

Interjections as morphosyntactic elements

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1. *The background:* Interjections, like English *oh*, *ouch*, *huh*, *eh*, etc., are usually considered to fall outside grammar, or at least to be situated somewhere in the periphery between language and communication. They are taken to lack phonological, morphological and syntactic structure, as well as meaning, despite the fact that in the Latin-based grammatical descriptions they qualify as one of the parts of speech. Interjections can stand as utterances, or modify utterances, as in (1)-(2), and require or assume a conversational context:

- (1) a. Oh, you look tired! b. Oh!
(2) a. You look tired, huh? b. Huh?

The monomorphemic interjections of this sort are considered as *primary* in Bloomfield's (1933) distinction, along with secondary ones like *dear me*, *goodness me*, etc. Ameka (1992) argues that primary interjections are words, while secondary interjections are phrasal.

In the present paper, I consider two primary interjections in Greek, namely *a* and *e* which roughly translate as *oh* and *hey/eh/huh* accordingly in English. I assume, following Wilkins (1992), and Tsoulas (2017) for Greek, that they are deictic elements, and argue that they are part of grammar. In particular, they realize the upper part of the left periphery which corresponds to the Speech Act layer.

2. *The empirical data:* Consider the following Greek examples (*a* and *e* are glossed as such):

- (3) a. *e*, pu pas; b. *a*, jirises?
e where are.going-2s *a*, came.back-2s
'Hey, where are you going?' 'Oh, you came back?'

If these elements are not part of grammar, then they do not enter the phrase structure and should not be expected to obey syntactic restrictions, contrary to fact, as exemplified below:

- (4) a. pu pas, *e*; b. *jirises, *a*?
where are.going-2s *e* came.back-2s *a*
'Where are you going, huh?' '*You came back, oh?'
- (5) b. *e*, min trexis! b. *min trexis, *e*!
e not run-2s not run-2s *e*
'Hey, don't run!' '*Don't run, hey!'

According to the above, *e* can occur in either clause initial or final position, while *a* is restricted to clause initial position only. Furthermore, clause final *e* is restricted by clause-typing, so while it is grammatical in questions (or rising declaratives), it is ungrammatical in imperatives. This kind of distribution shows that these two morphemes are part of the phrase structure and as such have syntactic properties. The pattern in (4a) is similar to the one attested with confirmational *eh* in English (6) (see Heim *et al* 2014):

- (6) You've got a new dog, *eh*?

A closer investigation of the syntactic distribution of *a* and *e* in Greek, further shows that they are restricted to root contexts only (7), precede modal particles (8) and discourse markers like *ande* in (9):

- (7) a. *a*, efije epitelus!
a, left-2s finally
'Oh, he finally left!'
- b. Mu ipse oti (**a*) efije epitelus.
me told-2s that *a* left-3s finally
'She told me that (*oh) he finally left.'
- (8) a. *a/e*, tha fijis?
a/e, will leave-2s
'Oh/hey, will you leave?'
- b. *a/e*, na fijis!
a/e prt leave-2s
'Oh/hey, leave!'
- (9) *e/a*, ande fije!
e/a, com'on leave
'Oh/hey, com'on, leave!'

They also qualify as utterances on their own (see (1b) and (2b)). Finally, *e* may occur as a ‘repair initiator’ (see Dingemanse *et al* (2014) on ‘universal’ *huh*)

- (10) A: O Janis aghorase aftokinito B: e?
 the John bought-3s car B: eh/huh?
 ‘John bought a car.’ ‘What?’

As Postma & Scheer (2015) argue, *huh* in B’s response is part of grammar with phonological and syntactic properties (equivalent to ‘what’).

The above distribution shows that the interjections *a* and *e* have a syntactic distribution. They are uninflected elements, as is common with interjections, but if we follow Tsoulas (2017) they seem to form the base for other markers such as vocative *vre* or *re* (‘you’), locative *na* (‘there’), *mba*, etc. Finally, extending the approach of Postma & Scheer (2015) to Greek, it can be shown that they also have phonological properties. Regarding their meaning, *a* expresses the *speaker’s* attitude (surprise, amazement, wish, irritation, etc.), while *e* involves the addressee, in a way to be further elaborated.

3. The analysis: In this paper I argue that the above interjections (with extensions to others as well) are part of the grammar. According to Wilkins (1992) interjections define utterances, so “they convey a complete proposition about the world”, whereby a complete proposition has a predicate and one or more arguments. In Wilkins’ approach interjections are context-bound ‘deictic’ elements. Tsoulas (2017) also argues that *a* and *e* are deictic elements; they encode anchoring and perspective (*a*) or attitude evidentiality (*e*). The next question is how the predicative structure implied by these interjections is structurally represented. Following recent literature (Hill 2008, Haegeman & Hill 2013, Heim *et al.* 2016, Wiltschko & Heim 2016, Miyagawa 2017, a.o.), I assume that there is a Speech Act layer on the upper part of the left periphery. The Speech Act head partly revives Ross’ (1970) proposal that declaratives are hidden performatives that contain a covert performative verb and the arguments ‘I’ (the speaker) and ‘you’ (the hearer) (to these we could add ‘here’ and ‘there’). I will assume, along with Speas & Tenny (2003) that the Speech Act head is predicative and takes the discourse participants (speaker, addressee/hearer) as its arguments (for a recent modification of the Speech Act layer, see Heim *et al* 2014):

- (11) [Speech Act [CP [IP]]] (where Speech Act defines a shell).

In this context, it will be argued that *e* and *a* ‘predicate and refer’ in Wilkins’ (1992) terms: they refer to the speaker/utterer (*a*) or the addressee/hearer (*e*). This perspective allows us to account for their distribution in relation to clause-typing and illocutionary force (of the clause they modify), their interaction with other particles (modal or discourse), and their restriction to root contexts. For example, if *e* is anchored to the addressee, we have a way to account for the role it plays in interrogatives and imperatives which involve the addressee, with or without a vocative phrase present. Similar considerations extend to *a* in relation to the speaker though. Since they relate to different discourse arguments, they may also co-occur, to the extent that *e* is final, as in ‘*A, efijes, e?*’ (Oh you left, eh?), with *e* roughly a question tag.

4. Conclusions and extensions: A formal approach to interjections assigns them lexical content, so they enter the syntactic computation. What makes them different is that they interface with the discourse, and have predicative/referring content which is context-bound. The fact that they qualify as utterances is not restricted to interjections, but can be found with other deictic elements as well, like English ‘*There!*’ or its Greek equivalent ‘*Na!*’ (with a pointing gesture). Being lexical, they are also subject to change. For example the English ‘*wow!*’ has given rise to a verb (*The y wowed the audience*) or a noun (*It’s a wow*); the reverse also holds (from verb or noun to an interjection). Finally, the utterance function of interjections (see (1b) and (2b)) can provide us with a cue of understanding elliptical phenomena, where propositional content is implicit (as in fragment answers or sluicing), without (necessarily) invoking deletion of propositional content.