



HANS SAUER

## HOW THE ANGLO-SAXONS EXPRESSED THEIR EMOTIONS WITH THE HELP OF INTERJECTIONS

### Abstract

The emphasis here is on two Old English texts, namely Ælfric's *Grammar* and the Old English *Soliloquies*, presumably translated by King Alfred. The *Grammar* offers a kind of theoretical discussion, whereas the *Soliloquies* show the use of interjections in a dialogue. In accordance with the tradition Ælfric has a chapter on the word-class of interjections, where he states, for example, that interjections express emotions and (translated into modern terminology) that they are phonetically and morphologically irregular. This is only partly true, however: Interjections also have several other functions: they can serve as attention getters, as greeting forms, as response forms, etc. Formally, primary and secondary interjections can be distinguished as well as morphologically simple and morphologically complex interjections. Etymologically, some were inherited from Indo-European or Germanic, whereas others (especially the complex ones) were newly formed in Old English. Altogether Ælfric mentions ca. ten Old English interjections; some occur in several variants and form interjection families. Several Old English interjections are only attested in Ælfric's *Grammar*, although they must have been common, e.g. *afæstla* and *haha / hehe*. The *Soliloquies* are a theological-philosophical dialogue. Especially one of the partners (the author) often gets very emotional and accordingly frequently uses interjections and interjectional phrases such as *gea la gea* 'yes oh yes' and in particular *nese la nese* 'no oh no'.

### Key words

*Emotions; interjections; Ælfric; Alfred; Grammar; Soliloquies; morphology; etymology; Old English; Latin*

### 1. Introduction: Emotions and interjections

Emotions are strong feelings which are often difficult to control, such as love and hate, hope and fear or despair, joy and sadness, anger, etc. There does not,

however, seem to be a complete or generally accepted list of emotions. One of the problems is that emotions cannot always be easily separated from the way in which they are expressed: Laughter, for example, can be a sign of joy or mirth, and tears and lamentations can be a sign of grief.

The word *emotion* itself is a relatively recent addition to the English vocabulary: It was borrowed from French in the 16<sup>th</sup> century but developed its modern sense only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Roget's Thesaurus*, for example, which was first published in 1852, still uses 'affections' and not 'emotions' as the superordinate term for feelings such as love, hate, fear, hope etc.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the Anglo-Saxons certainly also had emotions.

One word-class whose main function has been traditionally defined as that of expressing emotions is the interjection. Matters are, of course, not quite so simple, because interjections also have various other functions, e.g. as discourse markers, and conversely emotions can be expressed in various other ways, e.g. descriptively ("He answered in an angry voice"). I shall nevertheless concentrate here on Old English interjections as markers of emotion, but I shall also mention some of their other functions.

Another problem is that interjections are mainly a phenomenon of spoken language, but for Old English (and generally up to ca. 1900) we can only list and analyse those that have been recorded in written documents. It is also not always easy to distinguish interjections from other word-classes, e.g. from adverbs.

Information about the Old English interjections is stored in some places which we would probably not primarily associate with emotions. Perhaps the most important of them is Ælfric's *Grammar*, written around 1000, which is the only theoretical discussion of emotions in Old English.<sup>2</sup> Interjections occur, however, in a wide variety of textual genres. Texts which employ interjections include: the Old English version of the *Soliloquies*, commonly ascribed to King Alfred and accordingly written shortly before 900.<sup>3</sup> Although the *Soliloquies* are a theological and philosophical text in the form of a dialogue, the speakers often get very emotional and the author (ic) especially uses a variety of interjections.

It is perhaps less surprising that many sermons contain highly emotional passages, because preachers often not only want to teach their audience, but also to move them; one well-known example is Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. The Old English version of the love and adventure story of *Apollonius of Tyre*, originally a novel from Late Antiquity which is full of pursuits and flights, storms and shipwrecks, love and hate, separations and reunions, is also full of emotions and accordingly uses a number of interjections.

In the present article, however, I shall concentrate on Ælfric's *Grammar* and on King Alfred's *Soliloquies*.

## 2. Research on the Old English interjections

Interjections have neither been among the main research interests of modern grammarians nor of Anglo-Saxonists.<sup>4</sup> Grammars and handbooks of Old English often do not even mention them. For example, they do not seem to occur in the first volume of the *CHEL* (*Cambridge History of the English Language*).<sup>5</sup> An early study, concentrating on the Alfredian corpus, is Wülfing (1901, I: 686–695). Offerberg (1967), apparently the most comprehensive study of the Old English interjections, is unfortunately unpublished and thus not available to most scholars. Bruce Mitchell in his *Old English Syntax* (1985, I: 526–528) devotes three of his ca. 1900 pages to the Old English interjections and gives a useful list of ca. 35 interjections. The *ThOE* (1995, I: 463) has a very brief section on interjections, listing only seven (09.01.03.01.).<sup>6</sup> Recently, there seems to have been some revival in interest; there have been more general articles by Cassidy (1996), Hiltunen (2006), and myself (Sauer 2006 and 2008), and an article specifically devoted to *hwæt* by Stanley (2000).<sup>7</sup>

## 3. Interjections and emotions in Ælfric's *Grammar*

In accordance with the Latin grammatical tradition Ælfric has a chapter on interjections (pp. 277–280 ed. Zupitza; cf. also pp. 10–11).<sup>8</sup> He defines interjections quite traditionally as the word-class that expresses emotions:

Interiectio est pars orationis significans mentis affectum voce incondita: Interiectio is an dæl ledenspræce getacnjende þæs modes gewilnunge mid ungesceapenre stemne (277–278).

The interjection is a part of speech which signifies the mind's commotion with an unformed voice/with unformed sounds.

Ælfric calls emotions *modes gewilnung* 'mind's desire' or *modes styrung* 'mind's commotion, disturbance', which seem to be alternative translations of the Latin *mentis affectus* – whether these were common Old English terms or just Ælfric's own translations is difficult to tell.<sup>9</sup>

His terms for L *interiectio* are *betwux-aworpennyss* and *betwux-alegednys*, lit. '[something] thrown in between' or '[something] put in between'; these are alternative loan-translations of the Latin term *inter-iectio*. They are hapax legomena and seem to have been Ælfric's coinages; probably they were not part of the general Old English vocabulary but just part of Ælfric's grammatical terminology and mainly used in the classroom for teaching grammar.

In accordance with the grammatical tradition Ælfric also mentions the main characteristics of the interjections, some of which are still re-iterated in present-day grammars (if they deal with interjections at all). Translated into modern terminology these are:<sup>10</sup>

(1) Semantic: Interjections have a meaning (*significatio – getacnung*): they express emotions (*modes gewilnung* etc.).

(2) Phonologic and morphologic: Interjections are phonologically and morphologically irregular and have no fixed shape or structure; they are pronounced *voce incondita – mid ungesceapenre stemne* ‘with an unformed voice or sound’ or with *behyddre stemne* ‘with an unclear (lit. concealed) voice/an unclear sound’. Furthermore Ælfric explains that interjections can be shortened or lengthened according to the speaker’s emotional state: “ac heora sweg byð hwilon gescyrt and hwilon gelencged be ðæs modes styrunge” (280/11–13).

(3) Syntactic: Interjections are usually not integrated into the sentence, and often they precede the sentence. Ælfric says that the interjection lies between the other words: “lið betwux wordum” (278/3), and this is, of course, also the meaning of his derived term *betwuxalegednys* (and *betwuxaworpennyss*).

(4) Interlinguistic: Ælfric adds that interjections cannot always be (easily) translated from Latin into English (279/12–280/1). However, he also says that some interjections are identical in Latin and in Old English (*haha* and *hui*; see below).

The statements made under (1) and (2) are especially only partly true, however: Interjections also have other functions besides expressing emotions; furthermore interjections were affected by regular sound-changes and many complex interjections were created from simple interjections (or from simple interjections and words belonging to other word-classes, see below). As regards (3), at least L *uae* – OE *wa* is sometimes integrated into the sentence, see below. Ælfric also states that interjections are like words: “þes dæl interiectio hæfð wordes fremminge” (279/12); this is, of course, also clear from the fact that he treats them as one of the eight word classes or parts of speech.<sup>11</sup>

The emotions which Ælfric mentions, and which can be expressed by (Latin) interjections are: joy (*modes bliss*), grief and distress (*modes sarnyss*), wonder and astonishment (*wundrung*), fear (*oga*), anger (*æbylignyss*, *yrre*, *yrsung*), repentance (expressed verbally: *behreowsian*), contempt (*forsewennyss*), scorn (*bysmerung*); expressions of emotions are lamentations (*wanung*), threats (*ðeowwræc – ðeowracan*), cursing (*wyrigung*), although he does not distinguish explicitly between emotions and the way they are expressed.

Ælfric also points out that some interjections are polysemous and can express quite different emotions, e.g. L *euge*: joy and scorn (*bliss and bysmerung*). Latin *o* even has five functions (280/3–5): (1) it expresses anger (*æbilignyss*); (2) grief (*sarnyss*); (3) astonishment (*wundrung*); (4) but it also expresses the vocative (“adverbium vocandi”): “o magister” – “eala ðu lareow”; (5) and it stands for the letter <o>.

This also shows two further phenomena: (a) Not all functions of an interjection express an emotion; (b) A word can belong to several word-classes – *o* can be an

interjection and an adverb (according to Ælfric); a letter (*stæf*), of course, still has a different status. Similarly, *a* and *e* in Latin are interjections, prepositions, and letters (280/5–6), etc.

Ælfric's *Grammar* is basically a grammar of Latin, but written largely in Old English. Accordingly he lists primarily Latin interjections (*a, atat, e, ei, euge, haha / hehe, heu / heu mihi, hui(g), la, o, pape, pro, uae / uae illi / uae uobis*);<sup>12</sup> two interjections according to Ælfric are from Hebrew (*racha, uah*). But he also mentions several Old English interjections, partly as translations of the corresponding Latin interjections, and partly independently. In two cases he claims or implies correctly that a Latin interjection and its Old English counterpart are identical in form and meaning: *haha / hehe* for laughter; *hui / huig*.<sup>13</sup> Moreover he mentions *la* in the context of Latin interjections. Its status as a Latin interjection seems doubtful, however, but it was certainly an Old English interjection (see below).<sup>14</sup>

Altogether Ælfric mentions ca. ten Old English interjections, namely:<sup>15</sup>

- (1) *afæstla* 'certainly, assuredly' (hapax legomenon);
- (2) *eala* 'alas, oh, lo' (very frequent in Old English);
- (3) *haha / hehe* 'ha! ha!' (indicating laughter) (hapax legomenon);
- (4) *hilahi* 'alas, oh' (hapax legomenon);
- (5) *hui / huig*: its meaning is difficult to ascertain – perhaps it expresses admiration or astonishment and (pleasant) surprise; cf. G *hui*. Ælfric's example, however, is (278/11): "huig, hu færst ðu" (but he gives no Latin equivalent). Here *huig* seems to be a greeting form, perhaps combined with a pleasant surprise, and perhaps to be translated as 'Hello, how are you?'; the French translators render it as 'Tiens! Comme vas-tu?';
- (6) *la* 'oh, ah, lo, indeed, verily' (ModE *lo*, the origin of which is more complex, however); OE *la* was also often used as an element in complex interjections, see below;
- (7) *wa* 'woe, alas', also used for cursing someone (ModE *woe*); as a noun 'misery, affliction'; also often used as an element in complex interjections, see (8) – (9) and 5. below;
- (8) *wa is me / wamme* (ModE *woe is me*), for L *heu mihi* and *uae mihi*.<sup>16</sup> Ælfric gives several examples, e.g. *uae illi – wa him; uae uobis – wa eow; uae tibi sit – wa þe si* (278/13–16). These examples also show that *uae – wa* is integrated into the sentence in Latin as well as in Old English, because it governs a case-form (the dative);
- (9) *wala* 'woe, alas' (common in Old English);
- (10) *wellawell* 'woe, alas'.

Counting is, however, not as easy as I have just suggested: I have regarded the forms *haha / hehe, hui / huig, wa is me / wamme* as variant forms of basically the same interjections; if they were counted separately, the number would be still greater. This also shows that several interjections did not have a fixed form in Old

English, at least not in writing (but this applies to Latin as well). *Wala*, *wellawell* etc. can perhaps be regarded as members of an entire interjection-family with many variant forms (to which belong also *wegla*, *weglaweg* etc.; see further 5.1 below); the common elements are *w* and *la*, connected by the vowels *a* or *e*, and often by internal rhyme (*wala* etc.) and/or reduplication (*wel-la-well* etc.). I have not included in the list the word *wawa* ‘grief, woe, misery’, which is used as a noun by Ælfric (three times on p. 279 ed. Zupitza). *Hilahi* can perhaps also be regarded as a member of an interjection family (variants not mentioned by Ælfric include *hi*, *hig*, *higla*, *higlahig* and *hela*).

One useful distinction is between primary interjections, which were coined as such, and secondary interjections. The latter are words from other word-classes which are then also used as interjections. But even this distinction is not fine enough, because there were morphologically simple and morphologically complex interjections which arose from a combination of primary or of primary and secondary interjections.

From a morphological and word-formational point of view there are thus at least four groups:<sup>17</sup>

- (1) morphologically simple primary interjections: *la*, *hui(g)*;
- (2) morphologically simple secondary interjections: *wa*;
- (3) morphologically complex interjections, which can be subdivided into
  - (a) combinations consisting of primary interjections: *eala*, *haha* / *hehe*, *hilahi*, *wellawell*, and
  - (b) combinations consisting of secondary and primary interjections (*afæstla*, *wala*);
- (4) full and condensed phrases: *wa is me*; *wamme*.

*La* was obviously used particularly frequently in the formation of complex interjections, five times in the examples provided by Ælfric, i.e. it occurs in half of the interjections listed by him: *afæstla* (probably *afæst* / *æwfæst* ‘upright, pious etc.’ + *la*)<sup>18</sup>; *eala* (*ea* ‘alas, oh’ + *la* – *ea* is not listed separately by Ælfric, however); *hilahi*; *wala* (*wa* ‘woe’ + *la*); *wellawell*.<sup>19</sup> For the formation of *haha* / *hehe* reduplication has been used, and in *hilahi* and *wellawell* reduplication and the use of *la* have been combined. *Wamme* is apparently a contraction of the phrase *wa is me*.

From an etymological point of view *ea* (as in *eala*), *wa*, *la*, *hui* and *haha* are old interjections, going back to Germanic and even to Indo-European.

- (a)  $\bar{e}a < \text{Gmc } *au$  (cf. G *au*) < IE; cf. L *au*.
- (b) *haha* < Gmc *\*haha* (cf. G *haha*) < IE; cf. L *haha*.
- (c) *hui* < Gmc *\*hui* (cf. G *hui*) < IE; cf. L *hui*.
- (d)  $\bar{l}a$ : Holthausen compares it to OHG  $\bar{l}e$  and to L *il-le*.
- (e)  $\bar{w}a < \text{Gmc } *wai$  (cf. G *weh(e)*) < IE; cf. L *vae*.

Most of the complex interjections seem to be Old English formations, however. Although grammars often stress that interjections are natural sounds or in any case of an onomatopoeic or sound-symbolic origin and that they are phonologically and morphologically irregular, the examples show that interjections often had conventionalized forms. Many were morphologically complex. Moreover, even old and simple interjections were affected by later sound-changes; thus OE *ēa* evolved through regular sound-change from Gmc *\*au* (cf. G *au*), and *wā* developed from Gmc *\*wai*.

From their semantic and pragmatic function most of the interjections listed by Ælfric express negative emotions (sorrow, grief): *eala*, *hilahi*, *la*, *wa*, *wamme*, *wala*, *wellawell*; only *haha* / *hehe* for laughter expresses a (normally) positive emotion (sign of joy). *Hui(g)* seems to express surprise or admiration, but in the example given by Ælfric it functions rather as a greeting formula. *Afæstla* seems to be a response form. *Hui(g)* and *afæstla* thus show two of the other functions of interjections.

A final question in connection with Ælfric's *Grammar* is how far the interjections mentioned there reflect actual Old English language use, perhaps even colloquial speech. *Eala*, *la*, *wa*, *wala* are attested outside his *Grammar* and were apparently used frequently. *Eala* is the most frequent complex primary interjection in Hiltunen's data (2006: 96), and according to the *DOE* there are ca. 1250 occurrences of *eala* in Old English texts. *Haha* / *hehe*, *hilahi*, *hui(g)* on the other hand are rarely attested, at least in writing, or even hapax legomena – but probably they were more frequent in the spoken language. For *haha* this is quite likely because it apparently goes back to Indo-European, and is still used to express laughter in Modern English (as well as in German) and thus apparently has an unbroken tradition; for the others it is more difficult to tell. *Afæstla* is a hapax legomenon, attested only in Ælfric's *Grammar*. But since he specifically labels *afæstla*, together with *hilahi* and *wellawell*, as “englisce interiectiones”, as ‘English interjections’ (p. 280/14) and also does not give any Latin equivalents for them, it seems unlikely that he made them up. It seems more likely that like *haha* they also reflect actual Old English usage. Thus Ælfric's *Grammar* is one of the rare witnesses (or even the only one) of some interjections which were perhaps frequent in spoken Old English. Thus we find traces of colloquial speech in a grammar.<sup>20</sup>

Ælfric lists many, but not all of the Old English interjections. Of the more frequent ones, noticeably *hwæt* is absent, but this may be due to the fact that *hwæt* is a discourse marker and does not primarily express an emotion. *Hwæt* occurs, however, in King Alfred's version of the *Soliloquies*, see the following section.

#### 4. Emotions and interjections in the Old English Soliloquies

The Old English version of Augustine's *Soliloquies* is another text in which we might perhaps not primarily expect interjections.<sup>21</sup> It is a theological and philosophical treatise, an “attempt to know God, and to affirm His and the soul's im-

mortality” (Greenfield and Calder 1986: 52). It has the form of a dialogue, an exchange between the author (St. Augustine; *ic* in the Old English version) and his Reason (OE *(ge)sceadwisnes*), although the latter is not clearly defined (see p. 3, ed. Endter).<sup>22</sup>

The Old English version is commonly ascribed to Alfred, although the corpus of Alfred’s own translations has been shrinking continually in recent decades: the Old English *Orosius* was taken from him some time ago and shown to be an anonymous translation.<sup>23</sup> More recently Malcolm Godden has taken the Old English *Boethius* from Alfred, too.<sup>24</sup> Godden also doubts whether Alfred was the author or translator of the Old English version of the *Soliloquies*, but we can leave this question open for our purpose.<sup>25</sup> If the original translation was made by Alfred, it must have been composed in the 890s, but it survives only in a manuscript from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, now the first part of London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv (cf. Ker 1957, No. 215).

The *Soliloquies* are not an impassionate or detached philosophical dialogue – often the speakers, and especially the author (OE *ic*) get quite emotional and express intense feelings. The author frequently uses interjections, whereas Reason / *(ge)sceadwisness* employs interjections much more rarely. Often there is no exactly corresponding word or phrase in the Latin source; therefore the Old English version frequently seems to be emotionally more intense than the Latin original, and the intensity seems to increase as the dialogue progresses.

To achieve the emotional intensity, it is not only interjections which are used, but also a number of rhetorical figures and structures, e.g. repetition and anaphora, especially by Reason. Reason uses interjections only twice, and in both cases *hwæt*, *hwat* (25/7; 60/28–29), as a kind of indignant surprise (see further below). Reason’s favourite emotion actually is wondering about the author, who on the one hand is slow to understand what she tells him, and on the other hand is also quick to forget what she has just taught him.<sup>26</sup> Her favourite phrase therefore is ‘I wonder’, *ic wondrie*, which often has no correspondence in the Latin original, but was apparently frequently added by the Old English translator, e.g. “*ic wondrie þin*”, ‘I am surprised about you’ (15/19); “*ic wundrige hwi þu swa spece*” ‘I wonder why you speak so’ (24/1; cf. 53/8; 60/8; 63/3); and conversely “*nis þæt nan wundor*” ‘this is no wonder’ (32/22; cf. 34/17; 35/11).

The following interjections are used in the Old English *Soliloquies*, apart from *hwæt* mainly by the author (*ic*):

- (1) *gea* ‘yes’ (ModE *yea(h)*); 6x: 20/16; 21/9; 22/1; 51/5; 53/6; 66/19.
- (2) *eala*, *æala*: expressing regret, but also astonishment; 5x: 12/17; 28/1; 53/1; 55/11; 63/18.
- (3) *na*, *ne*, *nese* ‘no’: *ne*: 21/19; *nese* 17/18; 18/6 – for combinations with *nese* see below.
- (4) *hwæt*: uttered by *ic*: 12/3; uttered by Reason: 25/7; 60/29. Attention getter, but often used in a reproachful way.

- (5) *wel la*: 13/6; and *walawa* 43/10, both for ‘woe, alas’; on the latter, see below.

Thus there are fewer interjections than in Ælfric’s *Grammar* (which, of course, is the later text): *eala* is also listed there; *walawa* and *wel la* can be regarded as further members of the *wala(wa)* interjection family. Not listed by Ælfric are *hwæt*, *gea* and *nese*. The reason is perhaps that *hwæt* is an attention getter, and *gea* and *nese* are response forms.

Once more, however, counting is not so easy, because there are also five different reduplicative combinations of the shape ‘X la X’ (*gea la gea* etc.), which were obviously created to achieve a very intense and emphatic way of showing emotion and also of emphatically agreeing and disagreeing. They also show once more the importance of *la* for the formation of complex interjections and also the use of reduplication. They are not listed by the dictionaries as headwords, probably because most of them are groups rather than compounds, but their form and use is quite striking.

The word-division is, of course, at least in some cases editorial: *wa la wa* / *walawa* is spelled as three words in some editions and dictionaries, but as one word in others. The same is true of punctuation: for example the exclamation mark which is sometimes used after *eala* is editorial.

The following combinations are used in the OE *Soliloquies*:

- (6) *do la do* ‘do it oh do it’: 60/28  
 (7) *gea la gea* ‘yes oh yes’: 2x: 35/1  
 (8) *nese la nese*, or *nese*, *næse* ‘no oh no’: 9x: 3/15; 47/1; 50/14; 52/9; 61/5; 61/16; 62/5; 68/14; 68/22  
 (9) *swuga la swuga* ‘be silent oh be silent’: 49/1  
 (10) *wa la wa* ‘alas’ lit. ‘woe oh woe’: 43/10

Whereas *gea la gea*, *do la do*, *swuga la swuga* and *wa la wa* are used just once, and *nese la nese* (or *nese*, *næse*) is used nine times. I give an example in context of each of the interjections used by Alfred. As the examples show, the interjections are often used after the introductory formula “Ða cwæð ic” ‘Then I said’.

- (1) *gea*: “Ða cwæð ic: **gea**, ic hys gelife.” (18/15)  
 (2a) *eala*: “Ða cwæð ic: **eala!** Ic eom myd earmlicre ofergiotolnesse ofseten ...” (63/18)  
 (2b) *eala*: “**Eala**, hu þin godnes is to wundrienne, forþæm heo is ungelic æal-lum goodum!” (12/17–18)  
 (3) *nese*, *na*, *ne*: “Ða cwæð ic: **nese**, **ne** do ic hi **na** ðe raðor gelice ...” (17/18)  
 (4a) *hwæt* (the author): “for[ðam] ic eom fleonde fram hym. **hwæt**, hy me underfungon ær ...” (12/2–3)

- (4b) *hwæt* (Reason): “Ða cwæð heo: **hwæt!** Ic wat þæt þu hefst ðone hlaford nu ...” (60/28–29)
- (5) *wel la*: “**Wel la**, god feder, wel alyse me of ðam gedwolan ...” (13/6–7); for *walawa* see below
- (6) *do la do*: “Ða cwæð ic: **do, la do!** Gedo þæt me scamige forði.” (60/28)
- (7) *gea la gea*: “Ða cwæð ic: **gea, la gea;** gyf hyt nu færenga gewurde ... (35/1)
- (8) *nese la nese*: “Ða cwæð ic: **nese, la nese;** ne nawer neah!” (61/16) ‘Then I said: no, oh no; not nowhere/never near’
- (9) *swuga la swuga*: “Ða cwæð ic: **swuga, la swuga!**” (49/1)
- (10) *wa la wa*: “Ða cwæð ic: **Wa la wa!** Hwæt þu me forhæardne lætst!” (43/10)

As far as origin (etymology) is concerned, *gea*, *hwæt*, and perhaps also *nese* are old words, going back to Germanic or even Indo-European:

- (a) *gea* < Gmc \**ja*; cf. G *ja*. ModE *yea(h)*.
- (b) *hwæt* < Gmc \**xwat* (cf. G *was*) < IE \**kwod*, cf. L *quod*. Like *quod*, OE *hwæt* (> ModE *what*) is also used as an interrogative pronoun as well as an interjection; but here we are only concerned with its use as an interjection.
- (c) *na*, *ne*, *nese* ‘no’: *ne* apparently goes back to Indo-European, cf. L *ne*. *Na* (> ModE *no*) is explained as from *ne* + *ā* ‘not + always’. *Nese* is explained as an originally complex form, arising from \**nisi* or \**ne sī* ‘be it not, it may/shall not be’, see, e.g., Holthausen.

The reduplicative combinations with *la* seem to have originated with *walawa*, which is perhaps the oldest and certainly the most frequently used formation of this type; probably this pattern was then extended to the response forms (*gea la gea* and *nese la nese*) and even to verbs in the imperative (*do la do*; *swuga la swuga*).

Functionally, *gea* and *nese* are response forms, and *hwæt* is an attention getter (see further below), but they also belong to the interjections; this is particularly clear in the *Soliloquies*, where *gea* and *nese* are combined with *la*. According to Wülfing (1901, II: 695) *gea* and *nese* become interjections through the combination with *la*.

The more frequently used interjections especially have a number of semantic shades which can vary according to context.

- (1) *Hwæt* is basically an attention getter, i.e. it “draws the listener’s attention to what is being said” (Hiltunen 2006: 103).<sup>27</sup> When it is uttered by the speaker, it implies also regret for his sins in his prayer to God (12/3). When it is uttered by Reason (*gesceadwisnys*), it seems to imply a kind

- of indignant surprise (25/7; 60/28–29). For further details, see Brinton (1996); Stanley (2000).
- (2) *Eala*: From its etymology (*ea* + *la*), *eala* expresses sadness and regret, and this seems to be its function in most cases when it is used by the author (ic) in the *Soliloquies*, e.g. 28/1; 53/1; 55/11; 63/18. In some passages it seems to express admiration and praise, however (12/17–18; see example 2b above). *Eala* is also often used in Old English where the Latin has a vocative (on Ælfric’s statement about the corresponding Latin *o* see p. 170 above); this is also the case in 12/17–18: “O admiranda et singularis bonitas tua”, which in the Old English version has, however, been transformed into an exclamation of admiration and praise: “Eala, hu þin godnes is to wundrienne”. The gloss to Ælfric’s *Colloquy* also has several examples of the use of *eala* as a marker of the vocative, e.g. “magister – eala lareow”.<sup>28</sup> For further details, see the *DOE* s.v. *eala*.
- (3) *Wa la wa* and *wel la* were apparently part of a widespread interjection family with many variant forms (see above), but basically the same function, namely to express sorrow, regret etc.

This leads us to the question (which we asked above concerning Ælfric) of how far the interjections and formulae used by Alfred in the *Soliloquies* were his literary creations and how far they can be regarded as common or even colloquial spoken Old English.

According to Hiltunen (2006: 102), who refers to Offerberg (1967), *la* was idiomatic Old English and part of the spoken language – but, as we have seen, it is used much more often in combination than in isolation by both Alfred and Ælfric.

*Eala* (which was formed with *la* as second element and accordingly must have originated later) is very frequent in Old English. According to Hiltunen (2006: 98 & 104–105) it is mainly literary and Christian, and *hwæt* was part of the poetic diction – but as its use by Alfred in the *Soliloquies* shows, *hwæt* was also employed in prose.

*Gea* ‘yes’ and *nese* ‘no’ were probably common response formulae. *Wa la wa* seems to have been a common formula of sorrow and regret, belonging to an interjection family. The other formulae created according to this pattern (*gea la gea*, *nese la nese*, *do la do*, *swuga la swuga*), however, apparently were not common.<sup>29</sup> It seems that they were created by Alfred (or whoever translated the *Soliloquies*) for special emphasis. *Nese la nese* also occurs in the Old English *Boethius*; this text furthermore has the formula *gise la gise* ‘yes oh yes’; see Wülfing (1901, II: 695).<sup>30</sup>

## 5. Summary

If we combine the evidence from Alfred's *Soliloquies* (*Solil*; before 900) and from Ælfric's *Grammar* (*Gramm*; around 1000), we get the following picture of the Old English interjections:

5.1. Corpus of Old English interjections: Altogether Old English had ca. 35–40 interjections. As explained above, it is impossible to give a precise number. The following ca. 12 interjections are attested in Ælfric's *Grammar* and in the *Soliloquies*; the number is comparatively small because several forms are here regarded as variant forms or as belonging to an interjection family or as groups formed with *la*, but most of the frequent and important Old English interjections are certainly included, and also some of the ones attested rarely, at least in written documents:

- (1) *afæstla*: 'certainly, assuredly'; *Gramm* (hapax legomenon).
- (2) *eala*: 'alas, oh, lo'; *Gramm*, *Solil* (very frequent in Old English); *æala*, *æla* mentioned by Mitchell (1985) are probably variants.
- (3) *gea*: 'yes'; *Solil* (probably common in Old English).
- (4) *haha* / *hehe*: 'ha! ha!' (indicating laughter); *Gramm* (hapax legomenon).
- (5) *hilahi*: probably 'alas, oh'; *Gramm* (hapax legomenon). Mitchell (1985) also mentions *hig*, *hig hig*, *higla*, *higlahig*: probably these formed an interjection family.
- (6) *hui* / *huig*: may have expressed admiration or surprise (or both; cf. G *hui*), but according to Mitchell (1985) 'alas!'; in Ælfric's example, however, it seems to be used as a kind of greeting formula, see p. 121 above); *Gramm* (rarely attested).
- (7) *hwæt*: attention getter; *Solil*. Very frequent in Old English; see Brinton (1996) and Stanley (2000).
- (8) *la*: 'oh, ah' (ModE *lo*);<sup>31</sup> *Gramm*; frequently used for combinations: (a) *afæstla*, *eala*, *hilahi*, *wala*, *wellawell*, *walawa*, *wella* (some attested in *Gramm*, some in *Solil*, and some in both); and: (b) in *Solil*: *do la do*, *gea la gea*, *nese la nese*, *swuga la swuga* (plus *walawa*); and in the OE *Boethius* furthermore *gise la gise*. Thus altogether six formations in accordance with this pattern seem to be attested.
- (9) *na*, *ne*, *nese*: 'no'; *Solil* (probably common in Old English).
- (10) *wa*: 'woe, alas' (ModE *woe*); as a noun 'misery, affliction'; *Gramm*; for combinations with *wa* (interjection family) see (11)–(12).
- (11) *wa is me* / *wamme* etc., (ModE *woe is me*); *Gramm*.
- (12) *wala* (*Gramm*), *wellawell* (*Gramm*), *walawa* (*Solil*), *wel la* (*Solil*): 'woe, alas': probably together with *wa* an interjection family. Mitchell also mentions the forms *weg la*, *weilawei*, *wilawei* etc.

Apart from these, Mitchell (1985: I: 528) also lists (but says nothing about frequency or rarity):<sup>32</sup> *ea* ‘alas’ (the basis of *eala*) and *æ* (perhaps a variant of *ea*); *efne* / *æfne* (*nu*) ‘behold!’; *egele* etc.; *enu* / *eono* / *ono* ‘behold!’; *eow* / *eule* etc.; *georstu* ‘o’; *gese* / *gyse* ‘yes’; *?hela*; *henu* / *heono* etc. ‘behold!’ (perhaps variants of *enu* / *eono*); *hu* (*la*) (*nu*) ‘how (now)! come!’; *huru* ‘indeed, surely’; *nic* ‘no’; *nu* (L *ecce*); *nula* (L *heia*); *sehde* etc. ‘behold!’; *tæg tæg* (L *puppup*); *?uton*.

5.2. Form (morphology): Regarding their morphologic shape the following groups can be distinguished:<sup>33</sup>

- (1) simple primary interjections: *gea*, *la*, *hui(g)*, *ne*;
- (2) simple secondary interjections: *hwæt*, *na*, *wa*;
- (3) complex interjections:
  - (a) consisting of primary interjections, often combining *la* and another interjection, and sometimes using reduplication: *eala*, *haha* / *hehe*, *hilahi*, *wella* / *wellawell*;
  - (b) combinations of primary and secondary interjections (or words), at least originally: *afæstla*, *nese*, *wala*, *walawa*;
- (4) phrases (full and condensed phrases): *wa is me* / *wamme*; *do la do*; *gea la gea*; *nese la nese*; *swuga la swuga*.

5.3. Etymology: Several of the simple primary and secondary interjections go back to Germanic or even Indo-European, namely *ea*, *gea*, *la*, *haha*, *hui*, *hwæt*, *ne*, *wa*, and perhaps also *nese*. Most of the complex interjections, including those with *la* as an element, seem to be Old English formations, however, e.g., *afæstla*, *eala*, *hilahi*, *wala*, *wellawell*, as well as the phrases, e.g. *wa is me*, *gea la gea* etc.

5.4. Function: Just taking *Gramm* and *Solil* into account, four functions of interjections can be distinguished; some interjections can have several functions, however, i.e. they show polysemy:<sup>34</sup>

- (1) interjections expressing emotions: (a) positive emotions: *haha* / *hehe* for laughter; possibly *hui(g)* for surprise and admiration; (b) negative emotions, expressing grief, regret, sorrow etc. (apparently the large majority): *eala*, *hilahi*, *la*, *wa*, *wa is me* / *wamme*, *wala*, *walawa*, *wellawell*;
- (2) attention getters: *hwæt*;
- (3) greeting forms: *hui(g)*;
- (4) response forms: *afæstla*, *gea*, *na* / *ne* / *nese*.

5.5. It is perhaps ironic that some Old English interjections which must have been common (e.g. *haha*) and colloquial are mainly or even exclusively preserved in a grammar and a philosophical-theological treatise.

5.6. Further fate: Many of the Old English interjections died out and were replaced in Middle English by interjections borrowed from French and/or Latin. Among those that survive are (although in some cases the functions have or may have changed): *yea(h)*, *haha*, *what*, *lo*, *no*, *woe*. For a survey of Middle English interjections see Mustanoja (1960: 620–640); cf. also Sauer (2008).

## Notes

- 1 Here used in the revised edition by Dutch (1962). On the question of terminology, see also Sauer (2008: 389–390).
- 2 On abbot Ælfric see, e.g., Gneuss (2009), and the entry in *BEASE*, s.v. Ælfric of Eynsham. According to Gneuss, Ælfric wrote his *Grammar* shortly after 992, and probably in Cerne (2009: 22).
- 3 On King Alfred see, e.g., Frantzen (1986); the entries in *BEASE*, s.v. Alfred and s.v. Alfredian Texts, the recent edition of the Old English *Boethius* by Godden (2009), and Godden (2007).
- 4 See also Sauer (2008: 390–393).
- 5 In any case the index of *CHEL I* does not list the terms ‘interjection’, ‘exclamation’, or ‘feeling’.
- 6 *Buf, eala, efne (nu), georstu, o, hu la, hwæt la, la hu.*
- 7 For assistance with the present article, my thanks are due to Susan Bollinger, Susanne Gärtner, Elisabeth Kubaschewski, Katharina Wolff and Gaby Waxenberger.
- 8 On Ælfric’s treatment of interjections see Sauer (2006). His *Grammar* is here quoted in the edition by Zupitza. For a French translation, see Mensah and Toupin (2005).
- 9 Clark Hall lists a number of compounds with *mod*, but no *\*modstyrung* or *\*modgewilnung*.
- 10 Cf. also Sauer (2006: 43–44).
- 11 Ælfric deals with the following word-classes: noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, participle, conjunction, preposition, interjection.
- 12 Most of these are listed by Lewis & Short. *A* is treated under *ah*, and *haha* is treated under *ha*. *E*, *hehe* and *la* are not listed. On the other hand, Lewis & Short give many Latin interjections not mentioned by Ælfric, e.g. *ehem*, *eheu*, *eho*, *eia*, *hei*, *heia*, *heus* etc.
- 13 He does not give a meaning for *hui(g)*; according to the Latin dictionaries (Lewis & Short) it expresses astonishment or admiration; ClarkHall lists it as an Old English interjection, but does not give a meaning.
- 14 *La* is apparently not listed in the *Theasurus Linguae Latinae*.
- 15 ClarkHall often puts an exclamation mark behind the meanings. The treatment of these exclamations in the dictionaries (BT, ClarkHall, Holthausen) is very uneven. Not all of them are listed; some of the complex interjections are just listed under their first element; especially ClarkHall lists some of the interjections without giving a meaning.
- 16 Cf. the song by Harry Belafonte “Woe is me, shame and scandal in the family...”
- 17 Cf. also Sauer (2006: 46–47).
- 18 Or possibly *ā* ‘always’ + *fest* ‘fast, firm’ + *la*.
- 19 Unfortunately I have no explanation at present for the *weg* in *weg-la-weg* or the *wel* in *wel-la-well*; they do not seem to be identical with the noun *weg* ‘way’ and the adverb *wel* ‘well’.
- 20 Von Lindheim (1951) (in his article on traces of colloquial speech in Old English) does not mention the interjections.
- 21 The main source are St. Augustine’s *Soliloquia*, but other sources were also used for the Old English version. The text is here quoted from the edition by Endter.
- 22 4/11–14/7 (ed. Endter) form a prayer by the author to God.
- 23 Frantzen (1986) lists as Alfred’s works: (1) His OE law-code; (2) the OE *Pastoral Care*; (3)

- the OE Boethius; (4) the OE *Soliloquies*; (5) the *Paris Psalter*.
- 24 In: *The Old English Boethius*, ed. Godden et al (2009), esp. I: 140–146. In 1992, Godden had still subscribed to the traditional view, namely that Alfred was the translator of the OE *Boethius* and the OE *Soliloquies*: Godden (1992: 513 & 524–526).
- 25 In: *The Old English Boethius*, ed. Godden et al. (2009: I: 143); see also Godden (2007).
- 26 As indicated above (see p. 120), Ælfric also regards ‘wondering, being surprised’ as an emotion.
- 27 *Hwæt* is the first word of *Beowulf* and several other Old English poems.
- 28 The Latin Colloquy is by Ælfric, but the OE gloss was added by somebody else.
- 29 The *DOE* s.v. *do*, for example, does not seem to list the phrase “do la do”.
- 30 Godden in his introduction to his edition of the Old English *Boethius* notices certain affinities between this text and the Old English *Soliloquies*.
- 31 The origin of ModE *lo* ‘behold, indeed, verily’ seems to have been more complex, because it may have combined OE *lā* > *lō* and a shortened form of *look*.
- 32 For an inventory of Old English interjections, see also Sauer (2008: 394).
- 33 See also Sauer (2008: 397).
- 34 Of course interjections can have many more functions; see, e.g., Sauer (2008: 392 & 397–398).

## References

### Editions

- Ælfric’s *Grammar*: *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, ed. Julius Zupitza. Berlin: Weidmann, 1880; 4th ed. with a new introduction by Helmut Gneuss: Hildesheim: Weidmann, 2003.
- Ælfric’s *Grammar*; French translation: Marthe Mensah et Fabienne Toupin, *La ‘Grammaire’ d’Ælfric: Traduction et Commentaire linguistique*. Publications de l’Association des Médiévistes Anglicistes de l’Enseignement Supérieur. Paris, 2005.
- Boethius: *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius’s ‘De Consolatione Philosophiae’*, ed. Malcolm Godden, Susan Irvine et al. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Soliloquies: König Alfreds des Großen Bearbeitung der Soliloquien des Augustinus*, ed. Wilhelm Endter. Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 11. Hamburg, 1922 [repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964].

### Dictionaries

- BT: Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1882–1898; *Supplement* by T.N. Toller, 1921.
- ClarkHall: J.R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. with a supplement by Herbert D. Meritt. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1960 [many reprints].
- DOE: *The Dictionary of Old English*, ed. Angus Cameron et al., Fascicles A–F on CD-ROM, version 1.0. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2003.
- Holthausen: F[erdinand] Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 3. Aufl. Heidelberg: Winter 1974.
- Lewis & Short: Charlton T. Lewis & Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1879 [many reprints].

- Roget: *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, new edition by Robert A. Dutch. London: Longman; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962 [many reprints].
- ThOE*: Jane Roberts & Christian Kay with Lynne Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English*. 2 vols. London: King's College, 1995; 2<sup>nd</sup> impression: Costerus New Series 131. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000.

## Studies and handbooks

- BEASE*: Lapidge, Michael, et al. (ed.) (1999) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Brinton, Laurel J. (1996) *Pragmatic Markers in English: Grammaticalization and Discourse Functions*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Cassidy, F.C. (1996) 'The Anglo-Saxon interjection'. In: Pollner, C. et al. (eds.) *Bright is the Ring of Words: Festschrift für Horst Weinstock*. Bonn: Romanistischer Verlag, 45–48.
- CHEL*: Hogg, Richard M. (ed.) (1992) *The Cambridge History of the English Language: Vol. 1: The Beginnings to 1066*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Frantzen, Allen J. (1986) *King Alfred*. Boston, Mass.: Twayne.
- Gneuss, Helmut (2009) *Ælfric of Eynsham: His Life, Times, and Writings*. Old English Newsletter Subsidia 34. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University.
- Godden, Malcolm (1992) 'Literary language'. In: Hogg, Richard M. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of the English Language: Vol. 1: The Beginnings to 1066*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 490–535.
- Godden, Malcolm (2007) "Did Alfred Write Anything?", *Medium Ævum* 76, 1–23.
- Greenfield, Stanley B., and Daniel G. Calder (1986) *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*. New York and London: New York UP.
- Hiltunen, Risto (2006) "'Eala, geferan and gode wyrhtan': On Interjections in Old English". In: Walmsley, John (ed.) *Inside Old English: Essays in Honour of Bruce Mitchell*. Oxford: Blackwell, 91–116.
- Ker, N. R. (1957) *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Mitchell, Bruce (1985) *Old English Syntax*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Mustanoja, Tauno F. (1960) *A Middle English Syntax. Part I: Parts of Speech*. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique.
- Offerberg, I. (1967) *A Study of Old English Interjections*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Stockholm.
- Sauer, Hans (2006) 'Ælfric and emotion'. *Poetica* [Tokyo] 66, 37–52 [Special Issue: *The Expression of Emotions in English with an Emphasis on Old and Middle English*, ed. Hans Sauer and Michiko Ogura].
- Sauer, Hans (2008) 'Interjection, emotion, grammar, and literature'. In: Amano, M., M. Ogura, M. Ohkado (eds.) *Historical Englishes in Varieties of Texts and Contexts: The Global COE Program. International Conference 2007*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 387–403.
- Stanley, Eric Gerald (2000) 'Hwæt'. In: Roberts, J. and J. Nelson (eds.) *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy*. London: King's College Centre for Late Antique & Medieval Studies, 525–556.
- von Lindheim, Bogislav (1951) 'Traces of colloquial speech in OE'. *Anglia* 70, 22–42.
- Wülfig, Ernst Peter (1901) *Die Syntax in den Werken Alfreds des Großen*. 2 vols. Bonn: Hanstein.

HANS SAUER is Professor at the University of Munich (LMU), where he has the chair of English Language and Medieval English Literature; he also teaches at the Wyzsza Szkola (Gallus) in Katowice. Previous posts and assignments (some still continuing) were at Eichstätt, Würzburg, Dresden, Innsbruck, Lodz, Palermo, Columbus/Ohio, and Brno. His research interests and publications include critical editions and studies of Medieval English texts (e.g. *Theodulfi Capitula* 1978; *The Owl and the Nightingale* 1983; *Anglo-Saxon Heritage in Munich* 2005), word-formation (e.g. *Nominalkomposita im Frühmittelenglischen* 1992), glosses and glossaries (e.g. *The Épinal-Erfurt Glossary*), lexicography, plant names, *Beowulf*, especially *Beowulf* translations and films, the history of linguistics and of English studies, varieties of English (e.g. pidgins and creoles; advertising), interjections. In 2009 his introduction to English linguistics was published in a Russian version. He is a co-editor of, e.g., *Anglia* and Middle English Texts (MET).

Address: Prof. Hans Sauer, University of Munich (LMU), Department of English and American Studies, Schellingstr. 3, 80799 München, Germany [e-mail: [hans.sauer@anglistik.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:hans.sauer@anglistik.uni-muenchen.de)]