
Øv – A PROBLEM FOR CATEGORIZATION

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Abstract: The Danish word *øv* is traditionally categorized as an interjection. However, in a set of data primarily from chat conversations, several instances of *øv* do not match any traditional definition of interjections: It is syntactically integrated and thus does not constitute a full utterance on its own, and its semantic-pragmatic use is more nuanced than “expressing an aspect of the speaker’s mental state”. The main part of the article is a functionally-based analysis of these instances of *øv*, the insights from which are used to question the general practice of lexical categorization. I argue that a pragmatically based model of categorization is better able to account for the full range of uses for a word form.

1. Introduction

It is a common and usually undisputed practice to sort lexemes into lexical categories (or parts of speech, or word classes, or syntactic categories etc. depending on the theoretical framework). While the universality and the exact boundaries of the individual categories are frequently discussed topics, the labels of noun, verb, adjective, and so on, are widely used. Even theories that seek to describe and categorize linguistic units in other terms tend to use the traditional classes in some way, if only as easy short-hands.

Despite the almost axiomatic usage of lexical categories, it is also common knowledge that some words can function as members of more than one category, and that some words do not fit neatly into any one category. However, it is often the case that the word in question can be seen as belonging mostly to one specific category, or as derived from a word clearly fitting into one category. In this article, I will argue that this is not the case for the Danish word *øv*. *Øv* is traditionally defined as an interjection (*Den Danske Ordbog* ‘The Danish Dictionary’; Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1140). However, in data I have collected primarily from 1-on-1 chat messages between 18 individuals, *øv* is used in several ways that do not fit any traditional definition of interjections, neither Danish nor cross-linguistic. I argue that it does not

fit into any other traditionally defined category either. The bulk of this article will be a functionally-based analysis of the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of several instances of $\emptyset v$ found in my data. With the result of this analysis as motivation, the final part of the article will discuss the categorization of $\emptyset v$, and briefly the practice of categorization in general.

2. Interjections

Linguists categorize and have categorized lexemes based on a wide range of features. Some have taken the morphology and inflection of a lexeme to be the most crucial defining characteristic, others focus on syntactic distribution, others again semantics, and so on. Although some theoretical frameworks weigh some of these features heavier than others as criteria, most also acknowledge that any one criterion is insufficient on its own, and most linguists at least consider all these aspects in their categorization (Lehmann 2013:142). Just as the different criteria are prioritized differently, the definitions of specific categories can vary from theory to theory and also from language to language. Since this article will frequently refer to “traditional categories” and “traditional definitions”, this section will provide an overview of what is meant by that with respect to interjections, cross-linguistically and specifically for Danish interjections. The account for Danish interjections will be based primarily on Hansen and Heltoft’s 2011 reference grammar *Grammatik over det Danske Sprog* (‘Grammar of the Danish Language’; henceforth HH). The cross-linguistic account will draw on several different authors.

As Ameka (1992:101) states, the interjections category is often unaddressed in traditional grammars. The term has been used by different scholars for a wide range of items, and cross-theoretically there is considerable overlap between interjections and other categories. Some even consider interjections paralinguistic, and their semantics and functions have been wildly discussed as well. Amidst this mess, however, it is still possible to find claims about interjections that are mostly agreed upon. Most accounts distinguish between primary and secondary interjections. Primary interjections are usually defined as “not used otherwise”, are typically short in form and without inflectional or derivational morphology, and may exhibit phonology and morphology not found otherwise in the language in question (Hansen 1998:38; Wilkins 1992:124). Some examples from English are “Wow!” and “Ugh!”. Secondary interjections, on the other hand, “[belong] to other word classes”, or are entire phrases that “may conventionally be used as exclamations” (Hansen 1998:38; see also Wilkins 1992:125). English examples are ‘Nice!’, as a case of an adjective used as an interjection, or ‘Oh my God!’, as a case of a phrase used as such. Following this common practice, this article will be referring to primary interjections when using the term ‘interjections’.

The term interjections is used to refer to grammatical categories on various levels, ranging from lexical class, to minor or peripheral clause type, over particles, pragmatic markers, and discourse markers (cf. Ameka 1992, Norrick 2009, Fraser 1990, Hilmisdóttir 2007, Hansen 1998, among others). Ameka (1992:107), who classifies interjections as a lexical class and a type of pragmatic markers, further defines them as a subcategory of what he calls routines. Routines are, together with particles, a subtype of pragmatic markers, defined by their ability to occur alone as a complete utterance, whereas particles are syntactically integrated. The ability to constitute a complete utterance on their own is also a widely, if not universally, accepted syntactic criterion for interjections. HH state that this is the primary, and historically the sole, criterion for the category, although HH do not consider all one-word utterances (*etfeltshelheder*) interjections (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1133). Among their examples of non-interjections are performative routines like *Skål!* ('Cheers!'); imperative verbs; and what they consider adjectives with ellipsis, like *Fedt!* (Literally 'Fat!', used with a meaning similar to 'Awesome!').¹ Although interjections can constitute a whole utterance, HH state that they can also be adjacent to another utterance that they frame or comment on. In that case they have one possible syntactic position, immediately preceding the utterance ("left of the sentence", Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1131). In Danish grammatical tradition, this is called the left interjectional position (*venstre interjektionalplads*, Hansen and Heltoft 2011:328). This utterance may be a sentence or an infinite element such as an adverbial or a noun phrase: for instance *aha* in, *aha, det er en andengradsligning!* 'aha, it is a quadratic equation!'; *nå* in *nå, nu til sagen!* 'well, let's get to it!' (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1139). A subset of interjections, which HH call neutral interjections, can also be placed at the very end of the utterance, in the right interjectional position (*højre interjektionalplads*, Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1125). This group mainly contains answer tokens such as *yes*, *no* and *okay*.

Regarding the semantics and pragmatics of interjections, most accounts are compatible with the claim that they express an aspect of the speaker's mental state in a spontaneous and instinctive way. "Expressing a mental state" can be seen simply as conveying an emotion or change in the speaker's mind (such as obtaining new information, being surprised, feeling pain), and additionally, as Cruz (2009:25) defines it, as encoding the speaker's attitude towards something. Some argue that interjections are semantically vague, which enables them to be used in many different, even mutually exclusive contexts (Cruz 2009:244). Others, such as Wierzbicka (1992), have attempted to give more specific semantic accounts of individual interjections. Wilkins (1992:153), following Wierzbicka's work with interjections and her Natural Semantic Metalanguage programme, argues that interjections are "built semantically out of basic deictic elements". For instance, the interjection

yippee can be semantically defined as ‘Something *here* has made *me* feel excited *here* and *now* and I say “yippee” to show *my* feelings *now*’ (Wilkins 1992:132). As for pragmatics, Ameka (1992:109) distinguishes between interjections and other types of routines (formulae) in that interjections “are spontaneous immediate responses to situations while the formulae are intentional and socially expected reactions to situations”. He thus limits the term interjections to what can be called response cries like *wow!* and *ouch!*, and excludes answer tokens (*yes, no*), greetings, and other items such as *sorry* from the category, all of which many other authors do call interjections. Cf. HH’s categorization of answer tokens as neutral interjections – though they also state that answer tokens can function as performative routines (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1134). Neutral interjections are one of HH’s two subtypes of interjections, containing *ja, jo* ‘yes’, *nej* ‘no’, *okay*, and *nå*.² The other subtype is subjective interjections, which are further divided into the groups emotive interjections, which are used to express the speaker’s emotional mental state, and communicative interjections, which are used to characterize the adjacent utterance in terms of its discursive function, e.g. as an objection to something in the preceding context (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1132). In comparison, Ameka (1992:114) divides interjections into three categories: expressive, which are “vocal gestures” expressing the speaker’s emotive or information state, such as “Wow!” or “Aha!”; conative, which “demand an action or response” from the recipient, such as “Sh!” or “Huh?”; and phatic, which establishes and maintains communicative contact, e.g. backchannels and continuers such as “mhm” and some uses of “yeah”. Wilkins (1992:153) holds that interjections “are speech acts, [...] convey complete propositions and have an illocutionary purpose”, while others, such as McGregor (1997:129, 118), argue that they cannot have truth value or express “most of the major speech act types”.³

In summary, the most crucial and most commonly agreed on criteria for interjections are that they can (and must) constitute a full utterance on their own, i.e. they are not syntactically integrated in a larger structure, and that they express an aspect of the speaker’s mental state. In the rest of the article, I will show that *øv* does not fulfill the first criterion, and that the second criterion is not very useful for defining a lexical category.

3. Case study: *øv*

3.1. Data and method

The data used for the present study (henceforth “my own data”) consist primarily of written conversations conducted through the chat application Facebook Messenger. Part of the data are also Facebook messages, but written in private “groups” rather than in the chat application. This part of the data was kindly provided by Maria Jørgensen. See Jørgensen (2017) for her treatment of the data. The conversations were volunteered by the participants

and contain messages from 18 individuals. Apart from this, one example is a headline from the website of the Danish public service *Danmarks Radio* at dr.dk; another is from a TV reality show, both publicly available online. In addition to my own data, I look at examples from two corpora: SamtaleBank, a subsection of TalkBank, which is a corpus of video and audio recordings of spoken conversations, available at samtalebank.talkbank.org; and KorpusDK, a selected collection of written texts, available at ordnet.dk/korpusdk.

Traditionally, the form *øv* is categorized as an interjection. According to its entry in *Den Danske Ordbog* (DDO), etymologically it is “sound mimicking”, and it is “used to express vexation/disappointment [da. *ærgrelse*] and displeasure.” DDO’s phonetic transcription of *øv* is [œw], and DDO lists *æv* [ɛw] as a synonym. My data contains instances of *æv*, but much fewer than *øv*. I have no instances of *æv* used in a way that *øv* is not, but I also do not have of *æv* used in all the ways I have seen *øv* used. Therefore I will not exclude the possibility of the two forms being distinct, whether syntactically, semantically, or pragmatically, but for the purposes of this analysis I will assume that *æv* is in free variation with *øv*.

Øv fulfills the traditional criteria for an interjection: It is short, does not inflect, can constitute a whole utterance on its own, and it can express the speaker’s mental state. However, in my data *øv* occurs in syntactically integrated positions, and in uses that are more nuanced than simply expressions of displeasure. I observe three types of “non-prototypical” uses of *øv*: as a predicate complement; as a head with a prepositional phrase complement; and as a nominal modifier. In the rest of this section, I characterize and exemplify these types in terms of their syntax and semantic-pragmatic functions. I do this through a functionally-based analysis. By functionally-based, I mean that I consider *øv*’s function, particularly its pragmatic function, most salient for its definition and classification. Consequently, considering the context of specific instances of *øv* is crucial for the analysis, as the function of something is only apparent in context. It would be impossible for someone encountering a hammer for the first time to determine how to use it and why, without also having access to nails and some sort of surface to hammer those nails into. As Givón (2014:50) states:

“[g]rammar is not, primarily, about extracting the information of ‘who did what to whom when and where and how’. Rather, the functional scope of grammar is [...] about the *coherence relations* of the information in the clause to its surrounding discourse”.

Therefore, while my analyses are of single utterances, the context of these will always be taken into account.

Sections 3.2. through 3.6. address the different types of uses found in the data, 3.2. being a brief account of prototypically interjectional use. All Danish examples are accompanied by my own glossing and translation. Where appropriate, the instances of *øv* will be translated into various English expressions with an approximate meaning in the context of the given example.

3.2. *Øv* as prototypical interjection

All examples elicited by a search for *øv* in the two corpora fit the traditional definition of interjections.⁴ Examples are given in (1-6). Throughout the article, the word *øv* is glossed ØV, as no simple translation will do; for the same reason all prepositions are glossed PREP.

(1) *anne_og_beate.cha*

- 89 *BE: *jeg skal aflevere den °for at komme*
 I must hand.in it.C PREP to come
 til eksamen°↘
 PREP exam
90 (0.8)
91 *AN: *det er en obligatorisk en→*
 it COP a mandatory one
92 *BE: *&=host m*
 cough
93 (0.6)
94 → *AN: *ej øv*
 EJ ØV

BE: 'I have to hand it in to attend the exam'

AN: 'it is a mandatory one'

(BE coughs)

AN: 'aw man'

(SamtaleBank)

- (2) *Hun ved, hun skal sige nej. Men tænker: øv.*
she knows she must say no. but thinks ØV
'She knows she must say no. But thinks: darn'

- (3) *øv det ved du ikke noget om*
ØV it.N know you not any.N PREP
'Boo, you don't know anything about that.'

(KorpusDK)

My own data contains similar examples, all from written Facebook chat messages:

- (4) A: [...] så jeg synes det var meget ubehageligt
so I think it.N was very unpleasant-N
B: øv ☹
ØV
A: '[...] so I thought it was very unpleasant.'
B: øv ☹
- (5) Åh øv, jeg ville være sikker på ikke at komme
ÅH ØV I wanted be sure PREP not to come
for sent og så er jeg 30 min for tidligt ...
too late and so am I 30 min too soon
'Aw man, I wanted to be sure I was not late, and then I am
30 minutes early ...'
- (6) nej, øv hvor kan man godt mærke
no ØV where can PRO.GEN good feel
at vi ikke var der...
that we not were there
'No, øv, you can sure feel we were not there ...'

3.2.1. Syntax

In all examples, øv functions as a full utterance. In (1) and (5), øv is preceded by another interjection, i.e. the interjection *ej* in (1) and the interjection *åh* in (5), and the examples can be interpreted as two adjacent interjections (followed by a clausal utterance in (5)). In (4) øv is adjacent to an emoticon. In (2) øv stands alone, embedded in a clause as reported speech. In (3) and (6), øv is followed by an adjacent utterance in accordance with HH's account. In the cases where øv is followed by an utterance, that utterance can stand alone and is syntactically independent from øv.

3.2.2. Semantics and pragmatics

In all cases, øv expresses displeasure. In examples (2-3) and (5-6), the speaker is expressing displeasure over something affecting them, while (1) and (4) are responses to the recipient relaying something negative they have been affected by. In the latter case, the displeasure being expressed can still be seen as part of the speaker's mental state, if it is assumed that the responses are expressions not just of sympathy, but of empathy: The speaker shares the

recipient's attitude towards the described situation. In fact, if the traditional view that interjections express the speaker's mental state is assumed, this is the only possible interpretation. Alternatively, (1) and (4) can be interpreted as indexing the recipient rather than the speaker, this difference being inferable from the context. This would give *øv* a very different semantic and pragmatic value than traditionally described. This interpretation seems plausible in light of the analysis of my own data, but for now I draw no premature conclusions. Instead I move on to the non-traditional examples of *øv*.

3.3. *Øv* as predicate complement

In several instances, *øv* resembles a predicate complement:

- (7) *det er øv at du skal holde igen med træning*
it.N is ØV that you must hold again PREP training
'It is frustrating that you need to hold back on working out.'
- (8) *Er det øv?*
is it.N ØV
'Is it *øv*?'
- (9) *han er super øv!*
he is super ØV
'He is super annoying!'
- (10) *men er det ikke lidt øv at komme med en tegning?*
but is it.N not slightly ØV to come
PREP a drawing
'But is it not somewhat bad style to bring a drawing?'
- (11) *Jeg bliver faktisk rigtig øv når hun siger det*
I become actually really ØV when she says it.N
'I actually get really upset when she says that.'

(7) through (10) are written messages from private Facebook chats, while (11) is the sole spoken example in my data, uttered by a contestant on the TV reality show *Paradise Hotel*. In my experience, all the written examples are also common in casual speech.

3.3.1. Syntax

Syntactically, *øv* in these examples acts as a predicate complement. In (7-10), *øv* is assigned to the role of predicate complement by the copula *er* 'is'. In (11), the verb *bliver* 'becomes' also designates *øv* as the predicate complement. In Danish, the material filling the predicate complement position is often an adjective, and the above examples are some of several cases of *øv* behaving

something like an adjective. As (9) and (10) show, *øv* is even gradable like an adjective, here modified by the adverbs *super* and *lidt* ‘a little’. In (7-10), *øv* could be replaced by an adjective of similar meaning, such as *ubehageligt* ‘unpleasant’, and largely retain the meaning of the sentence (the case of (11) is slightly different and is addressed further below):

(7') *det er ubehageligt at du skal holde igen med træning*

(8') *Er det ubehageligt?*

(9') *han er super ubehagelig!*

(10') *men er det ikke lidt ubehageligt at komme med en tegning?*

Unlike prototypical adjectives, *øv* does not inflect to agree with its subject.⁵ For some Danish adjectives, this inflection is optional, but it does not seem to be even possible for *øv*; at least in my data, the form **øvt* does not occur.⁶

3.3.2. Semantics and pragmatics

While the meaning expressed by these instances of *øv* are all related to displeasure, it is slightly more nuanced than simply an expression of the speaker experiencing displeasure. This is in part due to *øv*'s role as a complement rather than a complete utterance: being syntactically connected to the subject of the sentence, *øv* characterizes this subject as something causing displeasure. Depending on the pragmatic context, different actors may be the one who experiences this displeasure. In (7) and (8), the affected party is the recipient, and the utterances are used to express sympathy with them, as in (7), or ask if there is reason to sympathize, as in (8). Although the focus here is on the recipients themselves, note that the construction *det er øv* ‘it is *øv*’ (with or without a following subordinate clause) can also be used to describe something about a person's situation. An example from a written chat conversation is given as (12):

(12) *Men vi er tjekket ud så har*
but we are checked out so have
ikke noget værelse, så det er lidt øv.
not any room so it.N is slightly ØV
‘But we are checked out, so we haven't got a room, so that is
a little annoying.’

In (9) there is no overt indicators as to who is affected, the sole focus lying on the subject being unpleasant. (10) is a proposal that a third party may be displeased by the speaker giving him a drawing for his birthday.

While *øv* in (11) is still predicated of the subject, *jeg* ‘I’, the meaning is not that the speaker is a cause of displeasure. Rather, the adverbial subordinate clause

når hun siger det ‘when she says that’ specifies a circumstance that causes the speaker (i.e. the subject) displeasure. Consequently, *øv* cannot be replaced by *ubehagelig* and retain the meaning of the utterance. The sentence *jeg bliver faktisk rigtig ubehagelig når hun siger det* would indeed mean that the subject becomes unpleasant towards others “when [the other person] says that”. On the other hand, *øv* can still be replaced by another adjective that is also semantically related to *øv*: the sentence *jeg bliver faktisk rigtig ærgerlig* (‘cross’) *når hun siger det* would have a similar meaning to (11).

3.4. *Øv* as head with prepositional phrase

Øv can also precede a prepositional phrase:

- (13) *øv med det ked af det hed*
ØV PREP it.N KED⁷ PREP it.N ness
‘Sucks about that sadness [i.e. it sucks that you are sad]’
- (14) *øv til det første*
ØV PREP it.N first-DEF
‘*Øv* to the first part.’
- (15) *øv for dig*
ØV PREP you
‘Sucks for you.’
- (16) *Øv for hans headset*
ØV PREP his headset
‘Sucks about his headset.’
- (17) *Æv på dig*
ÆV PREP you
‘Boo on you.’

All examples are written Facebook chat messages.

3.4.1. Syntax

In all the examples in this group, *øv* appears with a prepositional phrase consisting of a preposition and a nominal (on the structure of the prepositional phrase, see Hansen and Heltoft 2011:103). The nominal (henceforth N) can be a noun with or without modifiers, or a pronoun. Some restrictions apply as to when it can be a noun or a pronoun, but these appear to be semantic or pragmatic in nature (cf. Hansen and Heltoft 2011:278). As for what material role *øv* plays in these examples, and considering *øv*’s possible paradigmatic relationship with adjectives discussed above, it is relevant to ask whether other adjectives can occur in constructions like this. While to my ear the sentences *ubehageligt med N* and *ubehageligt for dig* are grammatical, I am more doubtful

about *?ubehageligt til N* and *?ubehageligt på dig*. Again, this may be a question of semantic or pragmatic restrictions.

In example (13), the construction matches what HH calls antisubject (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1227). I will not go into their full and somewhat complicated account of antisubject here, but according to this interpretation of (13), the utterance is semantically equivalent with *Det ked af det hed er øv* 'That sadness is ØV'. However, according to HH's account, only the preposition *med* 'with' forms antisubjects, while my data shows examples of constructions with various other prepositions, which, as will be shown in 3.4.2., have very similar meanings to (13). Based on my observations, these are fairly common expressions in Danish, both with *øv* and with other elements in its place (e.g. *godt for dig* 'good for you' or *hvad sker der for det?* 'what's up with that?'), but to my knowledge, these phenomena are not described in any Danish reference grammar. HH do describe a related construction, that of antiobjects, being formed with prepositions other than *med*, but antiobjects are somewhat different from the prepositional phrase constructions in examples (14-17). Therefore, I will treat examples (13-17) as instances of a novel construction and analyze them independently of the notion of antisubject and antiobject, though keeping in mind that the phenomenon may be related to the former.

Øv in (13-17) seems to be the core constituent of the utterances, wherefore I argue that *øv* should be seen as a syntactic head with a prepositional phrase complement. Another interpretation is it being a variant of the predicate complement constructions, with an ellipsed dummy subject and copula. This works for most of the examples:

- (13') *Det er øv med det ked af det hed*
'It sucks that you are sad'
- (15') *Det er øv for dig*
'It sucks for you.'
- (16') *Det er øv for hans headset*
'It sucks about his headset.'

As mentioned above, these three examples are the ones where a similar meaning is obtained if the adjective *ubehageligt* is used in *øv*'s place – in the remaining two examples, there also seems to be a difference in how and whether an ellipsis analysis makes sense. In the case of (14), the utterance could be interpreted as (*Jeg siger*) "*øv*" *til det første* '(I say) "ØV" to the first part', i.e. as the speaker summarizing their reaction to one part of the earlier discourse (cf. 3.4.2). However, (17) seems less probable as a case of ellipsis: *?(Det er) øv på dig* '(It is) ØV on you' does not clarify the meaning of the

utterance compared to the original example. Since all the examples in this group have comparable meanings, and further since the ellipsis analysis is not uncontroversial in grammatical theory in general, I will avoid assuming that any of the examples (13-17) are instances of ellipsis. While there might be difference between the constructions with *med*, *for*, or no preposition as opposed to those with *til* or *på*, I will, in this article, interpret $\emptyset v$ as the head in all examples, no ellipsis involved.

Finally, this leaves of course the question of what exactly $\emptyset v$ is the head of. It might be seen as heading the clause, which per Hengeveld (1992:68) would make $\emptyset v$ a verb. However, there is otherwise little reason to call $\emptyset v$ a verb: it neither inflects like one nor does it refer to an action. Further, verbless utterances are perfectly common in Danish, especially in casual conversation (Samtalegrammatik.dk 2017a; Heltoft 2015). For this reason, I will simply call $\emptyset v$ in these constructions a head with a prepositional phrase complement.

3.4.2. Semantics and pragmatics

Here as well, $\emptyset v$ indicates that something or someone has caused someone else displeasure. The specific preposition determines who affects whom. This seems largely semantically encoded in the prepositions, but it is possible for the same preposition to be used with different meanings, suggesting that the pragmatic context is also crucial.

The construction $\emptyset v \textit{ med } N$ in (13) is used when the recipient has talked about N , and N or some situation relating to N has a negative impact on the recipient. The speaker can use the construction to express sympathy for the recipient.

At first glance $\emptyset v \textit{ til } N$ in (14) has the same function, only in cases where the recipient has talked about both N and one or more other things, and the speaker wants to comment specifically on N . However, as mentioned above, $\emptyset v$'s syntactic behavior is different in adjacency with *til* as opposed to *med*. The fact that *?Det er $\emptyset v \textit{ til } N$* may not be a possible construction, but *Det er $\emptyset v \textit{ med } N$* seems to be, suggests that $\emptyset v \textit{ med } N$ is more "predicate-like", while the meaning expressed by $\emptyset v \textit{ til } N$ is more along the lines of 'I say $\emptyset v$ to N ' (cf. Wierzbicka (1992) and Wilkins (1992) on the semantics of interjections). Nevertheless, the illocutionary function of $\emptyset v \textit{ til } N$ is also to express sympathy with the recipient.

$\emptyset v \textit{ for } N$ is also used to express sympathy but has two possible meanings depending on the semantics of the nominal. In (15), *dig* 'you' is not the source of displeasure, but rather the person affected by it. It expresses that it is bad to be in the recipient's situation. This cannot be the case for (16), as *hans headset* 'his headset' is not an animate being capable of subjective experience, and

the context – the recipient having just mentioned that someone’s headset has broken – suggests that it should be interpreted the same way as if the preposition *med* had been used. The difference seems to depend on whether the nominal is animate or inanimate, and not whether it is a noun phrase or a pronoun: In *øv for hans headset*, the noun phrase could be replaced by the pronoun *det* and the utterance would retain its meaning. It is unclear whether the reverse is true, i.e. whether *øv for N[ANIMATE]* can only mean that N is experiencing displeasure, and there are no concrete examples in my data to examine with this question in mind.

Example (17) suggests that this animacy restriction is not universal for all prepositions: Here, the speaker uses *øv på dig* to signal that the recipient has done something that causes the speaker displeasure. This is a similar meaning as the *øv med N* construction, except that the affected party is the speaker, not the recipient. Thus (17) is not an expression of sympathy, but in terms of illocutionary acts rather an accusation or reproach. My data has no examples of *øv på N* where N is a noun, so further research is necessary to determine if the construction can only mean that N is a cause of displeasure.

Returning to the issue that it seems *øv* can be replaced by an adjective in constructions with *med* or *for* but not in constructions with *til* or *på*, in *til*’s case it may be explained by *øv* here having a more prototypically interjection-like function than in the other examples. *Øv på dig* is less straightforward to explain, but it was suggested to me that it may be a calque from English (cf. *Shame on you*), making it syntactically anomalous. *Øv på dig* may also be dialectal, sociolectal, or even idiolectal, as, based my own casual investigation, it is not accepted by all speakers.

3.5. Øv as nominal modifier

In the last type of constructions, *øv* acts as a modifier inside a noun phrase:

- (18) *Jeg har haft en mega øv dag,*
I have had an extremely ØV day
med dårlig undervisning
PREP bad teaching
'I have had a really bad day with bad teaching'
- (19) *En underlig følelse af øv når man*
a weird feeling of ØV when PRO.GEN
finder ud af at jeg er
finds out PREP that I am
fuldt vaccineret
fully vaccinated
'A weird feeling of *øv* when you find out that I am fully vaccinated.'

- (20) *Drake har det altid værre: 5 sange*
Drake[name] has it.N always worse 5 song-PL
der redder din øv-dag
PRO.REL save your ØV-day
'Drake is always feeling worse: 5 songs that will save your
sucky day'

(18) and (19) are written chat messages, while (20) is the headline of an entertainment article on dr.dk (Danmarks Radio 2017).

3.5.1. Syntax

While *øv* modifies a nominal in all these examples, the constructions are syntactically diverse. In (18), *øv* modifies *dag* the same way an adjective might: cf. *en mega træls dag* 'a really unpleasant day', *en mega god dag* 'a really good day'. In (20), *øv* also modifies *dag*, but as part of a compound. The two morphemes are linked by a hyphen, suggesting some degree of disconnect between them. Here, *øv* cannot be replaced with just any adjective: **træls-dag*,⁸ **trælsdag*; **dejlig-dag* 'nice-day'. Several adjectives do form compounds with *dag* (*dagligdag* 'everyday'; *fridag* lit. "free day", 'day off') but the formation is not unrestrictedly productive, while NOUN-*dag* compounding arguably is. In (19), *øv* is in a prepositional phrase with *af*, modifying *følelse* 'feeling'. Again *øv* is not replaceable with an adjective (**en underlig følelse af underlig* 'a weird feeling of weird'), being in a usually nominal position (cf. *en underlig følelse af ærgelse* 'a weird feeling of vexation'). A difference between this group and the previous ones is that the modified nominal is a new entity introduced to the discourse. In the previous examples, the entity associated with *øv* was pre-established in the discourse. This was signaled syntactically by anaphora or by the speaker repeating the phrasing used by the recipient. In contrast, the indefinite article *en* is used in (18) and (19). Being the headline of an article, (20) begins a new discourse.

3.5.2. Semantics and pragmatics

In all three examples, *øv* acts as a modifier that indicates something is a cause of displeasure. In (18) and (20), *dag* 'day' is modified to mean 'an unpleasant day'. In (19), *øv* also modifies (*en underlig*) *følelse*, but just like the syntax is different, so are the semantics slightly different from the other two examples. The feeling is not necessarily unpleasant; rather the situation the speaker describes is. The "feeling of *øv*" is weird because the situation is essentially good, but its consequences are negative. The semantic and syntactic differences may be related, as a prepositional phrase following the head noun can be said to have larger scope and be less closely connected to the head than a modifier preceding it (Rijkhoff 2008:14).

3.6. A misfit

One frequently occurring construction is similar to the examples of $\emptyset v$ as a predicate complement and as a head with a prepositional phrase, but it is not straightforward to place in either group. An example from my data is given as (21):

- (21) $\emptyset v$ at I er syge
 $\emptyset V$ that you are sick
 ‘Sucks that you guys are sick’

At first glance, it resembles the predicate complement construction with the subject and copula ellipted. Upon closer examination, however, it may share more characteristics with the prepositional phrase construction.

A traditional interpretation of (21) might be as an interjection + a free-standing nominal. Intonation may play a role for how to interpret the syntax of the construction. Of course, (21) being a written example, there is no intonation to base an interpretation on. However, I have informally observed spoken examples of $\emptyset v$ at *S*, where it has sounded to me to be uttered without a break in intonation. For the sake of this analysis, I will go with this admittedly imperfect theory about the intonation. Ideally, a formal analysis of the intonation of $\emptyset v$ at *S*-constructions should be conducted in the future to investigate the matter closer. For now, I will discuss example (21) using the information available.

On the role of intonation for interjections, HH state that a continuous intonation pattern encompassing both interjection and adjacent utterance (“utterance topic”) signals a connection between the two, making them interpretable as one utterance (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1115). But in $\emptyset v$ at *I er syge*, $\emptyset v$ appears integrated into the clause rather than simply connected to it. Consider HH’s example *nåh, et lille lam ’aww, a little lamb’* (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1113).⁹ Both here and in (21) the utterance topic acts as a nominal; in (21) it is a subordinate clause, in HH’s example a bare noun phrase. DDO states that a subordinate clause introduced by *at* often acts as the true subject of the clause. If $\emptyset v$ had the same function as HH’s *nåh*, an utterance of the form $\emptyset v$, *I er syge* would be less marked. Given this and the fact that the form $\emptyset v$ at *S* where *S* is a clause is frequent in my data and general observations, I hold that it is a construction type different and separate from HH’s example.

Following this analysis, example (5) $\emptyset v$ *hvor kan man godt mærke at vi ikke var der* could be interpreted the same way, as an interjection with a complement, rather than an interjection commenting on an utterance topic as per HH. Both *at I er syge* and *hvor kan man godt mærke at vi ikke var der* could stand alone as an exclamation expressing a degree of surprise or intensity with stress on *at* and *kan*, respectively. Assuming the traditional definition of interjections,

HH's analysis makes sense, but if $\emptyset v$ can function as shown in section 3.4., the other interpretation may be more likely. It seems to me that there would be a difference in the stress pattern between the utterances with $\emptyset v$ and without $\emptyset v$, so a closer study of the intonation could be relevant.

In summary, I find two possible interpretations of $\emptyset v$ at *I er syge*, not counting the traditional one: i) $\emptyset v$ as a predicate complement with dummy subject and copula ellipted, or ii) an independent interjection with a complement, perhaps the same construction as the one in 3.4. with the preposition ellipted. Which of the analyses is more appropriate may depend on the pragmatic function(s) of the construction, but since examples in sections 3.3. and 3.4. both are used the same way as (21) – as sympathizing responses – there does not seem to be enough basis for a decisive conclusion.

3.7. Summary: Characteristics of $\emptyset v$

According to my analysis, $\emptyset v$ can appear in more positions than “left of the utterance”, appearing syntactically integrated into the clause. It can resemble an adjective in predicate complement position or modifying a nominal, or resemble a modifying noun inside a prepositional phrase or part of a compound. It can also fulfill a function not resembling that of any specific other lexical category: In the examples in section 3.4., $\emptyset v$ is placed to the left, but I argue that it acts as a head in a syntactic unit with the prepositional phrase, rather than as an adjacent utterance.

$\emptyset v$ fails Ameka's criteria of being a “spontaneous immediate response”, as its syntactic integration suggests more planning than that – at the very least, nothing suggests that $\emptyset v$ is any more “spontaneous” than any given adjective, noun, or word of any other category. As for HH's distinction between emotive and communicative function, $\emptyset v$ straddles the two: it both expresses emotion on the speaker's part and is a reaction to previous discourse. In this sense, $\emptyset v$ is also problematic with regards to HH's distinction between subjective interjections as opposed to neutral interjections as responses to previous utterances (cf. Hansen and Heltoft 2011:§2). Additionally, $\emptyset v$ can be part of the starting utterance in a new discourse. It also fulfills both Ameka's expressive and phatic functions. When it acts as a head, $\emptyset v$'s pragmatic function fits Cruz' (2009) description of interjections as encoding the speaker's attitude towards something, if the intended meaning is interpreted as “I say $\emptyset v$ to N”. However, when it is in predicate or modifier position, it has this function only to the extent that an adjective also encodes the speaker's attitude towards something (the attitude being having the opinion that something is e.g. annoying or red in color) – or even to the extent that a noun encodes the speaker's attitude that the object the noun in question denotes exists in the world. Given that

“encoding the speaker’s attitude towards something” could in this sense be true for almost any word, it is not a sufficiently salient criterion for defining a lexical category.

If *øv* does not fit the traditional definition of an interjection, how can its usage be characterized instead? In all its syntactic functions, *øv* is semantically similar to an adjective like *ubehagelig(t)* ‘unpleasant’, though examples like (11) show that they are not synonymous, nor syntactically interchangeable. Instead, I argue that *øv* has something to do with a subjective experience of displeasure; pragmatically, it indicates that some specific thing is unpleasant. This does not contradict DDO’s account of *øv* as “expressing vexation or displeasure”, but *øv*’s function in my data is more nuanced than that, as it can assign the feeling of displeasure to either the speaker, the recipient, or both or neither.

In his proposal of interjections as deictics, Wilkins argues that interjections may originate from imperative verbs and that “it is just a short step from having one [argument filled] by extra-linguistic context [...] to having all arguments filled by extra-linguistic context” (1992:131). Following this, *øv* as a traditionally defined interjection would inherently index elements of the speech situation, resulting in a meaning à la ‘I am feeling displeasure about something here and now’. If *øv* as examined in the present article is derivative from this usage, the same deictic elements would be in play. It may explain cases like (11): If *øv* indexes the speaker as experiencing something unpleasant, then the speaker being the subject of *øv* would not make the speaker the cause in an unmarked situation. Compare *en øv dag* or *en trøls dag* ‘an unpleasant day’, with the semantically dubious *#en ærgerlig dag* ‘a vexed day’. *Ærgerlig* can replace *øv* in some circumstances but not others, relating to the two possible meanings of *ærgerlig*: *Det er ærgerligt* means something akin to ‘it is too bad’, i.e. the subject is a cause of disappointment, while *jeg er ærgerlig* means ‘I am vexed’, i.e. the subject is disappointed.¹⁰ Similarly, *øv* can describe both the cause and the affected, but more flexibly than *ærgerlig(t)*, requiring no change in morphological form. This characterization of both *øv* and *ærgerlig(t)* would be in keeping with Hengeveld and Rijkhoff’s (2005) view that hidden features of multifunctional words are triggered by contextual cues and only surface in context. The flexibility of *øv* could be explained by deictic information already being present in *øv*. Alternatively, consider McGregor’s (2013:245) view that nothing is hidden in a lexeme (multifunctional or not) and that particular meanings are the compounded results of its semantics, its syntactic environment, and pragmatic inferences. Following this, the different meanings of *øv* would be due to semantic and pragmatic restrictions imposed by the context, such as people being unlikely to disparage themselves, or, in the case of the uses of different prepositions, the animacy of the subject.

4. Categorizing $\emptyset v$

Having analyzed different examples of $\emptyset v$, I now turn to how – or whether – to place $\emptyset v$ in a lexical category. The fact that $\emptyset v$ need not stand alone would per Ameka's criterion make it a particle. His description of particles “expressing speaker attitudes or perspectives towards a proposition” matches what $\emptyset v$ seems to do in the discussed examples (Ameka 1992:107). However, particles do not normally have the adjective-like or nominal-like functions, nor the full syntactic distribution pattern $\emptyset v$ does, which counts against grouping them together. $\emptyset v$ in different positions seems to act more like a prototypical interjection, more like an adjective, occasionally more like a nominal (without otherwise bearing any striking resemblance to a noun). This could be a reason to assign several category labels to $\emptyset v$, arguing for overlapping categories; or more conservatively, calling $\emptyset v$ an “interjection with adjectival function” or something similar. But in my view $\emptyset v$'s resemblance to either interjections or adjectives is not strong enough to justify categorizing it as such. I argue for this in the next two sections.

4.1 $\emptyset v$ as an adjective

Throughout my analysis, I have compared $\emptyset v$ to adjectives. Yet, there are key differences between the two. As stated earlier, $\emptyset v$ does not inflect like most adjectives. Syntactically, $\emptyset v$ is sometimes but not always interchangeable with an adjective. This does not necessarily exclude $\emptyset v$ from the category: As Croft (2001:75) points out, distributional analysis “often reveals covert categories”. These subcategories may differ in their inflectional and distributional patterns. Consider that semantic restrictions influence the order in which adjectives can appear as modifiers in noun phrases (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:529; Bache 1978). For instance, the noun phrase *a big red dog/en stor, rød hund* is the unmarked choice compared to *a red big dog/en rød, stor hund* in both English and Danish. It could be that $\emptyset v$ is part of a subcategory of adjectives with fewer options for inflection and syntactic placement. In terms of semantics, $\emptyset v$ indicates a subjective experience of displeasure. “Indicating subjective experiences/properties” also characterizes a possible subcategory of adjectives that can be used as exclamations (i.e. interjectionally): The utterance *Træls!* (similar in meaning to *ubehagelig*, cf. note 8) is common, while *?Rød!* ‘Red!’ would require very specific circumstances. This may also be the rule determining which adjectives can occur in $\emptyset v$'s place in the discussed examples.

But once subcategorization is accepted, we are quickly faced with the challenge of deciding how similar or different lexemes need to be to justify calling them the same category, subclasses of the same category, or separate categories. While a subcategory of “adjectives of subjective experience” can be proposed, the correlation it predicts is not perfect. Recall the end of 3.7. on the meanings

of *ængerligt* versus *ængerlig* and corresponding uses of *øv*, as well as questionable utterances like *?ængerligt til N* and **ængerlig til N*. If the subcategory status of a given adjective determines whether it can be used like *øv*, this would imply that *ængerlig(t)* changes subcategory depending on its gender inflection. This seems like a problematic implication. Some do argue that inflection can make a difference in categorization, e.g. that gerund and participium verbal forms are better considered nouns and adjectives, respectively, but for *ængerlig(t)* the pattern is not extendable to other adjectives, weakening that interpretation. The analysis of *øv* as an adjective also fails to explain examples like (19) and (20) where *øv* syntactically behaves nothing like an adjective and in fact more like a noun. Overall, I see no clear and unambiguous pattern for *øv*'s likeness to an adjective and would not categorize it as such.

4.2. *Øv* as an interjection

As the main point of this article, I argue that *øv* does not match the traditional definition of an interjection. However, before discounting that label, it is relevant to ask whether the features of *øv* are shared with other forms traditionally called interjections. If so, the problem might be addressed by redefining the category.

In my own data and the corpora, the discussed constructions seem much less frequent with other interjections than *øv*. My data has two instances of the form *yay*, which is not Danish in origin, that resemble the prepositional phrase construction:

- (22) *Yay for dig!*
yay PREP you
'Yay for you!'
- (23) *Yay til det sidste og øv til
det første*
yay PREP it.N last-DEF and ØV PREP
it.N first-DEF
'Yay to the last part and *øv* to the last part.'

Following my own intuition, however, *øv* in the predicate compliment and prepositional phrase constructions can be replaced with another interjection such as *wow* or *nå*, under the right circumstances. DDO also recognizes *nå* as a modifier in the compound *nå-generation* 'indifferent-generation', structurally identical to example (20). Yet, some of the sentences would probably be less intuitively understandable than their *øv* counterparts. A sentence *er det nå?* 'is it *nå*?' might require a qualifying explanation to determine whether *nå* expresses indifference or disappointment or something else, while I doubt that *?nå at I er syge* '*nå* that you are sick' would be accepted at all. Using *nå*

in the prepositional phrase construction also seems unlikely, and I personally would struggle to accept several interjections as replacing *øv* as a predicate complement: e.g. *?Det er pyha* ‘it is phew’; *?Det er bøh* ‘it is boo’.¹¹

As with the adjective category, this does not necessarily mean *øv* does not belong to a subcategory of interjections. If *øv* indicates a subjectively unpleasant experience, perhaps only interjections expressing subjective experiences can be used in this way – in other words, those with emotive or expressive function. This excludes e.g. *bøh* ‘boo’. However, it does not explain why *nå* is only possible in some of the constructions discussed, as this interjection can express a subjective experience e.g. of indifference. While *nå* also has other, more discursive functions, its presence in a compound like *nå-generation* suggests that at least it can function like *øv* (cf. note ii). Likewise, *pyha* ‘phew’, which might be unacceptable in all the discussed constructions, expresses relief. HH mention *pyha* as an example of an interjection without illocutionary function, enabling it to be inserted amidst an utterance: *det var, pyha, godt at vi nåede toget* ‘it was, phew, good that we made the train’ (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1142). While there is nothing inherent in *pyha*’s semantics that would make it less illocutionary than *øv* (and I find HH’s example awkwardly worded at best), it cannot be denied with absolute certainty that this could explain the difference in syntactic distribution. Regardless, *nå* is a harder fit. Further study may uncover a clearer pattern and provide basis for redefining the interjections category, including possible semantic or functional subcategories, but for now it seems hard to fit *øv* into a paradigm of interjections as traditionally defined.

5. Final remarks

In conclusion, *øv* does not fit easily into any traditional lexical category. It is not the only word, neither in Danish nor other languages, for which this is the case. Instead of treating these cases as misfits or exceptions to the existing classification system, it might make more sense to reconsider the system altogether. Categorizing individual lexemes tells us something about certain aspects of their behavior, depending on which criteria we use to categorize them, making it somewhat of a circular practice. Many lexemes, *øv* included, are multifunctional. This is not necessarily a problem for describing those lexemes, but if we are to categorize them, too heavily overlapping categories render themselves useless. An approach to this is to consider individual lexemes unspecified and only having the potential for being categorized in context (see e.g. Jensen 2016). However, this approach does not eliminate the need for categorization, only postpones it. While there may be languages whose individual lexemes can carry out any possible function, this is clearly not always the case, and *øv* specifically carry out functions that are not straightforwardly definable as either interjectional or adjectival or similar. As mentioned, categorization can be done on the basis of many different

criteria. Staying with the pragmatic-functional focus of my own analysis, an alternative to the above is doing away with the traditional categories altogether and instead creating new, pragmatic categories. This has already been done in various grammatical theories: In Moore and Carling (1982:161) a radical form of instructional semantics would describe all words as having procedural as opposed to declarative meaning, being “instructions” to the recipient as to how to interpret and react to utterances. Meaning is seen not as fixed and stored in the forms themselves, but instead as triggered in the mind of the recipient and more dependent on context. Other proposals are Croft’s (2001) Radical Construction Grammar and McGregor’s (1997) Semiotic Grammar. By adopting a pragmatic categorization system, it becomes less crucial to distinguish between paralinguistic and “wholly” linguistic behavior, as things like laughter, hesitation markers, body language etc. are certainly meaningful and can too be analyzed as a kind of instructions, while analyzing them as linguistic signs in the traditional sense may be harder to argue for (Hansen 1998:245). However, many existing theories only briefly or not at all address “minor word classes” such as interjections, and therefore cases like *øv*, or they, despite their innovative approach to categorization, use the traditional labels, the definitions of which restrict how e.g. *øv* can possibly be described. The use of the traditional categories has a long history. Eschewing them altogether would be a massive undertaking – but perhaps worthwhile in creating a complete and satisfactory functionally-based model of categorization.

Notes

- ¹ HH’s account contrasts with that of Christensen and Christensen, which consider expletives and formulaic social expressions interjections (2014:156).
- ² For meanings and uses of *nå*, see *samtalegrammatik.dk* 2013a, 2013b, and 2017b; and Mølgaard 2016. For meanings and uses of *okay*, see Mortensen and Mortensen 2009.
- ³ Note that McGregor states that all utterances do have illocutionary force.
- ⁴ An exception may be *Øv for alle!* in *KorpusDK*, which could be analyzed as an instance of the construction described in section 3.4.
- ⁵ This also seems to be the case for newer adjectives borrowed from English, e.g. *nice* and *cool*.
- ⁶ According to DDO certain adjectives such as *lilla* cannot take the *-t* suffix, but in my experience the form *lillat* is acceptable to some speakers, whereas *øvt* has not been accepted by anyone I have asked.
- ⁷ The lexeme *ked* is an adjective that only exists in idiomatic expressions such as *ked af det* ‘sad’ and some derivations such as *(at) kede* ‘(to) bore’.
- ⁸ According to DDO *træls* is associated with unpleasantness, monotony, etc.
- ⁹ Note that the comma does not mark a break in intonation.

- ¹⁰ Note the animacy difference between *det* and *jeg*, and the ungrammaticality of **hun er ærgerligt* ‘she is ærgerlig-N’ (but *det er ærgerligt med hende* ‘it is too bad with her’).
- ¹¹ ”Boo” is here meant in the sense of a scary sound, not as the disapproving exclamation.

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