INTERJECTIONS AS IDIOLECT MARKERS:
A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH

Anhelina Sliepushova,
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University,
13В, Marshala Tymoshenka St, Kyiv, 04212
a.sliepushova@kubg.edu.ua
ORCID iD 0000-0002-7727-737X

The article focuses on interjections that constitute idiolect of The Simpsons characters. For this purpose the subcorpora of Homer Simpson, Marge Simpson, Bart Simpson and Krusty the Clown have been analyzed by means of corpus and discourse analysis. A focus is made on wordlists and keyword lists that identify statistically the most frequent and salient words of the corpora. The results of the paper show that the most significant interjections and interjectional phrases in characters' subcorpora are catchphrases that make their idiolect different from others. Thus, interjections not only express characters' attitude or reaction to a situation but also reveal their personal traits.

Key words: *idiolect, interjections, corpus-based analysis, animated series, The Simpsons.*

Слєпушова А.І.

Вигуки як маркери ідіолекту: корпусний підхід

Стаття присвячена виявленню вигуків, які складають ідіолект персонажів американського анімацій-ного серіалу "The Simpsons". З цією метою проаналізовано підкорпуси реплік персонажів за допомогою корпусного та дискурс-аналізів. Статистично підраховано найчастіше вживані та ключові вигуки, що вирізняють ідіолект одного персонажу від іншого. Виявлено, що вигуки впливають на впізнаваність ідіо-лекту та розкривають риси характеру персонажів.

Ключові слова: *ідіолект, вигуки, корпусний аналіз, анімаційний серіал, "The Simpsons".*

Introduction

The notion of idiolect as an individual use of language is widely discussed in linguistics. Hower, its precise definition and key constituents are a subject of debate. Interjections are the focus of this research since they express the character's attitude towards a situation, describe the character and make its idiolect a recognizable one. They reveal what the character feels and thinks uttering it.

The aim of this research is to identify interjections that constitute idiolect of characters from the animated series *The Simpsons* by means of corpus analysis. **The material** of the research are the scripts compiled from 3 episodes per each of 29 seasons, altogether 87 episodes of the animated sitcom *The Simpsons* (1989 — 2018) and a film *The Simpsons Movie* (2007).

Theoretical Background

The notion of linguistic personality can be traced back to W. von Humboldt [2, 45], who developed the concept of language as a creative process that reflects the worldview of the nation, thus emphasizing the importance of research in this area, noting that all people speak the same language and at the same time each person has his or her own language. It is necessary to learn the spoken language and the language of an individual. The term "idiolect" was introduced by American linguist B. Bloch [9, 7] in the 1940s, in his point of view an idiolect is "the totality of the possible utterances of one speaker at one time in using language to interact with one other speaker".

In modern linguistic theory, the notion of idiolect is subject to different interpretations. Thus, O. Selivanova [4, 167] defines idiolect as "an individual type of language which is realized in a combination of different features of speaker's spoken language and in written speech it reveals the features of idiostyle". O. Severskaya and S. Preobrazhensky [3, 155] interpret this notion as "an intrinsically systematic individual-author language". In our paper, we will use the term idiolect as "the author's preferences in the selection and use of certain lexico-grammatical and nominative units that are determined by his linguistic competence, poetic skills, experience of communication and cognitive operations related to the process of reflection of the world by means of language" [1, 17].

It is also important to clarify the notion of interjection. The principles of classification of parts of speech, such as interjections, remain controversial issues in modern linguistics. L. Bloomfield [10, 176] uses the term interjection as a term for forms that "occur predominantly as minor sentences, entering

into few or no constructions other than parataxis". According to his point of view, these minor sentences are divided into "completive" and "exclamatory" ones. The completive type supplements a situation and occurs mostly as answers to questions. On the contrary, exclamatory type "occurs under a violent stimulus" [10, 177]. L. Bloomfield's definition of the interjection covers both words and phrases. F. Ameka [5, 104] referred to the latter as interjectional phrases. Our research is based on the definition of F. Ameka who claims that interjections are "conventionalised vocal gestures (or more generally, linguistic gestures) which express a speaker's mental state, action or attitude or reaction to a situation" [5, 106] and is aimed at the analysis of both interjections and interjectional phrases.

Methods

The research material has been divided into subcorpora of *The Simpsons* characters' remarks and analyzed by means of corpus [11, 16] and discourse [7, 8] analyses. For this purpose, software *AntConc* [6] was applied involving quantitative and qualitative approaches. In this way, the corpora of the father of the family Homer, his wife Marge, their son Bart and Krusty the Clown have been compiled. The wordlists that show the most frequent words in the corpora and keyword lists that identify the most salient words in the corpora comparing to the reference corpus (The Corpus of Contemporary American English) represent the quantitative approach. Using semantic prosody we also applied the qualitative approach to identify the interjections and interjectional phrases that constitute idiolect of *The Simpsons* characters.

Results and Discussion

For about three decades an American animated sitcom *The Simpsons* has occupied a considerable layer in American pop-culture. Created by M. Groening and produced by the Fox Broadcasting Company, it has gained popularity all over the world. As a family, *The Simpsons* represent a large number of working-class families in the United States. They live in a fictional mid-sized town called Springfield and have a two-storied house and a car that allows to suppose it is a typical American middle-class family.

Homer Simpson, the father of the family, fills the role of provider because he is the only member in his family who has a stable work at the Springfield Power Plant with a stable salary. Working as a safety inspector he has no idea how a remote safety console works and completely neglects all safety rules that is proved by the absence of job-related words among the most frequent ones in his remarks. Instead, he eats dozens of doughnuts and takes a nap at work. After work, he goes to the bar to drink lots of beer neglecting his family duties and providing a bad example of parenting. For this reason the word *beer*

and interjection *Mmm...* that Homer uses when he tastes or imagines something tasty are among top 10 keywords of his remarks. On the contrary, his wife Marge gives comfort and emotional support for every member of the family. However, the top keywords *Homie* and *Homer* allow us to suppose that she mostly cares for her husband who constantly gets into troubles. In general, she is a kind-hearted and caring full-time mother. Occasionally, she can sometimes get explosive outbursts of anger that is expressed by interjection *Mmm*, but she always admits her errors.

There are three children in The Simpsons family. Bart Simpson is a ten-year-old rebellious child, who acts out for attention. He always bullies others and does not see any authority even his parents cannot influence his behaviour. His idiolect is full of swear words that he uses to show his rebellious attitude towards authority figures. Lisa Simpson, the middle child, is a vegetarian, a strong environmentalist, a feminist, and a Buddhist at the age of eight. Lisa's high intellect is the reason for the fact that semantically her remarks relate to discourse field of psychological states, actions, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge and not the field of entertainment and games that would be more typical for her age. Maggie, the youngest child, is a quiet infant that is always seen sucking on her pacifier. Hence she is a speechless character in *the Simpsons*.

The first point to be analyzed is subcorpus of Homer Simpson. He has some obvious flaws, namely excessive alcohol consumption, sloth, gluttony, lack of good manners but he is essentially devoted to his family. Homer's most popular catchphrases is an exclamation *D'oh!* amounting to 7,4% of his subcorpus.

(driving a long ways away)
Homer: Hey everybody! We're almost there.
Marge: Did you remember to lock the front door?
Homer: D'oh! *(goes home and locks the front door)*
Marge: Oh. Did you remember when you locked the front, to lock the back?
Homer (angry): D'oh! *(locked the back)* [17].

As we can see from the example Homer uses it as an annoyed grunt. Unlike a common exclamation *Oh!* that can be used as a marker of different emotions, such as surprise, disappointment or joy, Homer's *D'oh!* has a narrow meaning of bad luck. It became so popular that *D'oh!* can be found in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*: used to express sudden recognition of a foolish blunder or an ironic turn of events [13, 143] or *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*: used when you have just said or done something that you know is stupid [14, 132].

Taking into account that *D'oh* is a Homer Simpson's catchphrase, it occurs in COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) [12], that covers 560 million words and focuses on contemporary American English, 655 times. It means that the usage

of interjection *D'oh* has gone beyond the scripts of *The Simpsons* and it is used to express that something has gone wrong.

The next point deals with Homer's famous exclamation *Woo-hoo!* that occupies the seventeenth place in his wordlist according to the frequency and amounts to 5,1% of the subcorpus. This interjection that "is used to express exuberant delight or approval" [13, 1896] has become one of his famous catchphrases. For instance, in the following situation, he expresses a feeling of joy because of the long weekend revealing his foolishness because he does not realize that his boss may fire him:

Marge: While you were out "earning" that dollar, you lost forty dollars by not going to work. The plant called and said if you don't come in tomorrow, don't bother coming in Monday.
Homer: Woo-hoo! A four-day weekend [17].

There is another prominent pattern in Homer's idiolect as shown in the respective subcorpus. It is an exclamation *Why, you little…!* (see *Fig. 1*) that can be extended with some offensive words (*Why, you monster!*; *Why, you little egghead!*). Moreover, this pattern is occasionally followed by threats, for example, *Why, you little! I'll show you who's a flabbi!*. Homer uses it usually towards his naughty son Bart when he is irritated with his behaviour. While saying it Homer grabs Bart's neck and angrily strangles him. As we observe Homer's *Why, you little…!* has negative semantic prosody in his subcorpus.

Hit	KWIC		File
1	You're not really Santa, tubby. -	Why, you little egghead! No, Ho	Season 1.txt
2	e using the bathroom after you.	Why, you little-- Krusty, please c	Season 3.txt
3	the one who double-dared us. -	Why, you little-- - [Choking] - [	Season 5.txt
4	od. He's stealing all the burgers.	Why, you little Homer. Homer, it	Season 6.txt
5	cks for that candy bar. - Three. -	Why, you little- - Guard! Guard!	Season 9.txt
6	a" in my life. Your script sucks. -	Why, you little- < Sputtering > -	Season 11.tx
7	nself. - So you know it's great. -	Why, you little- < Sputtering > -	Season 11.tx
8	e never alone in this crapshack!	Why, you little! what kind of an ;	Season 15.tx
9	we go. Here we go. Here we go.	Why, you little The Simpsons - 1	Season 18.tx
10	de 4/Treehouse of Horror XXI>	Why, you little <both groaning>	Season 22.tx
11	. All I have to do is wake up.	Why, you little <choking> Pay f(	Season 23.tx
12	rant that. Well, you can't have it.	Why, you little Why, you little W	Season 26.tx
13	you can't have it. Why, you little	Why, you little Why, you little W	Season 26.tx
14	it. Why, you little Why, you little	Why, you little Why, you little W	Season 26.tx

Figure 1. The concordance lines of *Why, you little* in Homer's subcorpus

The next point concerns the subcorpus of Marge's remarks, Homer's wife. Being a housewife and full-time mother, she is the moralistic force in the Simpson family and tries to keep order in it. *AntConc* ranks an interjection *Mmm* the sixth place in keyword list. So, it is statistically significant in this subcorpus comparing to COCA. Regarded as Marge's trademark, this interjection expresses some combination of disapproval, annoyance, and frustration. This can be illustrated by the following example:

Lisa: Mom! Dad's on PBS!
Marge: Mmm. They don't show police chases, do they? [17].

Here Marge's *Mmm* expresses annoyance about the fact that her husband constantly gets into troubles. She is used to his foolish adventures and expects to see him in a police chase.

Particular attention shall be paid to the interjectional phrases. According to keyness, *ay* and *caramba* that constitute Bart's famous catchphrase *Ay, caramba!* occupy the first and the second places in the given subcorpus. From the Spanish interjections *ay* denotes surprise or pain [14, 28] and *caramba* is a minced oath, a euphemism for *carajo*. This exclamation is used in Spanish to denote surprise (usually positive) [14, 61]. However, Bart uses it with negative meaning of *Damn it!*:

Homer: Bart, didn't I ask you to watch Maggie?
Bart: Ay, caramba! [17].

Obviously, Bart forgot to do what his father had asked him and says *Ay, caramba!* to blame himself realizing that he will be punished by Homer.

There is one more point to be considered. It refers to the subcorpus of Bart's cult figure who is Sir Herschel

Shmoikel Pinchas Yerucham Krustofsky, better known by his stage name Krusty the Clown. He hosts TV show for kids and is depicted as a cynical, burnt-out chain smoker who is depressed when offstage. Krusty often exhibits laziness, irresponsibility, and promiscuity.

A considerable part of his keyword list consists of interjections, namely *Huh*, *Hey*, *Hoo*, *Hah*, *Ugghhh*. It can be explained in the following way: every episode of The Krusty the Clown Show opens with the above-mentioned interjections and the introducing of the clown, for example: *Hah hah hah, kids! Welcome to Krusty show!* It proves

that the image of the clown is supported by specific linguistic means, interjections in particular. The clown's speech has to attract the audience's attention, so interjections surely contribute to his image of a person who entertains children.

Conclusions

In this paper we have identified interjections that constitute idiolect of *The Simpsons* characters (see *Fig. 2*). Since keyword lists pick up the most prominent words by comparing a target corpus with a reference one (COCA) we consider key interjections to be the markers of character's idiolect.
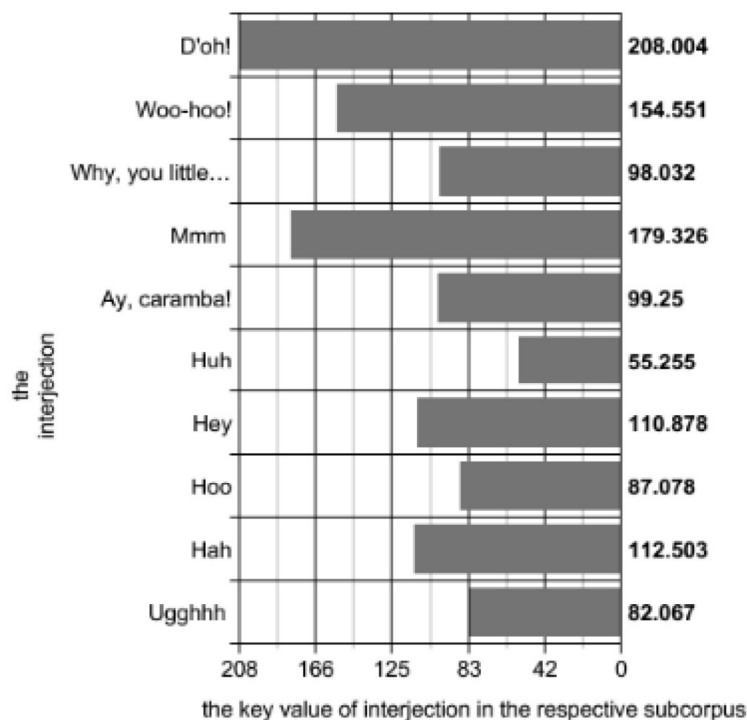
Figure 2. Interjections in *The Simpsons*

Thus, Homer Simpsons' keywords that define his idiolect are interjections *D'oh!*, *Woo-hoo!* and interjectional phrase *Why, you little…* They reveal his slow-witted nature and violent, impatient attitude towards his son. Marge's keyword list is defined through interjection *Mmm* that is used to express her dissatisfaction with the situation, especially troublesome acts of her husband. Bart's idiolect is identified through interjection *Ay, caramba!* that expresses emotional distress and is explained by his

mischievous behaviour. Meanwhile, interjections *Huh*, *Hey*, *Hoo*, *Hah*, *Ugghhh* reveal the clown Krusty's occupation.

To summarize, it is suggested that according to the key value in the corpus interjections might be considered key constituents of character's idiolect that make it recognizable one. For the reason that interjections are spontaneous reactions to a situation they reflect character's true feelings and thoughts and contribute to the character's idiolect.

REFERENCES

1. Bezrebra, N. Yu. (2008). Linhvostylistychnyi ta semantyko-kohnityvnyi aspekty poetyky E. Dikinson [Linguostylistic, Semantic and Cognitive Aspects of E. Dickinson's Poetics]. Dys. … kand. filol. nauk: 10.02.04, K., 199 p. (in Ukrainian).
2. Humboldt, W. (1984). Izbrannyie trudy po yazykoznaniiu [Selected Works on Linguistics]. M. : Progress, 400 p. (in Russian).

3. Severskaia, O. I., Preobrazhenskii, S. Yu. (1991). Funktsionalno-dominantnaia model evoliutsii individualnykh khudozhestvennykh sistem: ot idiolekta k idiostiliu [Functionally-Dominant Model of the Evolution of Individual Artistic Systems: from idiollect to idistyle]. *Poetika i stilistika, 1988–1990*, M.: Nauka, 146–156. (in Russian).

4. Selivanova, O. O. (2006). Suchasna linhvistyka: terminolohichna entsyklopediia [Modern Linguistics: Terminological Encyclopaedia]. Poltava: Dovkillia-K, 672 p. (in Ukrainian).

5. Ameka, F. (1992). Interjections: The Universal Yet Neglected Part of Speech. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 18, North-Holland, 101–118.

6. Anthony, L. (2019). AntConc (Version 3.5.8) [Computer Software]. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software

7. Bednarek, M. (2015). Corpus-Assisted Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Television and Film Narratives. In P. Baker, T. McEnery (Eds.), *Corpora and Discourse Studies*, pp. 63–87, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

8. Bednarek, M. (2018). Language and Television Series: A Linguistic Approach to TV Dialogue. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 303 p.

9. Bloch, B. (1984). A Set of Postulates for Phonetic Analysis. *Language*, 24, 3–46.

10. Bloomfield, L. (1984). Language. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 580 p.

11. Taylor, C., Marchi, A. (Eds.). (2018). Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review. London: Routledge, 314 p.

12. Davies, M. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): One billion million words, 1990-2019. https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/

13. Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary. (2008). Springfield: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2032 p.

14. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. (2005). 7th edition, Oxford University Press, 1918 p.

15. Random House Webster's Spanish-English English-Spanish Dictionary. (2006). 2nd edition, New York: Random House, 693 p.

16. Stefanowitsch, A. (2020). Corpus Linguistics: A guide to the methodology. Berlin: Language Science Press, 490 p.

17. The Simpsons Episode Scripts. https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/episode_scripts/