

# Typologizing Interjections

An all-day workshop organized by Maïa Ponsonnet, Aimée Lahaussais & Yvonne Treis  
Tue 21 November 2023, Dynamique Du Langage, Lyon

## What?

An all-day workshop to frame the “Typologizing Interjections” project, aiming for large joint publication that pioneers a worldwide semantic typology of interjections.

## When, where, how?

**Tue 21 November 2023**, 9am-5pm CET

Dynamique Du Langage, MSH-LSE, salle Elise Rivet, 14, avenue Berthelot, Lyon 7<sup>e</sup>

Hybrid: <https://cnrs.zoom.us/j/99988207656?pwd=OGU4Z0JScmJMOEFROFV6bDFTVnNDQT09>

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Funding: [ASLAN Interject1](#)

Check [Calendrier Dynamique du Langage](#) for updates

## Program

9.00am *Welcome to Dynamique du Langage*

9.30-10.10 Maïa Ponsonnet (CNRS DDL) Introduction (definitions, classifications, typology)

10.10-10.50 Mark Dingemans (Radboud Uni) Interjections at the heart of language

10.55-11.12 *Morning tea*

11.20-12.00 Yvonne Treis (CNRS LLACAN) Interjections in the Ethiopian linguistic area

12.00-1.30pm *Lunch*

1.30-2.10 Lameen Souag (CNRS LACITO) Interjections in Korandje (Algeria)

2.10-2.50 Aimée Lahaussais (CNRS HTL) Interjections in Kiranti language descriptions (Nepal)

2.50-3.10 *Afternoon tea*

3.10-3.50 Christian Döhler (BBAW) Interjections in Komzo (PNG)

3.50-4.30 Julie Marsault (CNRS HTL/Lbx EFL) Interjections in Umó<sup>h</sup>o<sup>n</sup> and Pá<sup>n</sup>ka (Nebraska and Oklahoma)

4.30-5.00 Discussion

## Background

Wilkins (1992: 124) seminally defined interjections as conventional lexical forms which frequently constitute utterances on their own, and rarely (or never) enter into constructions with other word classes. This syntactic independence probably explains why, despite their probable universality across the languages of the world (Wierzbicka 1999: 276) and their ubiquity in usage (Kockelman 2003), interjections remain understudied in linguistics (Dingemans 2017; forth; Colombat & Lahaussais 2019)

So far, a number of published case studies have described individual interjections, mostly within one single language (e.g. Schourup 2001; Evans 1992; Goddard 2014; Ponsonnet 2014; Levisen 2019 inter alia). As for typology, Ameka (1992) and Ameka & Wilkins (2006) devised seminal partitions of interjections, later adjusted by Heine (2023); and Ponsonnet (2023) has explored the semantic distribution of interjections in a sample of Aboriginal Australian languages. Beyond these foundational insights, much remains to be done regarding the typology of these key communicative resources.

Our “Typologizing Interjections” project aims to address this gap with the publication of an open access edited volume. This will include some framing articles (theory, methods, typology etc.), as well as a

larger number of shorter, descriptive contributions on the semantics and functions of interjections in individual languages across the world. To start this scientific conversation and joint research effort, we propose a one-day workshop accessible in hybrid mode. The first part of the day will feature framing contributions about the aims and underpinnings of the enterprise. The second part will host a small number of descriptive contributions presenting the semantic and functional distribution of interjections in individual languages across continents.

- Ameka, Felix. 1992. Interjections: The universal yet neglected part of speech. *Journal of Pragmatics* 18(2–3). 101–118.
- Ameka, Felix & David Wilkins. 2006. Interjections. In *Handbooks of Pragmatics 2006*, 1–22. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Colombat, Bernard & Aimée Lahaussais. 2019. *Histoire des parties du discours, Orbis/Supplementa 46*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Dingemanse, Mark. 2017. On the margins of language: Ideophones, interjections and dependencies in linguistic theory. In Nick J Enfield (ed.), *Dependencies in language*, 195–203. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Dingemanse, Mark. 2023. Interjections. In Eva Van Lier (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Word Classes*. Oxford University Press.
- Evans, Nicholas. 1992. “Wanjh! Bonj! Nja!”: Sequential organization and social deixis in Mayali interjections. *Journal of Pragmatics* 18(2–3). 101–118.
- Goddard, Clifford. 2014. Interjection and emotion. *Emotion Review* 6(1). 53–63.
- Heine, Bernd. 2023. *The grammar of interactives*. Oxford University Press.
- Kockelman, Paul. 2003. The meaning of interjections in Q’eqchi’ Maya: From emotive reaction to social discursive action. *Current Anthropology* 44(4). 467–490.
- Levisen, Carsten. 2019. Laughter Interjections. *Scandinavian Studies in Language* 10(1). 110–130. <https://doi.org/10.7146/sss.v10i1.114674>.
- Ponsonnet, Maïa. 2014. *The language of emotions: The case of Dalabon (Australia)*. John Benjamins.
- Ponsonnet, Maïa. 2023. Interjections. In Claire Bower (ed.), *The Oxford guide to Australian languages*, 564–572. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schourup, Lawrence. 2001. Rethinking well. *Journal of Pragmatics* 33(2001). 1025–1060.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. 1999. *Emotions across languages and cultures: Diversity and universals*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilkins, David. 1992. Interjections and deictics. *Journal of Pragmatics* 18(2–3). 119–158.

## Abstracts

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### Maïa Ponsonnet (CNRS DDL): Introduction

The ‘Typologizing Interjections’ workshop hopes to generate descriptive accounts of ‘systems’ of interjections in individual languages, so as to shed light on the typology of such systems. Accordingly, this introduction will broach a few methodological and epistemological questions inherent to the enterprise.

On the methodological front, I will propose a working definition of interjections (Wilkins 1992; Libert 2020), and solutions to operationalize it in descriptive or typological work. I will also discuss some methodological caveats to and tools for ‘typologizing’ interjections, including a review of the notions of ‘type’, ‘class’ and ‘set’ (Ameka 1992; Ameka & Wilkins 2006).

With respect to underlying scientific questions, I will identify two distinct alternatives to the historical perception of ‘interjections-as-expressive-black-boxes’ (Jakobson 1960; Dingemanse 2017; Colombat & Lahaussais 2019). One pathway repositions interjections into the interactional realm, away from expressivity (e.g. Kockelman 2003); another approach investigates the notion of expressivity and corresponding properties. These complementary angles both raise important questions that typological work on interjections can help us tackle.

- Ameka, Felix. 1992. Interjections: The universal yet neglected part of speech. *Journal of Pragmatics* 18(2–3). 101–118.
- Ameka, Felix & David Wilkins. 2006. Interjections. In *Handbooks of Pragmatics 2006*, 1–22. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Colombat, Bernard & Aimée Lahaussais. 2019. *Histoire des parties du discours, Orbis/Supplementa 46*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Dingemanse, Mark. 2017. On the margins of language: Ideophones, interjections and dependencies in linguistic theory. In Nick J Enfield (ed.), *Dependencies in language*, 195–203. Berlin: Language Science Press.

- Jakobson, Roman. 1960. Linguistics and poetics. In Thomas A Sebeok (ed.), *Style in language*, 350–377. MIT Press.
- Kockelman, Paul. 2003. The meaning of interjections in Q'eqchi' Maya: From emotive reaction to social discursive action. *Current Anthropology* 44(4). 467–490.
- Libert, Alan Reed. 2020. *Interjections and other parts of speech*. Peter Lang D. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b16446>
- Wilkins, David. 1992. Interjections and deictics. *Journal of Pragmatics* 18(2–3). 119–158.

### **Mark Dingemans (Radboud University): *Interjections at the heart of language***

Interjections are usually treated as peripheral to the language sciences. I review work from disparate disciplines that suggests an inversion of perspective: from interjections as marginal items to interjections at the heart of language. Around 1 out of every 8 turns in conversation is an interjection, and the most common ones are not the involuntary grunts that typically feature in examples, but instead a small set of agile and adaptive interactional tools that streamline everyday language use.

Continuers like “mmhm” help people co-construct complex interactional structures; repair initiators like “huh?” help people calibrate mutual understanding on-the-fly; and change-of-state tokens like “oh” display knowledge as it evolves in interaction. I provide some practical pointers for identifying and comparing key interactional resources using sequential methods (Dingemans 2023). I also discuss how metaphors shape our scientific practices and shape our theories. Received views variously cast interjections as a kind of pressure valve for our emotions; as primitive, involuntary grunts; or as linguistic fossils. I propose to complement these metaphors with more productive ways of thinking about interjections: interjections as words below the waterline; as scaffolds for the complexity of language; and as a swiss army knife of interactional competence.

Dingemans, Mark. 2023. “Interjections.” Edited by Eva van Lier. *The Oxford Handbook of Word Classes*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/ngcrs>

### **Yvonne Treis (CNRS-LLACAN): *Interjections in the Ethiopian Linguistic Area***

Against the backdrop of existing semantic typologies of interjections (Ameka 1992; Ameka & Wilkins 2006; Heine 2023; Ponsonnet 2023), this paper is a first attempt to systematize the interjections in the Ethiopian Linguistic Area and to investigate areal patterns in their meaning and form. Based on published data from grammars, theses and dictionaries of (mostly) Cushitic, Ethio-Semitic and Omotic languages as well as my own fieldwork data of Kambaata (Cushitic), it aims at determining which semantic categories are shared across the languages and what their organization and degree of elaboration is. It also raises the question of how commonly interjections of certain semantic domains are borrowed across the languages of the linguistic area.

Special emphasis is placed on animal-directed interjections, because several Ethiopian languages (among them Zargulla, see Azeb 2013) are known to have fairly diversified interjectional sets to chase away, to summon and to otherwise direct domestic animals of different species, sexes and ages.

Ameka, Felix K. 1992. Interjections: The universal yet neglected part of speech. *Journal of Pragmatics* 18. 101–118.

Ameka, Felix K. & David P. Wilkins. 2006. Interjections. In Jef Verschueren & Jan-Ola Östman (eds.), *Handbook of pragmatics*, 1–19. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hop.10.int12>

Azeb Amha. 2013. Directives to humans and to domestic animals: The imperative and some interjections in Zargulla. In Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle & Martine Vanhove (eds.), *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Cushitic and Omotic Languages*, Paris, 16–18 April 2008, 211–229. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe.

Heine, Bernd. 2023. *The grammar of interactives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192871497.001.0001>

Ponsonnet, Maia. 2023. [47.] Interjections. In Claire Bowern (ed.), *The Oxford guide to Australian languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### **Lameen Souag (CNRS Lacito): *Interjections in Korandje (Algeria)***

Korandje is an endangered Songhay language of Algeria with perhaps 3,000 speakers, whose inventory of interjections has not previously been studied. After briefly considering the comparative category of

“interjections”, and whether a corresponding emic category can be defined in Korandje, this talk will present an overview of the interjections attested in a transcribed audio corpus.

In contrast to onomatopoeia or ideophones, phatic interjections and hesitation markers are pervasive in the corpus studied, including some of the most frequent lexical items. Ritual adjacency pairs, prominent in greetings and etiquette, display a very different profile phonologically and functionally, and should probably not be considered as members of the same word class. Elicitation reveals a notably greater diversity of conative/imperative interjections than attested in conversational recordings, indicating the limits of the latter as a data source.

While some interjections cannot be given secure etymologies, most of those that can derive from Arabic, and clearcut retentions from Songhay are almost entirely absent; like many other aspects of its non-core lexicon, this word class has been profoundly reshaped by centuries of contact with Arabic. Nevertheless, while Korandje-Arabic bilinguals can in many respects be considered as using a single interjection system across both their languages, a few iconic items still help index language choice.

### **Aimée Lauhaussois (CNRS HTL): *Interjections in Kiranti language descriptions***

In an investigation of the place of interjections in grammars of Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal (Lauhaussois 2016), I concluded that, if present, interjections were only minimally so, in the form of a list of exemplars, sometimes with exemplification. None of the grammars presented typologies of functions or meanings.

In the current study, I focus more narrowly on grammatical descriptions of Kiranti languages, using a considerably larger database than in earlier work. I focus in particular in interjections present in my corpus of Thulung materials, which are a case study for the difficulties in categorizing interjections in these languages.

Lauhaussois, Aimée. 2016. Where have all the interjections gone? A look into the place of interjections in contemporary descriptions of endangered languages. In Carlos Assunção, Gonçalo Fernandes & Rolf Kemmler (eds.), *Tradition and Innovation in the History of Linguistics*, 186–195. Münster: Nodus Publikationen.

### **Christian Döhler (BBAW): *On interjections in Komnzo (PNG)***

We will share this abstract asap!

### **Julie Marsault (CNRS HTL, Labex EFL): *Interjections in Umó<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup> and Pá<sup>n</sup>ka***

In this talk, I will present interjections in Umó<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup> and Pá<sup>n</sup>ka, two varieties of a Siouan language traditionally spoken in Nebraska and Oklahoma (United States). I will mainly use archival data from the 19th century, but also contemporary didactic materials and my own fieldwork data (elicitation in 2023), documenting the variation in spelling observed in different (or sometimes the same) sources. Examples (1) to (3) illustrate several interjections. Interjections are one of the word categories where men and women’s speech differ, as we can see in (2) and (3).

- (1) *í-chi-chi* “cry when burnt: ouch ouch ouch!” (OLIT-UNL 2018:311)

*I-ch<sup>h</sup>i-ch<sup>h</sup>íiii!*    *Ko<sup>n</sup>há,*    *náthi<sup>n</sup>ge-xti=mó<sup>n</sup>*    *há,*    *á=biamá.*  
INTERJ    grand\_mother.VOC burnt\_to\_nothing-INTENS=AUX.1SG DECL.M say=PX.REPORT  
“I am burnt. O, grandmother! the heat has left nothing of me,” said he. (Dorsey 1890:14.3)

- (2) *mmmm* “female interjection of surprise” (Dorsey n.d.)

*Mmmmm!*    *á=biamá.*    *Eát<sup>h</sup>o<sup>n</sup>-xchi*    *mo<sup>n</sup>hni<sup>n</sup>*    *a,*    *á=biamá.*  
INTERJ say=PX.REPORT why-INTENS    A2.walk    Q    say=PX.REPORT  
“Mmmm! on what very important business are you traveling?” [she said]. (Dorsey 1890:27.8)

- (3) *wa* “yikes! Eek! said by men (women say *í<sup>n</sup>*). Both *wá!* and *Í<sup>n</sup>!* are uttered forcefully and then

quickly cut off.” (OLIT-UNL 2018:311)

My presentation will include onomatopoeias because of their morpho-syntactic resemblance to interjections. In (4) and (5), the onomatopoeia *k'ú* “whirring sound made by the wings of a bird rising suddenly from the ground” (Dorsey n.d.) is used in different syntactic contexts.

- (4) *K'ǔ!* *ó<sup>h</sup>e* *athá=biamá.*  
ONOM flee go=PL.REPORT  
"K'u!" They went fleeing. (Dorsey 1890:61.15)
- (5) “*Kuuuuu!*” *é* *go<sup>n</sup>,* *gió<sup>n</sup>* *athá=biamá.*  
ONOM say as fly go=PL.REPORT  
Off they flew with a whirring sound. (Dorsey 1890:578.6)

Finally, I will comment on my experience when eliciting interjections from a group of the very last Umó<sup>h</sup>o<sup>n</sup> speakers – elderly people who remember the language in which they were immersed in their youth, and became English-dominant speakers as the community underwent language shift.

Dorsey, James O. 1890. *The Čegiha Language*, Contributions to North American Ethnology, Vol 6. Washington, D. C., U.S. Government.

Dorsey, James O. n.d. *A Grammar and Dictionary of the Ponca Language by the Reverend J. Owen Dorsey*. Manuscript non publié.

OLIT-UNL. 2018. Part II: Lessons from the Omaha Language Class at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In ULCC & OLIT, Umó<sup>h</sup>o<sup>n</sup> Íye t<sup>h</sup>e, Umó<sup>h</sup>o<sup>n</sup> Úshko<sup>n</sup>-t<sup>h</sup>e: *The Omaha Language and the Omaha Way. An Introduction to Omaha Language and Culture*, 243-636. University of Nebraska Press. Contributors from the Omaha Language Instruction Team : Mark Awakuni-Swetland, Rory Larson, Alberta Grant Canby, Emmaline Walker Sanchez, Arlene Walker, Delores Black, Aubrey Streit Krug (2014-16), Loren Frerichs