

Interjections and emotions: the case of *gosh*

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Abstract

Interjections in general can be considered linguistic expressions of emotions and attitudes, constituting complete and self-contained utterances. Though all languages are believed to have ‘emotive interjections’ (Wierzbicka 1999: 276), the literature on interjections and emotions has proved to be sparse, while studies on specific interjections are particularly uncommon. This study investigates the interjection *gosh*, which we propose to analyze as an expletive secondary interjection, originally used in the area of religion as a euphemistic replacement of ‘God’. The religious connection practically severed, *gosh* can be revealed as non-stigmatised and, in general, positively-valued. It is clearly a mild expletive, with a wide range of emotive, cognitive and discourse-structure uses. By exploring components of the BNC and COCA corpora this chapter contributes to the study of *gosh* in terms of further formal and functional features (position and syntactic peripheral behaviour, discourse role in conversation, dialogic character) together with possible differences between British and American English. Looking at the behavior of *gosh* in our data, we claim that it is an interjection that functions as a pragmatic marker in present-day English.

Keywords: interjection, euphemistic, pragmatic marker, emotion

1. Introduction

Interjections belong to a fairly broad class of items which have been variously defined in dictionaries and grammars.¹ Definitions in these sources regard interjections as linguistic expressions of emotions and feelings, exclamatory words or special reproductions of sound

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uttered under the stress of emotions – emotions which are variously characterized as short, strong, sudden or involuntary – and constituting complete and self-contained utterances (see the *Macmillan*, *Cambridge International* and *Longman Dictionaries*, for instance, and Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1390 and Carter & McCarthy 2006: 113, 539).

Overall, the literature on interjections and emotion can be characterized as sparse and scattered. Even when all languages have ‘emotive interjections’ (i.e., interjections expressing cognitively based feelings; cf. Wierzbicka 1999: 276), researchers on emotion have invested only “a tiny research effort into interjections”, as compared to other related areas of research such as facial expressions and words for emotion categories (Goddard 2014: 53-54). Among the reasons that may explain this neglect we find: (a) the consideration of interjections as a marginal phenomenon, not worthy of study by theoretical linguistics, (b) the difficulty in the definition and classification of the phenomenon, and (c) their close association with the expressive, non-descriptive, component of language. From a semiotic point of view, interjections have an expressive function, “rather than the representational or symbolic function characteristic of ordinary words and sentences”: interjections show rather than say (Goddard 2014: 54).

The present chapter is a first attempt to explore the use of the interjection *gosh*, which, among the secondary interjections with a religious origin, is commonly heard in present-day English, both British and American, and which, within the studies of interjections, has not been widely discussed. In fact, we do not know of any specific study of *gosh* (alone) in the literature. We hope to contribute to the study of this interjection in terms of its form and meaning in conversation, stressing possible differences between British and American English.

Gosh has been characterized in some dictionaries as an informal interjection which is nowadays old-fashioned (cf. e.g. the *Macmillan Dictionary*, the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* and the *Cambridge Dictionary of English*). By looking at the data samples we have analyzed, from spoken natural texts from the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, we claim that, far from being outdated or old-fashioned, *gosh* is still very much alive, not as a euphemistic item of religious vocabulary (along with *golly*, *gee* or *heck*), but as an expression of emotive and cognitive meanings and even as a linguistic marker of discourse structure, sharing features with pragmatic markers and showing aspects of grammaticalization. It is important to point out that interjections are not seen in this study as belonging to a clear-cut category; rather, some of them routinely function as pragmatic

markers (see, for instance, Norrick 2009) and are thus included in the taxonomies of these elements.²

In a sociolinguistic corpus analysis of euphemisms based on the BNC, Lynngeng (2015) finds *gosh* to be the most highly used euphemism of the total list of twelve euphemistic swearwords that she studies.³ Further interesting conclusions in her study in relation to the use of *gosh* in terms of gender, social class and age are that *gosh* is used more by women than by men (in a 65% to 35% contrast, approximately), both female and male speakers belonging to the upper class and upper-middle class use *gosh* more often, and speakers in the age-range of 45-60+, both male and female, are the most frequent users of *gosh*.

Comparing the frequency of use of *gosh* with that of other interjections, whose up-to-date status seems to be less argued about, e.g. *wow*, *oops* and *yuck*, and whose definitions in the same dictionaries (cf. e.g. the *Macmillan Dictionary*) are not given the label ‘old-fashioned’ but are only characterized as ‘informal interjections’ or ‘informal exclamations’, we find that the consideration of *gosh* as old-fashioned is not at all justified. On the contrary, the frequencies of use of these three interjections in British and American English (henceforth, BrE and AmE, respectively) are in fact lower, and in the case of *yuck* much lower, than those of *gosh*, with the only exception of *wow* in American English.⁴ The reason *gosh* seems to be regarded as an expression whose use is in decline,⁵ we argue, is its connection with the religious domain. It is the religious connection of *gosh* that is in decline, not its general and pragmatic use as an emotive and cognitive marker.

² We adopt the label ‘pragmatic marker’ in this study, following Norrick (2009: 870), among others, “to include elements which regularly fill the initial slot in conversational turns, with various pragmatic/discourse functions, making an independent contribution and/or relating the following sequence to the dynamic context” (cf. also Foolen 2012: 218). Related concepts and labels are those of ‘discourse markers’ (cf. e.g. Schiffrin 2001, Jucker & Ziv 1998), ‘discourse particles’ (Fischer 2006, Aijmer 2002) and ‘pragmatic particles’ (Cook 1999, Holmes 1990); see also the rather inclusive class of Fraser’s (1996) ‘pragmatic markers’ and ‘discourse markers’ (1999).

³ The list includes the following items: *gee*, *heavens*, *gosh*, *flaming*, *blasted*, *blooming*, *crikey*, *blimey*, *oh my goodness*, *sugar*, *heck*, and *darn*.

⁴ The searches were carried out in the spoken components of the BNC and COCA corpora (10 million words and 109 million words, respectively) and the results were the following: *wow*: 241 hits in BNC and 9,478 in COCA; *oops*: 136 in BNC and 321 in COCA; *yuck*: 22 in BNC and 80 hits in COCA. These results can be compared with those obtained for *gosh* in the same data samples, as explained in Section 3: 256 in BNC and 3,732 in COCA.

⁵ See for instance the recent article in *The Guardian* on “The words we no longer use” (March 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/shortcuts/2017/mar/15/golly-cassette-and-croquet-the-words-we-no-longer-use>). We thank Lachlan Mackenzie for bringing this article to our attention and, in general, for contributing to this discussion.

These arguments become reinforced when we contemplate the historic evolution of *gosh* with the aid of the Google N-Gram Viewer Program,⁶ which carries out searches of expressions in a large number of books available on Google. See Figure 1.

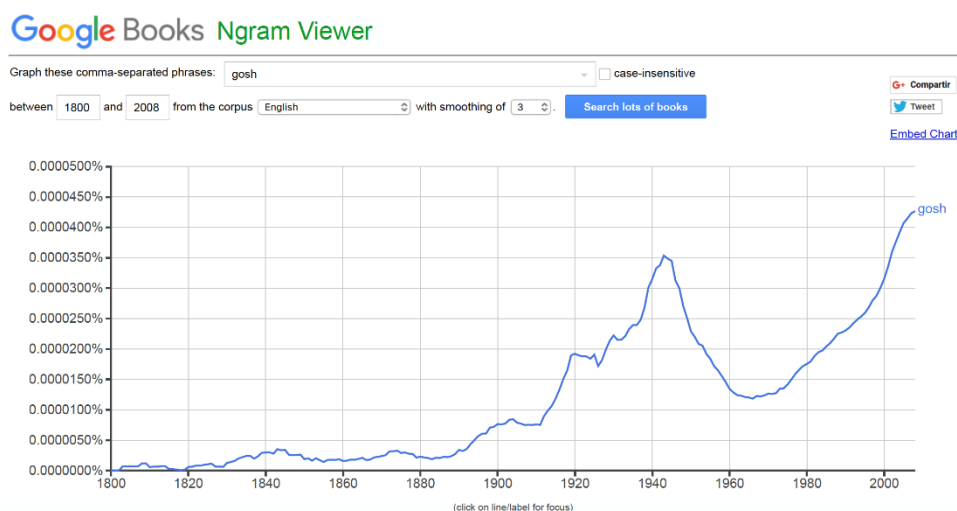


Figure 1. Frequency of *gosh* in English, 1800-2008

In the figure we see a first peak in the use of *gosh*, coinciding with the year 1943, which is then followed by a steep decline ending in the 1960s. At that time, the use of *gosh* seems to have reached a plateau (lasting, according to the figure, from 1962 to 1970, approximately), to then undergo a moderate but constant increase which ends in the year 2008, when the program last records the frequency of use of this item. What we consider clear, in any case, is that the line illustrating the use of *gosh* from the year 1970, approximately, is an ascending, rather than descending, one, and so it would be logical to hypothesize that the tendency past the year 2008 would be also ascending. Notice that the peak reached at 2008 surpasses the previous one noted for the year 1943. It would not be at all disparate to see the decline suffered by *gosh* from 1943 to 1962 coinciding with the lesser use of the interjection as a euphemistic expression connected to a religious meaning and the increase from 1970 to 2008 corresponding to the adoption of *gosh* with a pragmatic meaning, now practically severed from any kind of religious implication.⁷ This is an area which merits further attention, but which falls outside the scope of the present study.

⁶ This is available online at <http://books.google.com/ngrams>.

⁷ Goddard (2014: 60) considers that, for some speakers, *gee!* and *gosh!* may retain associations with Jesus and God, respectively. An indicator of this for the latter is the existence of *My gosh!* (cf. *My God!*).

However, we have devoted some effort to exploring the present-day English examples offered by the N-Gram Viewer program for this search (including *gosh!*, *oh my gosh!*, etc.) in order to check which uses of *gosh* were instances of the interjection. It should be noted that the genres represented in the books taken as the basis for the N-Gram Viewer search include collected short stories and other literary fictional works, autobiographies and essays, where *gosh* is often found in the dialogues contained in these books or even in their titles (cf. e.g. *Oh my gosh!: The incredible lightness of being Burgis!*). Taking the period of 2003-2008 into account (having disregarded the previous one of 1944-2002 as being less relevant for our purposes), we can conclude that a majority of these examples (72.4%) uses *gosh* as an interjection and/or pragmatic marker (e.g. ““Oh my **gosh**, oh my **gosh**, oh my **gosh!**’ He kept repeating this to himself while he walked right past me.” *Soar with your Savior*, by Kimberly Alyn 2003). In two further uses, representing 20.7% of these examples, the word *gosh* occurred, not as an interjection, but as a family name (as in “Salah Abdallah **Gosh** left Britain on Thursday, the Sunday Times of London reported. *Press Digest*, Vol. 13:1-26, 2006) or as an acronym (GOSH, standing for Great Ormond Street Hospital for children). Finally, in 6.9% the use of *gosh* as an interjection or another type of word was dubious or no illustration of *gosh* could be found.

The outline of this study is as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on interjections, stressing various aspects which will be relevant for the subsequent data analysis and discussion. Section 3 deals with the data and methodology. Section 4 presents the findings of the analysis, with the discussion of, on the one hand, some formal features of the combinations found for *gosh* and its position in British and American English and, on the other, the semantic meanings and discourse/pragmatic functions of *gosh*, with the discussion of emotive, cognitive and discourse-structure uses of the interjection. The final subsection makes claims on *gosh* as a pragmatic marker. In Section 5, we summarize the main findings of the chapter and point to further areas of study.

2. Background

Whether or not interjections are part of language and whether they communicate feelings or information has been addressed from two main viewpoints: Ameka (1992), Wierzbicka (1992) and Wilkins (1992) consider that interjections encode rich conceptual structures which

are part of the semantics of natural language. Goffman (1981), by contrast, regards interjections as falling outside the linguistic domain. Accordingly, they are not grammatical or even linguistic items. Instead, they are described as “response cries”, that is, non-word vocalizations that are to be interpreted as bearing on a passing event, an event within a limited course in time (1981: 90). He argues that interjections are ritualized acts, more similar to gestures than to linguistic expressions: “These cries are conventionalized utterances which are specialized for an informative role, but in the linguistic and propositional sense they are not statements” (Goffman 1981: 108). Goffman defines an interjection as a “condensed, truncated form of a discretely articulated, non-lexicalized expression” (1981: 100) “and not a fully-fledged word” (1981: 99). Both sides agree that (a) interjections are capable of constituting utterances that stand on their own in a unique, non-elliptical manner; (b) they express a speaker’s mental or emotional state or attitude (Wharton 2002).

Cuenca (2000) considers interjections somewhat peripheral to language, being phonologically and morphologically anomalous. This does not imply they are not words: it is simply that they do not constitute a prototypical word class.

Quirk et al. (1985) suggest it can be argued that interjections form a relatively open class because they can rather freely be created by onomatopoeia. For instance, comic-strip cartoons often contain such nonce interjections as *yuck*, *g-r-r-r* and *blaat*. Authors of children’s books have for decades made use of names such as Eeyore, Woozles and Heffalump, and introduced interjections containing unlikely consonantal sequences such as *fwondo*, *jaargh* or *ptooxo*. All humorously reflect a similar structured freedom to make use of expressive vocalizing in ordinary conversation.

2.1. *Primary and secondary interjections*

It is possible to distinguish two types of interjection (cf. Ameka 1992 and Ameka & Wilkins 2006):

1. primary, such as *oops*, *ouch*, *wow*, which cannot be used in any other sense but as interjections;
2. secondary interjections such as *shit*, *damn*, *hell*, etc., words which have an independent semantic value but are often used as interjections.

Goddard (2014) adds a third type:

3. 'noise-like interjections'.

With primary interjections Goddard suggests we should distinguish between “phonologically aberrant ‘noise-like’ primary interjections” (*Ugh, Psst!, Mm*) and “phonologically normal ‘word-like’ primary interjections” (*Wow!, Yuck!*), the latter having the potential to serve as base forms for normal words: *to wow (someone), yucky (adj.), wow of a time, yuck factor*.

Gosh is a euphemistic secondary interjection like *shoot, darn, heck*.

2.2. *The semantics of interjections*

With regard to how far interjections communicate, Wierzbicka finds them to be, prototypically at least, *monological*: in most cases they express the speaker’s current emotion (Wierzbicka 2006: 290). Pragmatic markers, on the other hand, can be said to be, on the whole, *dialogical*: they link, in some way, the speaker and the hearer, the “I” and the “you”. We find, however, that a group of interjections (secondary interjections, and those that can be seen as pragmatic markers, e.g. *wow, hey, my goodness*) can also be considered typically and inherently dialogical, such as when they are uttered as a reaction to something the hearer has said or done. Nevertheless, it is true that mainly primary interjections (e.g. *ouch, oops*) are not necessarily directed to another person or persons. They may be murmured under one’s breath or shouted aloud in all kinds of situation.

As Goddard (2014: 54) notes, from a semantic point of view, interjections are standardly categorized as:

- a. volitive: interjections that express directive messages (such as English *Shh!*),
- b. emotive: those that mainly express feelings in the emotional sense, such as disgust, fear and annoyance,
- c. cognitive: those that “deliver more cognition-oriented messages, typically related to information state, that is, to what one knows, comes to know, etc.”, as with *Wow!, Gee! and Yikes!*

2.3. *From God to gosh*

Gosh was originally an expletive functioning as an interjection. It was a euphemistic variant of the word attributed to the Deity: *God*.

According to Ljung (2009), ‘expletive’ has a number of meanings. In the context of swearing it denotes taboo words and expressions used in grammaticalized constructions, signaling the attitudes and emotions of the speaker, as we shall see. Most of the expletives used have literal meanings associated with one of three major taboo areas, namely religion, sexuality and excretion, the first being fundamentally different from the other two.

The mention of God, Jesus, Christ or the Holy Ghost was not in itself offensive and these are in fact used in church services. What was offensive was when people started to use the name of the Deity to give added weight to their own utterances. Such swearing *by* a higher power was sacrilegious and was denounced as “taking God’s name in vain”; those that indulged in it were punished, often severely, according to Ljung (2009).

Traugott (1972) and Hopper & Traugott (1993) have pointed out the importance of the desire to imitate others, which is basic to the dominance of prestige in language change. The desire to imitate peers in a prestige group leads to change; the desire to imitate peers in the same group leads to minimization of change. Obliteration of boundaries and the compacting and reduction of redundancy are balanced by the introduction of new and innovating ways of saying approximately the same thing. These new and innovating ways of saying things are brought about by speakers seeking to enhance expressivity. This is typically done by the “deroutinizing” of constructions, in other words in finding new ways to say old things.

Prestige groups would not wish to be punished for ‘taking God’s name in vain’; hence the rise of the euphemism *gosh*, which retained the initial part of the name, while the latter part was softened to ‘sh’ /ʃ/ (/gɒʃ/) and was conveniently different and subjective enough to become the new fashion.

In this way *gosh* came to be conventionalized as part of the accepted vocabulary of the community and eventually institutionalized. Institutionalization refers to the spread of a usage to a community and its establishment as the norm. At first it would be an innovation or ‘nonce-word’ serving an immediate communicative need, or solving a problem of a speaker by economizing, filling in a conceptual or lexical gap. According to Brinton & Traugott (2005: 45), institutionalization is sometimes regarded as a precursor of lexicalization, sometimes identified with it.

2.4. *Interjections as pragmatic markers*

Norrick (2009) claims that in everyday talk interjections routinely function as pragmatic markers, initiating utterances and relating them to the foregoing interaction. Much of the interactional significance of primary interjections (such as *oh* and *mhm*) derives from their characteristic position as turn-initiators, while much of their meaning in any particular case depends on their intonation contour. Maschler (1998), who includes some interjections in her widely-considered class of discourse markers, sees this system of elements as having a fundamental role in negotiating the boundaries of conversational actions and segmenting spoken interaction.

Secondary interjections in particular, such as *boy* and *hell*, display a range of functions, not only as parallel pragmatic markers but also as discourse markers signaling contrast, elaboration and transition. Moreover, a few secondary interjections in initial turn position function as intensifiers as in *hell yeah*, or *shit no*, rather than pragmatic markers.

New interjections and their functions always seem to be accepted by participants. There seems to be an unlimited number of new interjections, according to Norrick. The class is *sui generis*, with recurrent pragmatic functions. For instance, teenage schoolchildren in Birmingham are reported to use ‘Oh my days!’ and ‘Oh my word!’ (first author’s data).

2.5. *Grammaticalization*

Cuenca (2000) claims that the phrases identified as secondary interjections are the result of grammaticalization. Their defining features are:

- a. an increase of the pragmatic meaning over the lexical meaning,
- b. instability and variation in phonetic form,
- c. morphological fixation,
- d. peripheral syntactic behavior

In short, secondary interjections result from a process of syntactic reanalysis from a literal meaning to a more abstract, pragmatic one as proposed by Traugott (1989, 1995). In fact, reanalysis and pragmaticization of meaning are the main features of grammaticalization.

Meaning changes and the cognitive strategies that motivate them are central in the early stages of grammaticalization and are crucially linked to expressivity. Furthermore, the meaning changes are initially pragmatic and associative, arising in the context of the flow of speech. At later stages, as grammaticalization continues and forms become routinized, meaning loss or ‘bleaching’ typically occurs, but even so, older meanings may still continue to constrain newer, ‘emptier’ ones (cf. Downing 2001 and Downing 2009 with regard to *surely*).

The lexical meaning becomes bleached as pragmatic meaning increases. The original objective ‘literal’ meaning changes to a subjective one. Subjectification is a pragmatic-semantic process whereby meanings become increasingly based in speakers’ subjective beliefs about, or attitudes towards, what they are discussing. Traugott (1989, 1995) illustrates how certain expressions that initially articulate concrete, lexical and objective meanings, have come – through repeated use in local syntactic contexts – to serve abstract, pragmatic, interpersonal, speaker-based functions. The evolution from *God* to *gosh* may have taken place in this way.

3. Data and method

Our database derives from two corpora: the *British National Corpus* (BNC) and the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). For the exploitation of the BNC, we used the *BNCweb* (CQP) tool from the University of Lancaster; for the COCA, we used the interface developed by Davies (2008), also the creator of the corpus, at Brigham Young University. Given that interjections are a phenomenon of spoken discourse, we centered our searches on the spoken components of these two corpora. The spoken part of the BNC, which is composed of 10 million words (representing 10% of the whole BNC), comprises a wide range of genres, half of them orthographic transcriptions of unscripted informal conversations and “spoken language collected in different contexts, ranging from formal business or government meetings to radio shows and phone-ins” (from the BNC website).⁸ The spoken component of the COCA, composed of more than 109 million words, consists of transcripts of unscripted conversation from more than 150 different television and radio programs. The BNC was collected in four years in the late 20th century (1991-1994), whereas the texts from

⁸ <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/index.xml>.

COCA represent the language from the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century (1990-2015).

A first search of these two corpora yielded the following results: 256 examples of *gosh* in the BNC and 3,732 occurrences in the COCA. Taking into account the disparity in the volume of words in each of the two samples, and turning these figures into more manageable numbers, we get the following frequencies per each corpus: 24.59 instances of *gosh* per million words in the BNC and 34.24 instances per million words in the COCA.

For the more detailed and fine-grained analysis, of both a quantitative and a qualitative nature, all the occurrences from the BNC were considered. However, once a detailed consideration of them was carried out, the 256 examples in the BNC yielded 246, with the rejection of 10 cases.⁹ To obtain an equivalent number of instances in the COCA, we restricted the whole list of examples to the first 246 obtained from the list of 500 hits provided by the interface, generating a random selection of examples. In both BNC and COCA, once we obtained the original list through the query, we expanded the context of each example, to be able to discover meanings and patterns of form of the use of *gosh* in a wider context.

Looking at the syntactic behavior of *gosh* in the data, we first explored two aspects: the sets of combinations appearing with *gosh* and forming a unit with it, and the behavior of *gosh* as a peripheral element and occupying a certain position with respect to the relevant utterance. In relation to the first aspect, it is important to mention that *gosh* appears in our results in two different forms: as a single-word interjection, on the one hand, and forming part of a multi-word expression, on the other, which – like the prototypical interjection *gosh* – can be a free utterance unit (as in *oh my gosh*). Following Ameka (1992), we will call the latter ‘interjectional phrases’.

Other features that we searched for had to do with the occurrence of *gosh* with certain elements and constructions, e.g. *gosh* with pronouns and *gosh* with certain clause types and constructions. In the second part of the analysis, we looked at the data in terms of the meanings and discourse functions of *gosh*. Our hypothesis was that the type of meaning and function associated with *gosh* would be, at least partly, related to the position and combinations of *gosh* with these elements and syntactic patterns.

⁹ The disregarded examples are a metalinguistic reference to *gosh* in text KBE (*What do you say oh gosh, oh gore, oh? / Got?*) and a series of examples, all part from the same conversation, where the interjection is also used metalinguistically in a fixed list of homophonous words: *Gosh, posh, cosh, cough, have you seen this headline? gosh, posh, cosh, cough* (KD0).

4. *Gosh* in British and American spoken discourse

4.1. *Gosh: phrases and position*

In this section we present the results from the data analysis on *gosh* with regard to the two aspects of the syntactic behavior of the interjection mentioned above.

As for the use of the single-word interjection or one which forms part of an interjectional phrase, the prototypical interjection *gosh* is the most frequent item in BrEng (64.23%), followed by the phrase *oh gosh* (28.01%), with a lower, but still substantial, frequency. In AmE the most used combination is the phrase *oh my gosh* (54.07%), but *gosh* and *oh gosh*¹⁰ are also used with remarkable frequencies (21.54% and 16.26%, respectively). See Table 1 on this. The differences between British and American English in the figures corresponding to these three most frequent phrases with *gosh* have been tested by means of the chi-square test, the result being that they are statistically significant differences (in *gosh* and *oh my gosh* $p < 0.001$ and in *oh gosh* $p = 0.002$).

Table 1. Phrases with *gosh* and frequency in BNC and COCA

	British English		American English	
gosh	158	64.23%	53	21.54%
oh my gosh	7	2.85%	133	54.07%
oh gosh	69	28.01%	40	16.26%
my gosh	3	1.22%	18	7.32%
by gosh	2	0.81%	2	0.81%
ooh gosh	5	2.03%	0	0.00%
mm gosh	1	0.41%	0	0.00%
ah gosh	1	0.41%	0	0.00%
TOTAL	246	100.00%	246	100.00%

¹⁰ Notice that the combination *oh gosh* includes instances of *oh*, *gosh* and *oh my gosh* includes instances of *oh*, *my gosh*; *oh my*, *gosh* and one occurrence of *oh*, *my*, *gosh*.

Gosh behaves as a peripheral element with respect to the relevant utterance, with no exception. This means that it finds itself outside the clause or utterance proper, typically in utterance-initial position, as we shall see below. This is the so-called ‘left periphery’ position, defined linearly by Degand (2014: 154) as “the most leftward positional slot of the utterance, outside the dependency structure of the verb”. In this position, *gosh* appears in some examples in combination with other peripheral elements, such as other interjections and pragmatic markers, forming clusters with these elements.

- (1) She’s a terrific, intellectual person who has union background, who just happens to be more conservative than John Sweeney. But who isn’t? *I mean, my gosh*, John Sweeney has made the union movement, with 40 percent of them Republicans, into an arm of the Democratic Party and he’s using really hundreds of millions of dollars in these election processes to elect only Democrats and I think, what do you expect from him? (COCA 20010106)¹¹

In (1), the similar syntactic behavior of both *I mean* and *my gosh* (as elements attached to the left periphery of the sentence they precede) and their associated pragmatic functions suggest that both can be treated as pragmatic markers (see the discussion in Section 4.3). In Section 4.2 we will discuss other aspects of the context of *gosh* obtained from the data.

Looking more closely at the syntactic behavior of *gosh* as a peripheral element, we explored the following features of the *gosh* phrase in terms of position:

- a. whether or not it occurs as a complete, independent utterance (i.e. it is free-standing); if it does, if it constitutes a *turn* in itself;
- b. if it does not, its position (initial, medial or final) with respect to the corresponding utterance.

Examples as a free-standing element (complete utterance) and in the three positions mentioned are given in (2) and (3), respectively:

¹¹ In the examples, we mark the phrase containing *gosh* in bold type. When the discussion also involves the utterance where *gosh* can be found and this needs to be highlighted within the relevant context, it is marked in italics.

- (2) A: Hundred and sixty-eight pounds thirty nine pence.
B: **Oh gosh!**
C: Is that their new catalogue or is that the one, the summer one?
B: This is spring summer. (BNC D97 1513) (free-standing)
- (3) a. I'm not the only parent that lost a son in war. **Gosh**, during World War II there were lots of them that were lost. (COCA 19931011) (initial)
b. They just, **gosh**, seemed like they belonged there. (COCA 091128) (medial)
c. There it is, **gosh**. Look, I was looking for my pen and it was there all along. (BNC KNV 405) (final)

Some observations with respect to the position of the interjection or interjectional phrase where *gosh* occurs are in order. When looking at the position of a peripheral element as here *gosh*, one could ask: 'position with respect to what?' Being a peripheral element, *gosh* is formally outside the clause proper and its initial, medial or final positions are understood as positions with respect to the utterance. By 'utterance initial', for instance (cf. (3a)), we mean left periphery (in the sense of Degand 2014 mentioned before). In final and, indeed, medial position, *gosh* and the *gosh* phrases are also peripheral. Where final (cf. (3c)), it occupies the so-called right periphery (cf. Beeching & Detges 2014); if medial (cf. (3b)), it is always parenthetical and thus never integrated in the argument structure. Arguably, the only case of integrated *gosh* found in the data is in the example: *The first report said near it but I can't imagine what that would be, probably inside the torpedo room, could be a torpedo flask itself or gosh knows what* (COCA: 20000816). But notice that here *gosh* forms part of the expression *god [gosh] knows what*, which in itself is a formulaic expression and used in this example with a pragmatic (non-propositional), rather than, lexical (propositional) meaning.

Concentrating for the moment on each of the most-frequently occurring combinations in each variety – i.e. *gosh* in BrE and *oh my gosh* in AmE – the results obtained for the features mentioned can be summarized as follows. In BrE the most frequent occurrence of *gosh* is as an utterance-initial, non-free-standing element; this represents about half of the total number of occurrences (49.32%). Also frequent, but to a lesser extent, is *gosh* as a free-standing element, i.e. used as a complete utterance, which occurs in 38.36% of the examples; in half of these, in addition to being free-standing, *gosh* constitutes a turn in itself. In AmE, *oh my gosh* occurs most predominantly as a free-standing element (61.83%), and more often

than not as a single element in a turn. Examples of *gosh* (BrE) and *oh my gosh* (AmE) as a free-standing element (4) and as a complete turn are as follows:

- (4) Shut that door! **Gosh!** It's ever so cold in this house! (BNC KC6 1916)
- (5) G: What joy is there in life?
K: **Oh, my gosh.**
G: Except for friendships. I've got some dear friends visiting from Holland, Michigan. (COCA 110824)

If it is not used as a complete utterance, *oh my gosh* occurs equally often in initial or medial position (18.32%). The similar frequency of initial and medial *oh my gosh* may be surprising; notice, however, that medial position includes cases where the sequence occurs in the context of direct speech or thought (see observations below on the position of *gosh* in this context).

Special attention must be drawn to cases of *gosh* which are turn-initial and expressed as a reaction to the hearer's turn, both as a complete utterance or as part of one, and which constitute more than half of all the examples, in both corpora (BrE and AmE).

The examination of the data has revealed some further interesting tendencies related to the surrounding elements occurring with *gosh*. Initial *gosh* in its different patterns often precedes personal pronouns (especially in BrE), notably *I* (as in ***gosh I wish I had her hair or her skin or her body shape***, BNC FL8 27) and also frequent but to a lesser extent *it* (***Gosh it's so cold out there!*** BNC KC9 7067), although all other instances of these pronouns also occur in our data. Demonstratives *this* and *that* are also found (as in ***Gosh that was quick***, BNC KC3 3080). As we shall see below, one context where these are found is in evaluative constructions.

Another interesting co-occurrence that has been found for initial *gosh* is when it precedes non-declarative clause types: interrogatives (both rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions, and also declaratives with question tags, with the force of an interrogative, this last type only in BrE, as in ***gosh that is cheap isn't it?***, BNC KD6 2616), exclamatives (or other patterns having the force of an exclamation: ***Gosh, you were the Attorney General!***, COCA 199221228) and imperatives, as in ***Oh my gosh. Look at that.*** (COCA 20070716) (or *gosh* preceding vocatives with the force of an imperative).

A final structure arising from the data involves a group of examples where *gosh* and its phrases precede the mark of positive (usually) or negative polarity: *Ooh yes!* <pause> *Oh gosh, absolutely, yeah!* (BNC KDM 15247).

Medial *gosh* occurs in two main contexts, which are both of a discourse type (cf. Section 4.2.4) and used to help organize the conversation or repair it. A further type of medial *gosh* involves its use in the context of direct speech or thought, as in *and then everybody's gone to the classroom and you think oh gosh the bell* (BNC KBW 12998) (cf. also Section 4.2.4). Notice that here the medial position is with respect to the whole utterance where *gosh* occurs. Taking the sequence representing the direct speech or thought into consideration, the position of *gosh* is initial in that sequence. These uses represent 5.48% of the examples of *gosh* in BrE (BNC) and 18.32% of examples of *oh my gosh* in AmE (COCA).

Final *gosh* is very infrequent with only a few cases (5 in BNC and 2 in COCA), one of them being (6):

- (6) Dad: Oh yes you have.
Ooh two aces I think.
Jane: Nan used to gargle <-|->¹² didn't she?
Dad: <-|-> Aces and nines, **gosh!**
Mum: Yeah.
Jane: With some horrible thing like <-|-> bicarb– bicarbonate of soda.
(BNC KBS 402)

4.2. Gosh: semantic meanings and discourse/pragmatic functions

With the religious connection practically severed, *gosh* emerges as an interjection exhibiting an array of different semantic meanings and discourse/pragmatic functions. Semantically, *gosh* expresses feelings in an emotional sense at the same time as it delivers an information-state type of message by informing the hearer of what the speaker knows, or rather, does not know. These two types of meaning, of an emotive and cognitive nature (see 2.2 above), frequently overlap in the examples because interjections with cognitive meanings arguably also convey an element of feeling (cf. Goddard 2014: 54). This makes it inadvisable to

¹² Notice that the symbol <-|-> stands for overlap in the BNCweb.

categorize the uses of *gosh* as belonging to one or the other types, and thus in 4.2.1 we discuss both interrelated meanings under the same section.

Another set of uses of *gosh* is as a marker of discourse structure (specifically, the organization of the conversation); this is the concern of Section 4.2.2. Again, these discursive uses of *gosh* do not constitute a clear-cut category, completely independent from the other two. In general, the uses of *gosh* just mentioned (i.e. the emotive, cognitive and discourse-structure uses) will be considered as being predominant, but often overlapping with the other meanings.

Unless otherwise stated, the position of *gosh* in the examples found expressing these meanings is initial (left periphery of the sentence) or else it is a free-standing unit (i.e. a complete utterance).

4.2.1. *Gosh as an expression of emotion and cognition*

An important meaning expressed by *gosh* as an emotive interjection is that of '*emotional involvement*': the speaker uses it to express his/her concern and emotional attachment to what is being said, usually in a positive sense. A relevant example is (7):

- (7) –How would you feel if you were him?
–Who wouldn't? But he is coming around, and I know that he loves her, I know that he does, and I know that he will be around more now.
–What do you think you would have done if you hadn't seen the program, if you were just making the decision by yourself?
–**Oh, gosh.** I – I don't know what I would have done. (COCA 19980323)

In line with what was said above, we see the phrase *Oh, gosh* in (7) as indicating uncertainty and also possibly as a device to gain time to think, given the rather challenging question preceding it. A related meaning is that of emotional impact, as in (8) where the *gosh* phrase refers to the speaker's own experience, in remembering a negative experience (on the side effects of a medicine – *Tagamet*):

- (8) –See your Tagamet that's one of the side effects it, you get very occasionally with it. It gives you <-|-> tightness <-|->

-<-|-> Ah.

-soreness in your breast.

-**Oh gosh** it's been murder. <pause>

-Er <pause> I th- I think er y- I think you should give yourself a- at least a week without it to get the <unclear> a chance to get away.

-Without what? <-|-> Tagamet <-|->

-<-|-> Without <-|-> your Tagamet

-Aye. (BNC H4F 77)

In the framework of this general meaning of emotional involvement, or emotional impact, an array of other, more specific, emotions are found for *gosh* in the data, at times combined together. Emotions such as admiration (cf. 9), delight, anxiety, apprehension (10), sympathy and emotional involvement (11) and frustration (12), among others, are present in the corpus sample. Other meanings are also relevant to these examples, such as surprise, as in (9) and (11) (see below), and intensification (clearly in 12, but also present in almost all instances of *gosh*; see below).

(9) B: In terms of lawns it's the biggest club in the world. (...)

D: They've got twelve thirteen lawns there.

C: **Gosh!** (BNC KBK 6153)

(10) **Oh gosh** I didn't know where any of you were. (BNC KP3 1127)

(11) N: (...) Then her husband left her.

C: **Oh gosh!**

N: They were divorced. (BNC KBK 7131)

(12) **Gosh**, why can't we get anything done? (COCA 120709)

The interjection *gosh* and its interjectional phrases can be a reflection of the speaker's state of knowledge, i.e. what one knows or comes to know, etc. (Goddard 2014: 54); as such it adopts an information-structuring function and also an epistemic one, in that it indicates the speaker's attitude concerning the likelihood of the event described. This is in line with Norrick (2009), who sees interjections essentially as expressions of some change in the speaker's cognitive state (cf. e.g. 2009: 879), and with Maschler & Schiffrin's (2015: 196-7) category of cognitive discourse markers (including interjections), typically related to what

one knows. The general meaning of the interjection here is surprise, as in: *And he was watching the game and said gosh, who is that female refereeing the basketball game.* (COCA 19970424).¹³ The statement to which *gosh* is referring is thus characterized as newsworthy, unexpected or surprising, combined in the example with an expression of disbelief at the idea of a woman refereeing a basketball game. The reader will note that surprise was seen to be relevant to some of the examples presented above. Other cognitive meanings found in the data and reflecting the speaker's state of knowledge are those of (sudden) realization (see also below), or else gradually coming to awareness, realization and processing of new information. We see *gosh* in (13), for instance, as an expression of surprise and sudden realization, and also indicating the processing of new information:

- (13) C: How long does a game take, as a general rule David?
D: Ah, maybe it's about three hours.
C: **Gosh**, <laugh>, oh, it's a kind of golf then isn't it?
D: Er, yes, very much so, I think that, to some extent, depending on the standard of the players. (BNC KBK 4947)

Among the uses of *gosh* expressing the cognitive meaning of realization or that of processing new information we find a good number of the examples of the interjection in sentence medial position, as in (14), combining a meaning of realization with surprise and intensification:

- (14) -You have a steady boyfriend, you had for the last 10 years...
-13.
-13 years, so, **gosh**, since you were 20, since you were a pup, (...)
(COCA 110926)

The exploration of the data has clarified that one of the most important functions of *gosh* is the expression of intensification or strengthening of what follows, which is present in

¹³ In line with Ortony et al.'s view (1990), we consider that surprise is not an emotion as such but a "cognitive state having to do with unexpectedness" (1990: 32; see also Norrick 2009: 868 on interjections expressing information states rather than emotions). Since surprise (in isolation), they argue, lacks the "essential ingredient" of a valenced reaction toward something, then it is not an emotion. This view, however, contrasts with that of other (but not all) theorists of emotions who do include surprise in their lists of basic emotions (cf. for example the selection given in Ortony et al. 1990: 27).

a high number of examples in both data samples, possibly in combination with the emotive and cognitive meanings already discussed. In this context *gosh* has the force of an exclamation, with an emphatic effect, although there may be a difference in the degree of emphasis conveyed, *oh my gosh* sounding more ‘dramatic’ in some instances than *gosh* or *oh gosh*. As an example, see the following from AmE:

- (15) K: (...) If you don’t remember, I want you to take a look at “American Idol” back in the day.
P: **Oh, my gosh**, I haven’t seen this in so long. (COCA 120323)

We have found this meaning of intensification in different contexts. One of them is when *gosh* appears preceding evaluatives, constructions with an evaluative meaning, among which we especially find copular constructions. In general (i.e. not only with copular constructions), the occurrence of *gosh* with an evaluative meaning is pervasive in the data. A selection of these examples – 30 in BrE and 25 in AmE – is given as follows:

- (16) **Gosh**, this beef is tender. (BNC KC4 149)
(17) **Gosh** that car looks a bit rusty doesn’t it? (BNC KE2 9687)
(18) –We’ve done – I don’t know, we did – oh, Lucy and Ethel. That was tragic.
–**Oh, my gosh**, that’s my favorite episode. (COCA 111028)

The strengthening effect of *gosh* on the speaker’s following statement can be noticed by a comparison with the statement with no preceding interjection, i.e. *This beef is tender*. The effect conveyed with the interjection is similar to that found with exclamatives (as in *How tender this beef is!*). But since exclamatives are not a common pattern in everyday conversation, by using *gosh* the speaker may express the exclamative meaning while retaining at the same time the declarative clause type. As mentioned in Section 4.1, we have noted an interesting correlation between this use of *gosh* with an evaluative meaning and the occurrence of personal pronouns, mainly *I* and *it*.

In Section 4.1 we also mentioned that a significant number of examples of initial *gosh* had been found introducing non-declarative clause types. The most important of these in number are interrogatives, which also illustrate the emphatic effect of *gosh*: rhetorical

questions (cf. (19)), declaratives with question tags with the force of a question (20) and ‘literal’ questions (21).

- (19) In the past, science has generally gone forward and then suddenly one day somebody says, **Oh, my gosh**, *do you see what we might be about to step into?* (COCA, 20041022)
- (20) –April, May, June, July, August, September they’ll be four in five months
–Mm mm
–by then.
–**Gosh** *it soon passes, doesn’t it?*
–When you think it doesn't seem five minutes ago (BNC KB8 8848)
- (21) –**Gosh** *how much have you got Paul?*
–Lots. (BNC KD0 369)

We also have emphatic exclamations, declaratives with an exclamatory effect, where *gosh* has been found in 14 examples in the two samples: **Gosh** *he looks ugly!* *Bleasdale*. (BNC KCV 31), **Gosh**, *he’s got a bloody right to!* (BNC KE6 7327). Both interrogatives and exclamations often include evaluatives, so again the emotive and cognitive meanings combine. Finally, imperatives preceded by *gosh* have been also found; cf. (22):

- (22) Well, see, you’ve said two different things that will be a real influence. Of course she’s going to be an influence and **my gosh**, *just think how long you’ve been in Washington*. Have we known any First Ladies who haven't been a real influence? (COCA 19921117)

A third context where *gosh* acquires an emphatic meaning is where initial *gosh* strengthens the, typically positive, polarity. The positive affirmation reinforces the hearer’s or speaker’s previous statement. Examples include the following: *Ooh yes!* <-|-> <pause> **Oh gosh**, *absolutely, yeah!* (BNC KDM 15247); *Oh yes cos there was quite a few er kids in in that little street of ours you know in* <gap desc="name" reason="anonymization"> *Street*. **Gosh** *yes. Quite a few kids in there*. (BNC HML 525)

Emotive and cognitive uses of *gosh* often respond to an immediate stimulus of a linguistic nature – normally what the hearer has said or even what the speaker him/herself has

said. Cognitive uses of *gosh* may imply a reaction to something the speaker is *thinking about*, rather than a mere reaction to a stimulus. In a few examples from our data samples, finally, *gosh* reacts to the immediate environment, that is, the extralinguistic context. We have attested 11 occurrences of this use in BrE, all of them with initial *gosh*, but none in AmE. In *Gosh this pickled ginger's <-|-> delicious!* (BNC KPU 164), for instance, the speaker expresses (pleasant) surprise or realization as well as positive feelings towards what s/he is eating.

4.2.2. Discursive and pragmatic uses of gosh

Goddard (2014: 54-55) proposes a classification of interjections in terms of *contexts of use*. Whereas most interjections have immediate (stimulus-bound) uses, others may also have didactic uses (as when talking to children) and, more important for our purposes, discursive or ironic-sarcastic uses. We have found various uses of *gosh* which we can group in the category of discursive uses, the most important of which have to do with the organization of the conversation. *Gosh* has been very frequently found initiating a turn in conversation, preceding a reply (in question-answer pairs) or another reaction to the previous turn (e.g. a statement or expression of surprise). In this context, *gosh* represents a dialogic reaction of the speaker to something the hearer has said, adopting an interactive role in the turn-taking of the conversation. In this productive use (57% in BrE and 54.5% in AmE), *gosh* may be found in the left periphery of the utterance or may be free-standing.

In Martínez Caro & Borreguero (2016) we explored the function of pragmatic markers as indicators of reported direct speech or thought in English and Spanish, including markers such as English *well* and Spanish *pues*. *Gosh*, when functioning in medial or even final position, also frequently adopts this role, followed by reporting verbs and verbs of thought such as *say, think, be like, go* and others. See (23-24):

- (23) Look at history. Medicare Part D. I was on Capitol Hill at the time. Dana, you may have been in the White House. Everyone was very nervous about it. *I remember members of Congress were saying oh, my, gosh, we have to explain it to the district.* Now ask any senior, they love it. (COCA 120815)
- (24) Right after the crash, she'd been unable to cry. Now on rare occasions, she was overcome, but she hid her tears from the children. *Do you think sometimes,*

Gosh, maybe, I'm too strong. Maybe I should let the kids see me cry? (COCA 19970718)

This context of *gosh* often involves the use of personal pronouns or demonstratives and evaluatives. In the following example, the expression of thought is embedded in the speaker's narration without a verb of *thinking*, and the use of *gosh I...* marks the beginning of the reported direct thought where the speaker is expressing a personal wish:

- (25) I think it's a case of the grass being greener on the other side, you know, you never seem to be happy with what you have yourself you always see it in somebody else, ***gosh I wish I had her hair or her skin or her body shape***, you just never seem to be satisfied with what you've got and yet other people see you as looking very attractive (BNC FL8 27)

A limited number of instances of medial *gosh* have been found in the data with a discourse function in two different contexts. In the first, the interjection is used to mark an interruption and the speaker's wish to reformulate his/her utterance as a restart (4 examples, 2 in each corpus), as in (26):

- (26) now interestingly we recently had a a thing about this from ***gosh*** . I can't remember where it was now but it it was certainly you know probably one of the er new er very new universities you know the <-|-> ex-polys (BNC FMD 108)

The second context is where *gosh* functions as a filler with the general meaning of 'time to think and search for the right word' (8 examples, 7 of them in BNC); cf. (27) and (28):

- (27) So it's the fact that in many cases the children were nude were just that's how the children were. The age range – oh, I didn't take pictures of them once they reached the sort of age of, ***gosh***, well, puberty, certainly. But considerably before then, I quit – I quit taking pictures of them. (COCA 150512)
- (28) They just, ***gosh***, seemed like they belonged here. (COCA 091128)

Finally, in a few examples from our data, *gosh* is used to mark the end of a discourse topic. This only occurs in two examples in the AmE sample and in one from the BrE sample.

- (29) Noel: No.
Enid: So one doesn't know er exactly what it's like <-|-> to do it.
Ian: <-|-> No. <-|-> No.
Enid: Mm. **Gosh**. And tell us about the children, how old are they?
Ian: Harry is erm he'll be two in June
Enid: Mhm.
Ian: then Thomas will be four in August. (BNC KC0 4402)

Notice that in (29) *gosh* finishes a topic and the utterance that follows introduces a new discourse topic ("the [= the hearer's] children"). It would be interesting to further explore the role of *gosh* at certain moments in interaction within other spoken discourse types, such as narratives (cf. Maschler 1998).

4.3. *Gosh as a pragmatic marker*

Looking at the behavior of *gosh* in our data, we claim that it is an interjection that functions as a pragmatic marker in present-day English. In fact, as we said above, in everyday talk some interjections routinely function as pragmatic markers and they are sometimes included in the taxonomies of pragmatic markers by some authors: see, for instance, Norrick (2009) and Redeker (2006). *Gosh*, used as a single-word interjection or as part of an interjectional phrase, shares the following features with other pragmatic markers. First, it has undergone a process of phonological variation, considering *God* as its original form, resulting in a phonologically different but acceptable variant of the word, as described in Section 2.3 (cf. Cuenca 2000). Second, syntactically it shows clear peripheral behavior, mostly occupying the left periphery of the sentence or standing on its own as a free-standing unit. In non-free-standing uses, *gosh* may also occupy the medial or final sentence positions, though these are certainly more infrequent; if medial, its parenthetical status is evidenced by its separation from the rest of the clause by commas and its not being integrated into the syntactic structure of the sentence. Third, whereas interjections are 'monological' (cf. Wierzbicka 2006 and Section 2.2), *gosh* has proved to mainly function 'dialogically', as pragmatic markers do,

linking, in some way, the speaker and the hearer, the “I” and the “you”. Another relevant feature showing that *gosh* does not function as a mere interjection is that, whereas interjections normally function as an immediate reaction to an external stimulus, *gosh* as a pragmatic marker often implies a reaction to something the speaker is thinking about. Fourth, like other pragmatic markers, *gosh* is multifunctional, expressing different functions. Even in a single example, *gosh* frequently indicates more than one meaning: e.g. emphasis and surprise, reformulation and realization, among others. Furthermore, the semantic meanings and discourse/pragmatic functions that we have found for *gosh* in the data are also indicative that it is not merely an interjection, but a ‘fully-fledged’ pragmatic marker. Among the functions that *gosh* most clearly shares with other pragmatic markers we find it as the first element in a new turn in conversation, sometimes as a free-standing unit, reacting to the previous statement and having an interactive meaning, in the context of direct speech and thought, initiating the second element in adjacency pairs, and as a filler or indicating a restart or reformulation of the message (in medial position). As we claim above, an important function of pragmatic markers, which has attracted little attention in the literature, is to act as boundary marks in direct reported speech and thought. Fifth, in our data *gosh* may appear in combination with other pragmatic markers or interjections such as *I mean* or *well*, sometimes forming ‘clusters’ of pragmatic markers and multiple themes (cf. e.g. Hasselgård 2004).

5. Conclusions

This study allows us to accept the hypothesis that the interjection *gosh* is definitely in use in the period stretching from the late twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century in both BrE and AmE for the sample analyzed. As a mild euphemistic expletive, it replaces ‘*god*’ in conversation, but with virtually no religious association or implication as regards meaning, thus causing no offense to an audience that might prefer to avoid the use of religious expletives. Whereas *God* (e.g. *Oh God!* or *God!*) as an interjection is still heard in films and, arguably, in the speech of older people as well as, it must be said, of people in their twenties, *gosh*, in comparison, sounds positively modern.

Gosh is a secondary interjection which can stand alone or form part of an interjectional phrase. Phraseologically speaking, *oh my gosh* is very clearly predominant in AmE, while both *gosh* (especially) and *oh gosh* are most frequent in BrE. As regards

position, *oh my gosh* is free-standing in AmE; likewise, *gosh* is initial (occupying the left periphery) or free-standing in BrE.

Gosh has a wide range of emotive, cognitive and discourse-structure uses, often combined together. In terms of emotions, at first sight, *gosh* is typically positive: it does not express anger or disgust, for example. On the contrary, it often expresses admiration for something made or created (***Gosh this is delicious!***) or achieved (...*and I thought **Oh gosh**, this trolley seems to be coming up here no problem. It is a miracle.*) Negative occurrences can occur, however, as in the following remembrance: *I lived in the farmhouse, he was a tyrant, **gosh** he was a tyrant.*

Intonation contour, together with the context, may affect the meaning of *gosh* in terms of its positive or negative implication. Due to the limited scope of the present chapter, however, the intonation of *gosh* has not been investigated in this study. According to the emotion involved, the implication can be positive (*Mary is getting married! – **Gosh!***); otherwise, the intensification, together with the nature of the event, can produce phrases rather than single words, with a negative implication, for instance, *Harry has died of AIDS. (– **Oh Gosh!** What a dreadful thing to have happened!).*

Gosh has undergone conventionalization and eventually institutionalization, as its usage spread to communities and became established as the norm. Lexicalization rather than grammaticalization proves dominant in the development from the original interjection *God*, by which the changes of form and meaning are crucially linked to expressivity. Furthermore, the changes are initially pragmatic and associative, arising in the context of the flow of speech. Form is gradually bleached by extensive use and morphological changes ensue which bring about changes in meaning, as seems to be the case with *gosh*. “When enough speakers restructure in similar ways, radical changes in the language occur and then we have what some linguists call ‘mutations’ in the language” (Traugott 1972: 11).

In so doing, the expletive loosens its ties, both with its original meaning and with the propositional content of the clause, pointing more strongly to the speaker’s own beliefs, state, and attitudes towards the objective world. This is subjectivity, or if attention is paid to one’s hearer, inter-subjectivity, “which alone makes linguistic communication possible” (Benveniste 1971).

Finally, there are certain issues worth looking at which this study has suggested but which are beyond the limited scope of the present paper. Among these are the analysis of the intonation of *gosh* in relation to its meanings, a detailed historical account of *gosh* in terms of

the processes of grammaticalization and conventionalization and, finally, an exploration of the possible correlations between the use of *gosh* and genre in the spoken component of each corpus (e.g. is *gosh* more frequent in spontaneous conversation than in task-oriented meetings or radio/TV broadcasts?).

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