A multimodal interactional-linguistic study of (Oh) (My) (G-word) interjections at sequence boundaries

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Interjections are still a relatively unexplored object of study. Like most interjections, expletive (Oh) (My) G-word tokens (where the G-word stands for e.g. *God, Lord, Days, Word, Dear;* cfr. Tagliamonte & Jankowski, 2019) are multifunctional interactional objects (Ljung, 2009). While often taken to be peripheral to language and the grammar of the sentence, they are not necessarily structurally unbounded: they are deployed in specific slots in the interactional structure (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006) and belong in ordered sequences of action from where they acquire their social meaning. As "liminal signs" (Dingemanse, 2020) they are context-bound and "ambiguous with respect to conventionality, intentionality, and accountability (p.191), and this paper will focus on how this ambiguity accompanied by their multimodal design have a role for participants in their interactional management across sequence boundaries.

This study offers a multimodal interactional analysis of a small special subgroup of (Oh) (My) G-word interjections (hence, OMG tokens) from an initial collection of 206 cases identified in 4 hours of video and audio data of everyday face-to-face and telephone conversation in American and British English(es). The study uses the qualitative methods of Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2017) to determine the position in the turn and sequence where these interjections are found, their syntactic and prosodic design, their visuo-gestural configuration, and their temporal alignment while drawing on co-participant orientation for evidence as to how co-participants treat each other's turns and actions. The interactional analysis involved the transcription of conversational extracts using GAT-2 transcription conventions (Selting, et al., 2011) and the registering of the position and composition of each OMG token. The phonetic analysis of each token was initially done auditorily and parametrically, recording different levels of phonetic detail (including phrasing, f0 contours and shifts, duration, and voice quality, and articulatory processes) without ruling out a priori the relevance of any feature (Local & Walker, 2005). Acoustic validation and analysis were done using Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2016) adopting conventional methods of normalisation for prosodic comparison across tokens and speakers. The analysis of gestural trajectories and bodily-visual behaviour was supported by an initial annotation in ELAN (Brugman & Russel, 2004) with the video on mute, registering gestural articulators and phases (McNeill, 1992), facial expressions, as well as major gaze shifts whenever visible on a frame-by-frame basis (Kendrick et al., 2023). The temporal configuration of visual and vocal behaviour was added to the transcription using the conventions in Mondada (2018).

The interactional overview resulted in detailed individual analyses of single cases which were then grouped into collections according to patterns of interactional similarity. While the majority of cases conform to the usual understanding of OMG tokens as displays of surprise and/or dismay in second (responsive) position in the sequence (Cantarutti, 2023), 23/206 OMG tokens differ multimodally and functionally in significant ways from the other cases in the collection and they are the focus of this study. These cases appear to work at the "hinges" of interactional sequences and are ambiguous regarding their role: they act simultaneously as sequence beginnings and endings. They occur at the end of sequences where a participant has offered an impropriety or a humorous characterisation of affairs as an initiating action, and after which an affiliating second or a third-pair part (Schegloff, 2007) has already been offered in response. OMG tokens appear after this appreciation of prior actions, and normatively before the initiation of a new sequence of action or topic (see example 1) and sometimes after a lapse in conversation.

An initial exploration of the prosodic and gestural design of these OMG tokens has determined a set of common features. On the one hand, the tokens are prosodically disjunctive from prior talk: the onset of the vowel in "Oh" tends be glottalized, the plosive in "God/Days/Dear" features a longer closure stage or an ejective-like release. Their production is quieter and with breathier or creakier voice quality than in surrounding talk. They are produced with stylised contours (Ladd, 2008) and greater segmental duration. This design bears similarities with self-talk (Keevallik, 2018) as well as with other sequence-closing elements, particularly of an idiomatic kind (Curl et al., 2006; Drew & Holt, 1998). In terms of bodily-visual behaviour, they are normally produced with gaze aversion from the co-participant before a return to mutual gaze in the next turn, and in some cases, aligned eyebrow-raising facial movements have also been identified.

The design and positioning of these interjections creates an interactional ambiguity that allows these OMG tokens to act as pivotal elements, drawing already-potentially-closed sequences to a definitive close after a moment of mutual appreciation while indexing the incipient opening new sequences of action. The paper will offer an overview of the qualitative turn-by-turn interactional analysis of a selection of cases from this collection with the relevant instrumental evidence for the prosodic and gestural design of this group of OMG tokens and analyse the social consequences of their use in conversation.

Index Terms: interjections, interaction, multimodality

Example 1: RCELAKE_Rank. GAT-2 + Mondada transcription conventions. Context: friends Mia and Ann exchange displays of evaluative and affective stance on use of oil on the skin for sunbathing.

```
63 ANN: `YE:AH. = it's dis`GUSTing:;(0.3)
64      like (.) you lOok at my dAd's ˇSKIN,
65      and it's like (.) ˇD:ARK and,
66      <<all> sort of> ˇBUBbling, = it's ((vocalisation)) (0.9)
67 MIA: tsk. `bEtter than my dAd's ˇELbow, nhh.
68      [hihihihi]
69 ANN: [hahahaha]
70      <<cr>ˇNI[CE:,>  ]
71 MIA:          [*`YE:::]AH;
                *gaze tw Ann->
                #Fig. A
72 ANN: thAt was <<cr>`R::*ANK.> =
   mia                  ->*looks away…->
                         #Fig. B
73 MIA: =↑thAt's `GR*OSS.
                ->*looks left->
               #Fig. C
74      *.hhh <<p, br>↑`O:::h ´D:E:AR,>
        *moves head slightly to the right ->
                  #Fig. D
75      (0.4)
76      mtk. *i <<all, f> ↑nEed to find someone to help me move> HOUSE *no:w,=
           ->*looks left and down----------------------------------------*looks up->
             #Fig. E                                                    #Fig. F
77       =cause <<all>*i dOn't have a> CA:R,
                    ->*looks at Ann ->>
                     #Fig. G
```

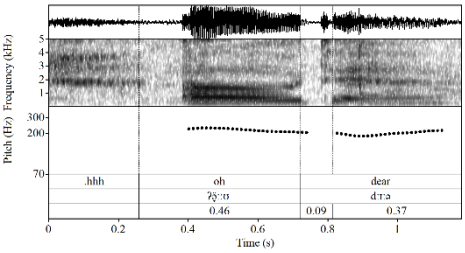

Fig. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Figures 1-7 (left): Major gaze shifts at moments indicated on the transcription above. Figure 8 (right): Acoustic visualisation (waveform, spectrogram, and f0 trace aligned to speaker's range in Hz log with an impressionistic IPA transcription) of line 74 "oh dear".

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