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On the origin and meaning of secondary interjections: A relevance-theoretic proposal

1. Introduction

Interjections are linguistic elements that individuals use to express mental states, attitudes or reactions to perceived stimuli. Quite often, they are seen as instinctive, involuntary or uncontrolled verbalisations, i.e. quasi-reflexes (Nicoloff 1990, 214), owing to their almost automatic and/or unconscious production. However, in many cases interjections are not produced instinctively (Światkowska 2006), but fully intentionally in ostensive-inferential communication. With them, speakers try to make manifest in a more or less precise way a certain informative intention amounting to assumptions about feelings, emotions or attitudes which they experience because of or project to some state(s) of affairs. In these cases, the production of interjections involves a conscious evaluation of the spatio-temporal setting of a conversation or specific elements thereof, and the selection of an item from among a more or less wide set of possible candidates on the basis of its suitability for what speakers want to express.

The peculiar and anomalous formal features of interjections have confused grammarians throughout history and led some to regard them as peripheral linguistic elements (Quirk, et al. 1985). Their lack of constant meaning and context-boundedness has also induced others to doubt their status as words. This might justify why interjections have received so little attention over the years. In fact, it was not until the publication of special issues of *Journal of Pragmatics* and *Langages* in 1992 and 2006, respectively, and a series of studies from different frameworks that they have progressively attracted more attention. Among those frameworks has been relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004), where researchers have examined what interjections communicate and how they contribute to communication (Wharton 2003, 2009; Wałaszewska 2004; Blakemore 2010, 2011; Padilla Cruz 2009a, 2009b, 2010).

This paper does not focus on the whole class of interjections, but just on a sub-type of them: 'secondary' interjections. These are linguistic elements which, borrowed from other word-classes, such as nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs, are frequently used to communicate feelings, emotions or attitudes. The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to propose an account of the origin of secondary interjections grounded on relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004). More specifically, it purports to explain why lexical elements belonging to distinct word-classes can be transferred to that of interjections. Secondly, it tries to suggest an explanation of the wide expressive potential of secondary interjections.

This paper starts by summarising some of the general characteristics of interjections and explaining what primary and secondary interjections are. Next, its third section reviews recent research on interjections. Then, it introduces the relevance-theoretic approach to concepts and lexical pragmatic processes, on which the proposal about the origin of secondary interjections and their expressive potential made in this paper rests squarely. This is presented in its fifth section, which tries to elucidate if the members of the word-classes from which secondary interjections undergo the same lexical pragmatic processes and why the resulting interjections may have differing expressive meanings. Finally, the concluding section summarises its main claims and suggests some directions for future research.

2. General characteristics and types of interjections

Interjections are normally considered paralinguistic elements because of their phonological and morphological anomalies, their relative syntactic independence, and their occurrence in discourse accompanying other linguistic chunks. This consideration has resulted in a historical lack of agreement as

to whether they are one of the traditional word-classes or parts of speech¹. As opposed to linguists who do not include interjections among their word-classes (Huddleston 1988), for those who do so interjections are an ‘open’ (Buridant 2006) or ‘closed’ class (Quirk, et al. 1972; Quirk and Greenbaum 1973; Quirk, et al. 1985; Greenbaum 2000), depending on the possibility to incorporate new items². Their class consists of language- and culture-specific items which express emotions and other modalities, whose most remarkable phonological, morphological, semantic, syntactic traits are the following (Quirk, et al. 1972, 1985; Wierzbicka 1991, 1992; Ameka 1992, 2006; Aijmer 2004)³:

1. They do not tend to be homophonous or homonymous with other lexical items and their peculiar phonological layout places them outside the regular linguistic system⁴.
2. They usually are monomorphemic and invariable, as they do not receive inflectional or derivational affixes⁵.
3. They do not have denotative, but indexical meaning, i.e. they behave as pointing devices that signal elements in the external reality.
4. They normally appear as stand-alone utterances or independent tone units, so they are loosely attached to the rest of the constituents of a sentence.

This broad formal characterisation has led authors to gather under the label of interjections words that express emotions (1), words and expressions used to carry out some conversational routines (2), expletives, swear words and imprecations (3), attention-getting signals (4), some particles and response words (5), words directed at animals (6), and onomatopoeias (7) (Wierzbicka 1991, 1992; Ameka 2006; Gehweiler 2008)⁶:

- (1) Yuk! Ugh! Phew! Wow! Oh! ¡Huy! ¡Ah!
- (2) Hello! Thank you! Good bye! Ok! ¡Hola! ¡Gracias! ¡Adiós! ¡Vale!
- (3) Shit! Bastard! Hell! Jesus! God! Christ! ¡Mierda! ¡Hostia! ¡Coño! ¡Jesús! ¡Dios! ¡Señor!
- (4) Hey! Psst! Eh! Look! ¡Ojo! ¡Mira! ¡Oye!
- (5) Yes! No! ¡Sí! ¡No!
- (6) Whoa! ¡Arre!
- (7) Hehe! ¡Jeje!

Those monomorphemic interjections which are not homophonous or homonymous with other words, constitute independent, non-elliptical utterances and do not co-occur with other word classes are normally alluded to as ‘primary’ interjections (Wierzbicka 1991, 1992; Ameka 1992, 2006). Goffman (1981) called them ‘response cries’. In contrast, those words which behave as interjections, even if not sharing all their prototypical characteristics, are transferred from other word-classes, have an independent semantic value and are also used as non-elliptical utterances to express a mental state are ‘secondary’ interjections. Within this broader category a further distinction can be made between ‘simple’ secondary interjections – i.e. only one item– exemplified by calls of alert or attention (8) or some swear words and imprecations (9), and ‘interjectional phrases’ (10) –i.e. with phrasal structure (Hill 1992; Wilkins 1992):

- (8) Help! Fire! Careful!
- (9) Dam! Hell! Heavens! Fuck! Shit!

¹ The word-class classification was firstly made by Dionysius Thrax in the 2nd century B.C. for Classical Greek. Based on a series of morphological, syntactic and semantic properties, it distinguished eight word-classes: nouns, verbs, participles, articles, pronouns, prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions. It was later on modified by Apollonius Dyscolus and Priscian in order to adapt it to Latin. Having Latin no articles, these grammarians replaced that class by interjections in order to preserve the initial number of classes. For a review, see Buridant (2006).

² Quirk et al. (1985, 67) consider interjections a marginal and anomalous word-class, the other classes being closed (prepositions, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, modal verbs and primary verbs), open (nouns, adjectives, full verbs and adverbs) and numerals.

³ See López Bobo (2002) for a comparison between interjections and conjunctions, sentential adverbs, imperatives or vocatives.

⁴ Although many interjections are monosyllabic, others are non-syllabic (‘tsktsk!’ ,‘shh!’), contain unusual sounds (e.g. the dento-alveolar click in ‘tut-tut’) or sound combinations in a language (e.g. the bilabial vibrant in ‘brrr!’), show iteration (e.g. the Spanish interjection ‘ayyyyyyy!’) or reduplication (e.g. the Spanish interjections ‘jayayay!’ or ‘¡huyhuyhuy!’) (Gehweiler 2008, 73).

⁵ However, when interjections are converted into nouns or verbs, they can receive inflectional morphology (Greenbaum 2000, 183). For instance, ‘pooh-pooh’ and ‘wow’, which can be verbs, or ‘boo’ and ‘tut-tut’, which can be nouns or verbs, can take third person singular and preterit or plural morphemes.

⁶ Examples are given in English and Spanish.

(10) Bloody hell! Dear me! My Goodness! My God!

Swear words and imprecations are also known as ‘expletives’. They are further sub-divided into ‘taboo expletives’, i.e. with homonyms connected to taboo areas of religion, sex or excretions; ‘moderated expletives’, which somehow camouflage their taboo origin (e.g. ‘gee!’), and ‘euphemistic taboo expletives’, i.e. with homonyms that are not their base forms (e.g. ‘goodness!’) (Biber, et al. 1999, 1094; Gehweiler 2008, 73-74).

If compared to primary ones, secondary interjections are more creative and open to newcomers from the word-classes of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs (Quirk, et al. 1985, 74; Buridant 2006, 7). This is the type of interjections that this paper centres on. It excludes from discussion both moderated and euphemistic taboo expletives, as an account of their origin and meaning would have to address historical considerations and would hence exceed the scope of this paper by far. More specifically, this paper tries to explain which lexical process(es) might make it possible for some words initially belonging to other categories to enter that of secondary interjections.

3. Contributions on interjections

In spite of their historical neglect, the word-class of interjections has recently awoken the interest of researchers from different linguistic disciplines. Over the last years they have undertaken rather illuminating descriptive and contrastive studies on, for example, the usage and peculiarities of interjections in certain languages (Eastman 1992; Aijmer 2004), their values and functions in specific interactional contexts (O’Connell and Kowal 2005; O’Connell, Kowal, and Ageneau 2005; Shenhav 2008) or judgements about individuals’ verbal fluency depending on their presence in speech (Hegde and Hartman 1979). Researchers have also carried out developmental studies on their acquisition by children and their progressive incorporation in speech (Meng and Schrabback 1999; Montes 1999).

Relevance theorists have not been oblivious to interjections either. Relying on the procedural and conceptual distinction (Blakemore 1992; Wilson and Sperber 1993), Wharton (2003, 2009) re-analysed them in procedural terms. In his view, interjections would not encode conceptual content or contribute to the truth-conditional content of utterances, but a procedural meaning that would assist hearers in the construction of higher-level explicatures concerning the emotion, feeling or attitude that the speaker expresses. This re-analysis of interjections has been the basis for Blakemore’s (2010, 2011) work on the ineffability of their expressive meaning, according to which they would work very much like gestures and tones of voice, giving rise to cognitive effects that are weakly communicated.

Wharton’s (2003, 2009) re-analysis has been questioned by Wałaszewska (2004) and Padilla Cruz (2009a, 2009b, 2010), who doubt that interjections only contribute to higher-level explicatures in those cases in which there is no lower-level explicature. Padilla Cruz (2009a) reinterprets their procedural meaning as instructions that would make the hearer look for the stimulus that causes the feeling the speaker expresses or the person, object or event to which the speaker projects it. As regards the non-conceptuality of interjections, Padilla Cruz (2009b, 2010) has given some reasons to reconsider their conceptual content and suggested that they might encode very general concepts amenable to pragmatic adjustments.

Regarding secondary interjections, a fruitful strand of research has looked into their sociolinguistic distribution and peculiarities in some languages and varieties (Cestero Mancera and Moreno Fernández 2008; Mayol 2008a, 2008b; Tsibulsky 2008; Ljung 2009), their meaning in situational, discourse and social contexts (Kochelman 2003) or their usage as discourse markers (Brinton 1996; Norrick 2009). Nevertheless, the origin of secondary interjections has received scarce attention. Apart from historical explanations of some language-specific items in terms of phonological evolution (van der Hoek 2007), extant accounts agree that secondary interjections arise after a gradual process of ‘grammaticalisation’ by means of which the lexical entries of the items originating them acquire a new grammatical and morphological status. This process progressively causes the semantic content of those items to become more abstract and general, thus enabling them to communicate notions or messages about emotions, feelings and attitudes (Traugott 1989, 1995; Hopper 1991; Hopper and Traugott 1993; Oppermann-Marsaux 2008). This process of grammaticalisation is linked to another of ‘subjectification’ (Traugott 1992, 1995), as a result of which words that initially encoded concepts and contributed to truth-conditional content acquire new functions that allow recovering the speaker’s attitude. The resulting secondary interjections have a diverse communicative potential, can appear in different discourse contexts and become rather fixed expressions, since their constituents cannot be altered or replaced by others

(López Bobo 2002; Buridant 2006).

An example is Gehweiler's (2008) account of the origin of 'gee!' from 'Jesus'. Relying on Traugott and Dasher's (2002) 'Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change', she shows that 'Jesus' firstly gave rise to a homonymous secondary interjection which foregrounded a pragmatic meaning, while "[...] the original semantic component, the reference to the religious person, was backgrounded and eventually lost" (Gehweiler 2008, 83). Initiated by speakers and motivated by the occurrence of the original proper name in non-religious contexts as an invocation, this process deprived that name of coded meaning and resulted in the item having utterance-token meanings, pragmatically polysemous meanings and new semantically polysemous meanings (cf. Traugott and Dasher 2002, 35). Nevertheless, since the proper name and the expletive were homophonous, speakers might have established some connection between the latter and the religious person referred to by the originating proper name (Gehweiler 2008, 74).

However, this account does not clarify what triggers grammaticalisation and subjectification processes or what makes it possible for some lexical items to shift grammatical category and enter that of interjections. The answer to these problems could be sought in lexical processes undergone by some items under certain circumstances. If so, which specific lexical processes could enact the transfer of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs to the word-class of interjections? And, more specifically, would items belonging to diverse classes undergo the same process(es), or would different processes affect them? And still a further problem: when lexical items from different word-classes are transferred to that of interjections, do they stabilise in the latter with one meaning or may they be used to express different emotions, feelings and attitudes? If the latter option is true, how may this be possible? What follows attempts to suggest possible answers on the basis of some relevance-theoretic postulates on concepts and lexical pragmatic processes, which the next section summarises.

4. Relevance theory and concepts

4.1. Words and concepts

Like Fodor (1998), relevance theory claims that mental concepts may have words as their natural language counterpart. It portrays the mental concepts encoded by words as (i) atomic rather than decompositional⁷, (ii) lacking definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient component features, and (iii) not structured around prototypes. Atomic concepts consist of an address in memory, which gives access to varied information stored in three types of entries:

- a) The 'logical entry', or the small, finite and relatively stable set of defining properties of the concept. It specifies its logical relations with other concepts (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 92).
- b) The 'encyclopaedic entry', or information about the extension and/or denotation of the concept, as well as diverse assumptions and personal experience organised in schemas, scenarios, scripts, etc. Its content varies across speakers and times because it can receive new information at any time, whose storage depends on factors like recentness, saliency, easiness or difficulty of accessibility of its items (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 93).
- c) The 'lexical entry', which includes phonetic and grammatical properties of the word corresponding to the concept (Carston 2002, 321-322)⁸.

Many atomic concepts have these three entries, but others lack one of them. For instance, 'and' encodes a concept that has no extension and so lacks encyclopaedic entry, and proper names have an empty logical entry because they do not have logical properties (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 92; Carston 2002, 322). Moreover, correspondences between natural language words and mental concepts are not

⁷ See Hall (2011) for a detailed explanation of concept atomism.

⁸ In his 'Dynamic Model of Meaning', Kecskes (2004, 2008) argues that the meaning of a word consists of 'coresense', or its relatively stable denotation; 'culture-specific conceptual properties', or idiosyncratic information associated with the word by members of a cultural group; 'word-specific semantic properties', or the lexical properties of the word, and 'consense', or its actual contextual meaning (Kecskes 2008, 393-395). Coresense and culture-specific conceptual properties would correspond to the encyclopaedic entry of a concept, while word-specific semantic properties would correspond to the information contained in the lexical entry. In Kecskes's (2004, 2008) model there is no such thing as the logical entry. Besides, the consense would be the result of conceptual adjustment of a word. Owing to the simplicity and explanatory potential of the relevance-theoretic description of concepts, this work will adhere to it.

always accurate (Sperber and Wilson 1997; Carston 2002). Some concepts do not map onto just one single word, but onto different words: synonyms. For other differing concepts natural languages only have one single word: homonyms. Still, other concepts cannot be effable through natural language words, but through linguistic structures, like phrases or idioms: complex concepts, whose meanings are determined (at least in part) compositionally. Finally, there are words, like personal pronouns, onto which no concept is mapped; they encode procedures and behave as slot fillers. At the most, they encode some very general conceptual content which must be pragmatically determined: a 'pro-concept' that needs fleshing out into a full concept (Wilson and Sperber 1993; Sperber and Wilson 1997; Wilson 1997).

Sperber and Wilson (1997) make an even more radical claim: words must be seen as not encoding precise, fully determined concepts but pro-concepts that require pragmatic adjustment in order to be specified or restricted. Accordingly, pro-concepts are so common that "[...] all words behave *as if* they encoded pro-concepts" (Sperber and Wilson 1997, 108; emphasis in the original). Since words encode pro-concepts, they behave as "[...] pointers to a conceptual space, on the basis of which [...] an actual concept [...] is pragmatically inferred" (Carston 2002, 360). Then, the concept associated with a word is merely considered a clue to the actual concept that the speaker intends to communicate when using that word. Accordingly, almost any content word, even if linguistically unambiguous, can communicate distinct, though related, meanings in different contexts (Sperber and Wilson 1997; Carston and Powell 2005). This seems to be the case of some verbs like 'put', 'take' or 'make', and adjectives like 'long' or 'empty'⁹.

This might also be the case of words liable to be transferred to the sub-type of secondary interjections. When using some words, speakers can convey non-lexicalised concepts or concepts not strictly related to the ones customarily associated with them. They may do so on the grounds of the information contained in the logical and encyclopaedic entries of those concepts. Speakers would trust hearers to work out the occasion-specific concepts by tracing the resemblance relations holding between the concepts customarily associated with those words and the new concepts they intend to communicate (Carston 2002). To put it differently, when some words are used, the concepts that they lexically encode would trigger a pragmatic process which, guided by expectations of relevance, yields different concepts. The resulting concepts may be narrower or broader than those initially encoded, so they are 'ad-hoc concepts' (Carston 2002). Their construction requires the interaction of information contained in the logical and encyclopaedic entries of lexically encoded concepts with contextual information and is accomplished as a consequence of the constant search for the optimal relevance of utterances. Hall (2011, 2) underscores that ad-hoc concepts are not "[...] already established elements of the subject's conceptual repertoire, but new concepts constructed in the comprehension process, [...] genuinely novel ones".

4.2. Ad-hoc concept construction

Relevance theory distinguishes two main types of ad-hoc concept construction: 'narrowing' and 'broadening' (Carston 1997, 2002; Wilson 2004; Sperber and Wilson 2008; Wilson and Carston 2006, 2007). Narrowing occurs when the linguistically specified denotation of a word is restricted and the word conveys "[...] a more specific sense than the encoded one" (Wilson 2004, 344). It operates by limiting the denotation of the lexically encoded concept to just a subpart of it (Carston and Powell 2005, 283). As a result, the word preserves its literal meaning because none of the logical properties of its lexicalised concept has been altered or dropped (Hall 2011, 2; Wałaszewska 2011, 317), but one or some components of its encyclopaedic entry is highlighted and elevated to "[...] a logical (or content-constitutive) status" in the resulting ad-hoc concept (Carston 2002, 339).

On the other hand, broadening takes place when the linguistically encoded denotation of a word is expanded and the word conveys "[...] a more general sense than the encoded one [...]" (Wilson and Carston 2007, 234). While narrowing preserves literalness, broadening does not, as one or more of the logical properties of the concept can be dropped (Hall 2011, 4; Wałaszewska 2011, 318). The resulting ad-hoc concept may go well beyond the boundaries of the lexically encoded concept. Depending on the extent to which the ad-hoc concept exceeds those boundaries, four varieties of broadening may be distinguished, which form a continuum:

- a) 'Approximation', in which "[...] a word with a relatively strict sense is extended to a penumbra of items [...] that strictly speaking fall outside its linguistically specified denotation" (Sperber

⁹ In the case of verbs like these, individuals might have several distinct concepts, so the one actually retrieved on a specific occasion could also depend, among other factors, on their direct objects (Hall 2011, 2).

and Wilson 2008, 91). Examples of approximation are loose uses of round numbers (11) or geometric figures and shapes (12):

(11) Peter earns €2000 a month.

(12) Spain is a bull skin.

- b) ‘Category extension’, in which a word with a particular sense and denotation is extended “[...] to a range of items that clearly fall outside its linguistically specified denotation” (Sperber and Wilson 2008, 91). Through this type of broadening, one or some defining or characteristic properties of a concept are applied to a set of items whose features somehow resemble that/those of the concept in question. Typical examples are the use of brand names or proper names for items of different brands:

(13) Have you got a Kleenex?

(14) He Xeroxed all the documents for me.

- c) ‘Hyperbole’, “[...] a more substantial broadening of the lexically encoded concept than approximation” (Wałaszewska 2011, 318) because the resulting concept can denote items of a diverse class by virtue of their having some similar or adjacent properties (Vega Moreno 2007, 48).

(15) The mall was full of people. [There were crowds of people, but it was not literally full]

- d) ‘Metaphor’, which involves a broadening on the basis of relatively peripheral or at least contingent properties (Vega Moreno 2007, 48; Wałaszewska 2011, 318):

(16) John is a lion/chameleon/shark/bull/George Clooney.

Secondary interjections originate in word-classes whose items have conceptual content. The reason why those items can enter the class of interjections and, therefore, be used with a different expressive potential might reside in their concepts undergoing one of these lexical pragmatic processes, namely, broadening. But would the items of each word-class undergo the same type of broadening? And more importantly, what would enact the broadening of the encoded concept? The following section addresses these issues. It seeks to find answers by comparing the transfer of lexical items into the class of interjections to some lexical phenomena characteristic of children’s language.

5. Secondary interjections: A relevance-theoretic account

Secondary interjections originate in lexical items belonging to word-classes like nouns (17), verbs (18), adjectives (19) or adverbs (20):

(17) Hell! Heavens! God! ;Hostia! ;Coño!

(18) Fuck! Come on! ;Joder! ;Anda!

(19) Good! Great! ;Bueno! ;Estupendo!

(20) Well! ;Bien!

Items initially belonging to those word-classes encode concepts, even if very general conceptual schemas or pro-concepts requiring subsequent adjustments. For those items to be transferred to the class of interjections, the (pro-)concepts they initially encode would undergo a process of broadening, as a consequence of which they would convey an even more general, diffused or vaguer meaning and get their linguistic denotation (significantly) expanded. From encoding concepts denoting individuals, objects, actions, qualities, etc., nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs would progressively get their denotation so loosened that they would refer to emotions, feelings or attitudes, either because such individuals, objects, actions, qualities, etc. cause those emotions, feelings or attitudes, or because such emotions, feelings or attitudes can be projected towards them.

The encyclopaedic entries of the concepts initially encoded by the items giving rise to secondary interjections could contain information about stereotypical properties, even if very marginal, of the

individuals, objects, actions or events to which those concepts are applied (cf. Gehweiler 2008). As a result of previous personal experience, those entries could also store information concerning emotions, feelings or attitudes associated with those concepts (cf. Kecskes 2004, 2008), either because their denotatum causes or has caused them or because individuals have projected them towards their denotatum. Obviously, the range of emotions, feelings and attitudes associated with those initial concepts would vary across individuals. For instance, the encyclopaedic entry of SHIT might connect the concept with emotions or feelings like disgust, repulsion, etc.; that of GOOD with feelings like wellness, pleasure, delight, approval, etc., and that of FUCK with feelings of disappointment, anger, frustration, wrath, etc. The association of those concepts with such feelings may also enable the words onto which they map to be used metaphorically or hyperbolically (more on this below).

When broadened, those initial concepts could shift towards more marginal, but somehow related, properties or emotions associated with them or to emotions, feelings or attitudes that somehow resemble their properties in some respects, thus progressively becoming fuzzier and more inclusive. Consequently, the items originating secondary interjections would instead become pointers to conceptual spaces related to the realm of emotions, feelings or attitudes. In other words, the meaning of those items would shift from individuals, objects, actions, characteristics or manners of actions, to more abstract meanings more or less loosely linked to their properties or to feelings, emotions or attitudes which they can cause or can be projected to them. When used as secondary interjections, those lexical items would only be a clue to an emotional concept that the hearer would have to construct on the fly by taking into account factors such as paralanguage. That concept could be in some cases a highly context-bound occasion-specific concept, whereas in others that concept could be more stable, inasmuch as it would point to the same type of emotions or feelings.

Some interjections might encode very general, broad, overarching, fuzzy concepts like EMOTION, FEELING or ATTITUDE. Other interjections might encode less general concepts like HAPPINESS or SADNESS corresponding to major types of emotions (Damasio 1994; Goleman 1995), which would be sub-types of those general fuzzy concepts. Still, other interjections might encode less broad concepts, like EUPHORIA, JOY, MELANCHOLY, DEPRESSION, DISAPPOINTMENT, etc., which would in turn be sub-types of the major types of emotions. These concepts would need subsequent adjustments on the basis of factors such as intensity or degree of the emotion experienced or expressed (Padilla Cruz 2009b, 2010). When the conceptual content of items originating secondary interjections is broadened, it might shift towards those kinds of (pro-)concepts. Maybe, the concepts encoded by some of those items are broadened in the direction of very general and broad concepts related to emotions, while those encoded by other items are broadened in the direction of more specific concepts related to particular emotions. In any case, hearers would have to flesh those concepts out on the basis of paralanguage in order to understand what speakers intend to express (Wilson and Wharton 2006; Wharton 2009). In some cases, the result of such fleshing out might be short-living ad-hoc concepts created to capture unique types of emotions or very specific nuances of emotions. Those ad-hoc concepts could not stabilise in the conceptual repertoires of users of a language; they might be a one-off, sporadic thing. In contrast, if the same kind of ad-hoc concepts is formed repeatedly and often enough, such occasion-specific concepts could subsequently stabilise and become proper concepts, liable to be shared by other communicators (Hall 2011; Solska 2012). Whether individuals will form ad-hoc concepts from the lexical items giving rise to secondary interjections will depend on factors such as encountering the same emotions or their same nuances, and availability of already stable concepts denoting them for retrieval from memory (cf. Hall 2011, 5-7).

The passing of items from some word-classes to that of interjections would involve an extension of their denotation. In the case of adjectives and adverbs, that extension might not be very dramatic, as the concepts these items encode could refer to emotions or feelings that would be somehow related or bear some resemblance with the qualities, properties or manners they standardly refer to. In contrast, in the case of nouns and verbs that extension might be more dramatic. But what might trigger such a denotational extension? And under which circumstances might it happen? To some extent, the origin of secondary interjections could be compared to children's overextensions of words, a phenomenon that has been accounted for in relevance-theoretic terms by Wałaszewska (2011).

5.1. Overextension and secondary interjections

Children have been shown to extend or overextend the meaning of words to refer to other entities or actions on the basis of some perceptual similarities (Clark 1973, 1993; Anglin 1977; Thomson and Chapman 1977). Concerning secondary interjections, it would be hard to think of some perceptual

similarity between the concepts initially encoded by the items giving rise to them and the concepts those items are subsequently used to communicate. However, the creation of secondary interjections would resemble children's overextensions in that the latter are frequent in situations in which children need to use a word that they do not know or cannot retrieve at a certain moment (Huttenlocher 1974; Thomson and Chapman 1977; Fremgen and Fay 1980; Gottfried 1997). When this happens, children replace the unknown or irretrievable word by another. Some secondary interjections might also originate in this way. Even if the words giving rise to them do not bear any kind of perceptual similarity to the feeling or emotion speakers intend to express, in some cases speakers could find in their encyclopaedic entries some information or property related, even if remotely, to the feeling or emotion that they intend to express, and, therefore, use those words as interjections. In other cases, on the contrary, speakers, lacking precise terms, would resort to those words as if they were place-holders or slot-fillers, the slot to be filled being the particular emotion that they express.

As Wałaszka (2011, 320) explains, the use of a word to activate a conceptual representation not often associated with it sometimes stems from the speaker's abilities. The Communicative Principle of Relevance establishes that any act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance. This presumption implies that the processing of a particular ostensive stimulus will be worth the hearer's effort and that the speaker will select, out of possible candidate stimuli, the one that she thinks will make manifest her informative intention in the easiest and most straightforward way depending on her cognitive abilities and stylistic preferences (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004). When children overextend some words, they do so because of their limited expressive abilities, although they aim for optimal relevance.

The usage of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs to express emotions, feelings and attitudes might somehow detract from optimal relevance, if there were other words that could convey the speaker's informative intention more efficiently and economically (Wilson and Sperber 2004, 612). However, speakers could resort to those items because at some specific moments they cannot retrieve or think of other more precise words to allude to their emotions or they find in their encyclopaedic entries some property or assumption that somehow connects with the emotion, feeling or attitude that they want to express. This would enable speakers to use those items as vehicles to express feelings, emotions or attitudes, above all when emotions, feelings and attitudes are ineffable, vague or difficult to pin down in words. Accordingly, a broadening similar to children's overextension could be thought to take place when adjectives and adverbs are used as secondary interjections. Think of adjectives like 'good', 'cute', 'cool', 'awful' or 'awesome', which have interjectional counterparts. Their encyclopaedic entry could contain assumptions about positivity, pleasure, delight, etc., which could be close or related to the feeling, emotion or attitude the speaker wishes to express when using them as interjections. Upon finding no better words to express that feeling, the speaker would resort to such words and expect the hearer to manipulate the conceptual content that they convey.

On the other hand, Wałaszka (2011) also explains that other overextensions can be viewed as the result of children's preferences. On many occasions, children use wrong words to refer to some concepts –they mislabel objects– even though they know the words conventionally used to name them. Such overextensions reflect early “[...] metaphorical abilities in young children and indicate children's linguistic flexibility” (Wałaszka 2011, 320). To do so, they rely on some similarity, shared property or common encyclopaedic information. This might be what happens when some nouns and verbs are transferred to the class of secondary interjections: they could be transferred as a consequence of metaphoric usage.

Many nouns can be metaphorically or hyperbolically used in attributive constructions to describe or assign characteristics on the basis of some contingent or emergent properties stored in their encyclopaedic entry. Likewise, many verbs can also be used metaphorically or hyperbolically to refer to another action which they somehow resemble or evoke. Consider the following examples:

- (21) (a) This is (a) *hell / shit / heaven*.
 (b) *Spanish*: Esto es un infierno / una mierda / el paraíso.
- (22) (a) John *fucked* everything.
 (b) *Spanish*: Juan (lo) ha *jodido* todo.
- (23) (a) They *fucked* me at the exam.
 (b) *Spanish*: Me han *follado* en el examen.
- (24) Esto es la *hostia*. / ¡Eres la *hostia*, tío!

In sentences like (21) or (24) the speaker would not be literally predicating that something is

‘hell/shit/heavens’ or that somebody is ‘the holy host’; rather, some stereotypical features or assumptions connected those nouns –e.g. negativity, pain, suffering, etc. in the case of ‘hell’; positivity, pleasure, delight, joy, etc. in the case of ‘heavens’; superiority, supremacy, etc. in the case of ‘host’– are attributed to other entities. Those features or assumptions could also be linked to emotions, feelings or attitudes. Along the same lines, a verb like ‘fuck’ (22a)–(23a) or the Spanish ‘joder’ (22b) and ‘follar’ (23b) do not mean what they standardly denote, but would make manifest assumptions related to ruining, destruction, failure, desolation, etc., which can also be associated to some negative emotions or feelings. In these metaphorical or hyperbolic constructions, those nouns and verbs get their conceptual content broadened to denote some property, state or action that shares some features with, or very roughly or ideally resembles, their initial literal referents. Strictly speaking, such property, state or action cannot be literally referred to by means of those lexical items.

Since nouns and verbs can have those metaphorical or hyperbolic usages and get their encoded concepts broadened, such usages might also enable those items to be used as secondary interjections, in which case their conceptual content would probably be broadened towards more peripheral properties. Accordingly, metaphorical or hyperbolic usages might make the transfer of nouns and verbs to the class of secondary interjections possible on the basis of common core or peripheral properties. Probably, the broadening of the concepts encoded by nouns and verbs is more radical than that undergone by the concepts encoded by adjectives and adverbs. Such broadening could be represented by means of the following figure, in which each concentric circle represents a slightly different property associated to the initial denotation of a concept and types of lines their centrality or marginality:

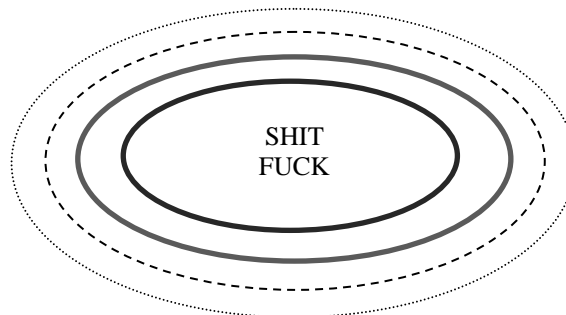


Figure 1: Conceptual broadening of lexical items originating secondary interjections

Regardless of whether secondary interjections arise as a consequence of speakers’ expressive limitations or preferences, their transfer from other word-classes would be due to the same lexical pragmatic process: a broadening of their initial lexically encoded concept that yields a fuzzier concept related to emotions, feelings or attitudes. For hearers to interpret secondary interjections, they would have to adjust that concept and create an ad-hoc one that captures the expressive content that they think their producers intend to express. However, when becoming secondary interjections, nouns and verbs, on the one hand, and adjectives and adverbs, on the other hand, seem to show different degrees of conceptual broadening and that broadening seems to operate slightly differently. This might reflect that the items belonging to each group undergo different types of overextensions.

5.2. Secondary interjections and types of overextension

Within children’s overextensions researchers have also distinguished two sub-types (Wałaszewska 2011, 321-322):

- a) ‘Over-inclusion’, also referred to as ‘categorical overextension’ or ‘classic overextension’ (Clark 1973, 1993; Rescorla 1980), in which the overextended word “[...] is applied to instances of other categories within the same or adjacent conceptual domain” (Wałaszewska 2011, 321). This process is evident when children use terms to refer to other entities which are co-hyponyms of the same superordinate term. This would be the case of ‘doggie’, an hyponym of ‘animal’, when used to allude to dogs, cats, horses, etc. not only because of perceptual similarity but, more importantly, because of conceptual contiguity –all are animals.
- b) ‘Analogical extension’, also alluded to as ‘analogical overextension’ (Rescorla 1980; Clark 1993), as a result of which children overextend terms on the basis of perceptual similarity to

other terms belonging to different, maybe unrelated, conceptual domains. This is what happens when they use 'cookie' to refer to 'moon' upon perceiving their roundedness.

Adjectives and adverbs could enter the category of secondary interjections as a consequence of over-inclusion. Their lexically encoded concept would contain encyclopaedic information about properties, characteristics or features that resemble those of, or can also be applied to, certain feelings, emotions or attitudes. As in other cases of over-inclusion, the information contained in the logical entries of those adjectives and adverbs giving rise to secondary interjections would provide a link between the initial concept encoded by those lexical items and the 'new' non-lexicalised concept that they would subsequently communicate when used as interjections. Thus, the adjective 'good' can over-include some feelings, emotions or attitudes on the basis of their belonging to conceptual domains like 'positivity', 'pleasure', 'delight', 'satisfaction', etc. Although this adjective normally expresses that the entity it modifies has a particular feature and can thus be described, it may be used as an interjection on the grounds of some property or information which can be extended to a certain feeling, emotion or attitude. In this sense, the adjective and the resulting secondary interjection would behave as hyponyms of broad concepts like POSITIVITY, PLEASURE, DELIGHT, SATISFACTION, etc., and speakers could use that adjective as a secondary interjection because they find in its denotation some feature that can be applied to emotions.

In contrast, nouns and verbs would enter the sub-class of secondary interjections as a result of analogical extension. Although the denotation of the concepts initially encoded by those lexical items and the feeling, emotion or attitude that they can subsequently be used to express may certainly not intersect at all, maybe the encyclopaedic entries of those original concepts contain or make manifest assumptions about some contingent properties or qualities, even if very marginal or peripheral, which can be applied or related to those feelings, emotions or attitudes. As shown above, nouns and verbs can be used metaphorically or hyperbolically to refer not to the entity or action that they standardly denote, but to some related entity or action which they can allude to on the grounds of contingent properties associated with them. However, when nouns and verbs are transferred to the class of secondary interjections, the information in their logical entries –e.g. that such words are normally used to refer to objects, individuals or actions– is ignored, since now those words are used to refer to feelings, emotions or attitudes. Thus, concepts like FUCK, SHIT, HELL or SHIT may be broadened to the ad-hoc concepts FUCK*, SHIT*, HELL* or SHIT*, which denote some emotion, feeling or attitude related that is the consequence of, is related to or is projected to what those concepts initially denoted.

Under this account, the lexical items giving rise to secondary interjections get their conceptual content broadened and that content is associated with a new emotional or attitudinal one. When their broadening is accomplished, those items could be associated with proper concepts denoting more or less specific types of emotions or feelings that individuals have already experienced, projected or encountered beforehand. Therefore, the resulting interjections could end up having rather stable usages as expressive vehicles for specific feelings or emotions and their interpretation might not require the construction of ad-hoc concepts any longer, as individuals could already have stored and associated mental entities with those interjections in a stable manner.

However, one of the problems that do not lend interjections amenable to conceptual analyses is precisely their usage with differing, sometimes diametrically opposed, meanings. Secondary interjections are not foreign to this phenomenon and, in effect, new secondary interjections are often used to express a wide variety of emotions, feelings and attitudes. If new secondary interjections were associated to specific (sub-)types of emotions, a new problem would arise: why could some of them be used to express differing or opposed emotions or feelings?

5.3. On the various meanings of secondary interjections

When nouns and verbs are used as secondary interjections, speakers invite hearers to broaden their encoded concepts and to construct ad-hoc concepts whose denotations might significantly differ from those of their initially encoded concepts because the encyclopaedic entries of those concepts store some information related to emotions or feelings. In the case of adjectives and adverbs, the concepts that these items initially encoded are extended to include something different on the basis of some conceptual proximity or hyponym relation. When some items from these classes become secondary interjections, they could be initially associated with a general (pro-)concept that denotes some (sub-)type of emotion. If so, those items would start their life as secondary interjections being specialised for expressing specific (sub-)type(s) of emotions or feelings. However, many new secondary interjections may be used to express

plenty of more or less differing emotions or feelings. The answer to why this may be possible could lie in some usages of secondary interjections.

Consider now the following Spanish sentences:

- (25) Me has hecho un favor muy bonito.
Literally: 'You did me a very beautiful/great favour'
(26) ¡Bonito favor me has hecho!
Literally: 'Beautiful/Great favour you did me!'
(27) Pedro es menudo.
Literally: 'Peter is tiny'.
(28) ¡Menudo es Pedro!
Literally: 'Tiny Peter is!'

(25) and (27) can have a literal reading, with 'bonito' and 'menudo' having their conventional meaning –i.e. 'beautiful' and 'tiny', respectively. However, (26) and (28) would be ironical (Yus Ramos, personal communication). The speaker would not be asserting that someone has done a great favour to her (26) or that Peter is tiny (28). Rather, in (26) the speaker would be dissociating herself from the belief that the favour that someone did her was positive, while in (28) she would be communicating something negative about Peter (Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004). In these two sentences, 'bonito' and 'menudo' must also be broadened, but the resulting ad-hoc concepts do not have positive connotations. Intonation and the placement of those lexical items at the beginning of those sentences may trigger a more radical broadening, as a result of which their meaning is reversed.

Although some items may enter the grammatical sub-category of secondary interjections and stabilise with a (pro-)concept resulting from another concept, their interjectional use to express distinct, maybe radically opposed emotions or feelings might be the result of ironical uses. As a consequence, the broad (pro-)concepts that those interjections would encode would have to be further broadened, maybe to include denotations that were not initially connected with them. Intonation and paralanguage could prompt a further or extreme broadening of an already broadened concept. Solska (2012) uses the term 'meaning reversal' to refer to the process by means of which a highly salient meaning of polysemous or homonymous words, or a deeply entrenched figurative meaning of other phrasal expressions, must be rejected and abandoned in favour of another meaning or a more literal reading that are backgrounded or of an ad-hoc concept¹⁰. However, those secondary interjections that stabilise in the linguistic system with an expressive value would not initially be ambiguous in terms of meaning. Their meaning reversal would not involve assessing two (or more) possible meanings and opting for one of them which receives less activation, but broadening and changing their meaning into a different one.

If this were right, secondary interjections could express various emotions as a result of a two-stage broadening: the concept encoded by the lexical items originating secondary interjections is firstly broadened to some very fuzzy (pro-)concept and that already broadened (pro-)concept is subsequently broadened as a result of ironical usages. This process could be labelled 'extreme' or 'radical' broadening. Since this process results in an association of lexical items with new and distinct concepts related to emotions, feelings or attitudes, it could also be described as a 'de-conceptualisation' of lexical items because they are deprived of their initial denotation or conceptual load, and a subsequent process of 'reconceptualisation', for those lexical items gain new denotations. The following figure could illustrate this process:

¹⁰ Meaning reversals differ from puns in that the interpretation of puns achieves an 'oscillating effect', as two interpretations can be simultaneously considered and the hearer may hesitate between them. However, in meaning reversals one interpretation is supplanted by another after realising its unviability (Solska 2012).

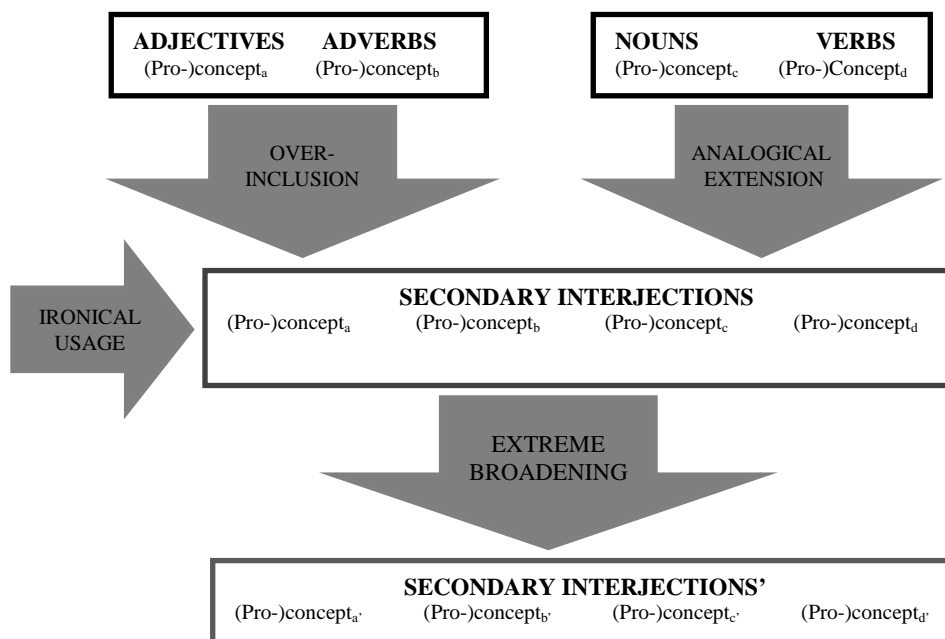


Figure 2: Extreme or radical broadening of lexical items when becoming secondary interjections

6. Conclusion

Concepts are not stable mental objects, as they need adjustments during comprehension. Sperber and Wilson (1997) suggested that the lexical pragmatic processes of broadening and narrowing could account for semantic change and evolution. This paper has argued that broadening could explain the transfer of nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives to the class of secondary interjections. If this were right, then at least broadening may be responsible for some word-class shifts. As a result of it, lexical items that had specific functions and were used in particular ways may be used in quite different ways, with the function of expressing emotions, feelings or attitudes.

This paper has also proposed that some lexical items may be used as secondary interjections because their conceptual content undergoes a broadening similar to the overextensions made by children, either because speakers lack words to refer to complex, evasive and ineffable things like emotions, feelings and attitudes, or because speakers use those words metaphorically or hyperbolically owing to the properties or assumptions that they would find in the encyclopaedic entries of the concepts that those items initially encoded. Additionally, this paper has differentiated two ways in which various types of lexical items may give rise to secondary interjections: adjectives and adverbs could enter the class of secondary interjections because their conceptual content would undergo over-inclusion, whereas nouns and verbs would shift to that class as a consequence of analogical extension. Regarding the distinct expressive potentials that secondary interjections have, this paper has put forward that these interjections could express different, maybe opposed, emotions, feelings or attitudes as a consequence of a further broadening of their conceptual load triggered by ironical usages.

Nevertheless, this paper has addressed the sub-category of secondary interjections as a whole and made some hypotheses about their origins in general terms. A more fine-grained and detailed account should consider individual interjections and look into their original meanings in order to unveil how those meanings are actually broadened. Thus, it would be possible to ascertain which kind of broadening they undergo, i.e. whether over-inclusion or categorical extension, if they stabilise in the linguistic system with a specific expressive potential for some time and when they show traces of such expressive potential evolving.

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Key words for index:

Secondary interjections
 Grammaticalisation
 Subjectification
 Semantic change
 Pro-concept
 Ad-hoc concept
 Broadening
 Narrowing
 Metaphor
 Hyperbole
 Over-extension
 Over-inclusion
 Analogical extension
 Ironic usage

Abstract

This paper seeks to propose an account of the origin of ‘secondary’ interjections on the basis of some Relevance-theoretic postulates about lexical pragmatics and how concepts behave (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995, 1997; Carston 1997, 2002; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 2004). Secondary interjections are words transferred from the word-classes of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Like ‘primary’ interjections, they have an independent semantic value and are used as stand-alone utterances to express emotions, feelings or attitudes (Wierzbicka 1991, 1992; Ameka 1992, 2006).

Most research on interjections has focused on primary ones and analysed their usage, characteristics, functions and values in distinct interactional contexts in certain languages or varieties. Within relevance theory, Wharton (2003, 2009) analysed the whole class of interjections in procedural terms. Concerning secondary interjections, researchers have examined their sociolinguistic distribution and peculiarities in different languages and varieties; their meanings in situational, discourse and social contexts, or their function as discourse markers. As a result, secondary interjections have been claimed to constitute a more creative sub-type than primary ones because they are open to constant innovations (Quirk et al., 1985; Buridant 2006).

Regrettably, the origin of secondary interjections, i.e. why items belonging to the word-classes of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs may be transferred to that of interjections, has not attracted much attention. Secondary interjections have been argued to arise after a process of ‘grammaticalisation’ by means of which the lexical entries of the items from which they originate acquire a new grammatical and morphological status. Consequently, those items can encode a more abstract and general semantic content. This process enables those items to communicate concepts that they did not previously encode (Traugott 1989, 1995; Hopper 1991; Hopper and Traugott 1993). Also, this process has been explained as a process of ‘subjectification’ (Traugott 1992, 1995). However, the reason why such grammaticalisation happens and some lexical items belonging to those word-classes enter that of interjections might reside in some lexical pragmatic processes affecting those items. This is what this paper suggests.

This paper proposes that the conceptual content of those lexical items might undergo a process of ‘broadening’. This process would be motivated by speakers’ expressive abilities or preferences. By comparing the transfer of items from various lexical categories of the phenomenon of ‘overextension’ characteristic of children’s language (Wąłaszewska 2011), this paper also suggests that adjectives and adverbs might undergo a type of broadening known as ‘over-inclusion’, while nouns and verbs might undergo another type of broadening known as ‘analogical extension’. The result would be a fuzzier and more general pro-concept denoting emotions, feelings or attitudes. Consequently, some items initially belonging to certain word-classes could stabilise in the linguistic system as devices to express specific types of emotions, feelings or attitudes. Finally, since many secondary interjections seem to be used to express various emotions, feelings or attitudes, this paper also proposes that their conceptual content might undergo a further broadening motivated by some of their uses and labels it ‘extreme’ or ‘radical’ broadening.