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## THE ENGLISH INTERJECTION *OH* IN SPECIALIST LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION

The following paper aims to analyse the functions of the interjection *oh* in the English corpus provided by Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its translation into Polish. Once the functions and patterns of the form are defined, the translation strategies employed are analysed. The study reveals which translational strategies proposed by Cuenca (2006) are employed in the translation of *oh*: literal translation, using an interjection with dissimilar form but having the same meaning, using a non-interjective structure but with similar meaning, using an interjection with a different meaning, omission, or addition of usually a primary interjection. The analysis of the interjection *oh* is preceded by a very brief presentation of various approaches focusing on the problem of defining and classifying interjections, as well as the presentation of the research concerning the interjection *oh* and its description in the specialist literature.

Keywords: *interjections, interjection oh, translation, translation strategies*

### 1. Introduction

In 1921, Sapir (1921: 6) wrote that “interjections are among the least important of speech elements”, and this view has been supported by many linguists until recently when the pragmatic turn in linguistic studies has been observed. There are probably several reasons why interjections received rather limited attention in the scientific literature (Ameka 1992, Goddard 2014). Some of the most important ones include the fact that interjections are phonologically anomalous, i.e. they are often made up of sounds (or sound sequences) that do not occur in other parts of speech, like the English *Psst!*, *Ugh*, etc. Thus, taking into consideration the main sound system of English, they are regarded as

non-words (Ameka and Wilkins 2006). What is more, the spelling of interjections often varies from speaker to speaker (e.g. *Oh*, *Och*), which often causes difficulties for lexicographers and corpus researchers. And maybe one more reason seems to be worth mentioning, i.e. interjections are spontaneous language elements, and by this very property, they rather belong to spoken language mode than written one; and for this reason, they have been absent from the great majority of texts that have been used by linguists for linguistic analyses for many years. However, during the past two or three decades, an increased interest in interjections was observed. Many linguists point out the fact that interjections are very important elements in human communication and social interaction. Starting from the '80s of the past century, there appeared quite a considerable number of publications discussing interjections, mainly taking into consideration pragmatic perspective to language (Ameka and Wilkins 2006, Goddard 2014). As a result of this growing interest in interjections, many linguists adopt different perspectives on defining as well as on classifying this category. The following pages will take a bird's eye view of a handful of definitions and classifications of this category.

## 2. Interjections: definitions and classifications

The specialist literature is abundant in varied definitions of interjections, taking into consideration their formal and/or functional properties. Many linguists think of interjections as a category associated with spontaneous feelings, reactions, or emotions. Jespersen (1921, 1924) defines them as “abrupt expressions for sudden sensations and emotions ...”, for Ilyish (1965: 172), they are “... expressions of emotions.” Goddard (2014: 4) claims after Wharton (2003) that “interjections show rather than say”, for Ameka and Wilkins (2006), they are expressions of “a speaker's current mental state or reaction or attitude towards an element in the linguistic or extra-linguistic context.” Similarly, Wierzbicka (1992) defines interjections as “a linguistic sign expressing the speaker's current mental state (1) which can be used on its own, (2) which expresses a specifiable meaning, (3) which does not include other signs (with a specifiable) meaning, (4) which is not homophonous with other lexical items that would be perceived as semantically related to it, (5) which refers to the speaker's current mental state or mental act (for example ‘I feel ...’, ‘I want ...’, ‘I think ...’, ‘I know ...’).” From a formal point of view, a unique property of interjections is that they are words that constitute utterances by themselves (Ameka and Wilkins 2006), and they are “... isolated in relation to the speech material used in the rest of language.” Also, Ilyish (1965) believes that in the majority of cases, interjections do not constitute parts of any phrases but stand isolated. They constitute their own utterances, and they do not enter into any

relations with other sentence elements as well as with inflectional or derivational morphology, which means that typically they do not take inflections or derivations; they tend to be invariable in form. They stand for a whole sentence or proposition; thus, they are holophrastic.

Still another perspective that may be taken into consideration in defining interjections is the pragmatic point of view in accordance with which Ameka (1992) defines interjections as the category of lexemes that encode the speaker's attitudes and communicative intentions and are context-bound. Context-bound, or indexical, in the case of interjections, means that they are presuppositions about social context and discourse which could be expressed by propositions (Ameka and Wilkins 2006). Thus, instead of saying *I've hurt myself and I feel pain*, the speaker exclaims *Ouch!* by means of which s/he becomes indexed as the one experiencing pain. Such an utterance is fully interpreted at the moment when the person experiencing pain is identified.

To sum up, it would be worth presenting a brief overview of Cuenca's (2000) point of view on the problem of defining interjections. According to her, the problems with defining interjections in a unified way are connected, *inter alia*, with the fact that most accounts of this category concentrate on its anomalous characteristics (e.g. interjections as a class of words can stand on their own as utterances, some of them do not fit in the phonological system of the language they belong to, they do not have any precise lexical meaning, they are language-specific and they are a heterogeneous class which includes one-word elements, as well as phrasal elements and onomatopoeic words) rather than on certain regularities that may be found among the members of this category. Cuenca attempts to define interjections within a framework of Cognitive Linguistics, which allows for treating their language peripherality and heterogeneity not as a handicap but as a means of avoiding the difficulties in definition (for more, see Cuenca 2000).

To understand the phenomenon of interjections better, it seems worth having a look at their classification. Typically, interjections are classified into *primary* interjections and *secondary* interjections. Primary interjections are words or non-words which can constitute an utterance by themselves and which typically do not enter into construction with any other word classes. These are elements such, e.g. as *Wow! Oh!, Psst!*, etc. They have no synchronic connections to other independently existing lexical forms in a language (Shannon 2018). "They form a unique form-meaning unit." (Ameka and Wilkins 2006: 4). Secondary interjections, on the other hand, are "words which have an independent semantic value but which can be used conventionally as utterances by themselves to express a mental attitude or state." (Ameka and Wilkins 2006: 4). They are forms that are identical with other words belonging to other word categories (Wierzbicka 1991). Thus, secondary interjections, i.e. words such, e.g. as *Christ! Damn!*, are used in a referential domain as well as in non-referential. Let us take

into consideration the form *Christ!* which in its referential domain relates, for most Christians, to the incarnation of God the Son and the awaited Messiah (the Christ) prophesied in the Old Testament. In the non-referential domain, the form is used for expressing a strong emotion such as surprise or anger, which is often felt as offensive for some people. Schultze and Tabakowska (2004: 555) refer to primary interjections as “narrow classification” and to secondary interjections as “broad classification”. To this binary distinction between primary and secondary interjections, Goddard (2014) adds *interjectional phrases* which are composite expressions consisting of noise-like primary interjections (*Ugh!*, *Psst!*, etc.) and word-like primary interjections (which can serve as base forms for words belonging to, e.g. the category of nouns, verbs, etc.; e.g. *Wow!*, *Yuck!*). Milewski (1965) classifies interjections along similar lines as presented above, with the difference that primary interjections are primitive acoustic symptoms related to the prosodic features of an utterance (e.g. *Ah!*). Apart from primary and secondary interjections, he also enumerates *appeals*, which serve to initiate the conversation or attract the interlocutor’s attention (e.g. *Hop-hop!*) and *onomatopoeic forms*, i.e. acoustic images of real sounds (e.g. *Hush!*). Milewski’s primary interjections, appeals, and onomatopoeic forms correspond to Zandvoort’s (1957) *regular interjections*, and secondary interjections are the same as Zandvoort’s *occasional interjections*.

Taking into consideration the semantic point of view, interjections are usually divided into *volitive*, *emotive*, or *cognitive* (conative). Volitive interjections express directive messages and serve as a means to urge somebody to do something (e.g. *Shh!*). Emotive interjections serve to express the speaker’s feelings, emotions (e.g. *Yuk!*). And, finally, cognitive interjections deliver messages which are typically related to what one knows (*Aha!*) (for more on the semantic classification of interjections, see, e.g. Wierzbicka 1991, 1992, Goddard 2014, Orwińska-Ruziczka 1992).

Jing and White (2016), on the other hand, classify interjections as minor clauses and subcategorise them taking into consideration the function they perform. And thus, they enumerate four subcategories, which are: *exclamations* (e.g. *Aha!*, *Wow!*), *calls* (e.g. *Hey!*), *alarms* (e.g. *Help!*), and *greetings* (e.g. *Goodbye!*).

An interesting point of view in the classification of interjections is presented by Ameka and Wilkins (2006), who place interjections in the context of human interaction and ask about the role of interjections in this communication. Their classification is based on interactional perspective, and on its basis, several subcategories are singled out: a group of interjections that are a speaker’s expressions of mental states (e.g. *Ugh!*, *Wow!*), and which are not addressed to anyone; interjections that are directed to an interlocutor and by means of which a speaker demands some kind of action (e.g. *Hey!*, *Shh!*); interjections which are used by an interlocutor, who is at the same time in the role of an addressee, to show that they are attentive and participate in the conversation (e.g. *Hmmm*, *Huh?*);

interjections used by an addressee as the reaction to what an interlocutor has said (e.g. *yeah, mhm, ok*); interjections that are selected by an addressee from a ritual set as, e.g. in salutations (*bye-bye*); and finally, interjections that are used by a speaker in order to deliver a meta-commentary during their turn in a conversation, very often to signal a problem in formulation or production (e.g. hesitation markers).

For reasons of space and the aim of the present paper, further classifications as well as other attempts to define the category of interjections will not be presented. I only hope that the preceding discussion has shown that the investigation of the domain of interjections has been carried out from many different points of view, taking into consideration a variety of approaches (semantic, pragmatic, etc.), which underlines the fact that interjections once regarded as not belonging to language, and thus not worth investigating by linguists, in recent decades have gained the status of those language forms that are extremely important communicative elements and deserve a thorough linguistic investigation.

### 3. The research into the interjection *oh*

When we listen intently to any English or Polish conversation, we can probably hear a lot of *ohs* fulfilling different functions, expressing various emotions, used in different places in an utterance (initial, medial position), and given various intonation patterns depending on the context of their use. And this is probably one of the reasons why the interjection *oh* has been given some attention in specialist literature, but it has not always been analysed by various researchers under the same heading. For example, Schiffrin (1987) includes *oh* into the category of discourse markers. According to her, *oh* is a marker of information management, and apart from its traditional function to express strong emotional states (when used alone), *oh* is used in initiating utterances and is centered on its information management function (when used in repairs); it is also used in question/answer/acknowledgment sequences, and as a marker of shifts in speaker orientation. Aijmer (2002) also includes *oh* into the set of discourse particles and claims that it is an interjection which through the process of grammaticalisation developed into discourse particle. Its main function, among others, is that of response marker which is used in discourse management, i.e. it marks assertion, emphasis, reaction, objection, clarification sequences, self-repair, coming to a realization. It is also used as a form whose function is to point to affect and emotion. In his paper devoted to discourse markers used in audiovisual translating, Chaume (2004) enumerates *oh* as a discourse marker along with *now, you know, I mean*, etc. Its function is to manage a coherent dialogue, especially through making clear what the speaker's intentions are and what they intend to do with words. Thus, *oh* is generally used

in question-answer adjacency sets, in repair strategies, and as an intensifier. Schourup (1985), in his analysis of discourse particles in English conversation, also devotes some space to *oh*, which, according to him, signals that a speaker has become aware of something and wants to show it, or that a speaker has paused for a moment to choose between alternatives or to make a decision. For Schourup, *oh* is an *evincive* form, by which he understands that some thought has occurred to a speaker but the nature of this thought is not specified.

On the other hand, Wierzbicka (1992), in her paper devoted to the semantics of interjections, regards *oh* as an interjection, not a discourse particle. Also, Jing and White (2016) analyse *oh* as an interjection which depending on the context of its use may indicate the speaker's response to what has just been said by an interlocutor, or that a speaker wants to move to another point in the dialogue, or it is the exclamation suggesting emotions, e.g. surprise. According to them, *oh* functions as a means to maintain the relations and communicative rapport between the sides in a conversation. Finally, Thawabteh (2010 after Carter and McCarthy 2006: 57) claims that *oh* is both an interjection and a discourse marker, because *oh* “[e]xpresses surprise, disappointment, and pain. As a discourse marker, [it] is used in particular to respond to new information or to indicate that a speaker has just discovered something surprising. The extent of the surprise can sometimes be indicated by a marked tone of voice which is represented in writing by *ohoh* and *oohh*.”

The multifunctional nature of *oh* is very often mentioned in the specialist literature. For example, according to James (1973), *oh* signals that somebody has just become aware of something in general – it may be a strong emotion (any emotion either positive or negative), it may indicate something to be done, a decision process, or awareness. *Oh* is used to show that a speaker has undergone some change in the current state of knowledge, awareness, information, or orientation (Heritage 1984). Adopting speech act theory, Tshomba (1986) describes *oh* as an interjectional form expressing deliberate hesitation, surprise, compassion, reaction, and response at the same time to a situation, as well as it may show that a speaker has just remembered something. Contrary to some other interjections, which express some definite meaning, *oh*, according to Ilyish, is not attached to any feeling in particular as it can be used by a speaker in different situations, i.e. when somebody is happy, sad, surprised, etc. Thus, he claims that the meaning of *oh* is “very vague” (Ilyish 1965: 172).

#### **4. Corpus analysis: the meaning of the interjection *oh***

Taking into consideration all the definitions and approaches taken in the analysis of interjections in general, as well as the analyses of *oh* presented above, for the purpose of the present paper, *oh* will be considered as an interjection

understood in the sense proposed by Cuenca (2000, 2002). Thus, it will be treated as an interjection, i.e. an element of a peripheral class of the category “sentence” which is context-bound and which typically encodes pragmatic meanings and sometimes presents phonological patterns anomalous as far as English and Polish are considered. So, *oh* is to be treated not only as a form that has an expressive function but also as a form that can be used as a discourse marker, since the term *interjection* refers to a grammatical category and the term *discourse marker* (discourse particle) refers to a functional category. Taking into consideration this point of view, *oh* may be considered a prototypical primary interjection which is not only a form possessing an expressive function, but it also functions as an element of discourse.

The following pages are devoted to the analysis of the instances of the use of the interjection *oh* in Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and their translation into Polish. The text of the novel and its translation were perused manually. While conducting the following analysis, some important issues seem to be necessary to be taken into consideration: 1. *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is written in the style which effectively imitates real-life conversation (i.e. the text consists of a large number of dialogues and monologues), but, on the other hand, in many fragments of the text, there are no clues relating the readers to, e.g. intonation and/or gestures, which are also important elements in determining the function and meaning of *oh* in certain contexts; 2. as the number of the instances of the use of *oh* is rather limited, it should be assumed that the results of the analysis reveal only general tendencies, which can be further confirmed in a more thorough study based on a wider corpus.

As mentioned above, *oh* is capable of expressing various emotions, and this purely expressive nature of *oh* is visible in 64 instances of the use of the interjection out of 202 instances found in the corpus material. In the majority of the instances, *oh* takes the initial position in the sentence and expresses a very wide range of emotions, thus proving Ilyish’s stand that there is no particular feeling attached to it, and its meaning depends purely on the context, the participants of the conversation, pitch, intonation, etc. In one of the examples (1), Bridget is asked to go to Prague with Daniel, a date she has long been waiting for, and she expresses her joy with the use of *Oooh*, where prolonging the *o* gives an additional shade of meaning showing her excitement about the date as well:

(1) Daniel: Will you come to Prague next weekend?

Bridget: What? Er hahahaha, you mean the weekend after this one?

Daniel: Yeeeee, next weekend, he said, with an encouraging slightly patronizing air, as if he had been teaching me to speak English

Bridget: *Oooh*. Yes, please, I said, forgetting the ice-queen mantra in the excitement.

Or, for example, Magda (Bridget's friend), in her conversation with Bridget, says that she would like to be like her and have an affair, "bubble baths for two hours on Sunday morning. Or stay out all night with no questions asked".

- (2) Magda: Don't suppose you fancy going shopping tomorrow morning, do you?  
 Bridget: Er. Well, I've got to go to work, I said.  
 Magda: *Oh*, said Magda, looking momentarily surprised.

In (2), *oh* expresses surprise at the fact that Bridget's life is not as beautiful and easy as Magda has imagined. In another example (3), Bridget is trying to answer an invitation written in a very posh style, and after some more or less successful attempts, she gets annoyed, which is expressed by the following:

- (3) Bridget: *Oh*, for God's sake.

Here, *oh* is emphasized by *for God's sake*. On some other occasion, Bridget and her Dad were invited to a very posh party, which Bridget describes in detail. Both of them stand and stare completely speechless and all the other guests look as if they could not believe their luck:

- (4) Dad: *Oh* dear, said dad, following my gaze ... .., thus expressing amazement at the whole situation they have found themselves in. The same posh party: Bridget meets an attractive adolescent schoolboy (5):  
 (5) Boy: "Hi", said the youth, He lit a cigarette unsteadily and stared, heading down the stairs towards me. "Don't suppose you fancy a dance? *Oh*. Ah. Sorry", he said, holding out his hand as if we were at the Eton open day and he was a former Home Secretary who had forgotten his manners: "Simon Dalrymple."

In (5), *oh* clearly expresses the young boy's embarrassment at not introducing himself to a woman before asking her to dance. The feeling of satisfaction and pleasure is expressed by the prolonged *oooh* in the conversation between Bridget and Mark (6):

- (6) Mark: But Una Alconbury told me you were a sort of literary whizz-woman, completely obsessed with books.  
 Bridget: Did she? I said, rather pleased by the idea suddenly.  
 Bridget: What else did she tell you?  
 Mark: Well, that you're a radical feminist and have an increasingly glamorous life ...  
 Bridget: *Oooh*, I purred.



In (7), panic is expressed by *oh* reinforced by the secondary interjection *God* and repetition:

- (7) Bridget: *Oh God oh God*. Still have not washed hair. Will quickly get into bath.

Surprise is expressed by *oh* in the conversation held between Bridget and her Mum (8):

- (8) Mum: Hello, darling, just called to say bye before I go, and hope everything goes well.  
 Bridget: Go? Go where?  
 Mum: *Oh*. Ahahahaha. I told you, Julio and I are popping over to Portugal for a couple of weeks, just to see the family and so on, get a bit of suntan before Christmas.

The examples above, selected from the corpus material, prove the fact that the interjection *oh* may express all kinds of emotions from those positive ones like pleasure, amazement, to those negative ones like anger or annoyance. Its meaning may be, and very often is, reinforced by other interjections (*God*, etc.) or repetition (*Oh God oh God*), which are often used to make the meaning of *oh* more precise in a given context.

Apart from pure expressive nature, the prototypical value of *oh* is the fact of realizing/becoming aware of something, like in the following examples (9) and (10):

- (9) Bridget: Where is Julio? I said, suspiciously.  
 Mum: *Oh*, he's stayed behind in Portugal to sort out all this planning permission palaver.  
 (10) Mum: That doesn't matter. You can drive up after work. *Oh*, did I mention? Malcolm and Elaine Darcy are coming and bringing Mark with them. (...)

In examples (9) and (10), *oh* simply indicates that the speaker has realized something and reacts to the fact with no special feelings. But in the majority of instances found in the corpus material, the value of realizing something is accompanied by a wide range of other emotions or feelings, like anger, annoyance, pity, resignation, panic, moan, etc. Let us consider a couple of such examples:

- (11) Bridget: *Oh no*, I'll have to ask Rebecca and Martin Crashing Bore now. But that means I'll have to ask Joanna as well. Shit. Shit. Now I've said I'm cooking I can't suddenly announce we're going out to a restaurant or I'll seem both bone idle and mean.

- (12) Bridget: My body is a temple. I wonder if it's time to go to bed yet? *Oh* no, it's only 8.30.
- (13) Bridget: *Oh* God. Even my own mother wishes I'd never been born.
- (14) Bridget: *Oh* my God, who's the Shadow Defense Secretary?
- (15) It took me a while to locate the terracotta oil burner, [...], but when I did I simply poured a little milk on to the teaspoon, tilted it and held it against the edge of the hole where you put the candle in. I couldn't believe it. The Essential Oil Burner was taking in milk. You could actually see the milk disappearing from the teaspoon. *Oh* my God, it's a miracle, I exclaimed.
- (16) *Oh*, don't be ridiculous, he said, laughing.

In example (11), Bridget is planning her birthday party, and by *oh no* she realizes that unfortunately, she will have to invite to her party more people than she has expected; the additional layer of meaning here is a kind of moan. The feeling of disappointment that time flows so slowly may be inferred from the use of *oh no* and the context of the situation of example (12). The value of realization of something in (13) is enhanced by the feeling of self-pity as Bridget is very sad at the fact that even her mother seems not to love her. Before the job interview, Bridget realizes that she does not remember the name of the Shadow Defense Secretary, and she gets into a real panic (14). In (15), on the other hand, Bridget is astonished at the fact that the Essential Oil Burner that she bought for Mark Darcy's mother was taking in milk. And in (16), Mark Darcy is amused at Bridget making this observation.

The corpus material provided us with a number of examples where the value of realization is combined with the phatic function (in terms of Jakobson), whose meaning is that of agreement. Consider examples (17) and (18) below:

- (17) "I must say," said Natasha, with a knowing smile, "I always feel with the Classics people should be made to prove they've read the book before they're allowed to watch the television version."  
 "*Oh*, I quite agree," said Perpetua, emitting further gales of laughter. "What a marvelous idea!"
- (18) Staggered downstairs hoping hair did not smell of fags to find Mum and Una exchanging political views while putting crosses in the end of sprouts.  
 "*Oh* yes, I think what's-his—name is *very* good."  
 "Well, he is, I mean he got through his what-do-you-mer-call-it clause that nobody thought he would, didn't he?"

Unfortunately, the corpus does not provide any examples of *oh* representing the value of realization with phatic function expressing disagreement, but there are quite a lot of examples of phatic function whose aim is to open, maintain, close, or verify the communication channel, and the instances of this type of

phatic expressions are most commonly observed in greetings and casual discussions. Although they may appear as having no purpose, as in everyday conversational exchange, the information they carry may seem trivial; they perform an important communicative function of managing bonds between the participants in the communication act. Let us consider a couple of examples of *oh* reinforcing this type of phatic expressions:

- (19) *Oh*, hello Mark.
- (20) *Oh*, hello, darling.
- (21) “*Oh*, hi, I’m sorry. I didn’t see you,” he said.
- (22) *Oh*, there you are, Daddy.

*Oh* also combines with utterances expressing conative function, i.e. inciting the interlocutor to perform some kind of action. The instances found in the corpus material are usually very short imperative utterances like the following ones:

- (23) *Oh*, don’t be absurd, Una.
- (24) Mother: “I’m coming round with the crew at ten o’clock tomorrow. *Oh*, darling, aren’t you thrilled?”  
 Bridget: “Mother. If you are coming round to my flat with a television crew, I won’t be in it.”  
 Mother: “*Oh*, but you must,” she said icily.

The number of occurrences of the interjection *oh* expressing the value of realization of something combined with phatic and conative functions, as well as additionally expressing various emotions (e.g. disappointment, annoyance, anger, moan, etc.), or indicating just the fact of realizing something without any particular accompanying feeling or emotions, is 137 out of the total number of the instances of *oh*, which is 202.

Summing up, it would be worth presenting the instances of the interjection *oh* from a statistical point of view. In the corpus material, there are 202 instances of *oh*, in 137 instances (68%) *oh* is used to express the value of realization of something, and in 64 instances (32%) *oh* expresses various emotions, which means that in the corpus material the interjection *oh* is more often used to express the fact of becoming aware of something than in its purely expressive nature. Within this function, *oh* is used 20 times (15%) to express just the fact of realizing something without any emotions accompanying it, in 70 (51%) examples, it expresses additionally different feelings, in 25 (18%) and 22 (16%) instances, it occurs in its phatic and conative functions, respectively. The statistics show that the interjection *oh* indicates more often, at least in the analysed corpus material, the fact of becoming aware of something, but within

this function, in the majority of instances, it is accompanied by other emotional values like a moan, pity, disappointment, etc.

The analysis of the functions of the interjection *oh* in the corpus material clearly shows that it is a very polysemic language unit whose prototypical value is that of expressive nature and also connected to the fact of becoming aware of something. *Oh* is capable of indicating a wide range of feelings and emotions from those positive ones, like joy, pleasure, to those negative, like pity, etc.

It would be worth mentioning that sometimes it is not very easy to decode the meaning of *oh* intended by the author of the book, as there is no intonation indicated in the written text, and the broader context sometimes does not give us any clue as what emotions accompany a particular occurrence of *oh*. In a spoken dialogue, gestures, intonation, and the interlocutor's mimics usually help to decode the intended meaning of the interjection, although in some cases, it may be misinterpreted as well.

## 5. Corpus analysis: the position of *oh*

While analyzing various meanings and functions of the interjection *oh*, it has been observed that *oh* in the majority of its occurrences in the corpus material, in 92%, appears at the initial position of the sentence, whereas in the middle of the sentence, it appears only in four instances, i.e. in 2%, and at the end of the sentence only in two instances, which is 1% of all the occurrences. *Oh* also occurs alone, constituting an utterance on its own, but such instances are rather rare; there are only eleven such occurrences (5%) in the whole corpus material. In the majority of the cases, in 95%, *oh* is followed by various linguistic units which may be organized into certain patterns:

a. there are 44 instances of the pattern: *oh* + a sentence, for example:

(25) "I think this must be for you, ' I said, holding out the card as she opened the door. "*Oh*, I thought it must be for you, she said.

(26) "What I meant was, there isn't anything any good like Blind Date on the other side during the literary masterpieces, so I don't think many people would be channel hopping." "Oh, Blind Date is "good", is it?" sneered Perpetua. "Yes, it's very good."

As far as this pattern is concerned, it is most frequent and in the majority of cases *oh* means that the speaker has realized something.

b. there are four instances of the pattern: *oh* + a vocative, and six instances of the pattern which is a combination of the previous two, which is: *oh* + a vocative + a sentence. Consider examples (27) and (28), respectively:

(27) “No,” I said. But then vanity began to get the better of me. “Why, anyway? What?” “*Oh*, darling,” she cooed. “They’re wanting someone younger for me to interview on “Suddenly Single”: [...]’

(28) “*Oh*, Daniel, I miss you too.”

c. there are only four instances where *oh* is followed by a formulaic expression, by which conversational speech formulas, pause fillers, and other conventional units are meant, and a vocative (pattern: *oh* + a formulaic expression + a vocative), for example (29), and just one instance has been singled out of *oh* followed by a formulaic expression alone, as in (30) which is the continuation of the dialogue in (29):

(29) “Never you mind,” I said, suddenly glancing over my shoulder at Perpetua, who was smirking. “*Oh*, please, darling. I’ve told them I’ve found someone.” “No.”

(30) “*Oh*, pleeeeeease. I’ve never had a career all my life [...]’”

d. in fourteen instances, *oh* is followed by *no* or *yes* and a sentence, like in examples (31) and (32):

(31) “*Oh* no, that was just the Vicar’s new vestments which set her off this morning. [...]’”

(32) “*Ooh* yes, better make that cuppa, “ I said, thinking it would give me a chance to get a good look round the bedroom and scout the study.

e. in fifty-six instances, *oh* is followed by another interjection or a combination of interjections as in the following example:

(33) *Oh*, thank God and all his angels in heaven above.

(34) *Oh*, for God’s sake.

The most frequent combinations are with *oh* followed by *God* (*Oh God* or *Oh my God*), *dear* (*Oh dear*), i.e. secondary interjections.

f. in forty-one instances, *oh* co-occurs with a secondary interjection and is followed by a sentence as in the following examples:

(35) *Oh* God, what’s wrong with me?

(36) *Oh* God, birds have started singing.

There is also a very small number (12 instances) of *oh* followed by an interjection and a vocative or a sentence equivalent (1 instance).

Taking into consideration all the observations presented above, it may be assumed that *oh* most often co-occurs with other linguistic units to which sentences, vocatives, formulaic expressions, other interjections, and their various combinations may be included. It very rarely occurs alone, which may be explained by the fact that *oh* is a very polysemic unit capable of expressing a wide range of emotions, and when used isolated in speech, or especially in a written text (dialogue), it may be difficult to decode its meaning intended by the speaker, and thus some misunderstanding of the message may take place. That is why *oh* is often followed by other linguistic units whose function is very often to complement its meaning, make it more precise in a given context, which is especially important not only in speech but also when it comes to texts such as, for example, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, where there are a lot of dialogues, monologues and the language is very emotional. The suggestions in the form of various linguistic units accompanying the interjection *oh* also constitute an indispensable help for translators coping with the polysemic nature of these small, but semantically capacious, units.

## 6. Corpus analysis: *oh* and its translations

Translating interjections is challenging not only from a theoretical and descriptive point of view but also because they cause many problems in the process of translation. In many languages exactly the same forms of interjections may be observed, for example, English *oh* or *ah* and Polish *oh* and *ah*, or German *oh* and *ah*, etc., but very often the conditions of their use are not the same. Following Cuenca (2006 after Baker 1992) and Schulze and Tabakowska (2004: 558), several major problems in the translation of interjections may be enumerated: the existence of identical or very similar forms cross-linguistically but differing in the conditions of their use as well as their frequencies, the apparently universal primary onomatopoeic interjections which due to their imitating natural sounds may seem to be identical in all languages, but in many cases, they are not, an interjectional idiomatic meaning, and phrasal non-idiomatic meaning in the case of secondary interjections which have undergone the process of grammaticalization (according to Cuenca 2006: 21, secondary interjections are grammaticalized elements as they “are words or phrases which have undergone a semantic change by pragmaticization of meaning and syntactic reanalysis, ...”), problems which originate from systematic differences between grammatical systems of different languages, and problems arising from the fact that some types of interjections become obsolete (for more, see, e.g. Cuenca 2006, Schulze and Tabakowska 2004, Lockyer 2015, Thawabteh 2010).

Taking into consideration all possible problems that may appear in the process of translation, it may be stated that translating interjections, in fact, involves

translating discourse meanings that are characteristic of a given language and are culturally bound. Thus, the task of the translator is the interpretation of their semantic and pragmatic meaning and the context they appear in. Then, the translator usually applies one of several translation strategies, and seeks an appropriate form, whether it be an interjection or not, which would best convey a particular meaning and has an identical or at least a very similar effect on the reader/interlocutor. Cuenca (2006: 27–28) distinguishes six translation strategies with reference to interjections, which are as follows:

1. literal translation,
2. using an interjection with dissimilar form but having the same meaning,
3. using a non-interjective structure but with similar meaning,
4. using a non-interjective structure but with dissimilar meaning,
5. omission,
6. addition of usually a primary interjection.

The analysis of the corpus material revealed that only three (out of Cuenca's six strategies) translation strategies are employed by the translator of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. These are literal translation, using an interjection with dissimilar form but having the same meaning, and omission.

As far as literal translation is considered, it is employed in 48 occurrences of *oh* (24%). In this case, *oh* always occupies the initial position of the sentence or stands alone, as in the following examples:

- (37) *Oh*, if only I could turn back the clock. Polish: *Och*, gdyby tylko dało się cofnąć czas.
- (38) *Oh*. Ahahahaha. Polish: *Och*. Ahahahaha.

What is also interesting is the fact that the spelling variants of *oh* are translated literally into Polish. Consider (39) and (40) below:

- (39) *Oooch*, goody. Polish: *Oooch*, jak fajowo.
- (40) *Ooh*, I am so looking forward to tomorrow. Polish: *Ooch*, nie mogę się doczekać jutra.

*Oh* is very often translated by the Polish interjection *o* which carries the same meaning in Polish as in the following example:

- (41) *Oh*, hi, she said seeing me. Polish: *O*, cześć – powiedziała na mój widok.

There are 57 instances (28%) of *oh* rendered into Polish by an interjection with dissimilar form but having the same meaning. In 55 instances, *oh* is translated by means of the Polish *o* followed by a secondary interjection, e.g. *O rany!* In the majority of cases, i.e. in 32 instances out of 55, *oh* is followed by

the secondary interjection *God* (or *my God*) and is rendered into Polish as *O Boże!* Consider the following examples:

- (42) *Oh my God*. I've overslept. Polish: *O Boże, zaspałam.*  
 (43) *Oh God*. Entire day has turned into nightmare. Polish: *O Boże! Co za koszmarny dzień!*

There are two instances of the English *oh dear* rendered into Polish as *O Boże!* as well. In thirteen instances, *oh* is followed by other secondary interjections, i.e. *dear* (8 instances), *blimey* (one instance), *shit* (two instances), *gosh* (one instance), and *joy* (one instance) and translated into equivalent Polish colloquial expressions as, for example, the following ones:

- (44) *Oh shit*, I'll take you home. Polish: *O cholera. Odwiozę cię do domu.*  
 (45) *Oh dear*. Polish: *O rany.*  
 (46) "*Oh blimey*, no wonder you look so ..." "What?" "Oh, nothing, nothing. Just a bit ... drawn." Polish: "*O rany, nic dziwnego, że wyglądasz tak ...*" „Jak?” „Trochę ... mizernie.”

In two cases, *oh* is followed by *hi* and *hello* (formulaic expressions) and translated into Polish as *o cześć* and *o dzień dobry*, respectively. *Oh* is translated into Polish *o* also in the case when it is followed by *no* or *yeah* (*yes*) in English:

- (47) *Oh no*, it's only 8:30. Polish: *O nie, dopiero 8:30.*  
 (48) "*Oh yeah*, I quite agree it's much the best to go for younger partners," I burst out airily. Polish: – *O tak, całkowicie się zgadzam, że lepiej mieć młodszego partnera – wypaliłam beztrąsko.*

There is also just one instance of *oh* translated into the Polish interjection *aha* having the same meaning of realizing something (49) and one instance of the Polish interjection *a* (50):

- (49) *Oh yea*, like, Bridget, it's not Liverpool, it's, like Manchester, right? Polish: *Aha, Bridget, to nie Liverpool, tylko Manchester, kumasz?*  
 (50) *Oh*, hello, she said coldly, not meeting my eye. Polish: *A, cześć – odparła chłodno, nie patrząc mi w oczy.*

The omission strategy is employed in 98 instances, and we can observe two mechanisms applied by the translator. The first one may be observed when *oh* is followed by another interjection or a formulaic expression, and *yes* or *no* and is rendered into Polish by means of only a secondary interjection, e.g. *Boże! Dobrze!* The majority of the cases constitute the English *oh God* rendered into Polish as



*Boże!* (29 instances). There are also instances of *oh* followed by secondary interjections or interjectional phrases (or composite expressions in the sense of Ameka 1992, Ameka and Wilkins 2006)<sup>1</sup> rendered into Polish by an equivalent secondary interjection or interjectional phrase, such, e.g. as the following ones:

- (51) *Oh, Bloody hell.* Polish: *Cholera jasna.*  
 (52) *Oh, for heaven's sake,* Colin, .... Polish: *Na litość boską,* Colin, ...  
 (53) *Oh.* Polish: *Dobrze.*

The second mechanism is the omission of the interjection in the translation at all, for example:

- (54) *Oh God.* It's no good. Polish: *Nic z tego nie będzie.*  
 (55) *Oh,* now you are not going to go looking like a sloppy tramp in dull colours. Polish: *Będziesz wyglądać jak niechlujna wdowa.*  
 (56) *Oh God,* feel awful: horrible sick acidic hangover and today is office disco lunch. Polish: *Czuję się okropnie: mam mdłości, zgałę i kaca, a dzisiaj jest ten dyskotekowy lunch w pracy.*

The table below shows the results of the analysis.

Table 1. Translation strategies

Translation strategy	Occurrences	Percentage
literal translation	49	24%
using an interjection with dissimilar form but having the same meaning	57	28%
- o + a secondary interjection	46	
- o + formulaic units	2	
- o + yes/no	7	
- aha	1	
- a	1	
omission	96	48%
- <i>oh</i> omitted + secondary interjection (or interjectional phrase) translated	58	
- no interjection translated at all	38	

A review of the results of translating *oh* allows one to conclude that omission is the main strategy employed by the translator. In the situation when *oh* is found

<sup>1</sup> Composite expressions, in other words, interjectional phrases are e.g.: *My goodness!*, *For heaven's sake!*, etc.

in combination with other linguistic units such as secondary interjections or interjectional phrases, it is only the second unit that is translated. In the rest of the instances, the interjection is omitted in the translation. Another strategy used in the translation is using an interjection with dissimilar form but carrying the same meaning and fulfilling the same function in the context. Here, the Polish interjection *o* most often replaces the English *oh*, the use of the Polish *aha* and *a* plays a marginal role, as there are only two instances of these interjections in the corpus material. Literal translation, on the other hand, is employed by the translator in only 24%. The results may also lead one to the conclusion that the translator feels that the Polish equivalent form *o* or only the secondary interjection (or interjectional phrase) in case of *oh* found in combinations is more natural in certain contexts in Polish than *och*. The data presented in this section coincide approximately with the results concerning the translation of *oh* (among other interjections) in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (e.g. see Drzazga 2019). The Polish translators of *Hamlet*, Barańczak (1990), Paszkowski (1961), and Słomczyński (1978), either render *oh* literally into Polish *och*, or they translate it by means of an interjection with dissimilar form but having the same meaning, namely *o* and *ach*. Paszkowski and Barańczak limit themselves to only two Polish equivalents of *oh* – *o* and *ach*, or *o* and *och*, contrary to Słomczyński who rather seems to diversify his translation, in this case, adding other Polish equivalent interjections such as *cóż*, *jakże*. Another observation is that Barańczak and Paszkowski often decide to omit *oh* in translation: Barańczak in 25 cases, Paszkowski in 22 cases out of 33 instances of the use of this form; whereas Słomczyński in the majority of cases is faithful to the original.

## 7. Conclusions

The number of analyses of the translation of interjections, including the interjection *oh*, has constantly been growing, together with the growing interest in the study of these linguistic units. The analyses are usually based on different corpora of English films (sitcoms, series, documentaries, etc.) and their audiovisual translations into target languages. As far as the study of the translation of interjections used in various written corpora (novels, plays, short stories, fairy tales, etc.) is concerned, there are not so many publications and analyses. Thus, I hope that the analysis carried out in this paper and the results that follow shed some light on the usage of the interjection *oh* in modern English literature and its translation into Polish. The paper has attempted to reveal various meanings and functions of the interjection *oh* in English written texts, as well as analyse various translation strategies employed in the translation of this interjection. The analysis of the corpus material demonstrated that omission is the main strategy adopted by translators. The results of the present analysis based on the corpus taken from *Bridget Jones's Diary*

correspond to those based on three translations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Paszkowski, Barańczak, and Słomczyński. The comparison of the results of these two analyses allows one to conclude that the interjection *oh* is rendered into Polish generally by means of three translation strategies: omission, using an interjection with dissimilar form but having the same meaning, or literally. In the case of literal translation and using an interjection with dissimilar form but having the same meaning, it may be observed that the use of both the strategies does not affect the meaning in a given context, i.e. they correspond well to the original version of the text. As far as the strategy of omission is concerned, the problem is more complex. Whenever interjections are used, in speech or in a written form, they are always used for some purpose intended by the speaker, and the omission in translation of this very expressive language unit almost certainly causes some loss of meaning. And it is only the translator's decision if this loss of meaning does not influence the perception of a given fragment in such a way as to change the overtone intended by the author.

The analysis of various publications concerning the translation of the English interjections, especially the interjection *oh*, has led to the idea of carrying out a much broader analysis of the translation of the English *oh* based not only on a written translation (carried out above) but broadened by its audiovisual translation. The results of such an analysis may demonstrate some differences and/or similarities in the way translators render the interjection in these two kinds of translation.

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