



THE POSITION AND MEANING OF INTERJECTIONS IN GA

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ABSTRACT

Interjections have been dealt with in language in various ways either as part of language or as non-words indicating feelings or state of mind. The paper focuses on interjections in Ga, a Kwa language of Niger Congo branch to find out how and what they communicate among the Gas. It attempts to answer the question of whether interjections are part of the Ga language by employing the Relevance theory. Data used were gathered from natural conversations and interviews on some of their uses in Ga such as eh, hmmm, waa, aahh among others. Both secondary and primary interjections were found in Ga. The paper shows that these interjections may occur sentence initial and sentence final. They communicate emotional feelings of the speaker in most instances which confirms what other linguistic scholars have found in literature. Such feelings include surprise, anger, contempt, pleasure, and pain among others. It also shows that interjections are used spontaneously in certain situations or places such as hospitals and playing fields. The stress or emphasis placed on an interjection in speech may also change its communicative meaning as context plays a role in deriving its meaning.

Keywords: *interjections, relevance, emotional, primary, secondary, intonation.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Scholars have dealt with issues in language especially lexical categories, however not much has been said on these words, interjections. The few scholars who have engaged in their research may have considered these words as part of language or as non-words that indicate emotions or state of mind but a clear position has not been agreed upon by authors as some have referred to them as particles (Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad 1982) conversational routines (Aijmer 2004), onomatopoeic words (Kryk 1992), quasi-reflexes (Nicoloff 1990), adverbials (Sledd 1959), among others. Due to this unclear term or definition, translating them into target languages has not been easy (Sierra Soriano 1992). Due to these controversies, authors have defined them from various view points and examined them from different perspectives. This paper also attempts to find whether it can answer some of these



controversies such as which lexical categories are used to express interjections where possible and to also find their uses and what they communicate in the Ga language. Ga, an SVO language, is a Kwa language of the Niger Congo branch spoken mainly around the coastal areas in Greater Accra such as La, Teshi, Nungua and Ga Mashi. It will also attempt to examine in the existence of a particular lexical class and are their morphological properties same as proposed in the literature.

1.1 Defining Interjections

There exist some works on interjections (Eastman 1992, Evans 1992, Kockelman 2003 Swiatkowska 2006, Corver 2007, Cruz 2009, Cruz 2010, Cuenca 2010) in which interjections were investigated from different points of view. Priscian a Latin grammarian defined interjections as ‘a part of speech signifying an emotion by means of an unformed word’ (Padler 1976:266). Sapir (1921) sees interjections as ‘the nearest of all language sounds to instinctive utterance’ they are also considered as exemplars of the purely emotive stratum of language (Jakobson 1960:354). Some define them as a subset of items that encode speaker attitudes and communicative intentions and are context bound (Ameka 1992a). Whatever definition is given for interjections they occur in our everyday discourse. Bloomfield (1933) cited in Ameka (1992a:104) used the term interjection to refer to a form ‘occur predominantly as minor sentences entering into few or no constructions other than parataxis’. Ameka (1992a) in agreement with Bloomfield grouped interjections into two, he reserves the term interjections primarily for little words and called that group primary interjections and phrases or words which due to their semantics are used as interjections were referred to as secondary interjections which can occur non-elliptically as one word. Primary interjections refer to little words which can occur as utterances on their own and may not appear in a construction in addition to other word classes for instance Gee!, Wow! Ouch! Oops! Among others (Ameka 1992). Interjection is a component of affect bursts’ which is defined as a ‘very brief discrete, nonverbal expressions of affect in both face voice’ as noted by Scherer (1994) cited in Goddard (2014:3). Goddard (2014) went further to classify interjection from formal, semantic and contextual point of view. In terms of formal perspective, he grouped them into three namely: noise-like primary, word like ‘primary and secondary, and for semantic perspective, three classes were identified by him emotive, cognitive and volitive and lastly for his contextual angle were immediate uses, didactic uses, discursive uses and ironic uses. From the explanations and attempts to define these little words- interjections- it can be concluded that they are some little words/phrases that occur in speech spontaneously to show emotional feeling of a speaker.

2.0 RELATED WORKS

Though attention has now been given to interjections in recent times, there exist some scholars who had examined them. Kockelman (2003) examined interjections in Q’eqchi Maya a language spoken in Guatemala and Belize. This is a language that belongs to the Mayan family. He examined 12 most popularly used interjections in this language by giving their meaning in terms of situational, discursive and social context. He further noted that



some of these interjections occur stressed while others do not and others are used frequently by women more than men. Corver (2007) investigated Dutch interjections from a syntactic point. He examined their internal syntax and postulated that complex interjective expressions are structured expressions which are phrase structural. He further argued that their phrasal organization is linked with coordination and finally gave some details on the properties of complex interjections in Dutch. Ameka (1992b) in his paper postulates a classification for interjections namely expressive, conative, and phatic. He explained expressive as gestures that are vocal in nature and indicate mental state, conatives are those that demand some kind of reaction or need a reaction and phatic is mainly to create a communication contact. Wharton (2001, 2003) claims that interjections contain procedural meaning and not conceptual meaning in his paper and further explains that they activate the presumptions for the hearer and the hearer can select the appropriate one based on the context. He finally placed the interjections along a continuum but failed to answer definitely the issue of interjections as being part of language. Interjections were also claimed to belong to intercalation with parentheticals also in that group but they show different distribution patterns as a result of different functions (Schelfhout and Copper and Oostdijk (2003). From the works that I came across, most of these interjections have not been examined in Ghanaian languages with the exception of Ewe that was investigated by Ameka (1992b), it was seen as relevant to examine Ga interjections to confirm what was in the literature or otherwise. This was the purpose for the investigation of interjections in Ga.

3.0 THEORETICAL APPROACH

Relevance theory (RT) (Clark 2013) proposes that interpretations are guided by the presumptions that a communicator must have had an interpretation in mind which justifies the effort involved in paying attention to behavior. He further claimed that most of the assumptions are contextual. In decoding utterances relevance is important. The data used Relevance Theory stated that as processing effort plays a role and the more mental effort involved in processing a stimulus the less relevant it is. RT is based on the Cognitive Principle of Relevance and the Communicative Principle of Relevance. The principle of relevance simply says Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance. The second principle, Communicative Principle simply means every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance. The presumption of relevance says

- a) the ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it
- b) the ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences (Clark 2013:107-108)

This simply means that any utterance will provoke a set of assumptions by the hearer and the hearer has the option of choosing from these presumptions. However context serve as a guide to making this choice and the less effort the hearer makes in selecting the appropriate message put across, the more relevant it is to the hearer. This means in using an interjection



for instance by an interlocutor, the hearer may choose the appropriate message using the relevance principle especially in cases where the interjection has more than one meaning being put across.

4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data was gathered from spontaneous speeches over a period of eight months (April 2016- November 2016). Conversations and discussions among speakers were listened to and written down. The participants were mostly between the ages of 25 and 70 as they were considered to have experience in speaking native language. Further questions were asked to confirm what a person meant when a particular interjection was used in speech especially from the students who were part of the participants and also from friends who called the researcher and during interaction use a particular interjection. Participants were made up of students of University of Education, Winneba, lecturers and other workers from other professions such as pastors, teachers. All the participants were natives of Ga located in Winneba and Accra. The interjections gathered are listed below. Following Ameka (1992a) they are divided into primary interjections and secondary interjections.

Primary Interjections

Secondary interjections

Waat	like serious
Hmmm	okεε
Tsakai	kpa
Tsia	kwε
Ajee	fu
Ajei	aba
Ah	lεlε
Aaah	oh my God
Ohoo	yes
Oooo	ataame
Aaw	sua
Waaw	
Hey	
Apuuu	



5.0 SOME PROPERTIES OF INTERJECTIONS

These interjections were noted to be monomorphemic in nature. From the data I noted that these interjections were never inflected and were mostly occurring at the beginning of the sentence or utterance. They sometimes occur alone to express the speaker emotive state which mostly may be derived from context. There were no markers or affixes occurring with them and those that fell into the secondary interjection class, though from other classes did not take any affix to show number agreement or tense as also noted by (Ameka 1992a) and further stated that even if an inflection occurs it may not be in conformity to the rules for that world class in the language. In addition Ameka (1992) added that primary interjections normally refer to mental states that can be an utterances on their own by appearing alone and therefore contain no address. This nature of interjections being complete utterances were also noted by (Huddleston and Pullum 2002). The spelling of interjections normally are a deviation from the phonological rules of a language and sometimes the combination of sounds to represent their pronunciation seem not be sufficient (Goddard 2014) for instance *tsk*, *mmm* and this was evident in the Ga data. A morphological property noted by Curme (1947) which was cited in in Javanovic (2004) postulated that most often their functions are not indicated since they seem not to possess any distinct forms. Javanovic (2004) further claimed that they are found at initial positions of exclamatory sentences and also may have cluster of forms that are related with meanings that are identical but different pronunciation as well as spelling and these different ways of spellings with same pronunciation was stated by (Xian 2015) as well as he claimed that interjections are sounds which are recorded in different forms.

6.0 WHAT INTERJECTIONS COMMUNICATE

In looking at the facial expression of most of the participants, it was noted that the use of the interjections were mostly accompanied with some sort of facial expression or gestures as also postulated by Ameka (1992) when he examined some interjections in Ewe and he noted that *Kss* which is an interjection is not only used among Ewes, but most of the language communities in Ghana employed it in their speech and it is accompanied in most cases with a clap to draw attention. This really confirmed that it was showing their emotional state at the time of speaking. The paper now follows with a discussion of some of the interjections that where noted in conversations.

6.1 Discussion of results

The interjection *hmmm* which I came across in speeches was the most popular. However, though it has the same form, the tone intonation pattern gave it different meanings. Examples are below

1.

Speaker A: Aku ye jei



Aku be there.

‘Is Aku there?’

Speaker B: e-be, e-je kpo

3 NEG 3SG go ICV

‘No, she is gone out’.

Speaker A: ηmεnε hu, hmmm

Today too, hmmm.

‘Today again, hmmm’.

2.

Speaker A: Ako, Ako, Ako, jee bo mi-tεε-ɔ

Ako, Ako, Ako, NEG P 2SG 1SG -call-HAB

‘Ako, Ako Ako, are you not the one am calling?’

Speaker B: hmmm

‘Hmmm’

In interaction 1 above the Speaker A (SA) enquired of Aku from Speaker B (SB) and was told Aku is not in and SB says ‘today too hmmm’. She did not just say today too but added an interjection which expresses her emotional state at the time of the utterance. This has sort of a low tone throughout its pronunciation to signify something like after all these warning, after all these incidents, u never learn etc.

In the response given by SB in 2 indicated that he has no concentration. This is said with stressed on it expressing ‘I am not interested in what you want to say, my mind is far off, leave me alone’, though a lot of assumptions are invoke when this interjection is said, the context aids in decoding it and arriving at the appropriate message. In this context the person is showing some kind of disgust as he may be saying in the mind why is SA worrying me, I need some quietness at the moment. The hearer in this case can decode the message will get the exact message with processing the stimulus and the less processing effort used the more relevant it is to the hearer.

The same interjection is used most often to express sadness or sorrow or pity. A person may be sitting and periodically may be saying *hmmmm* especially when a love one has passed or is feeling very sad about an issue. This may be accompanied with tapping of the feet or some kind of facial expression. It also expresses anger when a person is so irritated and may want to fight and is interrupted he may be there expressing this emotion by saying *hmmm ole* and may be clenching the fist or tapping the feet in angry manner. It can be also to say *esa bo dientse* ‘it is unto you’ Do as you want or please. Now lets consider some more examples.



5.

Speaker A.: Yoo lɛ e-gbo, aahh aaah aahh hmmm.

Woman DEF PERF-die aaah aahh, aahh hmmm

‘The woman is dead aaah, aahh aahh, hmmm’.

This interjection *aahh* signifies anger or pain most often. In interaction 1 (example 4), SB use of the interjection signifies anger or contempt SB tried to say did you notice that this person insulted me, why do you ask when I beat the person. On the other hand, it signifies sorrow or how painful, what a pity as SA is hurt by the news of the death of the woman, she may be a woman who she knew had suffered but in this context it was to indicate how sad and painful it was that after all the efforts put in to help her recover she had passed on and this is illustrated in 5.

The next interjection is *tsia/ tsiakai* and *ajei*. In 6 the SB uses *tsia* to say that I do not or believe you can do it, I have reservations about it and I doubt you as well. In 7 the interaction was between two siblings who I noted play/share jokes. The SB pinches the sister SA and you hear *ajei* three times with the third one really stressed, and SB responds have I done something? Here the SA is expressing the pain she felt at time of the pinch but there was no anger and she does not pinch or try to do something to the brother. In another scenario where a person steps unknowingly on another person’s toe, the person stepped on said *ajei* but quickly slaps the person who stepped on the toe to show her anger and pain. The person responds *awww mijee gbɛ* ‘Aww I am sorry, it is not intentional’.

6.

Speaker A: Bo o-baa-fee?

2SG 2SG-FUT-do

‘Are you the one to do it?’

Speaker B: Tsia yɛ nɛgbɛ ?

Tsia be where

‘Tsia, for where.’

7.

Speaker A: ajei , ajei, ajei

‘Ajei, ajei, ajei’

Speaker B: Mi-fee bo no ko.

1SG -do 2SG something.

‘Have I done something to you?’



The next interjection is seen in example 8 below.

8.

Speaker A: Kwε, jeeε bo mi-kε wie-ɔ.

Look, NEG P 2SG 1SG speak-HAB

Look are you not the one am talking to?

Speaker B: Mɛni sane?

What matter

‘What is the matter?’

Speaker A: Wɔ-baa –wo nyε ni nyε-baa-na.

3PL-FUT-score 2PLCONJ 2PL-FUT-see

‘We shall score you.’

Speaker B: kwε, kwε, kwε, (laughs)

Look, look, look (laughs)

Speaker A. Ooηmɔ, bo lε mεε.

2SG-laugh, 2SG DEF wait

‘You are laughing, you wait’.

In the use of this interjection, *kwε*, which expresses warning or caution to the listener, on the other hand, when *kwε* is reduplicated it no more expresses warning but to say you are funny, or it is a joke, you don’t what you are saying, you are lying, what you are saying is not important, it is worthless, I don’t have time to listen to this and this is illustrated in 8 above.

In the instance of example 9, SA has employed two interjections in the same utterance. the use of *hmmm* is employed in the middle to express gladness and *kpa* ‘stop’ which is said repeatedly shows the extent to which what the speaker is expressing the emotion. These emotions may include unbelievable, unimaginable, very beautiful, extravagant, and trust me. When *kpa* occurs as an interjection, most often it is the repeated form. When it occurs once, it commands the hearer to immediately bring to a halt an action being taken.

9.

Speaker A: Ni mi-tee jεi, hmmm, jeeε shwεmɔ, kpa, kpa, kpa, kpa.

When 1SG-go.PERF there, hmmm, NEG play-NOM, stop, stop, stop, stop

‘When I went there, hmmm, it was not a joke, stop, stop, stop’.

Speaker B : Gbaa mi sane.



‘Narrate it to me/I am all ears’.

In illustration 10 below, SA uses *eh* at the end of the utterance to express some kind of resentment, and in her next utterance she made use of *waat* to indicate the excitement and satisfaction she derives from taking such as meal. However, it was also noted that this interjection *waat* sometimes occur in speeches to express some kind of disagreement or surprise by a listener. When it occurs in speech and it is stressed it shows anger and disgust.

10.

Speaker A : Mi-sumə-ɔɔ omə, eh.

1SG-like-NEG, eh

I do not like rice, eh.

Speaker B: Mi lɛ, mi-nyaa omə he eh,

1SG TOP 1SG- like rice body, eh.

As for me I like rice, eh.

Speaker A: aah, kɛji o -na ampesi kɛ ka mli kontomire ni akɛ ŋkatie eshwie

mli, waat kɛ afɔlɔ pɛya

Aah, if 2SG -get yam and pot inside kontomire and COMPL groundnut put

inside, waat and cut pear

eshwie mli

put inside.....

‘ aah, when you get boiled yam with kontomire in local warepot and groundnuts is added, waat and then you sliced pear on top of it

Speaker B: hmmm (nodding the head in agreement)

Hiaaaiii, this was an interjection that I came across among children between the ages of 2 and 9 years on the playground and during interaction. This was heard among a children when for instance one calls for the other to take some of her food and dislikes the food, she rather looks into the food and say *hiaaaiii*, or if one of the children soils herself, the others may say this. Sometimes when they enter a place that looks dirty then this is also heard by these children. There seem to be interjections that are used solely among children as also noted by Monte (1999) where he discovered that there were seven Spanish interjections used among Spanish children between the ages of one and three years . This is said with all the vowels nasalized.

Apuuu /apuuu tɔɔ is recently used among some few Gas especially the Ga students in University of Education, Winneba. From follow up interviews / discussion conducted I learnt



it was from Akan which is being used by the students. It communicates to the hearer that you don't trust the speaker's utterance or what he said. It was mostly heard among male students or colleagues who may not agree on some issues especially sporting activity or debates among them.

7. 0 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Table 1: the interjections found in Ga and their meaning

Interjection	Type	What it communicates
Hmmm	Primary	Anger, Approval, sorrow, pain, surprise
Aah, /hey	Primary	Annoyance, impatience, disgust
Tsia/ tsiakai/apuuu/apuuu tɔɔ	Primary	Disgust, irritation,
Aawww	Primary	Sympathy
Kwɛ/kpa	Secondary	Wonder, surprise, disgust
Hiaaaii	Primary	Disgust, contempt
Waat/waoo	Primary	Delight, pleasure, surprise
Like serious/ oh my God	Secondary	Surprise, delight, joy, relief
Ok /aba	Secondary	Impatience, sympathy

From the table 1, it came to light that speakers express their emotions or state of feeling in speech such as disgust, sympathy, contempt, surprise impatience among others, with the use of some interjections in their utterances. The interjections were not inflected as noted in languages studied. There were the use of both primary and secondary interjections and some of these are having equivalent in Ga but those used among other language tribes like *apuuu* were evident in the data.

8.0 CONCLUSION

The interjections found from the data gathered seem not to come from any lexical category in Ga except the secondary ones like *kpa* that were employed. Interjections in Ga occur in speeches and decoding them depend on context and their relevance to the speaker. Some interjections have different interpretations and the context and relevance help the interlocutor to get the right inference and get the right message. In addition, tone and change in length as well as intonation play a role in deriving the meaning as a change in tone may cause a change in meaning as also noted by (Xian 2015) They occur at the beginning of utterances, middle



and end as well and two or three different forms appear in the same utterance with commas most often separating them. They can also be repeated in an utterance or speech and they are not inflected in any form. This paper attempted to work on interjections in Ga to have these documented in Ga and to contribute to the new trend of investigation of this to prompt other Ghanaian linguistics to investigate these in their language and a typology can later be derived from them. The paper may not have discussed every interjections in Ga as those found in the data are what was used and future discussion can be made by examining them from a pragmatic and semantic view.

Glossary

COMPL: complementizer.

CONJ: conjunction.

DEF: definite article.

HAB: habitual marker.

ICV: Inherent Complement Verb.

NEG: negative.

NEG P:negative particle

NOM: nominalizer.

PERF: perfect marker.

TOP: topicalisation.

1SG: first person singular pronoun.

2SG :second person singular pronoun.

3SG: third person singular pronoun.

1PL: first person plural pronoun.

2PL: second person plural pronoun.

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