



## On Chinese Translation of English Interjections

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### Abstract

English interjection is the function word with certain special features. To translate them correctly and appropriately is a good way to perform the characteristics and character of figures on the works. Although there are many translation methods, not every method can be used in translating the English interjections. This paper summarizes three ways of Chinese translation of English interjection through analyzing various meanings of English interjection and various examples. They are sound translation method, tone translation method, and context translation method. Using these three translation methods, the readers can translate the English interjections correctly and appropriately.

**Key words:** Interjection; Meaning; Chinese translation

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### INTRODUCTION

Interjection is one kind of the most expressive words in oral English. People choose different interjections to express different emotions. The famous linguist Wilkins pointed the use of the interjection. Randolph (1985) said that interjections are purely emotive words which have no referential content. Chinese scholars studied more on the Chinese interjections. There is only a little research about the Chinese translation of English interjection. The interjection research has always been neglected.

To address this issue, this paper will sum up three ways of Chinese translation of English interjection—the sound translation method, the tone translation method, and the context translation method through analyzing various meanings of English interjection and various examples. These three translation methods can solve almost all problems of the Chinese translation of English interjections. To translate the English interjection in these three ways, the readers will have a better understanding on English literatures or English films. At the same time, the better translation and understanding will do well for the improving of the English communication skills and the expressing skills.

### 1. ENGLISH INTERJECTION

Interjection is a word or phrase used to express surprise, shock, pain etc (*Longman Advanced American Dictionary*, 1987, p.1081). It belongs to the area of oral. In grammar, interjections are function words but not sentence elements; in syntax, they play the role of modification.

#### 1.1 English Interjection

An interjection is sometimes expressed as a single word or non-sentence phrase, followed by a punctuation mark. The isolated use of an interjection does not represent a complete sentence in conventional English writing. Thus, in formal writing, the interjection will be incorporated into a larger sentence clause. It also can be a reply to a question or statement.

Interjection is the function word with certain special features and one of the most expressive words in oral English. People choose different interjections to express different emotions.

##### 1.1.1 Features of English Interjection

Since interjections are records of sound, they are usually recorded in different ways. The same pronunciation can often find a different spelling.

For example:

[hʌm] —— hum, h'm, humph.

[hu'rei] —— hurray, hurrah, hoorah, hooray.

[əu] —— O, Oh, Ooh.

['əu'kei] —— OK, Okey, Okay, O'key.

Changes of the strength, length and tone of the interjection pronunciation will have an impact on the expression of feelings. Sometimes they even cause the expression of opposite meaning.

Interjection is the most independent function word, which acts as an independent composition but a general syntactic composition in a sentence. Since they are independent, the interjections can be put at the beginning of a sentence, in the middle of a sentence or at the end of a sentence. Among them, the beginning of a sentence is the most common location. In addition, one interjection can also be an independent sentence, used to express a complete meaning.

In practical applications, the use of interjection will be affected by the geographical factor or the context factor. The pronunciation of the interjection is relatively stable since ancient time. But languages are developing with the changing time. Since the 20th century, some interjections in English are gradually abandoned, such as: alas, alack, bingo, pish, cripesdash, heigh-ho, yipee, and so on.

### 1.1.2 The Emotions Expressed by Common English Interjections

“Oh” expresses surprise, blame, pain, praise, trouble and so on.

For example: “Oh, learned judge! Oh, wise young man.” cried Shylock. (*The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare) Here, Shylock used “Oh” to express praise to the judge.

“Ah” expresses surprise, happy, hate, remorse, contempt, threat and so on.

For example: “Ah, what splendid clothes!” thought the Emperor. (*The Emperor's New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen) Here, “Ah” expresses the happy emotion of the emperor when he knew there were so splendid clothes.

“Come” expresses encouragement, impatience, comfort, and used to attract attention, etc..

For example: “Oh, come, Mathilde. Surely you can tell an old friend.”

(*The Lost Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant) Here, Jeanne was encouraging Mathilde to tell her what has happened in last ten years.

“Dear” expresses regret, sadness, compassion, sympathy, surprise, desire, etc..

For example: “Dear me, ” he said to himself, “Am I foolish or unfit for my office?” (*The Emperor's New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen) Here, “dear” means he was surprise to find that he could not see the clothes.

“Well” expresses comfort, concession, expectation, ridicule, explanation, blame, hesitation, etc..

For example: I handed the note to him and said, “Oh, very well, I apologize.” (*The \$1,000,000 Bank-Note* by Mark Twain) Here, “well” expresses an emotion of comfort and concession.

“Now” expresses request, instructions, comfort, etc..

For example: “Now, now, my boy! It's all right! There's no need to cry!” Here, “now” expresses an emotion of comfort. “Now, now, you two, don't fight again!” Here, “now” expresses an emotion of warning and command.

“There” expresses proud, encouragement, sympathy, sorrow, comfort, impatience, disappointment, provocative, and to attract attention etc..

For example: “There! There! Never mind, you'll soon feel better.” Here, “there” was said to encourage someone or to comfort someone. “There, there, you said too much.” Here, “there” expresses an emotion of impatience.

“Now” expresses excitement, contempt, impatience, etc.

For example: “We have won the match, man!” Here, “man” expresses an excited emotion. “Hurry up, man.” Here, “man” was said without sufferance.

“Boy” expresses excitement, happy, surprise, etc..

For example: “Boy, oh, boy! Our team's going to win! How fantastic! ” Here, “boy” was said to express a happy and excited emotion.

There are some other common English interjections, such as “ha” (surprise, doubt, contempt), “aha” (proud, surprise, satisfied), “hey” (joy, say hello), “hell” (surprise, joy, say hello), “why” (surprise, protest), and so on.

### 1.1.3 Phrases Used as Interjections

Some other words or phrases also can be used as interjections. They are described as “other word category used as interjection”.

For example:

“Oh, my god! / Oh, my gosh! /Gosh!” generally can be used to express surprise, joy or anger.

“Holy cow!” can express a tone of surprise like “Wow!”.

“All right!”, as an interjection, means “good, great!”

“Good heavens” means surprise, unhappy.

“Dear me” expresses the same meaning of “dear”.

“Thank God! /Thank goodness!” means relief and thanks.

## 1.2 Chinese Interjections

Interjections in different Lineage classification and different language are very similar. It should be the first to know some common Chinese interjections before studying the Chinese Translation of English interjections.

### 1.2.1 Ancient Chinese Interjections

There are many interjections in ancient Chinese. However, interjections can only be used to express emotions. Interjections have sound form, but it is difficult to say that they have a lexical meaning. The interpretation of the interjection in the dictionary is: “..., used to express the

certain emotion”, or simply to say much more direct: “..., interjection, nonsense.” In the following form are some common ancient Chinese interjections.

**Table 1**  
**Some Common Ancient Chinese Interjections**

噫	吁	唏	也	矣
乎	哉	嘻	兮	夫
焉	与(欤)	诸(之乎的合音)	邪(耶)	已
呜呼	嗟夫	噫乎	嗟乎	噫嘻

For example:

“噫”sometimes expresses a kind of praise.

Eg. “噫! 宫有守, 私有系, 会合不可以常也. (《临川集 同学一首别子固》)”. Or it can express an emotion of sad. For example, “子路死, 子曰: “噫! 天祝予! (《论语 先进》)”

“呜呼” often expressed strong and imaginative feelings, sad or happy, condemned or praise.

Eg. 孔子曰: “苛政猛于虎也.”吾尝疑乎是, 今以蒋氏观之, 犹信. 呜呼! 孰知赋敛之毒有甚是蛇者乎? (《柳河东集 捕蛇者说》)

“嗟夫”here, is a kind of lament or sign.

Eg. “嗟夫! 予尝求古仁人之心, 或异二者之为, 何哉? 不以物喜, 不以己悲. (宋·范仲淹《岳阳楼记》)”

### 1.2.2 Modern Chinese Interjections

Many modern Chinese interjections come from the ancient Chinese interjections. So far, many of the ancient Chinese interjections are still used. But some of them have already been abandoned. And at the same time, new interjections appear.

Here are some common modern Chinese interjections:

**Table 2**  
**Some Common Modern Chinese Interjections**

Emotions or feelings	Modern Chinese interjections
Joy, happy	哈哈、嘿嘿、呵呵、
Sorrow, pain, sad	唉、咳
Anger, contempt	哼、呸
Surprise	啊、哇、咦、呀
Come to realize the truth, understand	哦、噢、喔、
Call or answer	喂、嗯、欸

### 1.2.3 The Tone of Chinese Interjections

In Chinese and English, a considerable number of interjections appear in the form of a vowel or vowel, such as 啊, 哎, 唉, 喂, 哦, 噢, 喔, O, ah, oh, ow. It shows that people express their feelings is basically the same way. Since English interjections and Chinese interjections belong to two different languages, they should follow the rules of different languages. Because Chinese is a tonal

language, the same Chinese interjection read in different tones, will express different meanings.

For example:

啊 (ā) ! 多晴朗的天气哇! (Praise and joy)

啊 (á) ? 这么快就要走了吗? (It means it is a pity that you can not leave longer.)

到底要不要继续下去, 啊 (à) ! (Question closely)

啊 (ǎ) ! 原来是这样啊! (Surprise and come to realize the truth)

## 2. CHINESE VERSIONS OF ENGLISH INTERJECTION

There are so many English interjections used by people in everyday communications. Different interjection has different Chinese version, and one English interjection may have different Chinese versions in different context. These English interjections in the following table are common used. The English-Chinese translations are the common translations in different contexts.

From Table 3, an obvious result is shown—most English interjections have more than one Chinese translation. Because there are many factors affect the Chinese translation of English interjections.

Some English interjections are translated into Chinese which has the same or similar pronunciation, such as “Ah” — “啊”, “Aha” — “啊哈”, “Hey” — “嘿”, “Oh” — “哦”, etc..

Some English interjections and the Chinese translations are expressing the same emotions, such as “Nuts” — “呸、胡说、混蛋”, “Oops” — “哎呀, 糟糕”, etc..

Some English interjections in different context are translated into different Chinese with different emotions and pronunciations, such as “There” — “哟、瞧、好啦、得啦”.

The emotional expressions are bound to be different between innocent pure children and mature subtle adults. Some interjections must be translated into different Chinese between adults and children. So, the age affects the translation.

Male, masculine, rough, open-minded; female, gentle, shy, charming. In English, women use “oh dear, dear me, my goodness, good gracious” more; men use “O lord, Good lord, Good heavens” more.

In Chinese, the male sound atmosphere thick, they use “嗨! 嗨! 嘿!” more; female spoke lightly, they use “呀! 噢! 哇!” more. So, the gender affects the translation.

The dialect is considered to be the means to express strong feelings; a lot of interjections have such geographical features. So, the region affects the translation.

**Table 3**  
**Some Common English Interjections and Chinese Version**

Some common English interjections	The Chinese version
Ah	“呀、啊”
Aha	“啊哈”
Alas	“哎呀、唉”
Bah	“呸”
Boo	“嘘”
Boy	“嘿、哇、哼、怎么样”
Come	“喂、好吧、说吧、得啦”
Damn	“该死、讨厌”
Dear	“哎呀、天哪”
Eh	“呃、啊! 嗯! 是吗? 好吗?”
Er	“嗯”
Gee	“哎呀”
Ha	“哈”
Hello	“喂”
Hey	“嘿、嗨”
Hooray	“好哇”
Huh	“嘿、哈、嘎、嗯? 什么?”
Hush	“嘘(别作声)、快!”
Man	“啊、嗨”
Now	“喂、喏、好了”
Some common English interjections	The Chinese Version
Nuts	“呸、胡说、混蛋”
Oh	“哦、哎呀、噢、啊、呀”
Ok	“好、行”
Oops	“哎呀、糟糕”
Ouch	“哎呦”
Pooh	“呸”
Pshaw	“啐、哼”
Sh	“嘘”
There	“哟、瞧、好啦、得啦”
Well	“好吧、不过、好啦、嗯”
Whew	“哟、唷”
Why	“咳、为什么、凭什么”
Wow	“哇!、噢!”
Yeah	“耶”

When the westerners face difficulties, they turn to God, longing to go to heaven after death, fear of hell. So, their interjections are and more with God and the kingdom of heaven: Oh, my God! Oh, lord! Good God! Oh Heavens! Gee! God Almighty! Heck (Hell)! Chinese people believe in fate, spirits, so they often say: 老天爷! 菩萨保佑! 阿弥陀佛! 真见鬼! So, faith and religion also affect the translation.

The words and way of talk in interpersonal communication related to people's social status and identity. That is to say, people play different roles; their language should be different, too. And the role also affects the translation.

### 3. TRANSLATION METHODS

Translation is the communication of the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text. (Bassnett, 2002) Generally speaking, literal translation and liberal translation (or free translation / paraphrase) are two common translation methods. Literal translation, or directed translation, is the rendering of text from one language to another “word-for-word” rather than conveying the sense of the original. While free translation is a translation that reproduces the general meaning of the original text. It may or may not closely follow the form or organization of the original for the purpose of translation. (Vermeer, 1992)

Here are three Chinese translation methods of English interjections: Sound translation method, Tone translation method, and Context translation method.

#### 3.1 Sound Translation Method

Sound translation method is to translate the English interjection into the Chinese interjection or onomatopoeia which has the same or similar pronunciation.

English interjections can express emotions through sound, and the Chinese interjections and some onomatopoeia can work in the same way. In many cases, the pronunciations, the forms and the feelings of the English interjections and the Chinese interjections are same or similar. In this case, the feelings expressed by the English interjection are more obvious. So the feelings can be accurately judged through its pronunciation.

For example:

(1) -This is for you.

-Thank you. Wow! It's my favorite cartoon book.  
(谢谢你, 哇! 是我最喜欢的卡通书。)

Here, wow [ wau ] is pronounced similarly with the Chinese interjection “哇( wa )”. They all express a pleasant surprise mood.

(2) Oh! My poor Mathilde, how you are changed! (*The Lost Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant)

(噢, 我可怜的马蒂尔, 你怎么变成这个样子了! )

Here, Oh [əu] / [o] is pronounced similarly with the Chinese interjection “噢( o )”. They all mean a surprise emotion.

(3) Aha, we won the game.

(啊哈! 我们赢了比赛。)

Here, Aha [ɑ: 'hɑ] has the same pronunciation with the Chinese interjection “啊哈( a ha )”. They all mean a surprise emotion.

(4) Ah! The fact turned out to be the case. I understand now.

(啊, 事实原来是这样的. 我现在明白了.)

Here, Ah [ɑ:] / [ɑ] has the same pronunciation with the Chinese interjection “啊 ( a )”. They all used to refer to someone comes to realize the truth.

(5) Hush! Mother is sleeping.

(嘘!妈妈正在睡觉呢.)

Here, Hush [ hʌʃ ] and the Chinese onomatopoeia “嘘 (xu)” are all used to call attention. Their pronunciations are all formed by airflow through the vocal organs friction.

### 3.2 Tone Translation Method

Tone translation method is to translate the English interjections into the Chinese words of a certain tone.

Some English interjections only play the role of calling others' attention or undertake other people's words. Their pronunciation simply means a tone, such as doubt, response, commitment, suggestions, echo, and so on. Sometimes they are the preparation before the speech or the speech pause in the middle. At this time, they generally lose the strong emotional significance. Some interjections have become greet words, such as hello, hey. There are also a variety of Chinese tone words. So the English interjections can be translated into Chinese correctly and appropriately by judging the speaker's tone.

For example:

(1) Hey! You're in trouble, aren't you? (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain)

喂! 汤姆, 你又惹祸了, 是不是? (《汤姆·索亚历险记》马克·吐温)

Here, “Hey” is a greet word, used to call attention.

(2) -Do you tango, Colonel ?

-Poorly, I am afraid.

-Well, I shall teach you to do it richly as it was done in old Spain. (Film: *Scent of a Woman*)

那就让我像从前西班牙人那样来教你吧。(电影《闻香识女人》)

Here, “well” is a tone of suggestion, which undertakes the above words.

(3) Perhaps, eh, you'd like to meet the staff, miss? (*Death on the Nile*)

小姐, 也许, 呃, 您想见见底下人? (《尼罗河上的惨案》)

Here, “eh” is the pause in the middle speech.

(4) Why, you don't mean to say you are going to leave home.

什么? 难道你是说你要离家出走吗?

Here, “why” is a tone of doubt, which undertakes the above words.

### 3.3 Context Translation Method

Context translation method is to translate the English interjections into Chinese content words or sentences which represent a specific emotional meaning.

One English interjection can express a variety of emotions while without specific vocabulary significance. There are very few English interjections, whose writing does not properly reflect their sound, such as pshaw [p], whew [wju: hju:] (Catford, 1965). In addition, there are also some from the notional conversion, such as there, come, why, etc.. They just have a specific meaning in a specific language environment. In this case, the Chinese translation can not be accurate and natural to express the speaker's feelings by using the first two methods. At this time, the full emotional meaning of the vocabulary will be given in the context when translating, and to fully express its rhetorical effect. Mix this specific emotional meaning with the complete meaning of the characters' words.

For example:

(1) “Pshaw”, she murmured, blushing with pleasure. (*Love is a Fallacy* by Max Shulman)

Here, Polly expressed a rebuke and pleased mood after her boyfriend appreciated her ability to study and understand.

In Chinese, “去你的!” “讨厌!” can be used to express this mood.

(2) There see? They are not good person! I am right!

Here, translate “there see” into “你瞧”. In this way, the speaker's feeling of pride (because he has made the right judgments) can be clearly reflected.

(3) You are telling a lie, David, huh?

Here, “huh” is a tone of doubt. Depending on the context and the emotional meaning, translate it “我说的没错吧?” can express the speaker's resentment and mockery.

(4) Nuts! I would rather die than go to steal into the house.

“Nuts” means hate and rejection. Here, the whole sentence can be translated to “呸! 我宁死也不进屋偷窃.”

(5) -Oh, no!

-Geez, you've already psychologically prepared for that, haven't you?

“Geez” means surprise, anger. Here, since he/she has already psychologically prepared for that, his/her reaction is much ado about nothing. “干嘛这样大惊小怪! 你不是已经做好心理准备了吗?” can be a better translation.

## CONCLUSION

This paper summarizes three ways of Chinese translation of English interjection through studying on interjections and translation methods. At the beginning of this paper, there are the introductions of the definition of English interjection, the features of English interjection and the emotions expressed by common English interjections. This paper also introduces ancient Chinese interjections and modern Chinese interjections. Although there are many translation methods, not every method can be used

in translating the English interjections. Above, the three methods of translation, the sound translation method, the tone translation method, and the context translation method can solve all problems of the Chinese translation of the English interjection. At the same time, the age, the gender, the region, the religion, and role factors should be also pay attention to. The use of interjection plays a very important role in improving the communication ability and expressing complex feelings. A good understanding of the interjections in the language communication will help and guide the English learners to achieve the ultimate goal. But, there are some limitations in the studying of contrastive analysis between English interjection and Chinese interjection. For this problem, two suggestions are given. On one hand, more interjections should be analyzed. On the other hand, the use of English

interjection and Chinese interjection in different context should be given more analysis.

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