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**POLYSEMANTICS OF THE RUSSIAN INTERJECTION OKH IN
HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE (19TH–21ST CENTURIES)**

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Abstract

This paper analyzes functional dynamics of one of the most common Russian interjections, “ox” (okh). It has been proven that it is the most frequent interjection among those attested at the earliest stages of the Russian language development and still remaining an active part of the language presently. The material for studies of evolutionary changes was taken from the texts of main, oral, newspaper, regional, dialectic and multimedia subcorpora of the Russian National Corpus. A conclusion has been drawn that the role of the interjection in texts is stable through the centuries, its polysemy allows expanding descriptions and bringing them closer to reader, adding emotive meanings, incline to compassion. Frequency of use in various contexts demonstrate relevance of genre and style-related limitations. It is argued that criteria of current and most objective retrospective description are related to changes in use of the interjection, its functional role, semantics, graphic presentation, composition of the linguistic item. Detailed descriptions of development of the oh interjection supported with usage examples taken from texts from various ages, genres and styles reveal historical development of interjection in the language, as well as relevant evolutionary changes. It is emphasized that the interjection oh is a resilient linguistic item due to its additional meanings, potential and real functionality in the Russian language of 19th–21st centuries. This lexical unit actively develops polysemantic relations due to its unique set of grammatic categories.

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1. Introduction

Evolutionary potential is a rather broad concept having its roots in biology and including a set of attributes characteristic of a certain phenomenon and its gradual change throughout the path that it follows in its development, with possible construction of forecasts. In addition, this concept describes the very existence of capabilities of a studied item with their subsequent actualization, or alternatively, non-actualization due to certain objective causes.

When working with interjection as a part of speech, active processes were noted that changed the interjections themselves, their function, place in a sentence, composition. With time, some items lost their interjectional meaning, some returned to a regular combination of parts of speech (from which they were initially formed), some succumbed to new rules of spelling and punctuation and continued existing in a renewed form corresponding to the modern structure of the language. In order to trace their path in historical retrospective, the authors turned to the Russian National Corpus, that allowed accurate sampling and constructed a statistically accurate state-of-the-art linguistic picture.

2. Problem Statement

Frequency of use of a morphologic unit in a language is a principal criterion when considering a given part of speech in the general history of the language, a confirmation that it takes up a significant place in the history. Interjections attract attention from scholars studying different languages in the context of cognitive connection between speech and brain (Rosch, 1975; Wharton, 2003). Today, a statement of Cruz (2010) who concluded that there is a certain continuum of more or less conceptual units, among which there are concept-containing and non-conceptual units, is an axiom. In the modern Russian linguistics, interjection is also an object of research in the context of comparison with other linguistic cultures (Alba-Juez & Larina, 2018), within the framework of semantic relations (Wierzbicka, 2009), synchronous description as a lexico-grammatic class (Ryabkova, 2011), native and borrowed nature (Shkapenko, 2016). Interjection is one of ten parts of speech in the Russian language, which is as ancient as any other, but that was recognized properly only during composition of the first Russian language grammar. Interjection was always an attribute of living speech, so it was relatively rare in ancient manuscripts. It did not impede it on the path of development within the general linguistic system and reach the modern form in order to continue performing its function at the current stage of linguistic development.

3. Research Questions

Methodological foundation of the research lies in provisions of the modern corpus linguistics, which undergoes a boom both in Russia and abroad (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). An advantage of corpora is a continuous expansion of data due to inclusion of living popular speech, which is vividly communicating judgment through interjections (Kachinskaia & Malysheva, 2019). Material for scientific description of historical dynamics of the “okh” (rus. ox) interjection was collected by continuous sampling from the Russian National Corpus (hereinafter – Corpus), which in the current state includes

124,565 documents with a total of 321,712,061 words, including 3733 documents with “okh” amounting to 13,277 occurrences. The okh interjection occurred at all times as we confirmed with lexicographic sources, thus, of great interest is its quantitative analysis: this interjection has vanishingly small ratio of homonymous items, usually it is a coincidence between the interjection and some compound proper name («Волшебник Ох», The Wizard of Okh).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify functional and intentional changes in the okh interjection as a communicative unit of speech that facilitates expression of emotive, cognitive and emotional-voluntary meanings of a Russian person.

5. Research Methods

In order to obtain objective data about changes concerning the okh interjection, a method of in-context study was applied, as were some elements of component analysis, semantic-stylistic method and quantitative statistical analysis.

6. Findings

The okh interjection occurred throughout the history of the Russian language, which was observed through historical artifacts and lexicographic sources, thus, its statistics is going to be more illustrative. This statistics covers only one of the interjections that the authors studied, but it may also be accompanied with a graphical data representation provided by the Russian National Corpus (<https://ruscorpora.ru>) following a specific query.

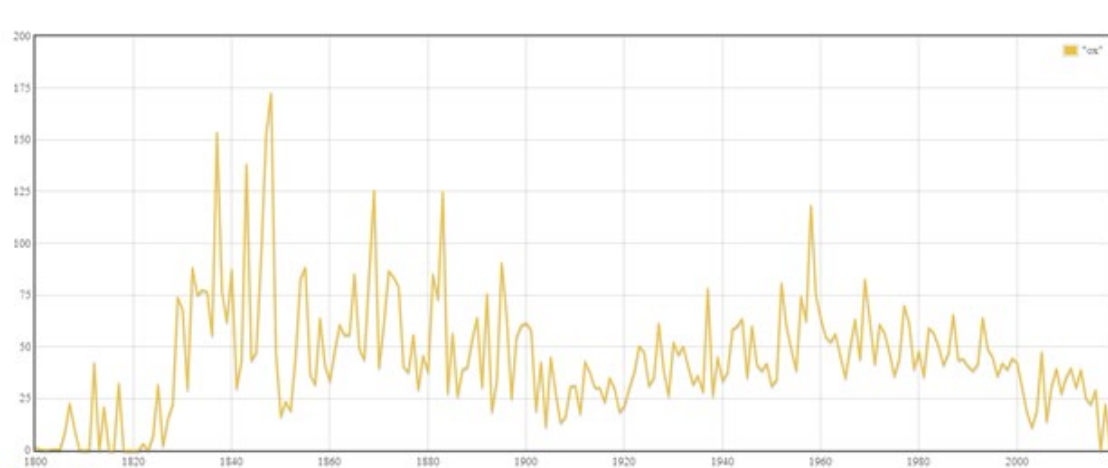


Figure 1. Statistics for distribution of the okh interjection through years and documents included in the Russian National Corpus

The diagram (Figure 1) allows tracing a peak in activity and popularity of the okh interjection as reflected in the documents, which it is possible to follow through the years. So, according to this measure, the most okh-rich years were 1837 (153.6), 1848 (172.5), 1869 (125.5), 1883 (124.9), 1958 (118.2).

Examples of occurrences found in the Corpus provide insight into usage of the okh interjection in literary texts (documents of the main corpus) and texts in other, more specific corpora, like oral texts. The Oral Corpus includes 4126 documents with 13,001,271 words and the okh interjection is represented in 578 by 1239 occurrences.

The Oral Corpus demonstrates an enhanced diversity in examples of speech sample recordings, for instance: “(no. 3, female, 30, 1973, psychologist) Завтра будет другой "ох"/ послезавтра еще один "ох” (Tomorrow there will be another okh / the day after tomorrow there will be one more. (A conversation with a sociologist on social and political topics (Samara) (2003) // Public Opinion Foundation)”.

The volume of newspaper materials in the Corpus amounts to 825,380 documents that record 305,365,947 words; the okh interjection is represented in 1477 documents amounting to 1561 occurrences. Some examples may include quoting interjections as a component in proper names:

«Господин Черкасский дебютировал как режиссер в 1964 году с мультипликационным фильмом «Тайна черного короля». После были выпущены «Волшебник Ох», «Доктор Айболит», «Крокодил и солнце», «Возвращение на остров сокровищ», «Крылья», «Вокруг света поневоле» и многие другие мультфильмы и ТВ-сериалы. С 1989 года Черкасский был президентом международного фестиваля анимационных фильмов «Крок». О творческом пути режиссера читайте в публикации “Ъ” «Союзмультпарadox». (Mr. Cherkassky debuted as a director in 1964 with an animation *A Secret of the Black King*. Later he directed *The Wizard of Okh*, *Doctor Doolittle*, *Crocodile and the Sun*, *Return to the Treasure Island*, *Wings*, *Around the World in Against One's Will* and many other animated films and TV series. From 1989, Cherkassky was the president of the Krok International Animation Festival. Read more on the director's career in Kommersant article titled Soyusmultparadox) (David Cherkassky of Captain Wrangel and Treasure Island fame died // Kommersant, 2018.10.30).

However, in most examples there are interjections:

“Без сожаления. Ох! Сколько эпизодов мы выбросили в речку, до сих пор жалко. Сейчас, вспоминая нашу жизнь, я ухожу от многих красивых, поэтических эпизодов. (Without regret. Okh! We had thrown away to the river so many episodes that I still have regrets. Now, remembering our life I go away from many beautiful, poetic episodes.) (Destined for love. Georgii Danelia is 88 on August 25 // Novaya Gazeta, 2018.08.24)”.

In the regional part of the Corpus, the okh interjection is represented in 113 amounting to 126 occurrences, while in total this part includes 37,068 documents recording 17,101,127 words. Regional documents include data from information websites, interviews, regional news archives. There one may find short summaries of incidents, personal testimonials from locally influential people, fragments of advertising materials and on-the-spot commentaries.

«<...> - Ох, что же я наделала! - причитала молодая женщина. - Сколько машин пригнали по моему звонку! Это же ложный вызов, да? Мне теперь придется отвечать? - Это не ложный

вызов, — успокоил ее пожарный. - Вы все правильно сделали: если почувствовали запах гари, сразу надо звонить 01. К тому моменту, когда выяснилось, что опасности нет, к дому № 15 на Сибгата Хакима прибыл наряд ДПС. (Okh, what have I done, the young lady lamented. So many cars arrived to my call. Does it count like a false alarm? Will I be prosecuted? - This is not a false alarm, a firefighter calmed her down. You did everything right: if you smell burning, you shall call 01 right away. By the moment it became evident that there is not danger, a traffic police patrol arrived to building no. 15 in Sibgat Khakim Street.) (Elena Gorbunchikova. Wrongfully parked SUV prevented firefighters from reaching Magellan housing complex // Evening Kazan, 2015.09.15).

A typical actualization of polysemantic meanings of the okh interjection is a sad exclamation attracting attention to speaker's feelings with respect to the speaker's own action and subsequent sincere discontent with its consequences or with the very fact of the action.

Dialect part of the Corpus is of special interest as it may present data on recording the interjection directly in the stream of oral speech reflected in the text and its description. There, the okh interjection is recorded in 32 totaling 57 occurrences out of a list of 1080 dialect documents of 395,440 words in total. There are also special markings for folklore and non-folklore recordings.

«чем... ох, ох, лучше бы мене не делать бы, остановиться бы... (oh my, I should not have done it, I should have stopped) (Strict Celebrations (с. Staroceslavino, Pervomaiskii District, Tambov oblast, 2002)». In this example, the okh interjection serves to express sadness and denial, subsequent repentance for the action, which seemed very much right at the moment of action. As it is evident, perception of interjectional meaning is not inhibited by interposition in the sentence, which is divided according to the spoken speech, however, the meaning of the interjection is read very clearly, even strengthened by word repetition.

“(За что Христа распяли?) — Када́ ма́ть - ть пѣдашлѧ// ох/ сын ты мой/ сын/ за чѣто ты распяфшы/ а он ѱварить// за ѱрешный мѣр/ крофѣ прѣливафшый// вѣт/ видимъ/ он што ты сказа́л// яво враги вѣт ы взяли// та́к он сказа́л// ты ни пла́чь/ Ма́тирь Бо́жйѣ/ вѣть на трѣтий дѣнь въскришѣся/ и тибѣ я явлѣюся// пра́вдѣ/ ѣсѣтинѣ. (Why was Christ crucified?) (When the mother came, okh, my son, son, why have you been crucified, and he said, for the sinful world the blood was spilled. That's what he said. His enemies took him and he said like this “You, Mother of Good, don't you cry, for on the third day I will resurrect and will appear in front of you, and this is true, true.) (How festivals were celebrated: Easter, Christianity. Christ and the Mother of God (the village of Chuvichi, Khvorostiansky district, Samara oblast, 1993)”. At it is evident from the example, the interjection is used next to a vocative, setting the tone to the phrase, in the same way it worked in Old Russian and as it still works in the modern language. Semantic field of the interjection is still vast and in this case it actualizes the meaning of experiencing grief by the speaker. Emotional content of the story that in free form represents the religious plot of crucifixion of Jesus Christ leaves no doubt that the informer is describing grief experienced by the Mother of God as an approximation to feelings of any mother having lost her son, which is evident from selection of vocabulary, which is while oriented towards book-learned biblical tone is also actually describing the event.

Occurrence of interjections in the poetic corpus is also high, and there they completely express their emotive potential, complementing a poetic verse with rhythm and feeling. So, in a verse in the poem

by Smeliakov Peter, *Peter, the time has come* (Петр, Петр, свершились сроки...), (1945-1949), the okh interjection specifies the feeling of regret, the protagonist's anxiety in a structure that mimics a phraseologism "Ох, нелёгкое это дело/ох, нелёгкая это работа..." (Oh, this work is hard):

Рот твой слабый и лоб твой белый

надо будет скорей забыть.

Ох, нелегкое это дело —

самодержцем российским быть!.. (Your weak mouth and your white forehead / Shall be soon forgotten / Okh, this is hard to do)".

The poetic corpus is rich in examples, it contains 89,124 document with a total of 12,407,747 words, out of which 513 texts contain the okh interjection, the number of occurrences is 772.

In its own turn, multimedia corpus is also rich in content: there are 1,098 documents totaling at 5,114,560 words, out of which there are 952 occurrences of the okh interjection.

«(Фекла, жен) Ох/ ох! Скачут! Аспиды! Ох/ ох! Скачут/ впереди! На рыжем жеребце! Змий с усищами! Ишь/ зенки-то вылупил. ((Fyokla, female) Okh, okh / They are riding / Vipers! / Okh, okh, They are riding in front! / On a chestnut steed! / A moustached viper! / Look, he is goggling) (Nina Sorotokina, Svetlana Druzhinina, Yury Nagibin. *Guardes-Marines, Ahead!*, TV movie (1987))".

Examples in the multimedia corpus are accompanied with video fragments, thus, there is little place left for ambiguity in understanding the scene included into the Corpus. For the quoted episode, it fair to say that the okh interjection serves to express the feeling of indignation, annoyance, spite, contemptuous mockery. A fragment of the female character's lively reaction is filled with a number of clearly attitudinal vocabulary, such as *аспиды, змий, зенки вылупил* (vipers, serpent, goggling), the structure of the phrase and its content communicate enmity to the characters to whom the speech was addressed. Stylistic nuance of the vocabulary is emphasized by emotional use of interjections that have no attitudinal meaning of their own but are capable of emphasizing attitudinal nature of utterance as a whole.

«(Нянька Вера (Галина Демина), жен, 62, 1925) Ох/ милый!

(Корсак (Дмитрий Харатьян), муж, 27, 1960) Куда Софью увезли? (Nanny Vera (Galina Demina), female, 62, 1925) Okh, my darling! / (Korsak (Dmitry Kharatian), male, 27, 1960) Where did they transport Sophia?)

(Nina Sorotokina, Svetlana Druzhinina, Yury Nagibin. *Guardes-Marines, Ahead!*, TV movie (1987))".

In the example above, the interjection emphasizes emotional component of both the individual phrase starting the dialog and the dialog as a whole, as it develops in the tone reflecting feelings of the characters, their confusion, attempt to overcome troubles, readiness to action in the face of obstacles.

A single interjection okh is already a significant value among the total number of occurrences and is recorded in a significant share of texts in the corpora listed above it amounts to 0.0027 % of words, which is a lot, as the total amount of words is 675,098,153. If take a per-text statistic, the percentage is even higher: the okh interjection is found in 0.68 % of the total number of texts in the main, oral, newspaper, regional, dialect, poetic and multimedia corpora taken as a total.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the research results confirm a hypothesis that frequency of use of the okh interjection depends on the breadth of its semantic combinability. Quantitative data illustrate frequency distribution per periods, functional styles and genres. Capabilities of corpus linguistics allowed analyzing individual functional and intentional characteristics of the okh interjection as a means of expression for subjective attitude of a Russian speaker.

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