Motivated by the frequent omission of interjections from film subtitles, this study investigates the interpersonal functions of interjections, and seeks to disentangle their meaning relations. Based on the analysis of interjections from six English language films under the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the study primarily classifies the functions of interjections in terms of whether the interjections independently realize moves in exchange. The function of the interjection which realizes a move on its own is described at the semantic stratum in terms of a minor speech function, and the function of the interjection which realizes a move together with a clause is described at the lexicogrammatical stratum in terms of an optional clausal function referred to as a ‘latched function’. The study highlights the distinction between latched functions and their agnate minor speech functions, and offers more delicate accounts of the functions of interjections. It proposes a system network of the minor speech functions, which can facilitate a more systematic analysis of the functions realized by interjections. This study contributes to the SFL description of English interjections, and can offer methodological insights into further research on the functionality of interjections.

1. Introduction

Despite their common occurrences in human speech, interjections like oh, hey, wow, ouch, oops, aha, etc. are frequently omitted from film subtitles, as reported in previous literature (e.g. Georgakopoulou 2009: 27), and also confirmed by my own observation in the context of English-to-Chinese film subtitling. The expendability of interjections raises interesting questions such as what aspects of meanings are compromised in the subtitles, and whether some aspects of meanings are more likely to be treated as expendable than others. To approach these questions, it is necessary to investigate first and foremost the meanings conveyed by interjections, which is the focus of this paper. It is worth emphasizing that with
the focus on meanings, this study on interjections is not confined to specific forms (e.g. Downing & Martínez Caro 2019; Reber 2012; Stange 2016 for some case studies of interjections). As will be seen below, the meaning of an interjection (sound form) varies depending on its context.

Many attempts have been made to explore the meanings of interjections. Most notably, Ameka (1992) classifies four types of communicative functions performed by interjections: emotive, cognitive, conative, and phatic (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative function</th>
<th>Definition / description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>emotive</td>
<td>express the speaker’s state with respect to the emotions and sensations they have at the time</td>
<td>Yuk! / Ugh! ‘I feel disgust’; Wow! ‘I am surprised’; Ouch! ‘I feel pain’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cognitive</td>
<td>pertain to the state of knowledge and thoughts at the time of utterance</td>
<td>Aha! ‘I now know this’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conative</td>
<td>get someone’s attention or demand an action or response from someone of a speaker’s wants</td>
<td>Sh! ‘I want silence here’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phatic</td>
<td>establish and maintain communicative contact</td>
<td>mhm, uh-huh, yeah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the descriptions that emotive, cognitive, conative, and phatic interjections are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, as Ameka (1992:114) himself points out, “the backchanneling [phatic] interjections could be cognitive since they signal the current state of the utterer with respect to their comprehension and mental involvement in the on-going communication”. Stange (2016:12) also notes that while phatic interjections “usually lack an emotive component ... they may, ... depending on their prosodical features, also express surprise or dismay”. While such classifications enable detailed analysis of the interjection in question, they offer little guidance as to the criteria to determine the “predominant function” (Ameka: 114) of the item (interestingly though, there does seem to be a tendency to identify the predominant function) – it seems that the decision regarding the main function of a given interjection largely relies on the analyst’s intuition, at best with due consideration of the context (e.g. Stange 2016:12, 15–16, 58). However, for the current study, it is crucial to classify interjections into mutually exclusive categories, and to explicate the criteria for the classification, so as to identify the aspects of meanings at stake in the context of film subtitling. In this, prior research conducted under the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) framework provides useful insights to unravel different aspects of
meanings. The current study thus adopts the SFL approach for the investigation of the functions of interjections.

From an SFL perspective, interjections typically realize meanings of an interpersonal nature. By looking into interjections in the English language, this study aims to contribute to the investigation of the interpersonal functions of interjections by unpacking and disentangling the relations among the functions. A system network will be proposed for a clearer picture of the meaning relations. This system can serve as an analytical tool for the annotation of interjections, and can provide methodological inspirations for further research if more delicate meaning differences are considered important or other aspects of meanings are of interest.

2. The interjections in question: Data and formal features

Given that this study initially arose from observations on the frequent omission of interjections from film subtitles, the current dataset is comprised of the soundtrack interjections in six English language films: The King’s Speech (2010), How to Train Your Dragon (2010), The Croods (2013), The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014), The Imitation Game (2014), and Mr. Holms (2015). The selection of the films was primarily concerned with the number of versions of subtitles available – multiple versions of subtitles would enable the identification of more general patterns of omission. While this selection criterion is not directly related to the functionality of interjections, the interjections in these films were indeed found to be functionally diverse (see Section 3). It is thus believed that this study can offer helpful insights into the investigation of the functions of interjections. As an additional advantage, the current dataset contains more comprehensive contextual information of the utterances of interjections, including visual clues, which can facilitate the determination of the function of the interjection in question (see e.g. Ameka 1992: 112; Goddard 2014: 54; Stange 2016: 45–47; Wilkins 1992: 122–123 on the association between interjections and facial expressions and/or bodily gestures).

The examples used in this paper are from The Croods unless otherwise specified, because the interjections in this film best represent the range of functions realized by interjections. I took my own transcription of the soundtrack interjections, i.e. watching the films and transcribing the interjections from the soundtrack. My transcription referenced the screenplays of the films and the multiple versions of subtitles which I had access to at the beginning of the project.\(^1\) Particularly, the

\(^1\) The screenplays of The Croods, The Grand Budapest Hotel, and The King’s Speech were retrieved on 3 August 2015 from http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~ina22/splaylib/Screenplay-Croods.pdf, http://d97a3ad6c1b09e180027-5c35be6f174b10f62347680d094e609a.r46.cf2.rackcdn.com
interjections included in these written versions served as references for my transcription of the soundtrack interjections which were omitted from all the versions.

Up to this point, I have been treating the term ‘interjection’ as if it were a clear-cut category, but there is actually no consensus as to which items constitute interjections (see Stange 2016: 5–8 for a discussion). The disagreement is partly due to the situation that the term interjection is used both as a function label (interchangeable with exclamation) and as a class label. To avoid confusion, this study follows Ameka’s (1992) suggestion to separate the two: the term interjection is reserved for the word class (class label), and the term exclamation is used as the name for a type of utterance (function label). These labels are clearly distinguished in the SFL framework (see Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 76; Martin 2013: 34–38), where the relationship between class labels and function labels can be specified in terms of realization. It is noteworthy that the realizational relationship between interjections and exclamations is not biunique – as will be seen in Section 3, interjections can realize a wide range of functions apart from exclamations; exclamations can be realized by words (and expressions of larger units) from various word classes not limited to interjections.

A definition of interjection, like definitions of other word classes, typically considers both formal and functional properties of interjections (see e.g. Ameka 2006: 743; Quirk et al. 1985: 853; Stange 2016: 20 for definitions of interjection). Given that the focus of this study is on the functions of interjections, definitions involving functional descriptions of interjections were not adopted to avoid circular argument. What was taken as the point of departure is the form-oriented definition of interjection provided by Wilkins (1992: 124): “A conventional lexical form which (commonly and) conventionally constitutes an utterance on its own, (typically) does not enter into construction with other word classes, is (usually) monomorphemic, and (generally) does not host inflectional or derivational morphemes”.

From a lexicogrammatical perspective, this definition offers descriptions of interjections across the grammatical ranks. This study will not be much concerned with the word structure (see Stange 2016: 36–38 for morphological features of interjections), and hence reduces the defining features of interjections to two recognition criteria. Firstly, interjections are (typically) syntactically resistant. Secondly, interjections are conventional forms, in the sense that their phono-
logical/phonetic/visual shapes are largely “fixed” in a given speech community (Wilkins 1992: 124). These two criteria guided my decision as to which soundtrack items counted as interjections and needed to be transcribed. As will be further elaborated on below, the two criteria are intended to distinguish interjections from language proper and non-language respectively. The demarcation can be a tricky task in certain circumstances, and below I will explain in detail how the decisions were made for this research.

2.1 Interjections as syntactically resistant utterances

The syntactic resistance of the interjections included in this study (e.g. *oh, wow, hey, ouch*) can be interpreted from two perspectives. Firstly, in terms of the structure of the phrase/group, interjections bear no trace of structure – they do not have the potential to be analyzed structurally. This rules out expressions such as *Bloody hell!, My goodness!, and Thank God! from the current study (cf. Ameka 1992: 111, where such expressions are considered “interjectional phrases”). Take *Bloody hell!* for example: admittedly, this expression as a minor clause does not need to be assigned an internal structure (in which case the function label of exclamation might suffice for the analysis), but it does have the potential to be analyzed as a nominal group, as suggested in Halliday & Matthiessen (2014: 196). In contrast, expressions such as *Oh man! and Oh dear! can indeed be regarded as interjections since they can hardly be analyzed structurally as groups or phrases – it might be argued that each of the expressions consists of two words, but here the ‘word’ refers to a graphological unit rather than a structural unit in the rank scale (Halliday 1975/2004: 33; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 7–8). Thus *oh man* and *oh dear* were included in this research, whereas *Bloody hell!, My goodness!, and Thank God! were excluded.

Secondly, in terms of the structure of the clause, interjections are non-elliptical – they do not have the potential to be supplied structurally. This rules out items such as *Great!, Careful!, and Help! from the current study (cf. Ameka 1992: 111, where such expressions are regarded as “secondary interjections”), considering that these expressions do have the potential to be filled out (as, say, *That’s

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2. It is noteworthy that interjections are problematic with respect to the notion of ‘word’ as a rank in lexicogrammar. Given that interjections typically do not enter into syntactic relations with other word classes, interjections are, strictly speaking, not a word class – they cannot be defined by their operation in the phrase/group rank. In this regard, interjection is not recognized as a word class in the Systemic Functional account of English grammar (see Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 75 for the word classes recognized in English).
great!, Be careful!, and Help! me! respectively), even though they are conventionally used on their own.³

Note that the expressions such as Great!, Careful!, and Help! are primarily treated as minor clauses rather than elliptical (forms of major) clauses in SFL literature (see Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:196) despite their potential to be structurally supplied. Admittedly, such utterances may not presuppose anything from the preceding speech, which may lend support to viewing them as non-elliptical minor clauses. Nevertheless, structural presupposition is only one type of ellipsis, i.e. anaphoric ellipsis, and there is another type – exophoric ellipsis, where the immediate context of situation supplies information for the interpretation of a given incomplete structure (Halliday & Hasan 1976:144; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:127–128). In this sense, the expressions can be interpreted as elliptical clauses. These expressions can then be regarded as either (non-elliptical) minor clauses or elliptical (major) clauses. Indeed, it has been acknowledged in SFL literature that minor clauses and elliptical clauses are not always readily distinguishable (Halliday & Hasan 1976:144; Matthiessen 1995:385, 434). For the current purpose of clarifying the boundary of the interjections under investigation, it is the lack of structural potential that is given priority – the expressions which do not allow the alternative interpretation as elliptical clauses were included in the current analysis.

Here an additional note needs to be made on yes/yeah and no. They are indeed interjections in certain contexts, for instance, the No! uttered by Grug when he finds his baby daughter playing with fire. Such instances were included in this study. However, when operating independently as responses to polar questions, they are not interjections, and were excluded from this study. In such cases, they are actually elliptical clauses (mood Adjuncts of polarity) – as Halliday & Hasan argue, yes/yeah and no realize “a single clause feature, that of polarity, ... and the fact that it is expressed on its own means that the whole of the remainder of the clause is presupposed” (1976:209) (see also Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:636–637). Likewise, this study did not include instances such as mm in response to a polar question, which can be regarded as a variant form of yes, nor did the study include instances such as hmm as an echo question, which may be interpreted as an elliptical clause.

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³ From the current perspective, Great!, Careful!, and Help! can be analyzed as exclamation, alarm: warning, and alarm: appeal (function labels, see Section 3) realized by two adjectives and a verb (class labels) respectively.
2.2 Interjections as stabilized forms

In the above, the focus was on the characteristics of interjections in comparison to language proper. Of equal importance is the need to distinguish interjections from noises or sounds which have not been fully recognized in a speech community. Little effort seems to have been made in this regard, as most prior studies on interjections are based on written data, where non-language sounds are already excluded. In this study, however, the interjections are primarily in the soundtrack, and it needs to be decided whether a certain sound could be regarded as an interjection. The decision made for this research is that the recognized soundtrack interjection needs to have a relatively stabilized written form. Here I am following Quirk et al. (1985: 74) in treating interjections as a closed class (cf. Norrick 2009, where interjections are considered an open-ended class). The reason is that if a given sound form can only be transcribed on an ad hoc basis, this means the form has not established itself as being in the English language, which does not fit Wilkins’ definition of interjections regarding their conventionality, and which may hence be considered unnecessary for subtitling.

By relatively stabilized graphological forms I mean that the spelling of interjections can vary according to the actual sounds. For instance, oh, ooh, and oooohhhhh can reflect variations in the length of the vowel. Yet it needs to be acknowledged that a written interjection may be rather different from a spoken interjection – a single written form, say, oh, may be used to represent a diverse range of sounds (see Stange 2016: 34–35 for more on the pronunciation of interjections).

To judge if a spelling is stabilized in English, I referenced three sources. One source of reference comes from examples offered in previous literature on interjections (e.g. Ameka 1992; Goddard 2014; Norrick 2009; Quirk et al. 1985: 853; Wharton 2009: ch4; Wilkins 1992, to list just a few). The other two types of sources are three spoken English corpora and five online dictionaries (see Primary sources). Written symbols of sounds which have not been included in the sources mentioned above were excluded from the current dataset. For example, in The Croods, there is an instance of Grug’s scream which is rendered in the screenplay as Raaaaar grooooOOOOooowwwlll ERF ERF Glaaaaaabbbllllllilth-hhhh! Such an instance is not considered an interjection, although the written form constitutes an independent non-elliptical utterance.

To summarize, the interjections which were included in this research meet the following two (form-oriented) criteria. Firstly, the forms are syntactically resistant – they have neither the potential to be analyzed structurally nor the potential to be supplied structurally. Secondly, their spellings have been relatively stabilized in the English language. These two recognition criteria proved to be
practical for the inclusion/exclusion of interjections for the current study, and the functions explored below are based on the subset of interjections which meet the two criteria.

3. **Interpersonal functions of interjections**

As mentioned, the interpersonal functions of interjections are grouped into mutually exclusive categories in the SFL literature. Depending on whether a given interjection constitutes an entire utterance independently, its function falls into one of the two broad categories: where the interjection stands on its own (as a minor clause), it realizes a ‘minor speech function’ (e.g. exclamation, call, greeting, see Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:196); alternatively, where the interjection is yoked into a clause (as a part of the clause), it realizes an optional function of the clause (outside the Mood and Residue in the case of a major clause) (e.g. Vocative and Expletive, see Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:159–160). In the former case, the interjection itself realizes an independent move (i.e. the basic semantic unit of interpersonal meaning). In the latter case, the interjection only constitutes a part of the move in exchange, and its function will be referred to as a ‘latched function’ in this study. Below I will attend to minor speech functions (at the semantic level) and latched functions (at the lexicogrammatical level) realized by interjections in turn.

### 3.1 Minor speech functions

Halliday & Matthiessen (2014:195–197) identify four minor speech functions: exclamations, calls, greetings, and alarms. Exclamations (e.g. Aha!, Ouch!, Wow!, Hurray!, Oh!, Yuk!) express the speaker’s affective response which is not directed at anyone in particular. Calls (e.g. Hey!, Psst., Ahem.), in contrast, have specific addressees – by using a call, the speaker summons the attention from the intended listener(s) and invites them into the conversation. Greetings (e.g. Hullo., Hi., Bye.) are used to begin / close a conversation to engage / disengage with others. Alarms (e.g. Boo!, Sh!) are exclamatory expressions with specific addressees. There is one further type of minor speech function – the independent moves realized by continuatives (e.g. Uh-huh., Oh.). This function is termed ‘continuity’ in Matthiessen (1995:433). Its interpersonal function is to indicate that the utterer of the continuative is tracking the previous speaker’s utterance (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:196), thus maintaining the social relations and communicative rapport between the interlocutors. Taking this into account, there are altogether five minor speech functions under consideration: exclamation, call, greeting, alarm, and continuity. The following subsections attend to how these minor speech functions can be distinguished.
3.1.1 Systematizing minor speech functions

There are two models which are particularly pertinent to the current focus on the differentiation of the minor speech functions – the system networks proposed in Matthiessen (1995: 436) and Martin (1992: 44). Below I will first review these two system networks, and then make some refinements, particularly with respect to the interjections concerned in this study.

According to Matthiessen, minor speech functions can be primarily distinguished into those which are self-oriented (exclamations) and those which are other-oriented (Figure 1). This provides a helpful starting point. Yet some issues arose when applying this framework to the current analysis. Firstly, the model suggests that minor speech functions are ‘non-role assigning’ – they do not realize initiating or responding features in the turn system. This, however, is counter-indicated in the current data. As will be seen in Section 3.1.2, minor speech functions can indeed serve as initiations and/or responses in exchange. In addition, Matthiessen (1995: 433) himself indicates that calls and greetings can both initiate and respond to a turn. It thus seems that exclamations, calls, and greetings can be regarded as ‘role-assigning’. In this sense, the role-assigning feature seems automatic in nature – as long as someone speaks, s/he automatically becomes the speaker, and renders the other party, if any, the complementary role as the listener.

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Figure 1. The most general systems of speech function (adapted from Matthiessen 1995: 436)⁴

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⁴. Slanted arrows represent realizational relations; square brackets either-or choices; curly brackets simultaneous choices.
This issue is resolved in the system network proposed in Martin (1992: 44), where the turn system in Matthiessen’s model is treated as a simultaneous system to the choice between ‘attending’ and ‘negotiating’ (Figure 2). This means calls, greetings, and exclamations (i.e. reacting moves in Figure 2) can also realize the feature of ‘initiating’ or ‘responding to’.

Similar to Matthiessen’s model, Martin’s system network also differentiates attending moves (calls and greetings) from reacting moves (exclamations). Here the basis for the differentiation is whether the moves are negotiable in terms of probability, usuality, inclination, obligation, or attitude (Martin 1992: 41, 43–44). In this regard, attending moves are not negotiable – calls and greetings are concerned with the mediation of attention rather than the mediation of message (Martin 1981/2010: 40–41). In contrast, exclamations realized by the major clause type of exclamatives and attitudinal minor clauses are indeed negotiable, for instance (adapted from Martin 1992: 43, emphasis in the original):

\[
\text{exclamation} \searrow \text{exclamative} / – \text{What a silly bugger he is!} / \\
\text{minor clause} \quad \text{Bugger!}
\]

\[
\text{response: probability} \quad – \text{He certainly is.} / \\
\text{usuality} \quad \text{He is sometimes.} / \\
\text{intensity} \quad \text{Yes he is rather.}
\]

Note, however, that expressions such as Bugger! were not considered interjections in this study, and the exclamations realized by the interjections included in this study are not negotiable in the sense outlined above, primarily because they have no structural potential. Thus the criterion regarding negotiability cannot be used to distinguish the minor speech functions realized by interjections.

There is another issue in both models – only three of the five minor speech functions are clearly distinguished; alarms and continuities are under-
differentiated or not taken into account. Either case will give rise to a series of changes, as the newly-added or newly-distinguished items will change the meaning of all the others (Halliday 1961/2002: 41). Specifically, before alarms and continuities are added to the system of minor speech functions, greetings mean 'neither exclamations nor calls'; when alarms and continuities are included, greetings become 'not exclamations, not calls, not alarms, nor continuities'. It is thus important to identify the specific semantic features which set the five minor speech functions apart from each other. For this, Matthiessen (1995: 434) proposes the system as shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Minor clauses (Matthiessen 1995: 434)](image)

It is noteworthy that this system of minor clauses is proposed on the basis of the perception that minor clauses, like protolanguage, operate bistratally (Matthiessen 1995: 385), i.e. meanings coded directly into writing/sounding without the mediation of grammar (Halliday 1985/1989: 10). Thus the semantic system of minor speech functions will be the same as this system of minor clauses. Since the current focus is on semantics, I will use semantic terms, i.e. ‘minor speech functions’, rather than ‘minor clause types’, and Figure 3 will be interpreted as a semantic system of minor speech functions, rather than a lexicogrammatical system of minor clauses.

The system foregrounds the contrast between ‘continuity’ and ‘enactment’, and the other minor speech functions can be further differentiated under ‘enactment’ – exclamations and alarms are ‘reactive’, whereas calls and greetings are ‘dialogic’. However, the system does not readily fit into the more general system of speech function presented in Figure 1 or 2 – it does not indicate the relations between the minor speech functions and the major speech functions. In addition, the contrast between ‘enactment’ and ‘continuity’ (in Figure 3) seems to bear a suspicious resemblance to that between ‘initiating’ and ‘responding (to)’ (in Figure 1 or 2). Moreover, the contrast between reactive and dialogic might be misleading as exclamations and alarms can also serve as initiations or responses in dialogic exchanges (see (2), (3), (5) and (6)).

I am thus proposing another system network with the particular aim of clearing up the aspects of meanings at stake to differentiate the minor speech functions
realized by interjections (see Figure 4). Subsystems are numbered in the network to facilitate reference.

The entry condition of the system is ‘move’, which can be realized by a minor clause, an elliptical clause, or “a clause selecting independently for Mood” (Martin 1992: 59). The current system network primarily consists of two simultaneous systems of move and orientation. The move system (System 1) consists of the most basic distinction between initiation and response.

The orientation system (System 2) contrasts the utterances which do not specifically address others (self-oriented), i.e. exclamations, with those which do (other-oriented). For other-oriented moves, further distinctions can be made with regard to whether propositions or proposals are enacted (System 3). Note that to enact a proposition (exchange of information) or a proposal (exchange of goods-and-services), the move is necessarily fused with experiential meaning – the specific ‘information’ or ‘goods-and-services’ are construed in the experiential meaning of language. Thus the moves realized by the interjections included in this study do not realize the ‘negotiating’ feature in System 3, since the interjections do not express experiential meaning. Compare, for example, alarms realized by Hey! (5) and Careful!: while the latter might arguably be seen as demanding an action (which broadly belongs to the category of ‘goods-and-services’), it is not the case for the former, since the specific action being demanded is not experientially construed in hey, even though it might be obvious in the material setting of the immediate context of situation.

Other-oriented moves realized by interjections then realize the feature of ‘attending’ in System 3. Here another contrast can be made in terms of the perceived status of attention of the intended listener (System 4). When the speaker believes the listener has attended to him/her, the speaker can take an attending role either by backchanneling (continuity) or by acknowledging (greeting) (System 5). Otherwise, when the speaker believes the listener has not attended to him/her, the speaker can summon attention with an attempt either to control action (alarm) or to draw attention only (call) (System 6). The ‘action’ in the feature of ‘control action’ refers to an already ongoing but undesired action (5). This is to exclude the action in response to a call, say, by turning to or looking at the speaker. Such an action is not considered to-be-controlled. Thus as here defined, an alarm also summons attention, but more specifically by way of attempting to control a certain undesired action. Whether an utterance functions to summon attention only (call) or to control action at the same time (alarm) is usually clear in a given context of situation. The difference is also reflected in voice quality – alarms resemble exclamations in this regard (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 196), but calls do not.
Figure 4. SPEECH FUNCTIONS realized by 'interjections' in relation to major speech functions (Key: I: if, T: then (i.e. if 'backchannel', then 'respond'; if 'summon attention', then 'initiate'))
Here a note needs to be made regarding the close relationship between exclamations and alarms. As indicated in Figure 3, exclamations and alarms are similar in the sense that both are subsumed into the ‘reactive’ feature. The difference is that exclamations are self-oriented, whereas alarms are other-oriented. Thus the alarms realized by interjections can be regarded as exclamations with specific addressees.

Of the five terminal features corresponding to the five minor speech functions, backchanneling moves (continuities) only serve as responses rather than initiations. In addition, responses to calls, which are still treated as calls in Halliday & Matthiessen (2014: 196), are now treated as continuities. Here is an example from *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (*TGBH*).

(1) **Anatole**: Excuse me.  
**M. Gustave**: *Uh-huh?*5  
**Anatole**: The police are here. They asked for you.  
**M. Gustave**: Tell them I’ll be right down.  
**Anatole**: Okay.

The *uh-huh* is regarded as realizing a continuity (responding to a call). This view is consistent with the classification criteria here established, where the defining feature of a call is to summon attention. The *uh-huh* is not used to summon attention, but to show the utterer has paid attention and to encourage the other interlocutor to continue, which fits into the defining feature of a continuity in the current research. Thus, attention-summoning moves (calls) are only seen as initiating moves.

Some of the minor speech functions have been further classified in Halliday & Matthiessen (2014: 196). For example, under greetings there are salutations (e.g. *Hi!*), valedictions (e.g. *Bye!*), and their responses; also included as greetings are well-wishings (e.g. *Cheers!*), which have not been found to be realized by interjections in the current dataset. Alarms have been subcategorized into warnings and appeals. Examples for the two subtypes offered in Halliday & Matthiessen (2014: 196) are *Look out!, Quick!, Careful!, Keep off!* (warnings) and *Help!, Fire!, Mercy!, A drink!* (appeals). The difference between warnings and appeals seems to be that in the case of a warning, only one participant (the addressee) is involved in the action in response to the warning, whereas two participants (both the addresser and the addressee) are involved in the action in response to the appeal.

5. The question mark indicates rising tone. This *uh-huh* essentially serves to encourage the other to continue speaking (continuity), rather than seeking specific information (question). The same usage can be found in (8) and (10d).
Yet alarms realized by interjections seem to be underspecified in this regard. For example, the *Hey!* uttered by Grug when his daughter throws a pebble at him can be interpreted as something along the lines of ‘Behave yourself!’ (involving one participant), or ‘How dare you hit me!’ (involving two participants).

Up to this point, different semantic features of the minor speech functions have been singled out, which can serve as the basis for determining the function of the interjection in question. Specifically, the decision can be made through a series of probe questions. As outlined in Figure 4, the first probe question is whether the interjection is self-oriented or other-oriented. If self-oriented, then the interjection can be annotated as realizing an exclamation. If other-oriented, the next probe question is whether the intended listener has already attended to the utterer. If so, the question becomes whether the utterer is following the previous speaker, or is verbally acknowledging the mutually-paid attention by starting / ending the conversation. In the former case, the interjection can be annotated as a continuity, and in the latter case as a greeting. If the utterer sees the listener’s attention as having wandered, the probe question becomes whether the utterer aims to summon attention only, or attempts to control certain undesired actions of the intended listener. In the former case, the interjection can be annotated as a call, and in the latter case as an alarm. Thus the system network can facilitate the decision as to the function realized by a given interjection, and can serve as a more systematic tool to differentiate the minor speech functions with particular reference to the realizations by interjections.

### 3.1.2 Exemplifying minor speech functions

This section provides examples to illustrate interjections realizing the five minor speech functions from the current dataset, with reference to the proposed system (Figure 4).

#### A. Exclamation

Here is an example of an exclamation as an initiating move:

(2) Grug: We need one of your ideas. Come on. You can do it.
    Guy: Belt! Emergency Idea Generator, activate! Ooh, I’ve got it.
    [Guy’s pet, Belt, is helping him make an attractive puppet.]
    Grug: Wow!
    Guy: Yeah. I know, but, he’s doing the best with what he has.

The *wow* expresses the speaker’s own affective reaction – Grug is impressed by the puppet made by Guy and Belt. While the *wow* itself can hardly be regarded as signaling the intention to communicate, it nevertheless receives a verbal reply from the following move by another speaker – by saying *yeah*, Guy ‘agrees’ with
the feeling expressed by Grug via this *wow*. The *wow* is thus regarded as realizing the feature of ‘initiate’ in the move system (System 1) in Figure 4, in the sense that this *wow* is actually responded to during the exchange. However, since the *wow* “does not officially establish a slot which second speaker is under some obligation to fill” (Goffman 1978:798–799), it is regarded as realizing the ‘self’ feature in the orientation system (System 2).

Exclamations can also serve as responding moves.

(3) [Deputy Kovacs is reading Madame D’s additional codicil to the audience at the congregation after Madame D’s death.]

Deputy Kovacs: “To my esteemed friend who comforted me in my later years and brought sunshine into the life of an old woman who thought she would never be happy again – M. Gustave H. – I bequeath, bestow, and devise, free of all taxation and with full and absolute fiduciary entitlement, the painting known as ‘Boy with Apple’ –

M. Gustave: *Wow!*

Deputy Kovacs: “ – by Johannes van Hoytl –

M. Gustave: I can’t believe it.

Deputy Kovacs: “ – the younger –

Dimitri: What?

Deputy Kovacs: “ – which gave us both so much pleasure.” (*TBGH*)

This *wow* is uttered in response to the previous speech, thus seen as realizing the feature of ‘respond’ in the move system (System 1) in Figure 4. Meanwhile, it expresses the speaker’s surprise at hearing the news, realizing the ‘self’ feature in the orientation system (System 2).

B. *Call*

(4) [Gran comes from behind Eep, who is ignorant of Gran’s arrival.]

Gran: *Yoo-hoo!*

[Eep turns back to face Gran.]

Eep: Gran?

This *yoo-hoo*, unlike the *wows* in (2) and (3), has a specific addressee – Eep, who has no idea that Gran is around. The utterance is thus employed to draw Eep’s attention. The interjection realizes the features of ‘other: attending: unattended: summon attention’ in the orientation system (System 2) in Figure 4, which corresponds to the minor speech function of call. As previously discussed, calls are only regarded as initiating moves, i.e. the feature of ‘initiate’ in the move system (System 1).
C.  **Alarm (minor speech function)**

Here is an example of an alarm as an initiating move.

(5) **Henckels:** By order of the Commissioner of Police, Zubrowka Province, I hereby place you under arrest for the murder of Madame Celine Villeneuve Desgoffe und Taxis.

**M. Gustave:** I knew there was something fishy. We never got the cause of death. She’s been murdered and you think I did it.

[M. Gustave starts running away.]

**Henckels:** Hey!

[Long pause, as Henckels and the other officers are running after M. Gustave.]

**Henckels:** Stop! (TGBH)

The *hey* here also has a specific addressee – M. Gustave, who is avoiding further interaction when *hey* is uttered. Thus the *hey* is used not only to summon attention, but also, as is clear in this specific situation, to stop M. Gustave from escaping, which is a rebellious (hence undesired) action as far as Henckels is concerned. Note that it is not really the case that the *hey* functions to summon attention, and the function to direct action is left to the following *stop* – Henckels obviously attempts to stop M. Gustave immediately M. Gustave starts running (rather than only to call his attention first, and then to direct him to stop), and he displays exclamatory voice quality ever since the utterance of the *hey*, which could be interpreted as ‘Stop!’ in this given situation. It is not that a *hey* could only realize a call if it is followed by a command (e.g. *Stop!*), but rather that a *hey* can realize an alarm (rather than a call) where it is used to control other’s action. Hence in the case of the word form *hey* as an independent utterance, it can be regarded as realizing an alarm (rather than a call) where there is an undesired action which triggers the utterance; it can be regarded as realizing a call where no undesired action occurs. Surely a *hey* which realizes an alarm also summons attention at the same time, but by way of the attempt to control action, and the voice quality resembling that in the utterances of exclamations. Thus in (5), the *hey* realizes the features of ‘other: attending: unattended: control action’ in the ORIENTATION system (System 2) in Figure 4, which corresponds to the minor speech function of alarm. Meanwhile, the *hey* realizes the feature of ‘initiate’ in the MOVE system (System 1).

Alarms can also serve as responding moves.

(6) **M. Gustave:** Perhaps this will soothe you.

**Madame D.:** What?

**M. Gustave:** “While questing once in...”

**Madame D.:** Don’t recite. [overlapping once]
M. Gustave: Now just listen to the words.

Madame D.: Please, not now.

M. Gustave: Hush.

M. Gustave: “While questing once in noble wood of gray, medieval pine,...

(TGBH)

In this situation, M. Gustave tries to calm Madame D. down by reciting some stanzas, while Madame D. is not really in a mood to listen and frequently interrupts him. The hush realizes an alarm to stop Madame D’s utterances, and specifically responds to Madame D’s request by rejecting it, thus realizing the feature of ‘respond’ in the move system (System 1) in Figure 4.

D. Greeting

(7) David: Hello, Bertie.

Bertie: Hello, David.

David: I see you’ve been coming out.

Bertie: Not at all. (The King’s Speech)

The two hellos have specific addressees whose names are latched onto the moves as Vocatives. In this case, both interlocutors have already attended to each other before the utterances. Hence the hellos are used to acknowledge this mutual attention; they realize the features of ‘other: attending: attended: acknowledge’ in the orientation system (System 2) in Figure 4, which corresponds to the minor speech function of greeting. The two hellos realize the features of ‘initiate’ and ‘respond’ in the move system (System 1) respectively.

E. Continuity

(8) Serge: I was the official witness in Madame D’s presence to the creation of a second will to be executed only in the event of her death by murder.

M. Gustave: A second will?

Serge: Right.

M. Gustave: In case she got bumped off?

Serge: Right.

M. Gustave: Uh-huh?

Serge: But they destroyed it.

M. Gustave: Oh dear.

Serge: However...
M. Gustave: Uh-huh?
Serge: I pulled a copy.
M. Gustave: A second copy of the second will?
Serge: Right.
M. Gustave: Uh-huh? (TGBH)

The three *uh-huhs* are used to show that M. Gustave is closely following Serge’s speech, and hoping to hear more. The utterances are thus other-oriented. Given that both interlocutors are fully engaged in the conversation, the *uh-huhs* assume the attending role as backchanneling. They realize the features of ‘other: attending: attended: backchannel’ in the ORIENTATION system (System 2) in Figure 4, which corresponds to the minor speech function of continuity. As discussed above, continuities only work as responding moves, i.e. the feature of ‘respond’ in the MOVE system (System 1).

3.2 Latched functions

Above I have investigated interjections as independent utterances, which can realize five minor speech functions of exclamations, calls, alarms, greetings, and continuities. Below I will turn to the interjections which do not operate on their own but serve as parts of clauses, e.g. the *ooh* in *Ooh, I’ve got it.* (2). This distinction has largely been neglected in prior research on the functions of interjections. From an SFL perspective, the function of the interjection varies depending on whether the interjection is latched onto a clause. When latched, the interjection no longer realizes a move on its own. Rather, it realizes a move together with the clause where it is latched, and the overall utterance serves as one move in exchange. It might be tempting to still regard the interjection as realizing an independent move given its syntactic isolation from the clause, but the interjection and the clause are spoken on a single tone contour, and it is very unlikely that the interjection would be responded to for its own sake. Thus latched interjections cannot be regarded as minor clauses realizing minor speech functions. As will be seen below, the speech function of the overall utterance depends on the clause where the interjection is latched, rather than the interjection itself. In this regard, the interjection is essentially *optional* in the clause onto which it is latched, but the interjection as an independent move is never optional in this sense. This difference between latched and independent interjections proved to be significant in the context of film subtitling, which is beyond the scope of the current paper. The current focus is on the properties of the latched functions realized by interjections.
From a tristratal perspective, latched functions operate at the lexicogrammatical level (clause rank) (cf. minor speech functions at the semantic level). Investigation of these functions hence needs to consider their places in the clauses (rather than their places in exchanges as initiating/responding moves). Some latched functions are related to minor speech functions: already identified associations include those between Expletives and exclamations, Vocatives and calls, and Continuatives and continuities. Following this I propose Alarms as the latched function related to the minor speech function of alarms. As will be seen below, the agnate pairs of Expletives and exclamations, Vocatives and calls, and Alarms and alarms are similar in the personal aspect of interpersonal meaning, but different in their interactional potential. The current data also include instances realizing what are here termed 'Negotiators', which are not related to any minor speech function, but resemble mood tags to some extent. In the following, I will deal with these latched functions of Expletive, Vocative, Continuative, Alarm, and Negotiator respectively.

3.2.1 Expletive

Akin to exclamations, Expletives are used to express the speaker’s “own current attitude or state of mind” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 159). However, not being a move means that an Expletive cannot be negotiated in linguistic exchange – it is not possible to ask a question regarding the utterance of the Expletive. Compare the following invented dialogues:

A: Ooh, I’ve got it. [Expletive]  
B: Who?/Have you?/What is it?  
A: I’ve got it.

A: Ooh! [exclamation]  
B: What’s up?  
A: I’ve got it.

B: Who?/Have you?/What is it?

In the case of Ooh, I’ve got it, the Expletive ooh is latched onto the declarative clause I’ve got it. They together serve as one move (statement) in exchange, and are spoken on a single tone contour. The ooh is an optional element in the clause, and cannot change the speech function of the overall utterance. Here are more examples.

(9)  
(a) Wow, where did she fly?  
(b) Oh, how the good die young. (TGBH)  
(c) Oh, look at that.  
(d) Ah, still alive!

6. Following SFL convention, the name of a structural function is noted with an initial capital.
In (9a), the Expletive *wow* is latched onto an interrogative clause, and they together constitute the move of a question. The Expletive *oh* in (9b) is latched onto an exclamative clause, and they together realize the move of an exclamation. The *oh* in (9c) is latched onto an imperative, realizing a command. The *ah* in (9d) is latched onto a minor clause, realizing an exclamation. As can be seen, an Expletive typically appears at the beginning of a clause.

3.2.2 Vocative

Vocatives are to calls as Expletives are to exclamations. As a latched function, a Vocative cannot be negotiated either. Compare:

A: *Hey* Dad, can we eat now? [Vocative] A: *Hey*. [call]
B: Just wait till we get home./*Yes?* B: Yes?
A: Can we eat now?
B: Just wait till we get home.

When a Vocative is adopted instead of a call, the intended listener’s attention can no longer be mediated verbally.

I will make another two notes on Vocatives. Firstly, regarding their occurrences in clauses, the Vocatives realized by interjections in the current data were all found to show up thematically (10), even though Vocatives realized by non-interjections are also found to occur at the boundary between Theme and Rheme, or clause-finally (see examples in Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:159).

(10)  
  a. *Hey* Dad, can we eat now?
  b. *Hey*, Thunk...you have a spider on your face.
  c. *Hey*, look! This cave has a tongue! Awesome!
  d. *Hello? Hello?* Is everyone all right?

Secondly, Vocatives in general can “mark the interpersonal relationship” or “identify the particular person being addressed” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:159), but in the current concern of interjections, such functions are rather limited and tend to be taken over by an additional Vocative. In (10a), for instance, the father-son relationship is taken up by the Vocative *Dad*, and *hey* is used to summon attention only.

3.2.3 Continuative

A Continuative can “constitute a setting for the clause” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:109) and signal “a new move to the next point” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:107). As Halliday & Matthiessen (2014:109) have mentioned, continuatives are “inherently thematic”.

(11)  a.  *Umm*, I’ve got an idea. Let’s go to that Mountain!
    b.  *Oh*, okay. I’m gonna go up, and why don’t you join us when you stop being
        a big drag!

In this study, I am using Continuatives in a broader sense, i.e. that Continuatives
    can signal the speaker’s intention to speak, whether as a new move or a move
    which has been uttered halfway. Here is an example of such a Continuative which
does not occur thematically.

(12)  **Gran**: Grug has no idea how to protect us. In fact, he has no ideas at all!
        **Ugga**: No, that’s not true. What about that one time when he… *uh*…
        **Gran**: Oh, face it. If he actually had an idea of his own…I’d have a heart attack
        and die!

Here the *uh* does signal the speaker’s intention to continue, although her turn is
immediately taken over before she could manage to sustain the smooth flow of her
speech. Note that it is not always possible to distinguish this turn-holding func-
tion from the move-initiating function realized by interjections – while Continu-
atives which are not positioned clause-initially are necessarily *not* move-initiating,
Continuatives which do occur clause-initially can indeed indicate hesitation at the
same time. Thus no distinction was made between move-initiating Continuatives
and turn-holding Continuatives realized by interjections.

Another two points need to be made here on Continuatives. Firstly, regarding
the relation between Continuatives and continuities, although the two are con-
sidered agnate (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:196; Matthiessen 1995: 433) – they
do share the same realizational forms, yet their functions are essentially distinct.
Specifically, continuities (as a minor speech function in semantics, or a minor
clause type in lexicogrammar) are other-oriented, but Continuatives (as a latched
function in lexicogrammar) are self-oriented. More specifically, a continuity
encourages the *other* to continue, whereas a Continuative indicates the *self* is to
continue, if not to discourage others from speaking. Admittedly, a Continuative
can also be regarded as being directed at the other interlocutor – directing the
other to leave the floor and not to interrupt, but it is still self-oriented in the sense
that the Continuative signals that it is the speaker’s own speech (rather than the
other interlocutor’s speech) that is given priority. A continuity, on the other hand,
signals that the other’s speech is encouraged and prioritized, thus other-oriented.

Secondly, regarding the relation between Continuatives and Expletives, both
are self-oriented functions latched onto clauses, and are typically located in the
clause-initial position. It is thus a challenge to differentiate between Continuatives
and Expletives, which can be realized by the same word form *oh*, as found in
the current data (13), and also discussed in previous studies (e.g. James 1973: ch2,
ch3; Reber 2012: ch6). According to the current definitions, Expletives per se do not position any addressees – they are self-expressive; Continuatives, on the other hand, do position addressees (but they signal to suppress, rather than invite, others to speak, hence self-oriented rather than other-oriented). However, it can be difficult to tell whether or not an oh positions others where it is located clause-initially and latched onto a clause realizing an other-oriented speech function. For example, it seems that the oh in italics in (13) could be interpreted either as an Expletive or a Continuative.

(13) [In a misguided attempt to be clever, Grug manages only to humiliate himself with his rather ridiculous inventions.]

   Ugga: What are you trying to do, Grug?
   Grug: Oh, you see, I thought if I could have ideas like Guy, uh, maybe Eep would listen to me. Maybe she wouldn’t want to go with Guy.
   Ugga: Oh, Grug, is that what this is all about?
   Grug: And I also thought it would kill your mother. So win-win.

The distinguishing criterion here proposed is to see whether there is affective / reactive meaning involved – if yes, the interjection is considered a realization of an Expletive, otherwise a Continuative. Particularly, when affective / reactive meaning is expressed, it is possible to trace the trigger of the utterance from the co-text and/or the immediate context of situation; otherwise, no explicit trigger can be identified, in which case hesitation is often indicated. Thus the oh above can be interpreted as realizing an Expletive considering that it reveals Ugga’s sympathy for Grug after hearing his explanation (verbal trigger). In contrast, the oh uttered by Grug in this example can be interpreted as realizing a Continuative, since there is no explicit trigger of this utterance of oh, and it indicates hesitance.

3.2.4 Alarm (latched function)

An interjection can also realize the latched function which is related to the minor speech function of alarm (14).

(14) [It is the first time that Ugga sees fire. She regards the fire as a baby sun, and is approaching it, which worries Grug, who believes fire is dangerous.]

   Ugga: What a cute little guy.
   Grug: Hey, stay back!

This hey should be distinguished from an Expletive: it is similar to an Expletive in terms of sound quality, but it has a target addressee Ugga. The hey should also be distinguished from a Vocative: it is not only used to call for Ugga’s attention, but also to control her action, i.e. to approach the fire, which should be prohibited.
from Grug’s perspective. Yet, this *hey* does not function as an independent move; it is latched onto the immediate following imperative clause *stay back* – they together function as a move (command) in exchange, and are spoken on one tone contour. To distinguish this latched function from the independent move of an alarm, the *hey* is treated as ‘Alarm’ (with the initial letter capitalized).

While the latched function of Alarm typically occurs at the beginning of a clause (14), it is also found to show up at the end of a clause (15).

(15) [Eep slips and falls into Guy’s arms, which irritates Grug – Grug cannot tolerate his beloved daughter being so close to Guy.]
Grug: Hey! Wait! Whoa! Whoa! WHOA!!
Guy: Okay! She’s up. I’m good. We’re good...

Here the *Hey! Wait! Whoa! Whoa! WHOA!!* is considered one clause (imperative) realizing a single move, and the clause contains Alarms both at the beginning and the end. The *whoas* are considered to realize latched functions, rather than an independent move, since they are not responded to separately from *Hey! Wait!* – the whole utterance *Hey! Wait! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! WHOA!!* is taken together as a single unit (move) in exchange. Besides, the overall clause is uttered on one tone contour. As Alarms, the *whoas* (and the *hey*) are employed to control Eep (Grug’s daughter) and particularly Guy’s behavior – they are virtually embracing each other, which is completely unacceptable in the view of a jealous father (Grug).

In comparison to this distinction here made between Alarms and alarms, I will make a note on greetings: while greetings are typically accompanied by Vocatives (7), it may not be necessary to differentiate greetings (minor speech function) from, say, ‘Greetings’ (latched function) – a Vocative is an optional feature of the clause, and does not determine the speech function realized by the overall clause, unless it is used as a move on its own, in which case it will be treated as a ‘call’; a greeting is still a greeting with or without a Vocative.

3.2.5 Negotiator

Also identified in the current data is another latched function which is not related to any minor speech function, but still typically realizes interpersonal meaning – this is what is referred to as ‘Negotiator’ in this study.

(16) Ugga: Grug, how about a story?
Grug: That’s a good idea. How about a story, huh?
Thunk: Yeah, a story! Tell us a story!

The *huh* in (16) is used to signal that the move requires a response, and that the response is expected to be a compliant one. In this sense, the *huh* seems to
function similarly to a Mood tag (see the functions of Mood tags described in Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:138). However, it does not contain the Mood element (Finite\^Subject), nor can it be substituted by a tag question in the current example, since the ‘un/tagged’ feature is a feature of a declarative or an imperative clause in English (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:185), but this *huh* appears in an interrogative clause. The function of the *huh* seems to bear more resemblance to the Negotiator described in Japanese – a Negotiator can compel others to respond, or as Teruya (2004:191) puts it, Negotiators can add the “negotiatory value” to the clause (interrogative or not). A Negotiator appears at the very end of the clause, when the speaker is ready to hand over the move to the other interactant, and it is typically an optional oral feature (Teruya 2004:191). There are a few differences between English and Japanese Negotiators though: firstly, while Japanese Negotiators can be obligatory in certain cases, English Negotiators in the current data are optional; secondly, Japanese Negotiators are more likely to be used by the person of lower social status, but the identified English Negotiators do not seem to potentially indicate the difference of social status of the interlocutors.

So far I have gone through five latched functions of Expletive, Vocative, Continuative, Alarm, and Negotiator, which can be realized by interjections. Thus, altogether ten functions have been recognized, summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Interpersonal functions realized by interjections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic features</th>
<th>Minor speech functions (moves)</th>
<th>Latched functions (realizations of parts of moves)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>self-oriented</td>
<td>affective/reactive (with explicit trigger)</td>
<td>exclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>continuative (without explicit trigger)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other-oriented</td>
<td>summon attention (not triggered by undesired action)</td>
<td>call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>acknowledge</td>
<td>greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>control action (triggered by undesired action)</td>
<td>alarm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>backchannel</td>
<td>continuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>urge response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Conclusion

This paper explores the interpersonal functions realized by English interjections under the theoretical framework of SFL. Building on prior research, this study recognizes five minor speech functions (in semantics) of exclamation, call, greeting, alarm, and continuity, and five latched functions of Expletive, Vocative, Alarm, Continuative, and Negotiator (clausal functions in lexicogrammar). In particular, this study highlights the differences between the agnate pairs of Expletive and exclamation, Vocative and call, and Alarm and alarm, which seems to have been largely ignored in previous literature on the functionality of interjections. Whether an interjection realizes a minor speech function or a latched function depends on whether it functions independently as a move in exchange. The current study thus contributes to the Systemic Functional description of the functions realized by English interjections. It proposes a refined system network of minor speech functions in relation to major speech functions, which disentangles the relations among the minor speech functions, and can assist in the analysis of English interjections. This study can also provide methodological insights into the exploration of other aspects of meanings expressed by interjections.

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