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Talking About Interjections[*]

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0. Introduction

In this article I present a framework for discussing the history of interjection studies. This framework is concerned with two aspects: linguistic theories, which for me is another word for ideological positions,[1] and general questions that can be asked about interjections. I will briefly sketch the theoretical frameworks, and then treat the questions in greater detail. To the end I will hint at some questions that have been neglected. At this moment I distinguish ten theoretical positions: 1. the classical position, 2. the romantic position, 3. the neogrammarian position, 4. the psychologizing position, 5. the structuralist position, 6. the discourse analysis approach, 7. the generative approach, 8. the (spoken) corpus linguistic approach, 9. the pragmatic approach, 10. the cognitive approach. Perhaps I should treat the number 10 as in the number of parts of speech, an ideal number that can vary according to our necessities.[2]

1. Approaches to interjections

1.1. The classical position

The first position is the classical position, dominant in the seventeenth century, for which the interjections belong to the periphery. In some cases this peripheral situation is shown by the extremely succinct information, such as the no more than 36 words of the *Grammaire de Port-Royal* (1660): 'Les interjections sont des mots qui ne signifient aussi rien hors de nous [just like the conjunctions): mais ce sont seulement

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[*] Slightly elaborated version of a paper given to the Joint Meeting 'Sprachlehre und Sprachpflege' of the Studienkreis Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft and the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas, Helsinki, 20.07.2007. Parts of the text have been presented at the TIN-dag 2006 at Utrecht. The author is a retired Italianist of the University of Utrecht.

[1] It is possible that such ideological positions coincide with discourse communities, in the sense of Andrew Linn's paper at the same conference. Cf. Linn (to appear in *Historiographia Linguistica*), where Linn puts this idea in writing. Rereading Karcevsksi (1941) I noted that he cites a discussion with Charles Bally and a correspondence with Nicolai S. Trubetzkoï about certain points. This suggests the existence of a discourse community of members of the later Geneva and Prague Schools in the interbellum years.

[2] Thus we could take together the pragmatic and the discourse analysis approach, and thus win space for the semiotic approach. Also we might consider other periods, such as the Latin grammarians, the Modists or the Renaissance period. And perhaps this framework lumps together authors who should be kept separate. All these matters would warrant further discussion in future articles .

des voix plus naturelles qu'artificielles, qui marquent les mouvements de nostre ame, comme b a , o , h e u , h e l a s , &c.'[3] This short text, however, gives the essential elements of the classical position: interjections don't refer to the outer world, they indicate soul states (the classical *affectus animi*), they are natural, that is spontaneous, as a kind of physiological reactions, and there are only four, striking, examples. Language is a prerogative of humans; animal sounds and other onomatopoetic elements are banished from the grammar. If we find an animal sound in the 17th century, it must be a survival from Renaissance linguistics. It is a Cartesian world, indeed.

1.2. The romantic position

The second position, which I will call the romantic position, is in absolute contrast to the classical one. The first sentence of Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Treatise on the Origin of Language, 1772) is: 'Schon als Tier hat der Mensch Sprache' ('Already as animals humans knew language'). This language is the immediate expression and communication of emotions, which we find in all primitive people, even in the Laplanders and Estonians of Europe. (Herder was born in Riga!) Primitive is for Herder a positive concept, opposed to the artificial language of bourgeois society, which, in his words, 'has stemmed, dried out and diverted the flood and the sea of the passions'.[4] These two elements, the word 'primitive' and the positive evaluation of primitive people, are typical indicators of the romantic position. We can hunt for the first manifestation of these aspects throughout the eighteenth century. And this position comes to an end when primitive becomes a negative epithet, and when the *Bildingsbürgertum*, so much despised by Herder, becomes a positive value.

      Perhaps we should give the Enlightenment a place of its own. If nature is the keyword for the classical position and primitive for the romantic position, we can execute a combined search and see the period both as a precursor of 'primitive' and as a development of 'nature'. In this context an interesting text is Nicolas Beauzée's article 'Interjection' in the Encyclopédie of Diderot and D'Alembert (around 1760). I will cite a short passage:

> Les interjections, mêmes telles qu'elles sont dans nos langues formées & articulées, ne s'apprennent pas par la simple audition & par l'intonation d'autrui; mais tout homme les tient de soi-même & de son propre sentiment; au moins dans ce qu'elles ont de radical & de significatif, qui est le même partout, quoiqu'il puisse y avoir quelque variété dans la terminaison. Elles sont courtes;

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[3] Buommattei (1643) follows another strategy to stress the marginal character of the interjections: he discusses whether conjunctions or interjections should be the last category, opting for the interjections, then he declares his intention to be brief because his readers by now will be tired, and he ends his list of examples with the words: *E altri. Ma questi bastino* ('And others. But these may suffice'). As in Port-Royal conjunctions and interjections are taken together as non-referential parts of speech.

[4] 'unsre bürgerliche Lebensart und gesellschaftliche Artigkeit mag die Flut und das Meer der Leidenschaften so gedämmet, ausgetrocknet und abgeleitet haben, als man will' (Herder 1762, § 1).

elles partent du mouvement machinal & tiennent partout à la langue primitive. Ce ne sont pas de simples mots, mais quelque chose de plus, puisqu'elles expriment le sentiment qu'on a d'une chose, & que par une simple voix promte, par un seul coup d'organe, elles peignent la maniere dont on s'en trouve intérieurement affecté. Toutes sont primitives, en quelque langue que ce soit, parce que toutes tiennent immédiatement à la fabrique générale de la machine organique, & au sentiment de la nature humaine, qui est partout le même dans les grands & premiers mouvemens corporels. Mais les interjections, quoique primitives, n'ont que peu de dérivés.La raison en est simple. Elles ne sont pas du langage de l'esprit, mais de celui du coeur; elles n'expriment pas les idées des objets extérieurs, mais les sentimens intérieurs.

In this citation the opposition between *naturel* and *artificiel* has been substituted by *langage du coeur* and *langage de la raison*. The *langage du coeur* expresses only internal sentiments, even before the child has conceptualized objects from the outer world. It has no syntax: syntax is the product of reasoning. We find here the word 'primitive', but not as an epithet of kinds of people, as in later texts, but as an epithet of language and of parts of speech: an initial stage of language. The typical contribution of the eighteenth century is *machinal*, seen as a synonym of *naturel*: instinctive reactions to sensations can be ascribed to *l'homme machine*. In the article on *Mot*, 'word', Beauzée elegantly distinguishes between the expressive and the communicative function of interjections:

Elles désignent dans celui qui s'en sert une affection, un sentiment; elles ne l'excitent pas dans l'ame de celui qui les entend, elles ne lui en présentent que l'idée. Vous conversez avec votre ami que la goutte retient au lit; tout-à-coup il vous interrompt par ahi, ahi! Ce cri arraché par la douleur est le signe naturel de l'existence de ce sentiment dans son ame, mais il n'indique aucune idée dans son esprit. Par rapport à vous, ce mot vous communique-t-il la même affection? Non; vous n'y tiendriez pas plus que votre ami, & vous deviendriez son écho: il ne fait naître en vous que l'idée de l'existence de ce sentiment douloureux dans votre ami, précisément comme s'il vous eût dit: voilà que je ressens une vive & subite douleur. La différence qu'il y a, c'est que vous êtes bien plus persuadé par le cri interjectif, que vous ne le seriez par la proposition froide que je viens d'y substituer […]: le langage du coeur se fait aussi entendre au coeur, quoique par occasion il éclaire l'esprit.

The cry expresses the pain the speaker feels, but it communicates only the knowledge that the speaker feels pain; it does not communicate the pain itself. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the hearer the extra value of the interjection is the creation of some emotion, perhaps compassion. We can contrast this view with the view of Sapir, who, in his semiotic context, distinguishes between the raw cry, which is a sign of the pain of the utterer, and the conventionalized interjection, which symbolizes the pain of the speaker and thus can communicate it. We can also picture the dentist's chair, where the patient uses the cry of pain as a means of communication, even before conventionalizing it as an interjection: it is not surprising that Tim Wharton (2000), for

whom any utterance has semantic content, draws many of his examples from the dentist's chair.

1.3. The psychologizing position of Wilhelm Wundt

The romantic position will be replaced in the course of the nineteenth century by two other positions, the neogrammarian one and the psychologizing one, represented respectively by Hermann Paul and Wilhelm Wundt. Later authors tend to confuse both positions, but Wundt and Paul polemicize with each other. For Wundt interjections belong to a pre-linguistic system, which is characteristic of all kinds of primitive people, both as a stage of humanity and as the initial stage of individual life. Some elements of this stage remain vital even when the linguistic system has been mastered. A rather similar position is held by Charles Darwin. His polemics against the neogrammarian Max Müller has a certain likeness to the discussions between Wundt and Paul.

1.4. The neogrammarian position

Paul refuses to speculate about the primitive stage of life, because as a philologist he is dependent on his documentation, which does not go back so far. He stresses his conviction that man has not changed: what might be different are the means at his disposal. Paul can't imagine very well the beginning of the communicative function of language: since language is a convention, it is difficult to understand how people without language can assign conventional meaning to its signs. This means that he takes the historical fiction of the deliberate creation of language for reality, just as critics of Rousseau's *Contrat social* consider this contract as a historical instead of a logical precedence. There seems to be an absolute break between animals and humans: animals don't communicate in our sense. Another aspect of Paul's approach is the mass of lexical detail he uses. When he wants to show that there is no essential difference between the linguistic creativity of primitive man and that of our contemporaries, he draws on onomatopoetic material and gives an enormous list of verbs and nouns indicating sounds, most of which constitute problems for the etymologist, and are thus a sign of recent creativity.

1.5. The structuralist position

The structuralist position proper develops in the 1930s, with several representatives, such as Karcevsky, Tesnière, in part Bally, and later the Dutch linguist A.W. de Groot. These studies distinguish themselves by a strictly synchronic approach: if the word 'primitive' is used it concerns more a layer in linguistic reality than a historical stage. We also note the wish to rethink the problems linked to the interjection. Both Karcevsky and Tesnière see interjections mainly as sentence types (*mots-phrase* or *phrasillons* in Tesnière's terms). Karcevski's article could be seen as an early attempt

to discuss interjections in terms of speech acts. He opposes phrases (= speech acts) to propositions (= sentences) and thus excludes them from syntax.[5] Both Karcevski and Tesnière take pains to distinguish interjections and onomatopoetic elements on a principled basis. Both establish a system of interjections: Karcevski develops a kind of feature system of the phonic side, drawing on the work of Trubetzkoï, Tesnière subdivides the content side, establishing a basic subdivision in four types: *phrasillons impulsifs, imitatifs* (representations of sounds), *impératifs* and *logiques* (e.g. yes/no); the *impulsifs* are then subdivided into *sensitifs, émotifs* and *intellectifs* (according to the opposition between body, soul and intellect), the *impératifs* into *phrasillons d'ordre, d'appel* and *de politesse* (according to the strength of the command), De Groot tends to distributive completeness; his treatment of phonological aspects mentions all possible combinations of consonants and vowels, with an ample exemplification. In this respect he is at the opposite of the classical position, which was very selective in its materials.

A late example of the structuralist approach is Mario Alinei's article on Dutch, English and Italian greeting expressions (see Alinei 1977). It has a very explicit feature analysis of the onomasiologic possibilities, which surely could be applied also to the more central types of interjections. Moreover, it is one of the few studies which adopts a contrastive method.[6]

1.6. The discourse analysis approach

The discourse analysis approach starts really in the 1950s, when interjections are studied in the framework of signals which articulate discourse. *Gliederungssignale* is the German term.[7] The main sectors taken into consideration are syntax and pragmatics. This approach is less interested in phonological detail: for people who want to analyse corpora the organizers establish transcription protocols; there is a standard representation for hesitation signals and analysts are not encouraged to transcribe intonational detail.

An early example of discourse analysis is Leo Spitzers study of spoken Italian (Spitzer, 1922). It is a study in the *Umgangssprache* tradition; his example is Hermann Wunderlich (1894). Since Spitzer's book will be lesser known in international linguistics, it might be useful to cite some of its features. Spitzer has a musical metaphor for interjections: *Die Interjektionen wirken wie absolute Musik*, especially as *Posaunentöne* ('trumpet sounds'). So he belongs to a small subset of authors that use

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[5] 'Phrase' is a unit of exchange in the dialogue; Karcevski states that there does not yet exist a general theory of dialogue.

[6] This discussion of the structuralist position is only a beginning. It might be useful to distinguish immediately between European and American structuralism. Moreover, there are many other authors who are worth considering, from Bühler to Jakobson. Also they are reacting critically against their immediate predecessors, which might be a topic in itself.

[7] This term was used for the first time in Gülich (1970: 9), in a study based on the corpus of oral speech used for the elaboration of *Le français fondamental* in the 1960s. Among the forms discussed are the interjections *ben* and *n'est-ce-pas*, but the discussion is distributional and the traditional parts of speech have no real function. This point may be characteristic of Discourse Analysis studies in general.

musical analogies for interjections; Sapir is another one – we have here a small subtopic in interjection studies. Spitzer's sources are theatre texts, which he defends alleging the objective character they convey to otherwise subjective registrations. But he also uses dialogues in novels and casual remarks of authors, such as Goethe's mention of the greeting *Felice notte*, in his *Italienische Reise*. As to documentation, Spitzer gives an early attestation of the use of *Hallo* in answering the telephone, citing an article of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of 27.1.1921, in which people are encouraged to avoid *Hallo* and to mention instead their names. Spitzer retorts that establishing contact and making yourself known are two distinct speech acts. This anecdote reflects the influence of technical progress on language use: obviously *Hallo* dates from the time in which succeeding to establish contact was an important feat in itself.

1.7. The generative approach

For the generative approach interjections are so peripheral as to be nearly non-existent. The only topic considered is syntax. Interjections are treated exclusively in frameworks that distinguish between the Sentence node and the Expression node and the main problem is where in the tree the interjection can be located. Examples are the work of Joe Emonds (e.g. Emonds, 1976), the articles of Deborah James (e.g. James, 1972), who incidentally thinks she is the first author to treat interjections, and an early article of Liliane Haegeman (Haegeman, 1984). Thus interjection studies confirm the caricature of a theory interested only in syntax, and not looking beyond its own backyard.

1.8. The corpus linguistic approach

The corpus linguistic approach, especially as regards spoken corpora, becomes important as large spoken corpora are available more and more languages. This approach exploits its strong points: the possibility to obtain frequency data and the discovery of favorite combinations.

1.9. The pragmatic approach

The pragmatic approach starts in the 1980s and is interested in the smallest details of language use: typical articles in this vein discuss the various uses of the hesitator *hm*, or the expression *aha*. There are two book-length studies: Konrad Ehlich's *Interjektionen* (1986) and Isabella Poggi's (1981) treatment of Italian which made its way also into the *Grande Grammatica di Consultazione* of Renzi and colleagues (Poggi, 1995). Most recent studies in France and Germany belong to this approach, especially because many pragmatics conferences take interjections as their theme, and

so give the practicians the occasion to continue working in this direction.[8] This framework is related to that of discourse analysis, but the methods used are more often introspective than based on documentation.

1.10 The cognitive approach

The cognitive approach, mainly represented by Wierzbicka and her followers, stresses the fact that all language elements, even interjections, have their notional counterparts. This approach imposed itself at the Conference of Buffalo 1990, whose results were published in the *Journal of Pragmatics* of 1992, in a series of very influential articles. Wierzbicka herself uses her well-known system of semantic paraphrases, based on a small group of primitives and expressed in very simple sentences.

1.11 Other possible approaches

In addition to these ten positions we can perhaps mention a semiotic approach. Sapir belongs to this approach: the raw cries he mentions in his *Language* (1921), are compared to a cloud, which is the sign of rain, whereas the real interjections are part of a symbolizing activity, whose relation to the emotions is compared with the relation between Rossini's musical representation of a storm and the storm itself. In a semiotic vein we should expect to find analogies between interjections and gestures, but I am not aware of any studies in that direction (There might be some material in sociobiology.) [9] Studies on interjections in comics, however, are more of a semiotic nature: they show interjections in other expressive forms, such as the autonymous use of the word *sigh* as a graphic interjection for sighing,[10] the gothic *Fraktur* characters for Teutonic insults, and the hieroglyphic swearwords of Astérix in Egypt.

There are also various eclectic descriptions. People who write standard grammars of a language incorporate ideologically dominant features of their times into a broad description based on a tradition; it would be interesting to compare these chapters, either trying to individuate the features, or at a more general level, to register

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[8] See for German the *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 26, 1/2, 2004, for French *Faits de langue,* 6, 1995, *Cahiers de praxématique,* 34, 2000 and *Langages,* 161, March 2006.

[9] Just a citation: '[…] the basic instinctive grunts, moans and screams that we share with other primates are not thrown out by our newly won verbal brilliance. Our inborn sound signals remain, and they retain their important roles. They not only provide the vocal foundation on which we can build our verbal skycraper; but they also exist in their own right, as species-typical communication devices. Unlike the verbal signals, they emerge without training and they mean the same in all cultures. The scream, the whimper, the laugh, the roar, the moan and the rhythmic crying convey the same message to everyone everywhere. Like the sounds of other animals, they relate to basic emotional moods and give us an immediate impression of the motivational state of the vocaliser. In the same way we have retained our instinctive expressions, the smile, the grin, the frown, the fixed stare, the panic face and the angry face. These, too, are common to all societies and persist despite the acquisition of many cultural gestures' (Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape*, 1967: 100-101)

[10] This interjection has interesting contrastive aspects. So the Italian version is a plain borrowing, pronounced /sai/, the Dutch one a loan translation, *zucht*. The latter is quite common to indicate a slight irritation.

the authors which are cited in the bibliography. For instance, the recent *Grammar* of the Rumanian Academy[11] has a very traditional chapter on interjections, but nevertheless it cites pragmatist Félix Ameka in its bibliography. There is also an interaction between specialists and generalists, either because a generalist feels the necessity to enter into the relevant discussions, or – in the case of the very big enterprises – by the fact that the editor invites a specialist for the chapter on interjections.

Finally there is the philological side, establishing which are the forms really used in a certain period, and discussing attestations. This aspect has not been very much developed – as we can see consulting dictionaries.[12] Diachronic developments are undervalued, and contrastive studies practically inexistent, which also holds for language contact approaches.

2. Questions to ask about interjections

2. 1. Opinions about the category of interjections

The first question we can ask about interjections concerns the category itself. It originates in Latin grammars, with a definition centered on the *affectus animi*, and the lack of semantic content; that is, interjections convey emotions and don't have a corresponding concept. Latin being the school language, the bias is literary (philological) and the examples cited belong to a small set corresponding to the occurrences in the comedies of Plautus and Terentius, authors frequently read and played in the Latin schools. Since everyone learned Latin at school, this framework has always been very strong: changing it used to be an act of rebellion. One of the minor research topics could be the form in which this rebellion has been expressed.

Mostly the classical definition has been adapted by extension. Animal sounds, excluded in the classical framework, could enter the picture via frog sounds, drawing on Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs*, with its chorus of frogs, chanting Βρεκεκέξ κοάξ κοάξ![13]

Not all interjections are emotional: other types could enter the discussion by viewing emotions as the prototype, or by creating other subtypes. As a good structuralist, Tesnière noted the need to do this and he expressed it graphically by the use of a wheel, the lower part of which is devoted to appeal functions. For the treatment of the other subtypes we find various strategies. You could exclude those categories, reducing them to separate classes of particles, or create an extended class of particles, which includes the interjections. This has been done by Longman's *Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999), a nice example of the spoken corpus linguistics approach, which has a class of inserts, corresponding to traditional

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[11] Gramatica Limbii Române, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2005.

[12] The situation seems to be improving. Thus the departing director of the the Dutch historical dictionary, Woordenboek van de Nederlandse Taal (WNT), Van Sterkenburg, dedicated his final address to the lexicographical aspect of interjections.

[13] Actually, Vossius, in his *Aristarchus* (1635), excluded implicitly animal sounds from human language, citing *The Frogs* as his (obviously well-known) example.

interjections in the broad sense, with nine subclasses, among which are the interjections in a narrow sense, defined as the emotional sounds. The subclasses are: Interjections (*oh! wow! oops!*), greetings and farewells (*Hi, See you*), discourse markers (*well, right, you see*), attention signals (*Hey you*), response elicitors (*eh? okay?*), response forms (*yes, no, okay, uh huh*), hesitators (*uh, erm*), various polite speech-act formulae (*You're welcome*) and expletives (*shit, bloody hell*).

2.2. The phonological questions

The second group of questions concerns the phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic/pragmatic aspects of interjections.

The phonological problem has two interesting aspects. The first is the paradox that on the one hand interjections contain sounds which are absent from 'normal' phonology of the language; on the other hand, every language has its standard representations of characteristic sounds, of the dog, the cat or the rooster, or of objects falling in water. These representations conform to the phonological system of the individual languages. Dutch roosters crow on the sound /y/, *kukeleku*, but in languages without rounded front vowels roosters use other vowels, such as *chiccherichi* for Italian roosters. And the whole page of sound-imitating verbs of Hermann Paul solidly remains within the phonological pattern of German.

The other phonological point is the reduction we observe in changes of categories, e.g. the reduction of *schiavo* to *ciao* in Italian:[14] this is not only a phonetic reduction of the word, but also the approximation of the preferred pattern for interjections. These reductions could be studied from both sides: from the source side, with the research question whether they conform to the typical reductions of allegro speech, and from the target side, where for instance German *Tschau* and *Tschüss* have similar sound patterns characteristic for interjections, irrespective of the different origins: Italian *schiavo* and French *adieu*.

2.3. Morphological and syntactic questions

Typical morphological problems are the composition of interjections, such as we observe in French *hé + las –> hélas*; reduplication effects, especially in swearwords (Dutch *godverdegodver*); and euphemistic substitutions, such as Italian *cavolo*, which means 'cabbage', for *cazzo*, the colloquial word for 'penis'.[15]

As to syntax, the most frequent examples are the local equivalents of *woe to*. These are threats; curiously we don't hear much about praise words, such as *Hail Mary*, and about the syntax of greeting formulae. In the classical view interjections don't have syntax, and can't govern case, and thus Beauzée in the *Encyclopédie* uses

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[14] See for this example Alinei (1991) and De Boer (1999). The greeting derives from the Venetian form of *schiavo* 'slave' or 'servant', which ultimately refers to the Slavonic populations of the early Middle-Ages as favorite suppliers of slaves.

[15] See De Boer (2000). In view of the three improbable etymologies given in the literature, I presented a semi-serious conjecture of my own, namely Caius, a Latin brother of English Dick and Peter.

the concept of ellipsis for the difference between *ecce homo* and *ecce hominem*, just as a century before Louis Meyer used ellipsis in his Italian Grammar.[16] How do less elliptically minded theories treat such cases?

2.4. Lexical, semantic and pragmatic questions

Lexical problems concern metaplasms (i.e., changes of category). This can go two ways: from other categories to interjections (and then the question is: do we have one or two words?), or from interjections to other categories (the adjectival use of *bloody*, or *damn*). Do these cases leave the domain of interjections, or can we talk about a kind of syntactic spreading of interjectional phenomena?

Semantic or pragmatic problems concern for instance the various uses of the interjections, such as *hm!* or *aha*! in various pronunciations. Many theories don't treat these problems, but especially the discourse analysis and the pragmatic approaches establish whole lists of uses.

2.5. Sociolinguistic aspects

The third group of questions concerns the sociolinguistic aspects, The romantic approach equates interjections with a primitive phase of humanity and associates older stages of our civilization with primitive peoples, lower orders, children and women. The principle seems to be that ontogeny repeats phylogeny, that is previous stages of humanity are reflected in the development from childhood to adulthood. Even if we don't share this view, it is obvious that there are differences between the uses of men and women, adults and children. Nineteenth-century authors seem to think that male *Bildungsbürger* don't use interjections. When I read this for the first time, I immediately checked this affirmation with the *Bildungsbürger* by excellence, Thomas Mann, and I found in the second line of his novel *Buddenbrooks* the utterance *Je, den Düwel ook, c'est la question, ma chère demoiselle*, with a reduced and an unreduced taboo-interjection of religious origin, and two kinds of code switching, to the dialect and to a foreign language, pronounced by *Großbürger* Johann Buddenbrook senior to his granddaughter. Politicians, such as Richard Nixon, with his deleted expletives, are well-known for their saucy language. But perhaps politicians belong to a more primitive category of people.[17]

Obviously, there is also variation alongside the other sociolinguistic categories: diatopical, diamesic, diaphasic and diastratic. The distinction between oral and written language is the most interesting one, because of changes in their relative importance:

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[16] See De Boer (2007) for this argument. Meyer has a relatively limited use of the ellipsis, of which I show the details.

[17] In my article *Le cazzate di Coliandro* (de Boer 2000) I studied the use of bad language in the mouth of detective author Carlo Lucarelli's character Coliandro, a rather low-class type of policemen, whose hero is Clint Eastwood. His language, rather undistinguishable from the language of the underworld, is particularly foul-mouthed: in this book I managed to note 108 attestations of the word *cazzo* used in twelve syntactic positions.

in comics, it is the written language that produces the most creative instances of interjections.

2.6. Philological questions

The fourth group of questions concerns philology. There is a clash between the forms cited in the grammars, and those that are really used. In seventeenth-century grammars we often find forms which existed already in Latin, but which are not found in texts of the period: my surmise is that they survived from school plays in the Latin school. Buommattei uses the *Decameron* of Boccaccio as his source of examples, but he does not mention whether these forms are still in use, in his days, 300 years later. But Boccaccio is a mighty source of examples, and since the book has been translated into many languages, we have here the possibility of approaching real use of the past in the languages of the translations.

I wonder whether the situation is much better nowadays. Can we use current grammars as sources of real use, or are people repeating every time the same old examples?

In any case, if we want to have a picture of the truthfulness of older studies, we have to do our own research about diachronic use. For this we have several types of approaches. I will cite two types of non-conformist research. The former is finding attestations in other languages than the language under study. If we consult the Middle Dutch Dictionary for the first attestation of the Dutch correspondent of welcome, we find *willecome* in a text from Brabant dated to 1265-1270. But the French *Roman de Renard*, dated half a century before, has the Fox greeting Tybert the Cat with the words *Tibert, huilcome*, using Flemish to make him feel at ease.[18] The editor of the text thinks that the fox spoke English, but given the setting of the story in Flemish territory, we can be sure this is one of the first attestations of this greeting in Medieval Dutch.[19]

The other type of approach is the use of oral recollection. This is an awkward method, because people tend to alter their memories. But I think it works well provided the emotions linked to the use of the word are strong enough. And thus I remember very well the word I used myself in the late 1940s when a car-driver opened his door just when I passed at great speed with my bike. The word was *kaffer*, nowadays very politically incorrect. It attests the survival of the strong impact of the Boer War in the Netherlands, half a century after it happened.[20]

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[18] *Roman de Renart*, edition Mario Roques, vss. 786-799. The episode told there is like a comedy, in which Renart utters his true feelings about the cat in an aside and then greets him with a loud voice saying friendly *Huilcome* in the local dialect that suggests an ancient community of interests between the beasts.

[19] The etymological dictionary of Greimas has a still older example from the *Jeu de Saint Nicolas* (dated by Greimas to 1190), which also comes from Flanders (the city of Arras).

[20] Already in the times of Vasco da Gama (1498) *cafre* was a non muslim black person from the Cafraria, i.e. South East Africa. Since the modern Portuguese Dictionary gives as one of the meanings *pessoa rude, bárbaro ou ignorante*, the insult must be very old and date from Portuguese times.

3. Conclusions

There is a great deal of literature on interjections, in and about various languages. Almost without exception these studies are intralinguistic studies: they mostly concern the author's own language. There is little comparison between languages. I think this is a pity, because many developments must be parallel: I cannot detach Venetian *ciao* from Viennese *Servus*. Moreover, many interjections travelled from one country to another. And they still do. A Dutch example for a strong negation, with 15 000 occurrences in Google is the sequence *niks, niente, nada*, combining the colloquial Dutch form with the Italian and the Spanish word. A borrowing supposes a channel and thus language contact. Speculating about where just these nations come together, the obvious answer is in sport circles: football, or the Tour de France. The first attestation is bound to belong to the sports press.[21]

In our global world, dominated by the English language, many English interjections find their way to other languages. They are badly documented. The WNT gives *oké*, in an article written in 2001, and knows the whole story of All Korrect and the presidential campaign of Martin van Buren in 1840.[22] But it does not give the slightest hint as to the date of its entrance into Dutch. The most recent travelling interjections, *oops* and *wow*, are penetrating the languages of the whole world, but there does not seem to be a comparative study on the respective dates of entry and on the phonological and graphic adaptation these words undergo.

In this paper I have tried to establish an overall framework, in which it is possible to talk about the many topics linked to the description of interjections. I hope it will be fruitful to consider various ideologically opposed positions, and I invite discussion of the criteria adopted. Moreover I hope the array of questions we can ask about interjections is broad enough to permit a thorough discussion of all kinds of questions of detail.

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[21] One of the correspondents of Sanders (2006) suggests a Papiamento origin (from the island of Curaçao) for the expression *nada di nada*. Still this leaves out the Italian part.

[22] Allen Walker Read dedicated several articles in *American speech* of 1963 and 1964 to the etymology of OK. He showed that it was an abbreviation of the facetious spelling Oll Korrect, invented in Boston in 1838, and then used in the presidential campaign of Van Buren, who came form Old Kinderhook, also abbreviated as OK. Although Read's articles have shown definitely the right answer, the discussions about *OK* are a nice illustration of the working of Gresham's Law ('Bad money drives out good money') in etymology: on the internet you can find all the discarded theories as possibilities from which people can freely choose their favorites. Obviously etymology is a field in which people prefer nice stories above documented evidence.

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