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# The Attenuative Derivation in Kambaata

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WORKSHOP “ATTENUATED QUALITIES IN A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE”

# 1. Some background on Kambaata

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CLASSIFICATION, SPEAKER AREA, TYPOLOGICAL PROFILE ...

# 1.1. Classification and sociolinguistics

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- Afro-Asiatic > Cushitic > ... > Highland East Cushitic
- Speaker Area: Southwest Ethiopia
- Number of speakers: > 600,000 (acc. to 2007 census)
- Medium of instruction in primary schools
- Official orthography (used here with minimal modifications)

## 1.2. Typological profile I

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- **Suffixing**, agglutinating-fusional with many portmanteau morphemes
- Head- and dependent-marking
  - 9 nominal cases
  - Subject indexing on verbs
- **Strict head-finality**
  - Dependent clauses before main clauses
  - Main verb or copula = last constituent in a sentence
  - All modifiers before head noun
- **Phonemic stress**, but no lexical, only grammatical minimal pairs, e.g. *ánganne* (NOM) - *angánne* (ACC) - *anganné* (GEN) ‘(of) our hands’

## 1.2. Typological profile II

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### Parts of speech

- 4 large sets with open membership: nouns, **adjectives**, verbs, ideophones
- Several small (closed) sets: various sets of pronouns, numerals and quantifiers, demonstratives, ...

## 1.3. (No) earlier works on attenuatives

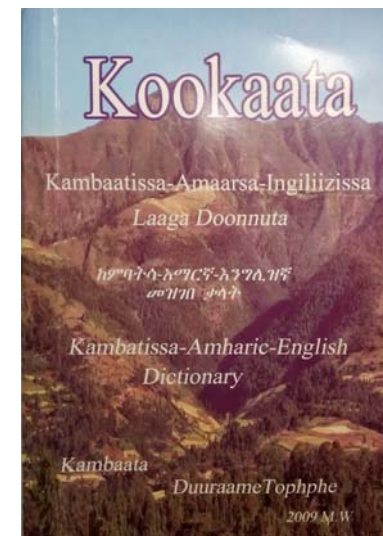
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- Works on related languages contain no information on attenuatives
- Earlier works on Kambaata contain no information on attenuatives
- Earlier works on Kambaata adjectives:
  - Treis (2008: §8): Inflectional and derivation morphology
  - Treis (2011): Agentive derivation
  - Treis (2017) treats, among others, de-numeral (compound) adjectives

# 1.4. Sources and data collection

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- 2002-2007: No data on Kambaata attenuatives at all
- 2 examples attenuative examples attested in a natural recording: conversation about the book “The Mixed-Up Chameleon” by Eric Carle (Harper Collins Publishers) in 2016
- Supplemented by some elicited forms prompted by these examples
- Database was extended when Alemu’s (2016) dictionary was published: His monolingual definitions of Kambaata entries contain as many as 56 attenuative adjectives (types, not tokens!)
- Examples were extracted, checked, discussed, paraphrased and exemplified with (near-natural) question-answer or statement-comment pairs with Deginet Wotango and Selamu Wotango in March 2018



# 1.5. Structure of this talk

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## 2. Form

- Inflectional morphology of adjectives
- Derivational morphology of adjectives
- Attenuative derivation *-lab*

## 3. Meaning

- Adjective + *-lab*
- Verb + *-lab*
- Noun + *-lab*
- Productivity

## 4. Summary



# 2. Form

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ADJECTIVAL INFLECTION, ADJECTIVAL DERIVATION, MORPHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF ATTENUATIVES, SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS

## 2.1. Adjectival inflection

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- Adjectives as modifiers in the NP: case/gender-agreement with head noun, 3-case system ACC, NOM, OBL
- Adjectives fall into 5 declensions
- Adjectives as NP heads: full case-marking potential, 9-case system like nouns ACC, NOM, GEN, DAT, ABL, ICP,\* LOC, OBL, PRED

Table 1. Case/gender morphemes on adjectives in *-á(-ta)* (Declension A1)

	ACC	NOM	OBL
M	<i>-á</i>	<i>'-u</i>	<i>'-a ~ '-a-a</i>
F	<i>-á-ta</i>	<i>'-a-t</i>	<i>'-a ~ '-a-ta</i>

\*ICP = instrumental-comitative-perlative

## 2.1. Adjectival inflection

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- Case/gender-agreement agreement of adjectives

(1)	<i>iib-á</i>	<i>wo'-á</i>	<i>iib-áta</i>	<i>azu-úta</i>
	warm-mACC	water-mACC	warm-fACC	milk-fACC
	<i>iib-u</i>	<i>wó'-u</i>	<i>iib-at</i>	<i>áz-ut</i>
	warm-mNOM	water-mNOM	warm-fNOM	milk-fNOM
	<i>iib-a(a)</i>	<i>wo'-iin</i>	<i>iib-a(ta)</i>	<i>az-óochch</i>
	warm-mOBL	water-mICP	warm-fOBL	milk-fABL
	'(with) warm water'		'(from/than) warm milk'	

## 2.2. Adjectival derivation

- Several productive derivational mechanisms to create adjectives

Table 2. Adjectival derivations

Derivation	Morphological structure	Example
Proprietary	Noun- <i>aam</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>orc-á</i> ‘mud’ > <i>orc-aam-ú</i> ‘muddy’ (m)
Agentive	Verb/Noun- <i>aan</i> -Number-Case+Gender	e.g. <i>dimb-</i> ‘be(come) drunk’ > <i>dimb-aan-ch-ú</i> ‘drunkard’ (m)
Resultative	Ideophone- <i>eem</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>dákk=y-</i> ‘be hidden’ > <i>dakk-eem-á</i> ‘hidden’ (m)
Privative	Noun- <i>beel</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>wozan-á</i> ‘heart’ > <i>wozan-beel-ú</i> ‘heartless’ (m)
Attenuative	Adj/Noun/Verb- <i>lab</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>mux-á</i> ‘wet’ > <i>mux-(i)-lab-á</i> ‘a bit wet’ (m)
Similative	Noun- <i>agud</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>bun-á</i> ‘coffee’ > <i>bun-agud-á</i> ‘coffee-like, coffee-coloured’

## 2.3. Attenuative derivation

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Figure 1. Structure of attenuative adjectives

A – N – V Stem		Attenuative		Inflection
Root	Derivation	(epenthetic <i>-i</i> )	<i>-lab</i>	Case/Gender

(2) *gambal-lab-á(ta) ~ gamball-i-lab-á(ta)* ‘blackish’ (from *gamball-á(ta)* ‘black’)

- Optional epenthesis or cluster simplification before *-lab* (speaker-dependent)
- Attenuative added to simple root or extended stems, e.g. *bun-agud-lab-á(ta)* {coffee-SIM-ATT-m/fACC} ‘brownish (lit. coffee-like-ish)’
- Attenuative adjectives as input of the *-im-* (quality noun) derivation (like other adjectives), e.g. *shiish-lab-im-áta* ‘quality/state of being a bit sour’ (Alemu 2016: 797)

## 2.4. Syntactic functions

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- As all other adjectives, attenuative adjectives can be used as (i) adnominal modifiers in the NP, (ii) NP heads, incl. heads of non-verbal predicates, and (iii) adverbial modifiers in the clause.
- Use as non-verbal predicate:

(3) *Kám, bux-ichch-i-láb-a-anka,*  
INTJ poor-SG-EP-ATT-mPRED-mCOP2<N>

*áff-ee-si bor-s-á xuud-dáanti-bay?*  
seize-3mPRF-DEF.REL bag-mACC see-2sIPV-NEG.Q

(Context: A says: “He wears a beautiful coat, he must be rich.”

– B replies:) ‘Ah no! He is “poorish”, don’t you see the bag that he carries?’

(fieldnotes 3/2018)

# 3. Meaning

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ADJECTIVE PLUS *-LAB*, NOUN PLUS *-LAB*, VERB PLUS *-LAB*,  
PRODUCTIVITY

## 3.1. Monolingual explication

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- (4) *su'm[m]-caakk-is-aan-ch-óon*      *botokonn-ámm*  
noun-light-CAUS1-AG-SG-mLOC      attach-PASS.3mPCO
- kotim-á*      *bikk-á*      *ih-ú*      *kul-is-aan-ch-ú*  
less-mACC      amount-mACC      become-mACC      tell-CAUS1-AG-SG-mACC
- [Monolingual definition of *-lab:*] ‘something that signals a lesser amount (extent, degree) when attached to an adjective (lit. a noun-enlightener)’  
(Alemu 2016: 635; stress marks, segmentation, glossing and English translation mine)

- Information to be drawn (and examined) from this definition
  - Attached to adjectival bases
  - Expressing a reduced degree of a quality



## 3.2. Attenuated colours

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- First attested examples: *-lab* used for the attenuation of colours; speakers accept *-lab* on all colour terms, ‘reddish’ most frequently attested

(1) *baar-lab-áta*      *ik-k*      *fad-dóo ’u,*      *hikkánne-n*  
yellow-ATT-fACC    become-3fPCO    do\_ completely-3fPFV    P\_DEM2.mOBL-N  
‘She (= the chameleon) became yellowish, just there.’ (TD2016-02-11\_001)

*gamball-(i)-lab-á(ta)* ‘blackish’ (Alemu 2016: 464, 812, 868)

*wojj-(i)-lab-á(ta)* ‘whitish’ (Alemu 2016: 160, 1061)

*biishsh-(i)-lab-á(ta)* ‘reddish’ (Saint-Exupéry 2018, Alemu 2016: xxvi, 29, 128, 216, 229, 261, 307, 335, 842, 844, 1010, 1045)

*bull-(i)-lab-á(ta)* ‘greyish’ (Alemu 2016: 161, 759, 778)

*bun-agud-lab-á(ta)* ‘brownish’ (Alemu 2016: 163)

### 3.3. Other attenuated qualities

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- Reduced degree of a quality (‘a bit [QUALITY]’, ‘almost [QUALITY]’, ‘fairly [QUALITY]’)
- Connotation (positive/negative) not fixed

(5) A: *Oddishsh-at tadá mool-táa’u, aag-ís-i!*  
clothes-fNOM by\_now be(come)\_dry-3fIPV enter-CAUS1-2sIMP

B: *Mux-i-láb-a-anta, qah-únka hád-a-n egér-tun.*  
wet-EP-**ATT**-fPRED-fCOP2<N> small-mACC<N> outside-fOBL-N wait-3fJUS

A: ‘The clothes should be dry by now, bring them in!’

– B (goes to check:) ‘They are still a bit wet, leave them outside for a while.’

(fieldnotes 3/2018)

## 3.4. V-*lab*: Approximate manner (I)

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- Deverbal *-lab*-adjectives express a similar, approximate manner of doing something (‘kind of V’, ‘almost (but not quite) in a V-ing manner’)
- Used adverbially in a clause (adverbial case: accusative)
- Alemu (2016): 15 different deverbal adjectives (some attested several times)
- Adjectives based on simple and extended verb forms, e.g.

*torr-lab-á* ‘in a kind of throwing way’

(*torr-* ‘throw’)

*maqees-lab-á* ‘in a kind of forcing way’

(*maqees-* ‘force (tr.)’)

*gis-i-lab-á* ‘in a kind of sleeping way’

(*gis-* ‘sleep’)

*uucc-lab-á* ‘in a kind of begging way’

(*uucc-* ‘beg’)

*uucc-aqq-lab-á* {beg-MID-ATT-mACC}

‘in a way of almost begging for one’s benefit’

*boroo’rr-am-lab-á* {insult.MID-PASS-ATT-mACC}

(*boroor-* ‘insult’)

‘in a way of almost insulting each other’

## 3.4. *V-lab*: Approximate manner (II)

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- (6) *Ciil-ii*      *daabb-úta*      *háshsh*      *bors-áan-ta-'i*  
infant-mDAT bread-fACC want.1sPCO bag-mLOC-L-1sPOSS
- gizz-á*      *xuujj-oommi=da*      *bácc-o.*  
money-mACC see-1sPFV.REL=COND be\_absent-3mPFV
- Shay-í*      *min-í*      *adab-áa*      *uucc-aqq-(i)-lab-á*  
tea-mGEN house-mGEN boy-mACC beg-MID-EP-ATT-mACC
- ass-eemmi=dá-a*      *kámm-o-'e*  
do-1sPFV.REL=COND-ADD reject-3mPFV-1sO

(Person reports about her experience in the bakery:) ‘I wanted to buy bread for the child, but when I looked for money in my bag, there was none. Even though I **kind of begged** (him) **for my benefit** (e.g. explained the situation, promised to bring the money later etc.), the tea house seller rejected to give (the bread) to me.’ (fieldnotes 3/2018)

### 3.4. *V-lab*: Approximate manner (III)

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(7) A: *M-á*                    *y-ée?*  
      what-mACC    say-3mPRF

B: *M-á*                    *y-ee=dá-a*                    *dag-im-bá'a.*  
      what-mACC    say-3mPFV=COND-ADD    know-3mNIPV-NEG

*Gis-i-lab-á*                    *ih-ánee-t*  
sleep-EP-**ATT**-mACC    become-1sICO.VV-COP3

*maccooc-eemíi-hu*  
hear-1sPRF.REL.NMZ1a-mNOM

A: ‘What did he say?’ – B: ‘I don’t whether he said something. I heard (something but) I was **kind of sleeping** (i.e. not paying attention).’  
(fieldnotes 3/2018)

## 3.4. N-*lab*: Similar nature (I)

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- **Denominal** *-lab*-adjectives express ‘similar to N in nature, character, main features’ and create ad-hoc categories
- Used as NP heads or as modifiers in the clause
  - e.g. *weteechch-lab-á haqq-á*  
‘a tree which is similar to the *weteechchu*-tree (here: producing a similar smell)’  
(fieldnotes 3/2018)
  - e.g. *oddishsh-lab-á* ‘(a) clothing-like, garment-like (thing)’ (Alemu 2016: 319)
- Alemu (2016): 21 different denominal adjectives (some attested several times)

## 3.4. N-*lab*: Similar nature (II)

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- Derived *-lab*-adjectives used as modifier:

(8) *oot-á*      *al-tichch*      *marf-lab-á*      *ut-ichch-ú*      *áff*      *wáall-o*  
hedge-fGEN    top-mABL    needle-**ATT**-mACC    thorn-SG-mACC    seize.3mPCO    come-3mPFV

‘He brought a **needle-like** thorn (e.g. a long, pointed thorn) from the hedge (e.g. to take out a splinter).’ (fieldnotes 3/2018)

- Derived *-lab*-adjectives used as NP head:

(9) *ann-i-sí*      *urr-óon*      *min-lab-á*      *uurr-ishsh-ée ‘u*  
father-mGEN-3mPOSS    frontyard-fLOC    house-**ATT**-mACC    stand-CAUS1-3mPRF

‘He has built a **kind of house** (i.e. not a proper house in the speaker’s mind) in his father’s front yard.’ (fieldnotes 3/2018)

## 3.5. Attenuatives vs. Similatives (I)

Table 2. Adjectival derivations

Derivation	Morphological structure	Example
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Agentive	Verb/Noun- <i>aan</i> -Number-Case+Gender	e.g. <i>dimb-</i> 'be(come) drunk' > <i>dimb-aan-ch-ú</i> 'drunkard' (m)
Resultative	Ideophone- <i>eem</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>dákk=y-</i> 'be hidden' > <i>dakk-eem-á</i> 'hidden' (m)
Privative	Noun- <i>beel</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>wozan-á</i> 'heart' > <i>wozan-beel-ú</i> 'heartless' (m)
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Similative	Noun- <i>agud</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>bun-á</i> 'coffee' > <i>bun-agud-á</i> 'coffee-like. coffee-coloured'



## 3.5. Attenuatives vs. Similatives (I)

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Attenuative	Adj/Noun/Verb- <i>lab</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>weteechch-ú</i> 'tree_sp' > <i>weteechch-lab-á</i> 'weteechchí-tree-like' (m)
Similative	Noun- <i>agud</i> -Case+Gender	e.g. <i>bun-á</i> 'coffee' > <i>bun-agud-á</i> 'coffee-like, coffee-coloured' (m)

Difference?

## 3.5. Attenuatives vs. Similatives (II)

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- Denominal attenuative and denominal similatives are semantically close, but:
- N + attenuative-derivation ‘similar to N (in nature)’  
vs. N + similative-derivation ‘similar to N (in physical appearance)’

(10) *bun-agúd-a*      *gedeel-i*      *al-éen*      *afuu'll-itóo'u*  
coffee-**SIM**-mOBL stem-mGEN top-mLOC sit-3fPFV  
‘She (= the chameleon) sat down on a coffee-**like** (regarding colour)  
(i.e. brown) stem.’ (TD2016-02-11\_001)

→ To be done: corpus  
study of *-agud* SIM

(11) *bun-lab-á=rr-a*      *ag-gáyyoo'u*  
coffee-**ATT**-mACC=NMZp-mACC drink-3fPROG  
(Context: Speaker reports about an unknown drink in a certain  
area/of a certain ethnic group.)  
‘They drink something coffee-**like** (in nature, e.g. in taste, preparation).’  
(fieldnotes 3/2018)

## 3.6. Productivity

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- Fairly productive derivational mechanism
  - Extensively used by Alemu (2016) in monolingual dictionary definitions
  - Informants can (sometimes) come up with new examples and possible contexts
  - My main informant was able to integrate most (but not all) dictionary examples into small dialogs to illustrate their (near-)natural use
  - When these dialogues were checked with a second native speaker, the usage contexts were accepted by others.

# 4. Summary

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# 4. Summary

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- Attenuative adjectives are adjectives that express
  - (on adjectival bases) a reduced degree of a quality
  - (on verbal bases) an approximate, almost (/not quite) identical manner
  - (on nominal bases) a similarity in nature, character ( $\neq$  simulative derivation: expresses similarity in physical appearance)
- No link to diminution
- Fairly productive derivational mechanism
- So far no cognate derivations known in related languages ( $\rightarrow$  to be done: survey with questionnaire)
- Diachronic source unknown

# Abbreviations

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ABL ablative, ACC accusative, ADD additive, AG agentive, ATT attenuative, CAUS1 simple causative, COND conditional, COP2 copula *-ha* (m)/*-ta* (f), COP3 copula *-VV-t*, DAT dative, DEF definite, DEM2 medial demonstrative, EP epenthesis, f feminine, GEN genitive, ICO imperfective converb, ICP instrumental-comitative-perlative, IMP imperative, INTJ interjection, IPV imperfective, JUS jussive, L linker, LOC locative, m masculine, MID middle, N pragmatic morpheme (function as yet to determine), NEG negation, NIPV non-imperfective, NMZ1a nominalizer *-VV-case/gender*, NMZp plural/thing nominalizer with *=r*, NOM nominative, O object, OBL oblique, P\_ pronoun, PASS passive, PCO perfective converb, PFV perfective, POSS possessive, PRED predicative, PRF perfect, PROG progressive, Q question, REL relative, SG singulative, SIM similative, VV vowel lengthening

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