

BOOK REVIEW

Greek Interjections: Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics. By LARS NORDGREN. Trends in Linguistics, vol 273. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2015. Pp. xii + 270. Hardcover, €93.41. ISBN 978-3-11-033936-9.

Nordgren's book, a revised version of his dissertation, is the second comprehensive account of interjections in Greek drama to appear in five years, following Michèle Biraud's *Les interjections du théâtre grec antique* (Louvain-la-Neuve 2010). In my review of the latter work (*JHS* 131 (2011) 280) I called it "a significant step in the right direction": this book is another one, leaving what was long an underdeveloped field of research in a healthy condition. Nordgren's treatment probably edges Biraud's as the best first point of call for anyone interested in individual interjections, although in several places it might have made better use of Biraud's work.

As a word class, interjections are notoriously difficult to classify, and Nordgren rightly begins (chapter 1) with an attempt to impose some order on the Greek material. His typology is based on the state of the art of interjection research in linguistics, particularly the work of Felix Ameka.¹ Nordgren distinguishes between three categories: "expressive" interjections (the largest group), which indicate the speaker's mental state, e.g. αἰᾶ and οἶμο; "conative" interjections, designed to get the addressee to do something, e.g. εἶα and the delightful ψύττα ("shoo!", said to sheep); and "phatic" interjections, which express the speaker's attitude towards the ongoing discourse, e.g. εἰέν and ναί. Nordgren excludes from his discussion so-called "secondary" interjections (originally nouns or verb forms) such as ἄγε and ἴθι. I find this exclusion regrettable, even if the reasons that Nordgren provides for it are cogent; there is helpful discussion of some of these items in Biraud's book.

In accordance with the title, the body of the book focuses on syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The presence of a chapter on syntax (chapter 2) may seem surprising, since interjections are often said to operate outside syntax altogether.

¹ See for instance Ameka's contributions to the special issue on interjections of the *Journal of Pragmatics* (vol. 18.2/3, 1992), also edited by him.

Yet phrases such as ὦμοι ἐγὼ πόνων (Eur. *Hipp.* 817) show that elements such as nominative pronouns and genitives may depend on interjections, as part of what Nordgren calls Interjection Phrases (IntP). Through an impressive collection of material, Nordgren shows that such IntPs have a prototypical “phrase schema” with a fixed word order: interjection – μοι – vocative/nominative (pro)noun – genitive (pro)noun – vocative – nominative (found in full form only at Hom. *Od.* 19.363, ὦ μοι ἐγὼ σέο, τέκνον, ἀμήχανος). The exceptions to this pattern that Nordgren lists (e.g. Eur. *Supp.* 805, *Phoen.* 373) deserved more attention, however, as did the other syntactical issue that Nordgren raises but leaves largely undiscussed, the position of an interjection within the wider clause (initial, interjected, or final).

The chapter on semantics (chapter 3) is the heart of the book. In it, Nordgren treats every interjection in the corpus in turn and gives a description of its meaning. Nordgren’s professed approach is one of “moderate minimalism”: without ruling out the possibility of multiple meanings for individual words, he argues that divergent uses should be seen as related and gathered under as few headers as possible. In practice Nordgren’s approach could simply be called minimalist (without the “moderate”): he formulates a single “core meaning” for each item. This approach lies on the opposite end of the scale to Biraud’s: she argued (often highly speculatively) for distinct phonological realization—and meanings—of many items. Thus, whereas Biraud hypothesized four separate pronunciations and corresponding meanings for φεῦ, Nordgren reduces that word’s varied uses to “I am vexed” (notions of surprise and intensification are discussed, but seen as secondary). Comparative evidence suggests that the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle: an English item like “yuck” is much more unified in use than “ah” (which has, in different phonological guises, genuinely distinct uses as a cry of pain, a sign of comprehension, etc.); Greek interjections presumably showed similar variation. It is, more generally, notable that Biraud is absent from Nordgren’s discussions in this chapter.

Notwithstanding these methodological issues, Nordgren’s survey is illuminating: he matches his own observations with those in commentaries, and draws out nuanced differences between individual items (e.g. between αἰβοῖ, which Nordgren paraphrases as “I am surprised [because of the quality of this]” and βαβαί, “I am surprised [because of the quantity of this]”).

The chapter on pragmatics (ch. 5) returns to problems of distinct functions for single words, focusing on secondary uses in certain types of context. In some ways the chapter serves as a corrective to the minimalism of the previous one:

Nordgren shows, for instance, how $\phi\epsilon\upsilon$ as a pragmatic “commentary marker” becomes something of a semantically bleached intensifier, and how $\iota\acute{\omega}$ (“alas, oh”) functions occasionally as a summons (“hail”). Many of Nordgren’s observations here would have been welcome earlier: the boundary between semantics and pragmatics is much fuzzier than the chapter division suggests. Thus, in the case of $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\epsilon\nu$ (“ok, well then”), what is treated separately as pragmatics—its function as discourse marker in transitions to new topics—seems to me as central to a proper definition as the notion of compliance, given as the interjection’s “core meaning” in chapter 4.

The book ends with a useful “lexicon,” an alphabetically organized compendium of interjections listing uses, translations and all instances in the corpus (sadly not organized by use, but simply by play), followed by a brief conclusion.

By shedding further light on an underinvestigated category, Nordgren has done a service for students of Greek drama and Greek linguistics alike.

EVERT VAN EMDE BOAS

Calleva Research Centre, Magdalen College, evert.vanemdeboas@magd.ox.ac.uk