

# A Pragmatic Analysis of Interjections in the Wild Child Movie: Types and Functions

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**Abstract:** Language plays an essential role in human communication. Human communication itself involves the exchange and negotiation of thoughts and information. In general, sometimes people encounter difficulties in expressing their feelings and emotions, and this is where interjections serve as essential linguistic tools. This study investigates the types and pragmatic functions of interjections in the Wild Child movie, using the framework from Ameka (1992) to identify how they are used in the movie. The film was selected due to its rich intentional use of colloquial language and reflects authentic teenage communication. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study analysed the movie script categorized as interjections by grouping them into two main types, primary and secondary, and then identifying their pragmatic functions, such as emotive, cognitive, conative, and phatic. This proposes that interjections in the movie function not only as tools to help express emotions but also to manage interaction, maintain social bonds, and convey mental states. The study confirms that interjections' function depends on the context, regardless of their form. These insights support a deeper understanding of pragmatic language use features and emphasize the educational value of interjections in improving learners' communicative competence.

**Keyword:** *interjections, pragmatic, communicative competence*

## INTRODUCTION

In a world where human connection is essential, the ability to express thoughts and emotions is a fundamental aspect of humanity. Communication serves as the foundation upon which society is built. As social beings, humans spend most of their time interacting and communicating with others (Sitanggang & Natsir, 2013). Language is the primary tool of communication for transferring information between individuals. Human communication is exchanging ideas, thoughts, emotions, and information between individuals. Language is necessary to communicate as it helps people understand somebody else's wants and expand on their thoughts. People use language in conversation either in verbal form or non-verbal form.

Communication will be more interactively conveyed if emotion and feeling are also shown. However, in some situations, people find it difficult to express their feelings and emotions using common words. This is where people need something to help them express their feelings better. In this case, interjections can help speakers to communicate better, especially in oral form. Interjections are utterances that convey emotions, manage interactions, and reinforce sociocultural identity (Ameka, 1992; Wierzbicka, 1992). Interjections are used to signify feelings or states of mind that cannot be conveyed using common sentences.

Interjections can be found in any media, for example, in movies. A movie is a form of entertainment that is considered to be an effective learning medium. In a movie, the actors or speakers often use expressions in verbal form. The use of interjections is perfect to make the conversation more lively. The use of interjections to express feelings and emotions in the movie shows that it is beneficial to help the actors make their acting look natural.

The researcher uses the Wild Child movie as the object because the application of interjections can be found in any daily conversation or entertainment media. Wild Child was released on August 14, 2008. It is a movie that features teenage romance, drama, and comedy. It tells about a young American girl, Poppy More. Poppy Moore grew up in a wealthy family, she always gets everything she wants. However, her bad behaviour and attitude caused her father to send her to Abbey Mount, a boarding school in England. Poppy shows her mischievous behaviour by breaking school rules. Hence, the Wild Child offers rich material for analysis because of their intentional use of colloquial language, especially the frequent interjections that

reflect authentic teenage communication (Tannen, 1989), especially in the movie, where interjections are used to help the actors to express and go deep into the role and the situations in the movie. Then, in the application of interjections, whether in real life or movies, people still have difficulties understanding what the speakers mean by the utterances of interjections. Hence, this research can help the readers learn more about using interjections.

Interjections are vocal gestures often produced spontaneously because they convey a speaker's mental state, action, attitude, or reaction to a situation (Ameka, 1992, p. 106). In addition, Ameka (1992) stated that interjections are syntactically independent; they are not grammatically connected to other parts of the sentence. For instance, "Oops!", "Ouch!", "Ugh!", "Eww!" or "Wow!". Interjections can stand independently as utterances and do not typically integrate into the sentence structure. This means that interjections in a sentence do not affect the rest or alter the sentence's overall meaning.

Ameka (1992:105) states that interjections can be divided based on the form into two main types: primary interjections, typically one-word expressions or non-words that function independently. They can make a complete utterance on their own within communication. Therefore, they do not belong to other word classes. Since they are independent, primary interjections can construct utterances to express emotions or reactions directly without needing additional words. The other type is secondary interjections. Secondary interjections originate from other word classes and are used as interjections in specific contexts. They are considered interjections because they can stand on their own to express feelings or emotions in communication. Although it belongs to other word classes, if the speakers intend to express emotions and feelings according to the context, then it is categorized as an interjection. Acknowledging this distinction is essential for analyzing how interjections operate within communication.

Furthermore, interjections serve important communicative functions. Interjections allow speakers to show their feelings and react quickly to a situation without forming a complete sentence. This spontaneous nature of interjections makes it important to enable speakers to convey their feelings directly and keep the conversation alive, maintain conversational flow, and create a stronger emotional connection that enhances the understanding between interlocutors. Ameka (1992:113) classified interjections based on the communicative functions into four categories: expressive, which are later subdivided into emotive and cognitive. Emotive interjections are used to show what the speaker is feeling. These are the types of interjections that function to reflect the speaker's internal emotional or physical state at the time they are speaking. Cognitive interjections refer to words or expressions that convey the speaker's state of mind, thoughts, or understanding when speaking. These interjections are commonly associated with cognitive processes, such as realizing, remembering, or thinking about something. Conative interjections are utterances directed at the listener to get the listener's attention. These interjections often serve an interactional function, as conative interjections encourage a response or action. Phatic interjections are used to maintain social interaction and to keep communication flowing.

Interjections are often understood not solely based on their form, but through the context in which they are expressed and the communicative situation surrounding them. Based on this, the current study is appropriately conducted within a pragmatic framework. Pragmatics is the study concerned with what speakers mean and are interpreted by listeners in a given context (Yule, 1996). As stated by Leech (1983), pragmatics is how people understand the meaning of what others say, depending on the situation. Thus, pragmatics is an analysis of language use that depends more on the situation and the speaker's intention rather than on the literal meaning of words or phrases.

Although Ameka's classification focuses on the functional aspects of interjections, Wierzbicka (1992) highlights their cultural uniqueness, suggesting that how interjections are used reflects underlying sociolinguistic conventions. For example, English speakers may say "Oh my God!" to convey surprise, whereas other languages use different expressions. These viewpoints underscore that interjections are universally present and shaped by cultural context.

Previous studies have examined interjections in spontaneous conversation, as in student conversation by Yuniarty (2018), in L2 learning and teaching by Petrova (2020). The study found that interjections play a crucial role in communication by expressing feelings and emotions, reinforcing cultural expression, and contributing to more effective interpersonal interactions. The following studies have investigated the use of interjections in movies and TV shows, as mentioned by Dinata, Jayantini, and Juniarta (2023), Desi, Oktoma, and Solihat (2023), Nabila and Ena (2022), Sari and Syahputri (2020), and Bashchenko (2023). These studies' findings consistently point out the dominant role of emotive interjections in spoken dialogues. Emotive interjections appeared as the most frequently used function, meaning characters commonly rely on vocal gestures to express their emotions.

Furthermore, interjections played a crucial part in creating dialogue that feels natural and realistic. These findings highlight the importance of interjections not only in emotional expression but also in supporting cultural understanding. Moreover, according to a study by Mao (2017), interjections were investigated from the perspective of cultural understanding. Universal primary interjections are more understandable across different cultures. However, specific primary interjections that are culture-specific are often challenging to understand without cultural familiarity.

This current study presents a gap from the previous studies. The study fills the gap by conducting a pragmatic analysis of the *Wild Child* movie by applying Ameka's (1992) framework of interjections. Therefore, this study aims to explore the pragmatic functions of interjections such as emotive, cognitive, conative, and phatic. Through this approach, this study aims to understand better how interjections are used to express meaning in scripted dialogues and how they resemble real-life social communication. Therefore, this study is expected to use interjections as tools to enhance students' communicative competence and make their speech more expressive. Eveliana, Syahid, and Widiastuty (2024) demonstrated that a vocabulary website with interactive features can effectively engage students in vocabulary learning; similarly, interjections found in movie dialogue can also serve a valuable media for learning because it has authentic, emotionally rich, and contextually grounded language use.

## METHOD

This research aims to identify the use of interjections in movies using a descriptive qualitative approach. This research approach is very suitable for this study because it meets the researcher's needs to collect and analyze the interjections as non-numerical data. The primary data source was taken from the script of the *Wild Child* movie. All the spoken interjections from the movie's dialogue were written down and identified. The study only included words that functioned as Ameka (1992) proposed interjections. To make sure the research results are trustworthy. The researcher watched the movie several times while cross-checking the official script to transcribe all interjections spoken in the dialogue. This helped increase credibility by ensuring the data matched what was actually said in the movie. The researcher kept detailed notes during data collection and analysis to keep the process clear and organized this allows readers to understand how the study was done.

For the analysis, each interjection was examined and categorized based on the type of interjection: primary and secondary. Thereafter, the interjections were categorized based on their functions in the conversation to determine what function they serve. They were grouped into four main functions: Emotive (conveying feelings), cognitive (showing the speaker's state of mind), conative (directed at someone, often as a command), and phatic (helping to maintain social interaction). The categorization was based on the context in which the interjections appeared, including tone, accompanying actions, and the conversational situation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings and discussion.

**Table 1. Types and Functions of Interjections in the Wild Child Movie**

	Types of Interjections		Functions of Interjections			
	Primary	Secondary	Emotive	Cognitive	Conative	Phatic
Frequency of Occurrence	106	75	98	17	38	28

The table shows that based on Ameka's (1992) framework, the analysis shows that in the *Wild Child* movie, the characters employ primary interjections more frequently than secondary interjections. Primary interjections occur 106 times compared to secondary interjections, which appear 75 times. This indicates a dominant use of spontaneous and direct utterances such as "Oh!", "Ugh!" and "Ew!" in the dialogue. As seen from the preference for the type of interjections used, it suggests that the characters in the movie tend to respond to situations impulsively without having to construct complex sentence structures.

To answer which function of interjections is used more often, the researcher concluded from the data that the emotive function is the most dominant function employed by the characters in the *Wild Child* movie. This shows that interjections in this movie are widely used to show feelings and emotions such as annoyance, disgust, shock, amazement, frustration, or pain. This aligns with Ameka's (1992) theory which states that interjections primarily serve to convey spontaneous emotions in discourse. The conative function occupies the second position, indicating interjections to draw attention, give a command, or address something. The phatic function comes in third place and is used to maintain communication flow. The last factor is cognitive function, which indicates a character's thinking process. From the findings, it can be concluded that the characters in the *Wild Child* movie are more dominant in using interjections in expressive and interpersonal aspects.

The following excerpts illustrate how interjections are used by the characters. "Ugh, In England, it rains 200 days out of the year." This utterance is spoken by Poppy soon after she arrives in England. Coming from the sunny and bright atmosphere of Malibu, she clearly expresses her frustration and annoyance toward the rainy weather in England. Categorized as a primary interjection with emotive function, "Ugh" appears at the beginning of the sentence, indicating a spontaneous emotional reaction towards the situation.

The next example highlights how primary interjection with emotive function used in dialogue. "Jesus, Poppy. You're a proper psycho." This line comes from Kate in response to the building burning in fire. In this context "Jesus" falls under secondary interjection because it is originally a noun, but in this dialogue, it is used as emotional exclamation. This interjection functions as emotive that convey speaker's emotional reactions in sense of shock. Align with Wierzbicka's (1992) state that interjections carry sociocultural identity. In informal British or American English, the word "Jesus" as an interjection is often used to convey disbelief or shock, not necessarily tied to religious context.

The interjections "Look, I know that I'm not some Malibu therapist." illustrate the use of secondary interjections that serve a conative function in the movie. In this scene, Kate is trying to draw Poppy's attention to what she is about to say. This reflects the conative function, as the interjection is used to signal that something important will be said.

Another excerpt is "Hello, Poppy. Welcome to Abbey Mount." delivered by Mrs. Kingsley, the headmistress of Abbey Mount School. "Hello" in this dialogue is categorized as a phatic interjection, which primarily serve function to initiate or establish social interaction. It is use by Mrs. Kingsley to greet Poppy's arrival and opening communication with her.

In the use of cognitive function, the line “Why don't you go out and buy yourself... Well, anything.” is spoken by Poppy to the matron in Abbey Mount School. The interjection “Well” is clearly a secondary interjection, appearing mid-sentence and used after a pause. It shows the moment when Poppy having hesitation about what she is about to say to the matron. It signals the moment of thought shifting as Poppy try to broaden her suggestion. This aligns with the cognitive function of interjections, which often indicate the speaker’s thought process.

Based on the results of the analysis, it is found that a single function does not always fall under the same category. One function can appear as either primary or secondary. For example, emotive interjections such as “Whoa. Hands off, mama” are categorized under primary interjections. On the other hand, an expression such as “Jesus Christ!” is also an emotive interjection but belongs to secondary functions. This indicates that a single function of interjections can be either a primary or a secondary type. Therefore, it shows that functions are not exclusively tied to one specific type.

Interjections also have a wide range of meanings. “Oh!” and “Ugh!” both serve an emotive function, yet they differ in meaning. “Oh!” expresses surprise, while “Ugh!” indicates a sense of disgust. This shows that the interjections' meaning and emotional nuances vary depending on the context in which they are used.

The function of interjections is more determined by the pragmatic context rather than by their form alone Ameka (1992). The interjection “Hey!” shows flexibility of function in its usage. “Hey!” is an emotive interjection expressing annoyance as in “Hey! I was listening to that.” This reflects a feeling of displeasure at the behavior of the interlocutor.

On the other hand, “Hey!” can also function as conative interjections, such as “Hey! Get up.” Which is used to command or direct the interlocutor to do an action. This illustrates that even though the form remains the same, the function may differ. This is in line with Goddard (2014) and Norrick (2009) who argue that the meaning of interjections depending on the speaker's communicative intention.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined the types and functions of interjections in the *Wild Child* movie using Ameka’s (1992) framework. The analysis shows that primary interjections are more frequently used than secondary ones. This indicates that the characters in the movie have a strong preference to react to situations spontaneously without having to construct a sentence by using a word or a non-word. Among the four pragmatic functions of interjections, emotive functions are the functions that appear most often, followed by conative, phatic, and cognitive functions. These functions show that the characters employ various ways to interact and communicate with others. The findings also show that a single function is not tied to a fixed type; primary and secondary types can serve the same function depending on the context. The role of interjections is determined by the context in which they are used, rather than by their fixed form. This means that even if the interjection is in the same word, the functions can differ depending on the speaker’s communicative purpose. By analyzing interjections applying theory from Ameka (1992) to a movie that raises teenage romance, drama, and comedy, this study provides a new perspective in pragmatics by showing how scripted dialogues can reflect natural spoken interactions using interjections. This study's findings can support language learners' comprehension of the practical use of interjections in day-to-day communication, thereby improving their language knowledge and enhancing their ability to construct expressive and effective communication.

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