The Acquisition of *oh*
Interjection in Early Childhood Observed on the Basis of CHILDES Database

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Interjections

Primary interjections are little words or non-words which in terms of their distribution can constitute an utterance by themselves and do not normally enter into construction with other word classes, for example, Ouch!, ... Oops!, etc. (Ameka 1992a: 105).

„an exclamatory insert used in speech to express emotion or attitude” (Biber at al. 2005: 457)

„a word or sound thrown into the sentence to express some feeling of the mind” (Crystal 1999: 206)

Interjections belong to the category of inserts. This category includes words that „do not form an integral part of syntactic structure” (Biber at al. 1999: 56) and often have an emotional or interactional meaning, such as, for example, greetings, farewells, attention signals, expletives, etc.
Ameka’s classification of interjections

- Interjections
  - Primary Interjections
    - Conative Interjections
      - Volitive Interjections: *Shh!, Psst!*
    - Phatic Interjections: *uh-huh, mhm*
  - Secondary Interjections
    - Expressive Interjections
      - Emotive Interjections: *Ugh! Wow! Oh!*
    - Cognitive Interjections
Purposes of Present Study

i) When does the interjection first appear in the child’s speech?

ii) In what situations is it used by the child and its caregivers?

iii) Does the use of the interjection show any developmental change in meaning?
CHILDES, CHAT format, CLAN

Command line: Eng-UK-MOR/Wells/Abigail/

chairs  

Continuous playback: On: ☑ | Off: ☐
Dependent tiers: %act: ☑ | %add: ☑ | %com: ☑ | %exp: ☑ |%
%gra: ☑ | %int: ☑ | %mor: ☑ | %par: ☑ | %sit: ☑ | %xpho: ☑

No media available for this transcript

0 @Loc: Eng-UK-MOR/Wells/Abigail/abigail02.cha
1 @PID: 11312/c-00020071-1
2 @Begin
3 @Languages: eng
4 @Participants: CHI Abigail Target_Child , MOT Mother , REB Rebecca Sister , NCH Nichole Sister , UNK Unknown
5 @ID: eng|Wells|CHI|1:5.28|female|typical||Target_Child||
6 @ID: eng|Wells|MOT|Mother||
7 @ID: eng|Wells|REB|Sister||
8 @ID: eng|Wells|NCH|Sister||
9 @ID: eng|Wells|UNK|Unidentified||
10 @ID: eng|Wells|NE|Adult||
11 @ID: eng|Wells|FMO|Family_Friend||
12 @Birth of CHI: 30-JUN-1972
13 @Date: 28-DEC-1973
14 @Comment: Nil
15 @Time Start: 9:19
16 @Location: Mothers bed+room
17 @Activities: Dressing
18 *MOT: that'll be washed today .
19 %mor: rel[that-mod[will aux be part|wash-PASTP adv:tem|today .
20 %gra: 1[LINK 2[4[AUX 3[4[AUX 4[0[ROOT 5[4[OBJ 6[4[PUNCT
21 %exp: some clothing of Abigail's
22 *RFR: <washed up > [>1
**CHILDES/ Eng-UK-MOR/ Wells/ Abigail/**

- abigail02.cha
- abigail03.cha
- abigail04.cha
- abigail05.cha
- abigail06.cha
- abigail07.cha
- abigail08.cha
- abigail09.cha
- abigail10.cha
- abigail21.cha

**@Location:** Kitchen

**@Activities:** Meal

**Situation:** Some toys fall down with a bang

**MOT:** one at a time.

**MOT:** pull them up.

**MOT:** pull (4.)

**MOT:** come on (3.)

**MOT:** oh.

**MOT:** in the basket (2.)

**CHI:** oh.

**MOT:** pull.

**MOT:** xxx.

**MOT:** oh.

**Situation:**

**MOT:** pull them up.

**MOT:** pull (4.)

**MOT:** come on (3.)

**MOT:** oh.

**MOT:** in the basket (2.)

**CHI:** oh.

**MOT:** pull.

**MOT:** xxx.

**MOT:** oh.
1. Adult 51.5%
2. Child 28.5%
3. Unknown age 20%
Main reasons for the production of oh

1. concern 20%
2. surprise 19.5%
3. other reasons 60.5%
Main reasons for the production-adults

1. concern 33%
2. surprise 15%
3. other reasons 52%
Main reasons for the production-child

1. disagree 23,5%
2. surprise 23,5%
3. other reasons 53%
Main reasons for the production-unknown age

- 1. surprise 24.5%
- 2. disagree 15.5%
- 3. other reasons 60%
Unknown age

- surprise: 8
- disagree: 5
- disappoint: 5
- agree: 4
- concern: 2
- excite: 2
- approve: 2
- confirm: 2
- disgust: 1
- impatient: 1
- reference: 1
CONCLUSIONS

The results have demonstrated that

1. the interjection *oh* appears for the first time
   (i) when the child is 1;5.28

2. the situations in which it is used differ with reference to the groups taken into consideration;
   (i) the child uses it mainly to disagree or when she is surprised.
   (ii) the caregiver (mainly mother) uses it when she is concerned or surprised.
   (iii) persons of unknown age use it when they are surprised or when they disagree.

3. the use of the interjection shows some developmental changes.
   (i) at the age of 4;8 the child uses it for the first time to refer to somebody else’s words.
   (ii) about the same age the child uses *oh* for the first time to refer to the previous situation.
THANK YOU