the profane and obscene ones exhibit a very limited ability to enter into syntactic structures like:

(20) **Damn** the torpedoes!

Gramley (1992:125) describes them as linguistic and non-linguistic items which include: nouns and verbs like: **Hell!** and **Damn!**, phrases and clauses: **Good morning!**, **Break a leg!**, special interjectional items: **Wow!**, **Whew!** and sounds like whistles, coughs and signs. Interjections are mainly used in conversations to convey meanings of **surprise, disgust, greetings, fear, pleasure, delight, excitement, resignation, approval, disapproval, grief, pain, sadness, pity, sorrow, pleading, doubt, hesitation, satisfaction and realization**. They have no real grammatical value, but can serve people when they do not know what to say or have some time to think about what to say. Most of them occur initially and are usually followed by the exclamation mark: (!) in written texts. Quirk et al. (1985: 853) state that some interjections have phonological features which cannot be found in the language system; thus '**Whew**' for instance, contains a bilabial fricative [ɸIU], [ɸ:] and tut-tut consists of a series of alveolar clicks [ɽ]. He adds that interjections involve the use of sounds that do not occur in English words. The form '**ugh**' is the spelling of an exclamation often pronounced as /ʌx/ or /əx/; even though, the /x/ is not a phoneme in standard American English or British English. Though interjections play an important role in communication, it is still debated whether some of the forms should be recognized as words at all.

2.1 Form and Meaning of the English Interjections

In this section, an alphabetical list of the most frequent interjections in English can be presented with their spelling conventions and the meaning(s) they express, (Quirk et al., 1985: 853; Biber et al. 1999:1083-5):

1. **Ah**: is used to express pleasure, resignation, surprise and realization:

(21) **Ah!** I won! (surprise)

(22) **Ah**, now I understand. (realization)

2. **Aha**: expresses satisfaction and recognition.

(23) Let's see, **aha**, this one is yours.

3. **Alas**: is less common than other interjections and usually used in literature to show grief or pity:

(24) **Alas**, she's dead now.

4. **Boo**: expresses disapproval, usually for a speaker at gathering; also a surprise noise.

5. **Dear**: expresses pity or surprise:

(25) Oh **dear!** Does it hurt? (pity)

6. **Eh**: expresses impolite request for repetition:

(26) A. It's hot today

B. **Eh?**

A. I said it's hot today.

Quirk et al. (1985: 814) state that the interjection '**Eh**' /ei/ (with a rising tone) can be used as a 'tag question' to invite the listener's response:

(27) She didn't pass the exam, **eh?**

It also expresses surprise:

(28) **Eh!** Really?

7. **Er**: expresses hesitation:

(29) Lima is the capital of**er**....Peru.

8. **Hello, Hullo**: both forms express greeting or surprise:

(30) **Hello!** My car's gone! (surprise)

9. **Hey**: is used for calling attention, surprise or joy:

(31) **Hey!** Look at that! (attention)

10. **Hi**: expresses greetings:

(32) **Hi!** What's new?

11. **Hmm**: expresses hesitation, doubt or disagreement:

- (33) **Hmm!** I'm not so sure.
12. **Mm, mhm:** are casual forms of 'yes':
- (34) A. Her name was Martha.
B. **Mm.**
13. **Oh, O:** both express surprise, pain, pleading or joy.
- (35) **Oh,** please say 'yes!' (pleading)
14. **Oho:** is used to express jubilant surprise.
15. **Ooh:** expresses pleasure or pain.
16. **Oops,** whoops: express mild apology, shock or dismay.
17. **Ouch, Ow:** both express pain:
- (36) **Ouch!** That's hurts!
18. **Pooh:** mild disapproval or impatience.
19. **Sh:** a request for silence or moderation of noise.
20. **Tut-tut:** expresses / ʈ/ a mild request or disapproval. It's also pronounced as /tʌt tʌt/ with ironic tone.
21. **Ugh:** /ʌx/ or /ʌg/ usually with ironic tone express disgust:
- (37) A. She burnt popcorn back there.
B. **Ugh** it reeks.
22. **Uh-huh** (= yeah) is used to show agreement and **Uh-uh** (=no) shows disagreement:
A. Shall we go?
B. **Uh-huh!**
23. **Um, Umm:** are used for hesitation:
- (38) 85 divided by 5 is **um** 17.
24. **Well:** expresses either surprise or introducing a remark:
- (39) **Well,** what did I say? (remark)
25. **Wow:** is used to show great surprise.
- (40) **Yeah, Yep:** casual forms of 'yes'.
26. **Yippee:** expresses excitement or delight:
- (41) A. My birthday is Friday.
B. **Yippee,** I won't be there.

3. Interjections in Arabic

Arab grammarians disagree whether to consider interjections as nouns or verbs since they carry features of both classes. Al-Zajjaji (1951: 48-50) refers to the name of a person or thing that functions as a subject/object or occupies the position of a subject/object as 'noun'. A 'verb' is an action or event which occurs in a period of time i.e. past, present or future. On the basis of disagreement, the Arabic interjections are recognized as nouns in the sense that they have the same morphological and syntactic characteristics of nouns:

1. Nunation التتوين as in صه (**silence**) and هيهات (**far from it**). This nunation, as Ibn Jinni (1955:44) shows is usually attached to indefinite interjections only. Thus, when not attached, an interjection is said to be definite. He also shows that the verb is neither definite nor indefinite and that the function of this nunation with interjections is to categorize them as nouns.
 2. Interjections, like nouns, can show number (duality, plurality) and gender (feminization). The forms دوايك (**re-counseling**) and دهدرين (**re-canceling**) are said to be dual, though Al-Asmaie (1963: 102) states that both forms are used for corroboration and repetition. Plurality and feminization can be shown in هيهات (of هيهية). But Ibn Jinni (1955:66) says that the letters 'ا' and 'ت' are redundant.
 3. Interjections occupy a position which is usually occupied by a noun. They can be objects as in:
- (42) فدعوا نزال فكننت أول نازل When they call for fighting, I went ahead,
Ibn Al-Anbari (n.d.: 536).
It is also noted that such forms may occur in different positions other than nominal:

(43) حي على الصلاة Come here to prayer.

(44) كتاب الله عليكم النساء/24" Thus hath Allah ordained (Prohibitions) against you.

Arab grammarians agree that interjections do not enter into syntactic structures; hence, the form نزال (**to fight**) in (42) is used for a purpose of citation in poetry. (Ibid)

4. Certain interjections accept annexation الاضافة which is a distinct characteristic of nouns as in 'عليك' (**keep to**) and 'وراءك' (**stay back**). Ibn Yaish (n. d.: 75) explains that the suffix 'ك', here, is obligatory when the interjection is originally 'quasi-preposition' شبه جملة i.e. adverbial or prepositional. He adds that this 'ك' is mostly vocative.

5. The interjection النجاءك (**to rescue**) can be prefixed by the definite article 'ال' (the). Ibn Jinni (1955:45) states that this article is nominal and not verbal.

On the other hand, interjections are categorized as verbs in the sense that they share verbs the following characteristics:

1. The semantic reference to verbs: most interjections denote 'request' or 'order' as: رويد (**to be kind**) and هلم (**to bring here**). In fact, they occur as imperatives or interrogatives. Ibn Yaish (n.d.: 28) states that those functioning as verbs have time reference as: هيهات (**far from it**) which refers to past and اف (**ugh**) which refers to present:

(48) هيهات هيهات لما توعدون" المؤمنون/36" Far, very far is that which ye are promised!

2. Interjections, like verbs, have explicit or implicit subjects in the nominative or accusative case:

(49) فلا تقل لهما أف ولا تنهرهما" الاسراء/23" Say not to them so much as ugh nor chide them.

The interjection أف (**ugh**) occurs in present, indicative mood and has the implicit subject 'you' in the nominative case.

As a result of the contrasted opinions shown above, interjections are different from other parts of speech in having these characteristics: (Owaish, 1982:63-6).

1. They are forms denoting emotions and expressing certain meanings like: surprise, pain, disgust, approval, disapproval, grief, sorrow, pity, sadness, warning and praising.

2. They are uninflected forms; hence, each should be recognized and studied independently and within the context.

3. Unlike verbs, they are aplastic صيغة جامدة i.e. they do not change their forms as regard to tense.

4. Number and gender are shown in explicit or implicit subjects that may appear in a context as in (46) or in the pronouns attached to certain interjections as in إليك (keep away), إليكما (dual), إليكم (plural),etc.

5. Unlike verbs, they are not preceded by certain articles which can precede verbs to refer to futurity as س in سيذهب (**will go**), قد in يذهب (**may go**) and سوف in سوف يذهب (**will go**). Such articles change verbs into accusative or jussive mood.

6. Unlike nouns, they do not usually accept nunation, annexation and the definite article ال (**the**), though certain forms are found in contexts as: صه (**silence**), بله زيد (leave **Zayd**) and النجاءك (**to be safe**).

7. They are not described as transitive or intransitive verbs, though nouns functioning as their subjects can be in the accusative case. This is due to the meaning of verbs they denote.

Consequently, Hassan (1974:117) classifies parts of speech, in Arabic, into: nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, articles and 'Al-khawalif' الخوالف (including interjections الأفعال). This classification depends on three modes: form, meaning and function.

Owaish (1982:226-7) states that interjections can be either simple forms i.e. 'single' as in the above examples or compound as in كذب عليك (**ought to do**) and هلم جرا (**go on**).

3.1 Form and Meaning of the Arabic Interjections

The following list shows the most commonly in use of interjections in Arabic and their relative meaning(s):

1. آ , أ : ألف النداء a particle of vocation.
2. أنت : expresses surprise.
3. أخ , إخ : both express grief, pity, sadness or sorrow.
4. رأيتك : (to tell , see):

4. Al-khawalif, in Arabic, is a newly recognized word class. Traditionally, they were referred to as forms of 'noun' or 'verb' since they carry some linguistic features of either class. Lately, they are separated as a unique part of speech having special characteristics which make them look different from nouns or verbs. Interjections, in English, on the other hand, are not clearly distinguished from other types of inserts (greetings, thanks, responses, discourse markers, etc). Certain reduced forms like **Yes, No, Sure, Certainly, and Definitely**. can be used as interjections.

5. Both English and Arabic interjections occur initially and are mostly followed by exclamation marks. But, in Arabic, they may occur in a noun position following the predicate: فدعوا نزال فكننت أول نازل.

6. They are, in both languages, uninflected forms, some of them in Arabic accept nunation: **صه**, **هلم**, **هلمما**, **هلموا**, **هلممن**; others can show number and gender: **عليك**, **مكاتكم** or annexation **ال** the interjection **النجاءك** which accepts the definite article **ال**.

7. The English interjections are single forms: '**oh, ouch, hey, oops**, etc'. In Arabic, they are either single as: **كذب عليك** and **هلم جرا**; **هيهات**, **بله**, **دونك** or compound as:

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