

## Turkish EFL Students' Failure of the Use of Interjections Properly: The Example of Kafkas Univeristy

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**Abstract:** Interjections in English are very complex and confusing elements of the language for EFL learners. However, EFL learners have to know enough number of them in order to carry out daily conversations English with native speakers as well as nonnative speakers properly. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the awareness of Turkish EFL learners of the use of interjections. To this end, 42 intermediate-level EFL students (10 males and 32 females) and 40 advanced students (9 males and 31 females) , attending to classes regularly at Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey, were the subjects of the study. The participants were given 36 types of interjections wanted to identify which interjections they knew. The responses of the subjects were assessed using SPSS 17 for windows. Descriptive statistics and Independent t-test were used for the assessment of the results. According to the result of the study, interjection “good ” was known by 75(97,5%) participants, “hello” by 75 (92,7%), and “goodbye” was known by 69 (91,5%) participants. On the other hand, the least known interjections were As for the lowest frequencies, they are “pshaw” 03 (3,6%), “alas” 3(3,6%) ,and “bah” 04 (4,8%). The results showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students as well as between intermediate an advanced students in knowing interjections. ( $p>0,05$ ).

**Keywords:** Interjections, Kafkas University, EFL, conversations.

### Introduction

Interjections are very important in daily conversations and, therefore, have a direct effect on the listener and speaker. As Hişmanoğlu (2010) states “...the functions expressed by interjections are typically emotional, such as pleasure, surprise, pity, hesitation, greeting, pain, pleading, etc.” (p.22). Such features of the language are considered among the pragmatic components. Therefore, in order for non-native speakers to be proficient in the target language, besides grammatical structures and vocabulary, they have to know the pragmatic components of that language. Çelik (2009) supports this idea as he maintains “sentences are only a part of the overall fabric of the verbal (or written). Therefore, in addition to the concepts of syntactic and semantic well-formedness, pragmatic well-formedness is also required. This is achieved through pragmatic competence”(p.236). According to Bachman, (1990, cited in Hişmanoğlu, 2010) “pragmatic competence includes both illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. While illocutionary competence refers to the functional use of language, sociolinguistic competence refers to the appropriateness of an utterance to context “ (p.21).

On the other hand, much as there has been much research on the different aspects of foreign and second language learning and teaching over the last two score years (Jones and Charlton, 1996; Andrews, 1998; Gewehr et al., 1998; Berk, 2000; Davies, 2000; Fischer, 2000; Brooke, 2001; Crystal, 2001; Colaizzi, 2002; Crystal, 2003; Dörnyei, 2003; Wierzbicka, 2003; Miller, & Endo, 2004; Erbe, 2007; Weeks, 2007), except for a few studies (Wilkins, 1992;Trask, 1993; Crystal, 1995; Li, 2005; Essberger, 2009; Hişmanoğlu, 2010; ) there is no detailed research on the interjections.

## Definition

The Columbia Encyclopedia defines interjections as “part of speech consisting of exclamatory words such as *oh*, *alas*, and *ouch*”. According to wikipedia “The word “interjection” literally means “thrown in between” from the Latin *inter* (“between”) and *iacere* (“throw”). Interjections are generally uninflected function words and have sometimes been seen as sentence-words, because they can replace or be replaced by a whole sentence (they are holophrastic)”. In wikipedia also it is stated that “in grammar, an **interjection** or **exclamation** is a lexical category used as a way to refer to some mentioned or understood noun without a grammatical connection with the rest of the sentence, by simply expressing an isolated emotion on the part of the speaker (although most interjections have clear definitions).”

As the definitions indicate, interjections are not connected to other parts of the sentences in the grammatical sense, rather they are separate words or utterances showing emotion.

## Problem

Interjections used in daily conversations and writing are very important as they indicate the emotions of the speakers and writers. Yet, in the foreign language situation, lack of interjections or improper use of them cause misunderstandings.

## Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to show the importance of English interjections for EFL learners and determine whether Turkish EFL learners know them sufficiently or not.

## Methodology

### Subjects

42 intermediate-level EFL students and 40 advanced-level students, studying at Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey, participated in this study.

### Instrument

A questionnaire, containing 36 interjections in English, formed by the researcher was used in this study. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to solicit information related to the classes and genders of the participants. The second part aimed to elicit information on how much the participants knew the given 36 interjections. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to elicit information (1. Know exactly, 2. Know, 3. Not sure, 4. Don't know, and 5. Don't know at all). For the statistics SPSS 17 was used. Data were evaluated through Descriptive Statistics and Independent Sample t-test.

### Procedure

In order to determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was carried out on 35 students and the reliability Cronbach's Alpha was computed as 0,792 reliable, which is very reliable.

## Research Questions

1. How much do the EFL students know English interjections?
2. Is there a significant difference between EFL students in relation to their gender in knowing interjections?
3. Is there a significant difference between EFL students in relation to their level?

## Results

The genders and levels of the participants have been given in Table 1.

Level	Gender			
	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Intermediate	10	24	32	66
Advanced	09	22,5	31	77,5
Total	19	23,2	63	76,8

**Table 1.** Genders and Levels of the Participants

In Table 1, it is seen that 19 (23,24%) of the students were males and 63 (76,8%) were females. Of 82 students, 42 (66%) were intermediate level, while 40(44%) were advanced level.

### Answers to the Research Questions

#### Research Question One: How much do the EFL students know English interjections?

Interjection	Exactly Know		Know		Not Sure		Not Know		Not know at all	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Ah	43	52,4	28	34,1	07	08,5	02	02,4	02	02,4
Aha	38	46,3	24	29,3	06	07,3	08	09,8	06	07,3
Ahem	08	09,8	05	06,1	14	17,1	17	20,7	38	46,3
Alas	02	02,4	01	01,2	05	06,1	24	29,3	50	61,0
Bah	02	02,4	02	02,4	06	07,3	20	24,4	52	63,4
Damn	24	29,3	09	11,0	07	08,5	11	13,4	31	37,8
Eh	22	26,8	22	26,8	15	18,3	11	13,4	12	14,6
Fie	05	06,1	02	02,4	05	06,1	27	32,9	43	52,4
Good	71	86,6	09	11,0	02	02,4	00	00,0	00	00,0
Goodby	66	80,5	09	11,0	04	04,9	03	03,7	00	00,0
Goodness	51	62,2	23	28,0	04	04,9	03	03,7	01	01,2
Ha	17	20,7	30	36,6	18	22,0	06	07,3	11	13,4
Hello	71	86,6	05	06,1	02	02,4	01	01,2	03	03,7
Hem	12	14,6	16	19,5	11	13,4	15	18,3	28	34,1
Ho	05	06,1	04	04,9	23	28,0	14	17,1	36	43,9
Hum	02	02,4	12	14,6	19	23,2	11	13,4	38	46,3
Hurrah	20	24,4	18	22,0	09	11,0	13	15,9	22	26,8
Lo	10	12,4	04	04,9	09	11,0	23	28,0	36	43,9
My	62	75,6	13	15,9	04	04,9	02	02,4	01	01,2
Now	63	76,8	11	13,4	05	06,1	02	02,4	01	01,2
Ohh	54	65,9	11	13,4	11	13,4	06	07,3	00	00,0
Ouch	17	20,7	07	08,5	09	11,0	17	20,7	32	39,0
Pooh	07	08,5	04	04,9	17	20,7	14	17,1	40	48,8
Pshaw	01	01,2	02	02,4	12	14,6	11	13,4	56	68,3
Pugh	01	01,2	01	01,2	10	12,2	22	26,8	48	58,5
Rot	03	03,7	04	04,9	10	12,2	15	18,3	50	61,0
Shoo	04	04,9	03	03,7	16	19,5	16	19,5	43	52,4
Shoot	21	25,6	14	17,1	20	24,4	10	12,2	17	20,7
Shucks	17	20,7	07	08,5	06	07,3	19	23,2	33	40,2
So	57	69,5	12	14,6	05	06,1	06	07,3	02	02,4
There	54	65,9	09	11,0	11	13,4	03	03,7	05	06,1
Ugh	22	26,8	10	12,2	13	15,9	16	19,5	21	25,6
Well	60	73,2	09	11,0	05	06,1	06	07,3	02	02,4
Whew	05	06,1	04	04,9	24	29,3	22	26,8	27	32,9
Woow	51	62,2	06	07,3	03	03,7	12	14,6	10	12,2

**Table 2.** Frequencies and Percentages of the Responses of Participants

The responses of the students have been given in Table 2. According to Table 2, the highest frequencies of their awareness of interjections are “good” 71(86,6%) exactly know, 09 (11%) know, “hello” 71(86,6%) exactly know, 05(6,1%) know, and “goodbye” 66 (80,5%) exactly know, 09 (11%)know, respectively.

As for the lowest frequencies, they are “pshaw” 01(1,2%) exactly know, 02 (2,4 %) know, “alas” 02 (2,4%) exactly know, 01(1,2 %) know, “bah” (2,4 %) exactly know, 02 (2,4 %) know, respectively. It is clear in Table 2 that students know mostly the interjections they encounter very often in daily life situations.

**Research Question Two: Is there a significant difference between EFL students in relation to their gender and knowing interjections?**

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S	sd	t	p
Male	19	96,79	15,18	80	,143	,87
Female	63	97,33	14,29			

**Table 3.** Answers of the Students and their Genders

It is clear in table 4 that there is no significant difference between male and female students in knowing the interjections,  $t(80)=,143$ ,  $p>,05$ .

**Research Question Three: Is there a significant difference between EFL students in relation to their level?**

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S	sd	t	p
Intermediate	42	99,52	11,77	80	1,85	,137
Advanced	40	94,77	16,55			

**Table 4.** Answers of the Students and their Levels

It is seen in Table 4 that there is no significant difference between intermediate and advanced level students in knowing the interjections,  $t(80)=1,85$ ,  $p>,05$ . In this respect it can be inferred that since the same or similar interjections are used in the commercially prepared materials for classroom uses, they do not help students improve their levels.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Interjections are very important in performing daily conversations, however, there are not enough number of studies on English interjections. In a study of interjections on EFL students at European University of Lefke, Hişmanoğlu found out that non-native first year students mostly misused the given common twelve interjections. According to Hişmanoğlu (2010)“Lack of pragmatic competence on the part of the learner may result in undesirable misunderstandings which can give rise to a breakdown of communication”(p.21). This study is in parallel with Hişmanoğlu’s study, as EFL students at Kafkas University know only the very common interjections well. When the genders of the students are taken into account, it is clear that there was no scientifically significant difference between the male and female students ( $p>,05$ ). Another striking result was that there was no difference between intermediate and advanced students ( $p>,05$ ). So, it can be concluded that the knowledge of interjections do not improve in parallel with the level of the students.

As a result, there are some ways to help students improve their interjection knowledge.

- 1.EFL students should be taught interjections through authentic materials such as commercially made videos and type records.
- 2.New textbooks and audio-lingual materials containing all aspects of interjections should be prepared by professionals.
3. Cultural differences between the interjections of English and Turkish should be taught comparatively.
- 4.Non-native teachers should be given trainings on interjections.
- 5.Students should be encouraged to use interjections in their conversation classes as well as in other classes.

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