

台灣華語中的感嘆詞「哎喲」

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摘要

語言學界研究感嘆詞有兩個主要的研究方向，其中之一是以語意學理論為基礎，另一個則是根據社會語言學的理論。本文主旨是藉由研究台灣華語的感嘆詞「哎喲」來呈現上述兩種研究法的互補關係。本研究的資料蒐集自『中央研究院現代漢語平衡語料庫』，我們分析了其中包含有「哎喲」的例句，並整理成十一種型式的用法。這幾種型式又可以分成以下五個大項：(1)表示否定立場；(2)表示肯定立場；(3)緩和個人立場帶來的效應；(4)表示嘲諷；(5)引起談話者注意。這五個大項符合了華俄屯 (Wharton) 在 2003 年所提出的高層次顯義 (higher-level explicature)，因為「哎喲」可以在語句的一開頭就提示聽話者，指出一個語意的方向，讓說話者和聽話者藉由語意表達和理解上的呼應達到語言社會上的功效。本文的假設從研究結果中獲得證實。

關鍵詞：感嘆詞；語料庫為基礎；台灣華語；中華文化；高層次顯義

The Interjection 'Aiyo' in Taiwan Mandarin

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Abstract

There are two prominent approaches to interjections, one is based on semantic theory and the other is informed by sociolinguistics. This study focuses on the Taiwan Mandarin interjection *aiyo* and attempts to show how both these two approaches are workable when conducting research on interjections. The data used was collected from the Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese. We analyze 67 examples, presenting 11 types of interjectory use of *aiyo*. They are categorized into 5 main categories: (1) for example, showing negative proposition, (2) showing positive proposition, (3) mitigating the proposition, (4) mocking the proposition, and (5) functioning as an attention getter. These five categories give sense to what Wharton (2003) proposed as "higher-level explicature", by pointing in the general direction in which relevance should be sought, together with the context, the speakers and the hearers know exactly the meaning of the utterance. Our hypothesis appears confirmed by the results.

Keywords: interjection, corpus-based, Taiwan Mandarin, Chinese culture, higher-level explicature.



I. Introduction

Interjections, such as *Oops!*, *Gosh!*, have been treated as marginal to language. They have no ‘real’ grammatical value, but we use them often in speaking more so than in writing. As Ameka (1992: 101) puts it, interjection is “the universal yet neglected part of speech.” Wilkins (1992) also points out that interjections are “relevant to theoretical research in semantics, pragmatics, morphology and syntax, historical linguistics and phonology.” This shows that the interjection is indeed worthy of our effort in understanding its nature.

Most of the research on interjections has been focused on the western languages, with relatively few of them related to Mandarin interjections. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate semantic meanings and pragmatic functions of interjections in Taiwan Mandarin, namely, the interjection *aiyo* 哎喲. We attempt to show that semantic and sociolinguistic approaches can both be successfully applied to the study of the interjection *aiyo*. Two research questions are raised: (1) What does the interjection *aiyo* communicate? (2) How does the communication work? The data for this study are collected from Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese, which is the largest database of both written and spoken contemporary Mandarin in Taiwan.

The paper is organized as follows: (1) introduction, (2) literature review, with an outline of semanticists’ and sociolinguists’ accounts of interjection and a brief precis of previous studies, (3) the theoretical foundations, in which Ameka’s (1992) proposal is introduced, (4) analyses of various meanings and functions of the interjection *aiyo* found in the data, (5) a further discussion of the research outcomes, and (6) the conclusion.

II. Literature review

Interjections have long been ignored as a subject in linguistics. Although interjections were considered by the ancient Greek grammarian to be a subclass of adverbs, they have been considered peripheral to the grammatical system and were not seen as phenomena worth studying in detail. Fortunately, the situation has changed recently as linguists begin to increase their efforts in the study of oral communication and the development of theories of verbal activity and interaction. Thus, new approaches to interjections have been proposed.

1. Semanticists’ view

Ameka (1992), Wierzbicka (1992) and Wilkins (1992) all provide definitions of interjections. Ameka (1992) divides interjections into two parts: primary and secondary interjections. Primary interjections are words or non-words that can stand alone as an utterance and do not come into other word classes. While secondary interjections “are those 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, 1992: 111).

Wierzbicka’s (1992) definition correlates with Ameka’s conception of a primary interjection. But she suggests that it is better not to regard exclamations such as *shit* and *hell* as interjections, for the meaning of this kind is included in the semantics of noun or verb they are derived from. While Ameka’s definition is too broad for Wierzbicka, for Wilkins, it is too narrow. Wilkins uses a variety of hedges in his definition of interjections, which “catches elements that would be called ‘secondary interjections’, ‘interjectional phrases’ and ‘complex interjections’ by Ameka” (Wilkins, 1992). Thus, even within the school of semantic theory, there is no agreement on how interjections should be defined.

Ameka’s classification has merit in that he considers both communicative function as well as the semantic features of interjections. He distinguishes interjections from other linguistic items, such as particles, discourse markers, and routine. He also reserves the term ‘interjection’ for descriptive use within the word level category.



Thus discussions concerning interjections will not be confused with other linguistic items which share similar morphological features or linguistic functions. Some might consider Ameka's view of interjections to be too narrow to describe the entire linguistics of interjection. However, when one focuses on a particular interjection as our study presents, Ameka's classification provides a specific and non-confusing frame to follow.

Interjections can be found in almost every language (Schachter, 1985: 60). While Ameka attempts to provide a narrow definition of interjections, the examples he gives to support his claim are nevertheless mostly in English. Whether or not his claim can be applied to other languages, especially from different language families, merits investigation.

2. Sociolinguist' view

Sociolinguist Goffman (1981: 99) proposes that an interjection "doesn't seem to be a statement in the linguistic sense." He discusses interjections according to socio-communicative roles they play rather than according to any linguistic content they may have. Wharton (2003) then accesses the strengths and weakness of semanticists' and sociolinguists' approaches and suggests a new analysis which preserves the insights of both. In his view, "interjections communicate attitudinal information, relating to the emotional or mental state of the speaker" (Wharton, 2003: 82). This is in line with the semanticists' belief.

Wharton (2003: 54) also points out that an interjection could be an indicator of "higher-level explicatures." In relevance theory, explicature is "the proposition that is explicitly communicated by the utterance" (Unger, 2001: 19-29). Wharton (2003: 54) states:

The basic explicature...is rarely recovered by disambiguation and reference assignment alone, and the construction of *higher-level explicatures* requires even more pragmatic development, such as the embedding of the basic truth-conditional content under a speech-act or propositional-attitude description.

That is to say, an interjection can explicate interrogative information even when the utterance is not syntactically an interrogation. For example, when a dentist asks a patient, "So you're having three teeth out, eh?" The patient could understand this utterance through higher-level explicatures such as "The dentist is asking whether I'm having three teeth out." or "The dentist is requesting confirmation that I'm having three teeth out."

However, Wharton (2003) proposes that interjections are not part of language; they are partly natural and partly coded. They are better analyzed as falling at various points along a continuum between 'showing' and 'saying'. He also suggests that what is coded within the interjection is procedural information rather than conceptual representation. With the procedural information, it points in the general direction in which relevance should be sought and might activate various attitudinal concepts or types of concepts. Here, Wharton is distancing himself from the view that interjections are part of language even if he did mention that some interjections can be inflected, such as *wow*.

Schourup (1985) also claims that although interjections have a specifiable meaning, part of it always depends on context. It seems that it is better to account for interjections both within semantic and pragmatic domains.

3. Studies about interjections

Below we highlight some scholars' studies on interjections in various languages. Lin (2006) studied the language of emotion in Kavalan and found that the four primary interjections in Kavalan, one of many aboriginal languages in Taiwan, signal different attitudes of the speaker. He indicated that *wanay* is used to express a



positive feeling while *azkaw* expresses a feeling of discontentment. *Ou* usually represents surprise and *nianpa* expresses sympathy or pity. Hsieh (2007) found that both primary and secondary interjections are attested in Kavalan. She focused on those interjections which reflect the speakers' emotions and found that the primary interjection *ou* reflects the speaker's emotions of anxiety, surprise or happiness; the interjection *oh* is used to represent understanding of an event and *wa* shows how impressed the speaker is upon seeing what he or she has seen. *Azkaw* indicates a speaker's emotion through carelessness or a mishap. She noted that "these primary interjections always occur at the clause-initial position" (Hsieh, 2007: 189). Regarding secondary interjections, she indicated that *nianpa* is used to express the speaker's sympathy or empathy. Hsieh also noted that the primary interjection is a more universal phenomenon because of its similar usage to *Wow!* *Oh!* and *Wa!* However, secondary interjections are "more language or culture specific" (Hsieh, 2007: 197).

Chao (2009) investigated exclamations in Southern Min, the predominant language spoken by Taiwanese. She classified interjections in Southern Min into three types according to their pragmatic functions. First, the majority of interjections in Southern Min express the presumption of the speaker and signal feelings of surprise or confusion, such as *hannh⁰* 啥, *eh⁰* 欸, and *iau²-siu⁷* 夭壽. Second, some interjections express the emotion of the speaker. For example, 哎 *aih⁰* is used to express lament and *hngh⁰* 哼 expresses resentment or disdain. Third, some interjections play the role of structuring discursive turn-taking in conversation. For example, to express understanding of the information the interlocutor reports, the speaker can use *honng⁰* 乎 and *ooh⁰* 喔, and *heh⁰-ah⁰* 嘿啊 to show approval. Chao (2009: 79) also noted that the intonation of the interjection can influence the function of that interjection. For example, *ooh⁰* 喔 can signal unwillingness but the intonation will be different from the one used to express the speaker's understanding. Among these three types, the ones which express the speaker's presumption (the first type) and the one which expresses the emotions of the speaker (the second type) usually appear with exclamations. However, the third type of interjections, which is used to structure conversation, does not involve exclamations. Chao (2009: 137) also studied exclamations in the scripts of Southern Min stage plays composed during China's Ming Dynasty and Qing Dynasty. She found that interjections in first-person narration were usually used alone to express the speaker's emotion, judgment, and attitude.

Research has been conducted to explore interjections in Mandarin Chinese (Xiao, 2005; Yao, 1996; Liu, 2002) and other dialects in China (Lu, 2005; Yang, 1997; Yang, 2006) as well as the cross-linguistic comparison of interjections (Geng, 1999; Cheng, 2003; Liu, 2000; Liu, 1996; Wang, 1999). Researchers have gained numerous insights and made significant findings in this field. However, the popular interjection *aiyo* in Taiwan Mandarin has remained unexplored which is why the present study hopes to fill in the gap between semanticists' and sociolinguists' viewpoints.

III. Methodology

The data for this study are collected from Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese which is the largest database of both written and spoken contemporary Mandarin in Taiwan, containing a total of 5 million words with part-of-speech tags. It is noted that the orthographic presentation of *aiyo* in Mandarin Chinese on Taiwan can be 哎喲, 唉唷, 哎唷, and 唉哟. They will each be examined.

The data will be analyzed based on Ameka's (1992) approach. According to Ameka (1992), interjections can be separated into primary and secondary interjections. Primary interjections are words or non-words that can stand alone as an utterance and do not come into other word classes. While secondary interjections "are those 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, 1992: 111).



As for the categorization of interjections, Ameka (1992) proposed an approach based on the specific communicative functions they fulfill and according to the types of meaning they predicate. Interjections can be divided into expressive, conative, and phatic. (1) Expressive interjections focus on the speakers' mental state and can be divided into the emotive and the cognitive. Emotive interjections express the speakers' mental state relating to emotions and sensations they have at the time; while cognitive interjections pertain to the knowledge state and thought at the time of utterance. (2) Conative interjections are directed at the auditor. They are either aimed at getting other's attention or demanding an action or response from the addressee. (3) Phatic interjections are used to establish and maintain the communicative contact. They are conventional vocalizations that express a speaker's mental attitude towards the on-going discourse, including backchannel and feedback. We will also examine the semantic functions of *aiyo*. Using Ameka's approach appears feasible for our study.

Semantically, "far from being natural and universal, interjections are often highly culture-specific" (Goddard, 1998: 185). Thus, cultural effects will also be taken into consideration in this study.

IV. The interjection *aiyo*

The occurrence of *aiyo* in the *Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese* is listed in Table 1. Based on the data, we will categorize them into different types according to their meanings and functions.

Table 1. The occurrence of *Aiyo* in *Sinica Corpus*

Different morphological presentations of <i>aiyo</i>	哎哟	唉唷	哎唷	唉哟
Number of occurrence	58	6	1	2
Total	67			

1. *Aiyo* 哎哟 as an interjection showing pain

According to the definition in *Jiaoyubu Chongbian Guoyucidian Xiudingben* 教育部重編國語辭典修訂本 (1997), *aiyo* 哎哟 is an interjection used to show pain. There are 9 examples of this kind of usage in our data, and some of them are discussed below. For example,

- (1) 球...打在豪豪的肚子上。「哎哟...」豪豪慘叫了一聲。
Qiu2 ... da3 zai4 Hao2-hao2 de du4 zi shang4. "Aiyo..." Hao2-hao2 can3 jiao4 le yi1 sheng1.
'Hao-hao was hit by the ball right in the middle of his belly. "Ouch," Hao-hao groaned.'
- (2) 『哎哟，好痛！』
"Aiyo, hao3 tong4!"
"Ouch, it hurts!"
- (3) 他女友捏了他一把，他大叫：「哎哟！好疼！現在不能做愛！」
Ta1 nu3 you3 nie1 le ta1 yi1 ba3, ta1 da4 jiao4, "Aiyo! Hao3 teng2! Xian4 zai4 bu4 neng2 zuo4 ai4!"
'His girlfriend pinched him and he yelled, "Ouch! It hurts! Now we can't make love!"'

Assignment of an emotion category to *aiyo* is determined by what the speakers say in the discourse where *aiyo* appears. That is, the language use in the discourse of *aiyo* plays an essential role; the rhetoric, speech acts and anaphora are all involved. In example (2), the speaker stroked his painful head and screamed "*aiyo*, it hurts." By using *aiyo*, the speaker expresses his/her feeling of pain at the moment of saying it as the entire speech act in its discursive context explicates: "It hurts!" (2). *Aiyo* can appear in the utterance-initial position, immediately followed by the expression describing pain which is the main proposition of the utterance. It can also function as



an utterance by itself, like in example (1). Without the proposition following, we can still decode the meaning of *aiyo* based on the context, which means “I feel pain.” It does not only reflect the feeling of the speaker himself, but also tells the addressee “I feel pain” or “It hurts.” In this sense, *aiyo* used for showing pain is more related to Ameka’s emotive interjections which express the speakers’ state relating to emotions and sensations they have at the time.

2. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection showing surprise

Another meaning of *aiyo* given in the official Education Ministry Chinese dictionary is to show surprise. There are total 25 examples and three of them are discussed below. For instance,

- (4) 大致的經過就是這樣的。|| 哎喲! 這還蠻有意思的嘛! ||

Da4 zhi4 de jing1 guo4 jiu4 shi4 zhe4 yang4 de. *Aiyo!* Zhe4 hai2 man2 you3 yi1 si1 de ma!
‘Basically That’s what happened. *Wow!* That sounds interesting!’

- (5) 小玲遲早會知道的。|| 哎喲! 千萬可別讓她知道她不是我們親生的。|| 老太婆啊! 孩子...

Xiao3-ling2 chi2 zao3 hui4 zhi1 dao4 de. *Aiyo!* Qian1 wan4 ke3 bie2 rang4 ta1 zhi1 dao4 ta1 bu2 shi4 wo3 men qin1 sheng1 de. Lao3 tai4 po2 a! Hai2 zi.....
‘Ling will know it sooner or later. *Oh dear!* Don’t let her know that she is not our own child. My dear wife! The kid....’

- (6) 哥，我們來試試看好不好? || 哎喲! 我的天啊，你還要試啊?

Ge1, wo3 men lai2 shi4 shi4 kan4 hao3 bu4 hao3? *Aiyo!* Wo3 de tian1 a, ni3 hai2 yao4 shi1 a?
‘Brother, let’s try it again, okay? *Oh!* My god, you want to try again?’

In example (4), the speaker is surprised what happened and by using *aiyo*, the speaker expresses his/her feeling of surprise at the moment when saying it. *Aiyo* appears in the turn-initial position, immediately followed by the surprising things which are the main proposition of the utterance. It does not only reflect the feeling of the speaker himself, but also tells the addressee that “I feel surprised because of that” or “It surprised me.” In this sense, *aiyo* used for showing surprise is related to Ameka’s emotive interjections, which express the speakers’ state relating to emotions and sensations they have at the time.

It should be noted that the surprising event can be either good or bad. For instance, example (4) shows that the speaker is surprised and the situation is interesting, while in examples (5) and (6), the speakers are surprised and scared. The speaker in (5) is saying, “Don’t let her know that she is not our own child.” The anaphora (‘her’, ‘she’) reveals the speaker’s emotional state. The speaker, who is the adoptive mother here, seemingly stutters out her daughter by using anaphora after taking surprise at what her husband just said, scared that their daughter Xiao-Ling will sooner or later learn of her adoption. Likewise, in example (6), the rhetorical exclamation of the hyperbolic expression ‘My god’, shows the speakers’ being surprised with what his partner has just said and fright about the possible result of trying. That a surprising event can be either good or bad seems to contradict with our intuition that *aiyo* should correlate with something bad. We will discuss this in the next Section

3. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection showing discontent, voicing a complaint, or illustrating impatience

Except for the meanings and functions listed in the Chinese dictionary, there are other usages found in the data. *Aiyo* can be used to show dissatisfaction toward the proposition proposed by the interlocutors, complain about the on-going situation, or to show impatience toward the interlocutors. Three examples are delineated below:



- (7) 如果寄航空，十天左右就到了。|| 哎哟，郵費怎麼這麼貴啊? ||
 Ru2 guo3 ji4 hang2 kong1, shi2 tian1 zuo3 you4 jiu4 dao4 le. *Aiyo*, you2 fei4 ze3 me zhe4 me gui4 a?
 ‘If sent by airmail, it will arrive in about ten days. *Good heaven*, why is the postage so expensive?’
- (8) 咦，文鈴呢? || 還沒回來呀! || 哎哟! 你這個做哥哥的是怎麼搞的嘛!
 Yi2, wen-ling ne? Hai2 mei2 hui2 lai2 ya! *Aiyo!* Ni3 zhe4 ge zuo4 ge1 ge1 de shi4 zhe3 me gao3 de ma!
 ‘Well, where is Wen-ling? Still not home yet! *Good heaven!* What kind of brother are you?’
- (9) || 媽，您坐下來看電視好不好? || 哎哟! 我怎麼看得下去嘛! ||
 Ma1, nin3 zuo4 xia4 lai2 kan4 dian4shi4 hao3 bu4 hao3? *Aiyo!* Wo3 zhe3 me kan4 de xia4 qu4 ma!
 ‘Mom, come sit down and watch the TV, alright? *Come on!* How could I sit down at a time like this?’

In example (7), the speaker complained about the postage being too expensive. By using *aiyo*; the speaker expresses his/her feeling of discontent, complaint, or impatience. The speaker uses a form of rhetoric—a question—as the interrogative *zen3me* 怎麼 ‘how is it that...?’ to reveal their emotional state.

An important mission of human language is to communicate human emotion. However, miscommunication occurs all the time. The time, setting and roles of the speaker and his/her interlocutors are all decisive factors ensuring clear communication. The interlocutor in example (7) could understand the complaint as a surprise, or as the speaker intends as a complaint upon surprise at the expensive postage.

Interrogatives are often used to show complaint. Egbert & Voge (2008) study two German interrogatives *warum* (why) and *wieso* (why), and note that *warum* indicates complaint because it usually points to something errant. Maynard (2000) studies the functions of the Japanese interrogative *nan(i)* (what) and notes that the non-interrogative use of *nan(i)* can be emotive. One of the sub-classes of this emotional expressivity is criticism. The speaker expresses his or her “critical and/or accusatory attitude” (Maynard, 2000: 1220) and gives the interlocutor an impression that he or she is complaining about something through this utterance.

Aiyo appears in the utterance-initial position and is immediately followed by the expression describing the discontent, complaint, or impatience situation which is the main proposition of the utterance. This reflects the feeling of the speaker himself and also tells the addressee “I feel discontent or impatience toward the situation or your deeds.” Therefore, *aiyo* as used here conforms to Ameka’s model for emotive interjections which express the speakers’ state relating to emotions and sensations they have at the time.

4. *Aiyo* 哎哟 as an interjection to get attention

Aiyo can be used as an attention-getter. Here are three examples:

- (10) 哎哟! 李太太啊，下班啦! 梅：嗯
Aiyo! Li3 tai4tai4 a, xia4ban1 la! Mei2: en.
 ‘Hello! Mrs. Li, you’re finally off work!?’ Mei says, “Mmmmh”.’
- (11) 我還以為是還有錢的人哪! 太：哎哟! 金木啊，我想冒昧的問你哦!
 Wo3 hai2 yi3 wei2 shi4 xuan2 you3 qian2 de ren2 na! Tai4: *Aiyo!* Jin1-mu4 a, wo3 xiang3 mao4 mei4 de wen4 ni3 o!
 ‘I thought we only elected the rich!! Tai says, “Hey! Jin-mu, it’s a little impolite, but I’d like to ask you a question!”’
- (12) || 對呀，堂哥... || 由衷的喜歡。|| 哎哟! 藍...我跟你講哦，你不要光哦，沈溺在這種愛情的感覺哦!



Dui4 ya, tang2 ge... you2 zhong1 de xi3 huan1. *Aiyo!* Lan2... wo3 gen1 ni3 jiang3 o, ni3 bu2 yao4 guang1 o, chen2 ni4 zai4 zhe4 zhong3 ai4 qing2 de gan3 jue2 o.

‘Yes, cousin... I love her from the bottom of my heart. *Hey*, Lan. I’ve got to tell you, you can’t just indulge in the affection of love.’

In example (10), the speaker is trying to open a conversation with Mrs. Li by using *aiyo*; the speaker tries to get the attention of the interlocutor. *Aiyo* appears in the utterance-initial position and is immediately followed by the person’s name the speaker wants to get attention of. For example, in example (11), the speaker wants to ask another interlocutor a question. However, in Chinese and Taiwanese culture it is not polite to call another directly by their first name. Thus, by using the interjection *aiyo*, it can mitigate the impoliteness to call other’s name directly. Therefore, use of *aiyo* for getting attention conforms to Ameka’s model for conative interjections that are directed at the auditor. They are either aimed at getting other’s attention or demanding an action or response from the addressee. In another sense, the use of *aiyo* for getting attention can also be seen as phatic interjections which are used to establish or maintain a communicative contact.

5. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection to mitigate a tense situation

Aiyo can be used to mitigate the tense situation. Here are three examples:

- (13) 擔心你的奴隸不見了。|| 哎喲! 我的好欣宜, 你講話憑點良心好不好

Dan1 xin1 ni3 de nu2 li4 bu2 jian4 le. *Aiyo!* Wo3 de hao3 Xin1-yi2, ni3 jiang3 hua4 ping2 liang2 xin1 hao3 bu4 hao3.

‘You are only worried about losing your slave. *Come on!* My dear Hsinyi! Think before you speak so capriciously.’

- (14) 需要出力的工作都由我來做, 怎麼樣? 哎喲! 我的好太太, 你就笑一個 嘛!

Xu1 yao4 chu1 li4 de gong1 zuo4 do1 you2 wo3 lai2 zuo4, ze3 me yang4? *Aiyo!* Wo3 de hao3 tai4 tai4, ni3 jiu4 xiao4 yi2 ge ma!

‘I will do all the physically demanding work, okay? *Now, now*, my good wife, please just give me a little smile.’

- (15) 高: 這是什麼意思啊? 林: 哎喲! 你就別裝蒜了, 我是今天才聽鎮長說

Gao1: Zhe4 shi4 she2 me yi4 si4 a? Lin2: *Aiyo!* Ni3 jiu4 bie2 zhuang1 suan4 le, wo3 shi4 jin1 tian1 cai2 ting1 zhen4 zhang3 shuo1

‘Gao: , “What do you mean by this?” Lin: “*Come on!* Stop pretending that you don’t know, I just heard (it) from the mayor today.”’

Example (14) shows that the speaker is trying to comfort his wife by using *aiyo*; the speaker wants to mitigate the tense situation at the time by using the rhetorical phrase *Wo3 de hao3 tai4 tai4* 我的好太太 “my good wife.” *Aiyo* appears in the turn-initial position and is immediately followed by expressions used to comfort the interlocutors. It is the main proposition of the utterance. It reflects that the speaker can sense out the tense situation, and wants to do something to relieve the pressure. So he first utters an utterance *aiyo* to show “I didn’t mean it” or “That’s not the truth, the truth is...,” and then follows with the comforting or explaining part. Therefore, *aiyo* used for mitigating is related to Ameka’s emotive interjections which express the speakers’ state relating to emotions and sensations.

6. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection to mitigate a negation



Aiyo can also be used to mitigate with the interlocutors' proposition. Here are two examples:

- (16) 秀：是男朋友還是女朋友啊？林：哎喲！秀梅你怎麼了？我哪有什麼女朋友？

Xiu4: Shi1 nan2 peng2 you3 hai2 shi4 nu3 peng2 you3 a? Lin2: *Aiyo!* Xiu4-mei2 ni3 ze3 me la1?
Wo3 na3 you3 she2 me nu3 peng2 you3?

'Xiu: "Was it a boyfriend or a girlfriend?" Lin: "*Nonsense!* What's wrong with you, Xiu-mei? You know I don't have a girlfriend."

- (17) || 哎喲，沒有啦！他這種身材是做蛙人啦！||

Aiyo, mei2 you3 la! Ta1 zhe4 zhong3 shen1 cai2 shi4 zuo4 wa1 ren2 la!

'*Nonsense*, Not at all! He is fit enough to be a Navy seal!'

In example (16), the speaker is trying to deny that he has a girlfriend, by using *aiyo* and a rhetorical question. He tries to mitigate the possible bad effect of disagreement. *Aiyo* appears in the utterance-initial position, immediately followed by disagreeing expressions which is the main proposition of the utterance. This reflects that the speaker doesn't only agree with the proposition, but also wants to maintain the interlocutor's 'face' that is, the speaker doesn't want to *embarrass* the interlocutor. So he first utters an utterance *aiyo* to show that "You misunderstood" or "That's not the truth, the truth is..." and then follows with the disagreement or explanatory part. Therefore, *aiyo* for mitigating a disagreement conforms to Ameka's model for emotive interjections which express the speakers' emotional or sensory state at the time.

7. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection showing embarrassment and mitigating compliments

Aiyo can also be used to show embarrassment and thus to lessen compliments by others. Here is one example.

- (18) 開了雜貨店，這喊你老闆沒錯啊！高：哎喲！你別糗人啦！

Kai1 le za2 huo4 dian4, zhe4 han3 ni3 lao3 ban3 mei2 cuo4 a! Gao1: *Aiyo!* Ni3 bie2 qiu3 ren2 la!

'You opened a grocery store, so now it's not wrong to call you the big boss! Gao says, "*Now now!* Don't make fun of me!'"

In the example the speaker, trying to mitigate the compliment made by others by using *aiyo*, serves to show embarrassment at the time when saying it. Or in another sense, *aiyo* also functions to mitigate the compliment. *Aiyo* appears in the utterance-initial position showing embarrassment, immediately followed by expressions mitigating the compliments which are the main proposition of the utterance. This relates to the politeness principle as influenced by Chinese culture as well as the concept of social 'face'. The speaker neither rejects the compliment nor accepts it. He only uses the interjection *aiyo* to mitigate the compliments. Therefore, *aiyo* for mitigating compliment conforms to Ameka's model for emotive interjections which express the speakers' emotional or sensory state at the time.

8. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection followed by negative comments

Aiyo can be followed by negative comments indicating something bad. Here are three examples:

- (19) 我當初怎麼沒想這一層呢？春：哎喲，這都怪我，我以為是這樣的。

Wo3 dang1 chu1 ze3 me mei2 xiang3 dao4 zhe4 yi1 ceng2 ne? Chun1: *Aiyo*, zhe4 dou1 guai4 wo3,
wo3 yi3 wei2 shi4 zhe4 yang4 de.

'Why didn't I think of this at the time? Chun says, "*Oh*, its all my fault, I thought it should be this



way”

- (20) 沒近視的人實在很多。|| 哎喲，做憲兵好嗎？||

Mei2 jin4 shi4 de ren2 shi2 zai4 hen3 duo1. *Aiyo*, zuo4 xian4 bing1 hao3 ma?

‘There are lots of people who aren’t nearsighted. *Well*, is it alright to be a military policeman?’

- (21) 太：他到鄉公所開會去了。春：哎喲，這八成是跟選舉有關係啊！

Tai4: ta1 dao4 xiang1 gong1 suo3 kai1 hui4 qu4 le. Chun1: *Aiyo*, zhe4 ba cheng2 shi4 gen1 xuan3 ju3 you3 guan1 a!

‘Tai says, “He went to the village office and will have a meeting there.” Chun says, “*Well*, this has got to have something to do with the election!!”’

Example (19) shows that the speaker is trying to confess fault by using *aiyo*; he tries to give a negative comment which implies that what precedes would be a bad thing. *Aiyo* appears in the utterance-initial position showing something bad concerning the situation and is immediately followed by negative comment. In example (20), although *aiyo* is followed by a question, “is it alright, to be a military policeman?” the question itself implies that the speaker didn’t believe that to be a military policeman would be a good idea. Therefore, *aiyo* for indicating negative comments conforms to Ameka’s model for emotive interjections which express the speakers’ emotional or sensory state at the time.

9. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection showing sarcasm

Aiyo can be used to show sarcasm.

- (22) || 你會彈，你會彈鋼琴喔？|| 哎喲！好恐怖喔！|| 你不要把人家彈壞了

Ni3 hui4 tan2, ni3 hui4 tan2 gang1 qin2 o? *Aiyo!* Hao3 kong3 bu2 o! Ni3 bu2 yao4 ba3 ren2 jia1 tan2 huai4 le.

‘You can play, You know how to play the piano? *Wow!* Oh, now that is frightening! You’d better not break it (the piano).’

In the example, by using *aiyo*, the speaker tries to give an ironic expression and make fun of the interlocutor. *Aiyo* appears in the turn-initial position and is immediately followed by sarcasm which is the main proposition of the utterance. Such sarcasm can be inherently psychologically negative and hurtful. However, the sarcasm here can also be that it doesn’t have a bad intention to hurt others, but to make a funny impression in them. It is used to make a joke of the interlocutor and usually occurs between people who know each other well. Therefore, *aiyo* for showing sarcasm conforms to Ameka’s model for emotive interjections which express the speakers’ emotional or sensory state at the time.

10. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection showing sigh

Aiyo can be used to show signs of emotion. Here are two examples:

- (23) 我們那一代不一樣，|| 哎喲！|| 時代不一樣。||

Wo3 men na4 yi1 dai4 bu4 yi1 yang4, *aiyo!* Shi2 dai4 bu4 yi1 yang4.

‘our generation was surely different. *Alas!* The times are different.’

- (24) || 哎…壞掉了…哎喲！跟你講，P C 呀，人生不如意事

Ai... huai4 diao4 le... *aiyo!* Gen1 ni3 jiang3, PC ya, ren2 sheng1 bu4 ru2 yi1 shi4

‘Ah... it’s broken...*Alas!* To tell the truth, PC, in life there will always be lots of disappointments.’



In example (23), the speaker is moaning about the fact that the era is different, by using *aiyo*; the speaker tries to give a sigh at the time when saying it and also to give us an impression that what followed would be something bad. *Aiyo* appears in the turn-initial position, immediately followed by a sign of emotion which is the main proposition of the utterance. Therefore, *aiyo* for showing sigh conforms to Ameka's model for emotive interjections which express the speakers' emotional or sensory state at the time.

11. *Aiyo* 哎喲 as an interjection showing agreement or something positive

Aiyo can be used to show agreement or something positive. There are six examples in our data and 3 of them are discussed below:

(25) 哈、哈、哈，唉喲，這也是，這也是有意思的說法

Ha1 ha1 ha1, *aiyo*, zhe4 ye3 shi4, zhe4 ye3 shi4 you3 yi4 si4 de shuo1 fa3.

'Ha ha ha, *oh boy*, this too is, this too is an interesting way of putting it.'

(26) 唉喲，唉喲，不錯，這個事情。

Aiyo, *aiyo*, bu2 cuo4, zhe4 ge shi4 qing.2

'*Oh boy*, it's not bad.'

(27) 這麼巧呀？|| 唉喲，還有巧的呢！||

zhe4 me qiao3 ya? *Aiyo*, hai2you3 qiao3 de ne!

'What a coincidence! *Un-hun*, wait there's even more!'

By using *aiyo*, the speaker in example (25) is trying to agree with the previous speaker. He/she tries to show agreement or a positive attitude toward the proposition. *Aiyo* appears in the utterance-initial position and is immediately followed by the agreeing or positive main proposition. Therefore, *aiyo* used for showing agreement or something positive conforms to Ameka's model for emotive interjections which express the speakers' emotional or sensory state at the time.

V. Further discussion

In this section, we will elaborate on the categorization of the various usages and take the cultural effects into consideration. Based on the various usages discussed above, we see that *aiyo* can be defined by all three kinds of the definitions of interjections proposed by Ameka (1992). That is, they can be used as expressive interjections, conative interjections, or phatic interjections. The usages of *aiyo* are expressive when they show emotion and exhibit the speakers' thought at the time of utterance. They are conative when used to get the interlocutor's attention and hoping to engage response. They are phatic when used to maintain communicative contact.

There are thus 11 interjective uses of *aiyo*: showing pain, surprising, voicing discontent, complaint, impatience, getting attention, mitigating tense situation, negation, compliments, showing embarrassment, sarcasm, sigh, agreement, and followed by negative comments. We see that these can be summarized into five main categories: (1) showing negative proposition, (2) showing positive proposition, (3) mitigating the proposition, (4) mocking the proposition, and (5) functioning as an attention getter. Negative (1) and positive (2) propositions, implicate use of *aiyo* to show pain, voice complaint, and ease tense situation or compliments. Mitigating the proposition (3), also involves either negative or positive intentions, mitigating either tense situations or giving compliments. Meanwhile, *aiyo* can be used in embarrassment or sarcasm constitutes mocking the proposition (4). Many of the 11 types actually function as attention getters when evincing pain, surprise, sigh or agreement. Although they can be categorized into 5 main kinds, upon a closer look, we find that



the interjection *aiyo* can actually be prefaced for any situation. It can be followed by positive as well as negative propositions. However, the definitions listed in the Chinese dictionary all tend to state *aiyo* as originally to be used to show pain or surprise which is more related to negative things. How can it now be used to show positive things or to mitigate compliments?

The first reason is that presumably the word *aiyo* has undergone semantic change, and this is perhaps worthy of another paper. The second reason involves the influences of Taiwanese and Chinese culture. Chinese people put a lot of emphasis on the virtue of modesty. According to Shih (1986), the essence of polite forms of modesty is reflected most clearly in compliment responses. Wang & Tsai (2003) taking Taiwanese college students as their subjects found that in responding to compliments, students tended to express disagreement or surprise in a manner seemingly motivated by Leech's (1983) Modesty Maxim. This shows that when Chinese speakers are responding to something positive or compliments from others, they tend to downplay the affect. Therefore, the interjection *aiyo*, originally used to show negative things, works to downplay the positive or compliment affect.

VI. Conclusion

The interjection *aiyo* communicates the speaker's emotion or mental state with the hearer. There are also cases where they merely express feelings or sensations without propositional content. The results of the study are in agreement with prior semanticists' and sociolinguists' views. To answer our research questions:

What does the interjection *aiyo* communicate? *Aiyo* can express negative or positive propositions and can mitigate the proposition. *Aiyo* can also be used as a result of semantic expansion or even through semantic weakening such as mocking the proposition and attention getter. In terms of cultural effects, we argue that the usage of *aiyo* is influenced by the virtue of modesty which emphasizes that we should downplay the compliments of others.

How does the interjection *aiyo* communicate? We have listed meanings and functions that *aiyo* play in conversations. We have explained the reason why it can be used together with positive proposition. As noted above, interjections can function as a higher-level explicature (Wharton, 2003). *Aiyo* is no exception given that *aiyo* can help us constrain the inferential processes and guide the comprehension process by narrowing down the hearer's search space indicating the general direction in which the intended meaning is to be sought. Therefore, with the interjection *aiyo*, the hearer would first have an impression of something bad and then combined with the context, the speaker's proposition is revealed. One can venture with a further study upon other linguistic and phonological features to inform understanding of interjections.

The result of the present study are in agreement with both semanticists' and sociolinguists' views. We appreciate the works of prior researchers in this field and their contributions that have inspired us to look deeper into this topic. We hope our feedback on such former studies can help to develop a stronger theoretical background for this field.

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