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# Interjections in Kambaata [revised]

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# Research context

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- Working group of the LabEx *Empirical Foundations of Grammar 2020-2024 Ideophones and Interjections* (YT & Aimée Lahaussais)



- In preparation: Special issue on ideophones (*Linguistic Typology at the Crossroads*)
- Work in progress: Workshop and special issue on the semantic typology of interjections (dir. Maïa Ponsonnet, with Aimée Lahaussais & YT)

# 1. Introduction into interjections

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DEFINITION, CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES, SEMANTIC TYPOLOGY

# Seminal definition of interjection

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- Wilkins (1992: 124):

“A conventional lexical form which (commonly and) conventionally constitutes an utterance on its own, (typically) does not enter into constructions with other word classes, is (usually) monomorphemic, and (generally) does not host inflectional or derivational morphemes.”

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- “conventional”, i.e. fixed (known/shared by the speaker community)
  - [Usually arbitrary phonological/phonetic shape
  - However: Interjections are also frequently discussed in connection with phonosymbolism, e.g. English *shush/hush!*, French *chut*, German *psst / ssssch*, Kambaata *sá* (‘be quiet’)
  - Also often noted: Their phonological marginality, i.e. unusual phonemes, unusual phonotactic patterns, e.g. German *pst!* ‘Hey you!’]

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- Syntactic autonomy
  - (Non-elliptic) utterances on their own, extra-clausal, separate intonation unit, syntactically peripheral
  - Often also means: do not have arguments or other dependents (but see Höder 2019 on interjections in Scandinavian languages and Kambaata further below)

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- Morphological invariance
  - At least from a synchronic perspective
  - Interjections may, of course, have developed from inflected elements; see, e.g., French *tiens!* (expression of surprise) < *tenir* ‘hold’

# Indexicality

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- Context-boundedness, situational relevance, indexicality
  - “[T]hey must be tied to the actual speech moment (...) before their complete interpretation (...) can be made. When I say “**Yippee!**” I am indexing *myself* and something (...) *here* which just *now* made me aware of some proposition which has made me feel excited and more happy (here and now), and so *I* say ‘[jipi:]’ in order to show how *I*’m feeling *right now*.” (Wilkins 1992: 132)



# Semantic typology

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- Ameka (1992)'s semantic typology of interjections: classification based on communicative function
  - **Expressive** (symptoms of the speaker's mental, emotional state)
    - Emotive, e.g. *Yuk!* (Disgust), *Wow!* (Surprise), *Ouch!* (Pain)
    - Cognitive, e.g. *aha!* (Understanding)
  - **Conative** (directed at the listener, expression of a speaker's wish),
    - Getting s.o.'s attention, e.g. German *Pst!*
    - Demanding action or response, e.g. *sh!* 'Be quiet!'
  - **Phatic** (establishment and maintenance of contact), e.g. *uh-huh* (backchanneling)



# Semantic typology: Revisions and additions

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- Ponsonnet (forthc.) adds 2 new categories with relevance in Australian languages
  - Constative (speaker describing a situation that they face), e.g. ‘there it comes’
  - Social (softening of interactions), e.g. for greetings, thanks, apologies
- Levisen (2019) adds the category of laughter interjections
- Heine (2023) in his *Grammar of Interactives* reshuffles the typology of interjections a bit
  - e.g. He takes “attention signals” (*hey!*) and “response signals” (*yes, no*) out of interjections.

# Interjections in grammars

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- Interjections have long been marginal words:
  - “It has been common to treat interjections as peripheral to the ‘real’ concerns of linguistics. Indeed, it has even been common to treat interjections as though they were outside of the concerns of linguistics altogether: placed, so to speak, into the wastebasket labelled ‘paralinguistic phenomena’.” (Wilkins 1992: 119f.)
- Uptick of works on interjections crosslinguistically and in individual lgs., see,
  - esp. Dingemanse et al. 2013 on *Huh?* as a universal word, Dingemanse forthc. etc.
  - see also Andrason and colleagues from 2020 to 2023: 13 papers on interjections in Hadza, Polish, Xhosa, Tjwao (Khoe), New Testament Greek, Biblical Aramaic, Biblical Hebrew, Ugaritic, ...
- They remain, however, rarely treated in grammars (Lahaussais 2016).

## 2. Case study: Kambaata

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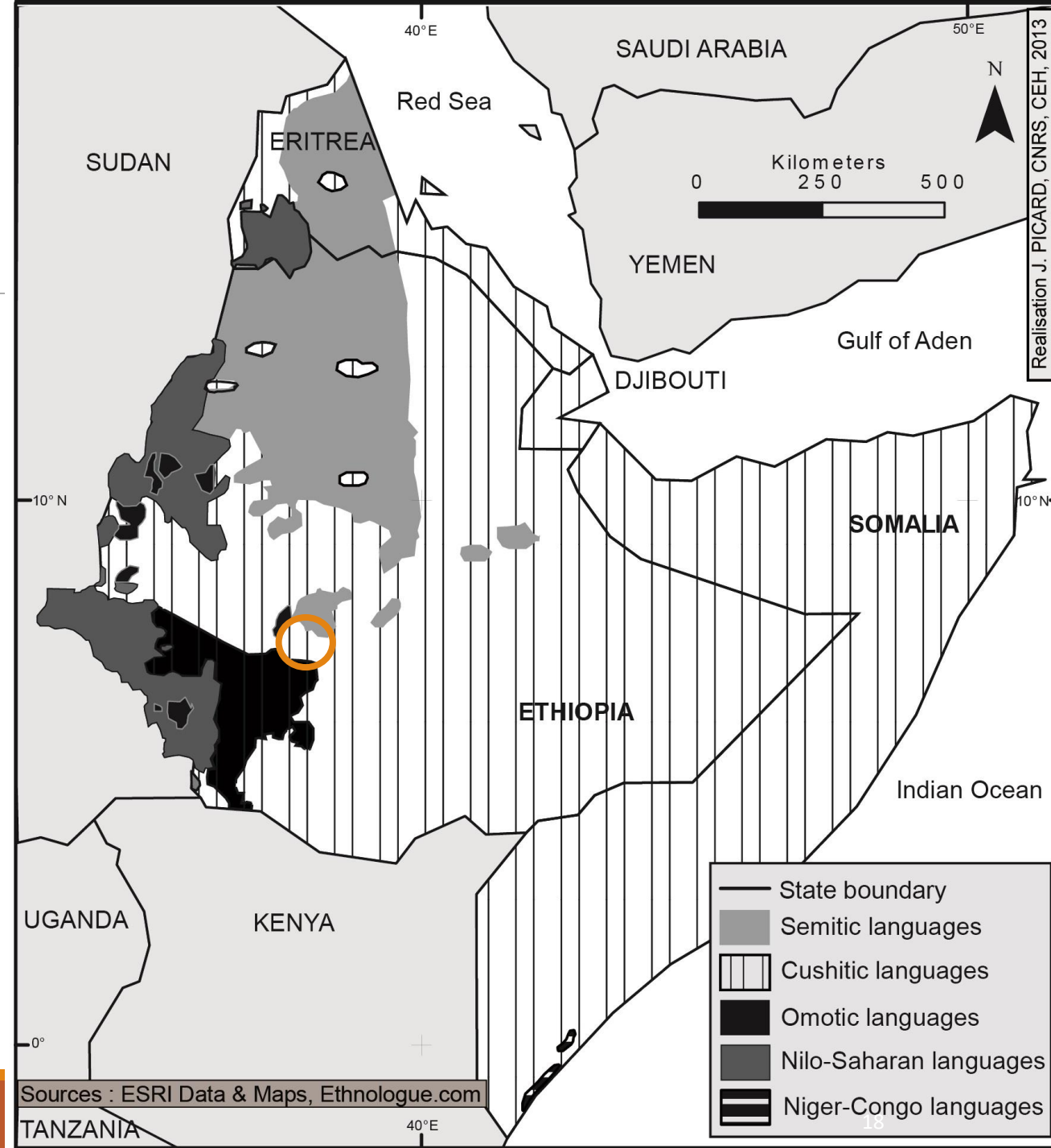
# 2.1. Introduction Kambaata

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INFLECTING VS. NON-INFLECTING WORD CLASSES

# Speaker area

- Classification:  
Cushitic > East Cushitic ... >  
Highland East Cushitic
- Number of speakers: > 600,000  
(acc. to 2007 census)



# Inflecting word classes

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- Kambaata is (almost) exclusively suffixing, rich in nominal and verbal inflectional and derivational morphology, morphological stress
  - Nouns: 2 genders, 9 cases, ~20 inflection classes (declensions)
  - Adjectives: 2 genders, 3 cases, agreeing with the head noun
  - Pronouns: person, number, gender, honorificity, case
  - Verbs: subject-indexing, aspect, mood, polarity, dependency status (main verb vs. converb vs. relative verb), etc.

# Uninflecting word classes

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- Some discourse particles
- 2 conjunctions: *té* ‘or’ and *bagáan* ‘but’
- (At most) a handful of adverbs: *léelan* ‘carefully, slowly’, *dángo* ‘unexpectedly’  
...
- Large word class of ideophones (cf. Treis forthcoming)



# Uninflecting word classes

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- Ideophones (~ 850 entries in Alemu 2016):
  - morphologically invariant + must be combined with the light verb *y-* ‘say’ (intrans.) and *a’-* ‘do’ (trans. clauses) to be inflected and syntactically integrated

(3) *mikk.mill*=*y-itu’nmáachch*      *címm*=*y-ít*  
budge.IDEO=say-3F.NEG4.CVB    shrink.IDEO=say-3F.PFV.CVB  
*afuu’ll-ít,*                      *ill-í-se*                      *al-í,*                      *muggeem-á,*  
sit\_down-3F.PFV.CVB    eye-F.ACC-3F.POSS    up-M.ACC    down-M.ACC  
*gur-áta,*    *makk-íta*      *bolóng~bolóng*=*at-táa’*,  
left-F.ACC    right-F.ACC    RED~move\_one’s\_eyes.IDEO=DO-3F.IPFV  
*tah-íchch-u*                      *waal-anó=g-a*                      *zug-gán.*  
flies-SGV-M.NOM    come-3F.IPFV.REL=SIM-M.ACC    lie\_in\_ambush-3F.PFV.CVB

(Speaking about a chameleon:) ‘It (lit. she) sat (there) stock-still, shrunk, (and only) moved its eyes up, down, to the left, to the right, (while) lying in ambush for a fly.’ (TD2016-02-11\_001)

# Uninflecting word classes

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- Some discourse particles
- 2 conjunctions: *té* ‘or’ and *bagáan* ‘but’
- A handful of adverbs: *léelan* ‘carefully, slowly’, *dángo* ‘unexpectedly’ ...
- Ideophones
- **Interjections**

# Uninflecting word classes

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- Interjections, e.g. *hashshú* ‘I am happy for you/I am happy because of you.’

*Hashshú*, *góon-ch-u-ta*,

*abb-íshsh*

*galaxx-áan-ke*.

yay.INTJ males-SGV-F.PRED-F.COP2 exceed-CAUS1.1SG.PFV.CVB thank-1SG.IPFV-2SG.OBJ

‘Yay, you are a hero! I thank you very much.’ (SMS exchange 2019, BN)

## 2.2. Interjections as a word class

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LANGUAGE-INTERNAL DEFINING CRITERIA, CATEGORIZATION  
DIFFICULTIES

# Interjections as a word class

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- Morphosyntactic criteria
  - Morphologically invariant, can constitute a non-elliptic utterance on their own (unlike discourse particles), do not have to occur with light verbs (unlike ideophones)
  - Non-morphological/lexically determined stress (like other morphologically invariant word classes, esp. ideophones)

*áayye* [grief], *hoogé* [sorrow, grief, anger],  
*hóola* [appreciation for achievement], *allaasá* [acknowledgement of a baby's burp]

# Difficulties of categorization

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- Difficulties of categorization not very frequent, but:
  - Where can the fine line between interjections and ideophones be drawn?  
Boundary is slightly permeable.
  - Where do interjections end and where do verbs begin?  
(See imperative-only verbs and conative interjections.)
  - Where do interjections end and where do demonstratives begin?  
(See presentative demonstratives and constative interjections.)

# Interjections vs. ideophones

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- Ideophones and interjections are in the vast majority of cases easily distinguishable
- Ideophones differ from interjections in that they (generally) require a light verb ('say' / 'do') – except sometimes in artistic speech: riddles, poetry (known for their brevity)

(4) *Cuph-á*      *dúbb,*      *can-á*      *wiqq*  
pestle-M.ACC   pound.IDEO   leather\_bag-M.ACC   tie\_tightly.IDEO

(Riddle) 'A pestle – to pound, a leather bag (filled with air) – to tie up.' (Desalegn 2020: 111; transcription, glossing and translation adapted; solution of the riddle unknown)

However: considered elliptic by native speakers

# Interjections > ideophones

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- Interjections seem to be able to turn into ideophones
- Boundary between *quoted* interjections and ideophones is slightly permeable
  - *hánda* ‘(I/we/someone/it are/is well,) thanks to God’ (no other addressee possible)
  - In exchanges about one’s (physical, psychological, economical) well-being, *hánda* constitutes an utterance of its own

[A:] *Wées-it*            *iill-ítee-ndo?*  
enset-F.NOM    reach-3F.PRF-Q

[B:] ***Hánda***            (*isí*)    *iill-ítee’u*  
thanks\_to\_God.INTJ    3M.IDAT reach-3F.PRF

[A:] ‘Are the enset (plants) ready (to be harvested)?’ – [B:] ‘Thanks to God, they are ready.’

(Field notes 2023, DWD)



# Interjections > ideophones

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- Interjection: *hánda* + *y-* ‘say’ = ‘say “Thanks to God”’
- Ideophone: *hánda=y-* ‘say’ = light verb construction, semantic broadening, ‘be thankful, be grateful; be content; be gratifying’

(2) *Hánda=y-í*                      *gáll-ee-haa*  
be\_grateful.IDEO = say-3M.PFV.CVB pass\_the\_night-3M.PRF.REL-M.COP2  
(Speaking about someone’s attitude/character) ‘He is (someone) who is content (with his life, with what he has)/he is a positive person.’ (Field notes 2023, DWD)

(3) *Habank-á*              *ichchí-i*                      *hánda=y-áano-ba’a*  
how\_much-M.ACC eat.3M.PFV.CVB-ADD be\_grateful.IDEO = say-3M.IPFV-NEG1  
(Speaking about a cow with a bad feed conversion ratio) ‘No matter how much it eats, it is not gratifying.’ (Field notes 2022, DWD)

# Imperativa tantum vs. interjections

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- From all verbal roots a regular imperative form can be formed
- 5 “special” imperatives only inflected for 2SG and 2PL
  - immediate situational relevance (recall interjections!)
  - can govern DO but cannot combine with anything else, e.g. not together with temporal adverbials

*ám-[i]* (SG) – *ammé* (PL) ‘Come (here) (for an instant)’

*ī* (SG) – *iiyé* (PL) ‘Take (what I have in my hands)!’

*mée* (SG) – *meeyé* (PL) ‘Give (to me what you have in your hands, with you)!’

*ashshám-[i]* (SG) – *ashshammé* (PL) (Greeting to people working) ‘Keep up the spirit!’  
(French: Bon courage!)

*kárag-[i]* (SG) – *káragge* (PL) ‘Listen up, pay attention!’

# Animal-directed communication

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- Animal-directed communication: morphologically invariant forms (incomplete list)

## ‘go’

- *hág* (for donkeys)
- *ár ~ síb* (for sheep, goats)
- *síf ~ sík* (for small goat)
- *chif* (for cats)
- *kút* (for chicken)
- *tá* (for cows)
- *bórt* (for bulls)
- *tích* (for calves)
- *bót* (for young bulls)
- *ách* (for big cattle)
- *túlum* (for heifer)
- ○ *hirká* ‘go into the cattle pen’ (for cattle)
- *fúl* (for dogs, out of the house), *píy* (away)
- *píy* (for wild animal)
- *zúr* (for horse, mule)
- *chái* (for mule)

## ‘come’

- *lúk-lúk-lúk* (for hens)
- *hurrú / húrr / azúrr* (for cats)
- *tí-tí-tí* (for dogs)
- *chí-chí-chí* (for sheep and goats)
- *sibu-sibu* (for small goats)
- *kulúl-kulúl* (for donkeys)
- *émba-émba* (for calves)
- *mác* (for mule)
- *hóq* (for horse, mule)
- *míu* (for wild animal e.g. hyena, leopard) ←

## other animal directed imperatives

- *sú* ‘catch’ (for dog)
- *háa* ‘stay calm’ (for cattle) [during milking]
- *ushshá* ‘stop’ (for donkey)
- *gó-gó* ‘settle, assemble, cluster’ (for bees) ←

# Interjections vs. presentative demonstratives

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- *kú'nn* for a long time mistakenly interpreted as an interjection

(5) *Aayichch-i daqqan-teenánta y-itáa-'e bagáan*  
Mum-F.NOM meet.REC-2PL.IPFV say-3F.IPFV-1SG.OBJ CONTR  
*kú'nn* *daqq-am-mu'nmáan* *kabar-ée* *iill-ineemm*  
meet.MID-PASS-1PL.NEG.CVB today-M.DAT reach-1PL.PRF

‘Mum used to tell me “You will meet (one day)” but – **Look!** – we haven’t met up to today.’  
(Kambaata Education Bureau 1989: 8.21)

# Interjections vs. presentative demonstratives

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- *kú'nn* for a long time mistakenly interpreted as an interjection  
but: masculine singular form of a presentative demonstrative paradigm

excerpt of the paradigm:

		M	F	M.PL	F.PL
Proximal (DEM1)	short	<i><b>kú'nn</b></i>	<i>tí'nn</i>	<i>kurú'nn</i>	<i>tirú'nn</i>
Medial (DEM2)	short	<i>hikkú'nn</i>	<i>hittí'nn</i>	<i>hikkurú'nn</i>	<i>hittirú'nn</i>

*kú'nn*

PRES\_DEM1.M

‘Here it (= the coffee: *buná* (**m**)) is!’

*tí'nn*

PRES\_DEM1.M

‘Here it (= the coffee spice: *xalachchíta* (**f**)) is!’

- But only *kú'nn* used as discourse signal (e.g. ‘here it comes!’, ‘here we go!’, ‘you see!’, ‘lo and behold’, French *voilà*) – recall example

## 2.3. Syntax of interjections

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# Syntax of interjections

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- Interjection with an accusative object

*Hashshú*, *góon-ch-u-ta*, *abb-íshsh* *galaxx-áan-ke*.  
yay.INTJ males-SGV-F.PRED-F.COP2 exceed-CAUS1.1SG.PFV.CVB thank-1SG.IPFV-2SG.OBJ  
*Y-itoontí=r-a* *gu'mm-ánka* *ekkú!*  
say-2SG.PFV.REL = NMZ4-M.ACC all-M.ACC <EMP> okay.INTJ  
'Yay, you are a hero! I thank you very much. Okay to all what you said.' (SMS exchange  
2019, BN)

# Syntax of interjections

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- Interjection with a dative object

[A:] *Wées-it*            *iill-ítee-ndo?*  
enset-F.NOM    reach-3F.PRF-Q

[B:] *Hánda*                    *(isí)*    *iill-ítee'u*  
thanks\_to\_God.INTJ    3M.DAT    reach-3F.PRF

[A:] ‘Are the enset (plants) ready (to be harvested)?’ –

[B:] ‘Thanks (to him), they are ready.’ (Field notes 2023, DWD)



# Syntax of interjections

- Some interjections can govern/combine with dative, accusative, vocative NPs
- Some interjections take pronominal object markers (e.g. 2SG.OBJ) that are otherwise found on verbs

<i>áayye ~ aayyée</i>	+ <b>VOC</b> or <b>DAT</b> + <i>áayye áte</i> (2SG.VOC) ‘Poor you’	Pain, regret, sorrow, grief
<i>hashshú</i>	+ <b>VOC</b> <i>hashshú áne</i> (1SG.VOC) ‘I am happy (for you or someone else)’	Congratulation
<i>háyy</i>	+ <b>VOC</b> <i>háyy áne</i> (1SG.VOC) ‘Poor me’	Regret
<i>hoogé</i>	+ <b>VOC</b> <i>hoogé áne</i> (1SG.VOC) ‘I am sorry (for the loss of s.th/s.o.)’	Sorrow
<i>hayyá</i>	+ <b>ACC</b> <i>hayyá baajaamíta</i> (F.ACC) ‘Bravo (to) the girl!’	Blessing, praise
<i>shiinch</i>	<b>ACC</b> + <i>baxará</i> (M.ACC) <i>shiinsh!</i> ‘Let the smallpox stay away!’	Defense
<i>hechchó</i>	+ <b>DAT</b> <i>hechchó kesáa</i> (2SG.DAT) ~ <i>heechchó-he</i> (-2SG.OBJ) ‘(I) bow to you’	Submission
<i>hóola</i>	+ <b>DAT</b> <i>hóola kesáa</i> (2SG.DAT) ~ <i>hóola-he</i> (-2SG.OBJ) ‘You surprise me!’	Surprise

# 3. Summary

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# Summary

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- Kambaata interjections
  - are conventional lexical forms
  - conventionally constitute non-elliptical utterances on their own
  - are monomorphemic
  - have lexically determined stress
  - are usually morphologically invariant
  - small areas of overlap between interjections and ideophones/interjections and imperative-only verbs/interjections and presentative demonstratives
  - some can host object morphemes (like verbs) and govern arguments

# Abbreviations

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ACC	accusative	NOM	nominative
ADD	additive	OBJ	object
CAUS	causative	PFV	perfective
COP	copula	POSS	possessive
CVB	converb	PRED	predicative
DAT	dative	PRF	perfect
EMP	emphatic	Q	question
F	feminine	RED	reduplication
IDEO	ideophone	REL	relative
INTJ	interjection	SG	singular
IPFV	imperfective	SGV	singulative
M	masculine	SIM	similative
NEG	negator	VOC	vocative
NMZ	nominalizer		

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