

## Parts unknown: re-centering “minor” word classes to rejuvenate grammar-writing and comparative linguistics

Classical models of grammar have been highly influential in grammar-writing and typology, focusing major descriptive and comparative efforts on categories like verb, noun and adjective and on staples of Standard Average European like the copula or comparatives and superlatives. Even if typological work in recent decades has questioned the a priori status and universality of some of these categories (Dryer 1997; Croft & van Lier 2012; Haspelmath 2012), much work still revolves around the same small set, with others relegated to ‘minor’ status. Such patterns are likely to self-perpetuate, stalling progress. This contribution argues that ‘minor’ word classes present unique opportunities for rejuvenating grammar-writing and typology, and presents a number of constructive suggestions to foster more work on them.

The empirical focus is on interjections and ideophones, two supposedly ‘minor’ categories. INTERJECTIONS, defined as monolexemic items that typically function as utterances, include some of the most frequent linguistic devices in everyday language use (Poggi 2009; Lahaussouis 2016). This alone indicates that they deserve representation in grammars of use (Ameka 1992). But interjections may well be of more fundamental importance to language structure. For instance, continuers like *mm-hm* scaffold the production of complex syntax in narratives (Bavelas et al. 2000) and many of the most frequent interjections represent a degree of metalinguistic sophistication not found in other animal communication systems. IDEOPHONES, defined as an open lexical class of marked words that depict sensory imagery, are in many languages a word class on the same order of magnitude as nouns and verbs. The morphosyntax of ideophones is rich and variegated, and displays a subtle interplay between expressiveness and system integration that sheds light on fundamental issues like linearization and multimodality (Dingemanse & Akita 2017). Their semantic typology reveals evidence for an implicational hierarchy (McLean 2020) with implications for paths of semantic change.

Crucially, these and other findings could hardly be gleaned from existing grammatical descriptions or typological enterprises, where both categories tend to receive short shrift (Ameka et al. 2006; Shopen 2007; Haspelmath et al. 2008; Dixon 2010).<sup>1</sup> An urgent task therefore is to foster more descriptive, comparative and theoretical work on these phenomena. For interjections, this contribution proposes to guide descriptive work by defining three clear and frequent sequential contexts in which interjections are likely to occur across languages and can be studied comparatively. For ideophones, it sketches how even current corpora and lexical material can answer fundamental questions in morphosyntax, multi-modality and semantic typology. Supported by methods of sequential analysis methods and guided by specific research questions, hopefully interjections and ideophones will soon turn from “parts unknown” into integral features of the larger linguistic landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> One way to quantify the neglect is to look at the widely used *Lingua Descriptive Studies Questionnaire* (Comrie & Smith 1977). This presents an impressive 502 questions, inviting grammar-writers to provide detailed descriptions of ‘major’ classes and to think about anything from adjectivalization to clausal organization and from superlatives to zero-marking. Amidst this largesse, ideophones and interjections receive exactly 1 question each, which is to list some sample lexical items.

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