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The approximative derivation in Kambaata (Cushitic)

Abstract: Kambaata, a Cushitic language of Ethiopia, has a productive, word-class changing approximative derivation. The process marked by the suffix *-lab* takes adjectival, nominal and verbal roots as inputs and generates approximatives that belong to the adjective word class, whose members are characterised by their agreement behaviour in the NP. The meaning of the Kambaata approximatives is dependent on the word class of its input. Deadjectival approximatives express a vague, attenuated degree of a property, deverbal forms convey similarity or near-identity in manner, while denominal forms express similarity in nature or function and create *ad hoc* categories. The sub-meanings are subsumable under an overarching meaning of approximation, understood as deviation from a prototypical realisation. The source of the *-lab* suffix is a verb 'resemble'. From a Cushitic perspective, the Kambaata approximative derivation is unique of its kind. No related language is known to have approximative morphology.

Keywords: approximation, derivation, adjective, adjectivisation, Cushitic

1. Introduction[*]

Kambaata, a Cushitic language spoken in Ethiopia, has a productive, recently grammaticalised approximative derivation. The derivational process marked by the suffix *-lab* (APRX) generates adjectives on the basis of adjectival (1), verbal (2) or nominal roots (3), in order to express a reduced (attenuated) degree of a property, e.g. 'red' > 'reddish' (1), a near prototypical way of carrying out an action, e.g. 'run' > '(in an) almost running (manner)' (2), or a resemblance in nature and character, e.g. 'needle' > 'needle-like (object)' (3).

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(1)   *biishsh-i-**láb**-aa*   *kin-íin*
      red-EP-**APRX**-M.OBL   stone-M.ICP

      'with reddish stones' (Saint-Exupéry 2018: 19)

(2)   *dagud-**lab**-á*   *marámm* (…)
      run-**APRX**-M.ACC   walk.1SG.PFV.CVB

      '(I) went (there) almost running (…)'

(3)   *marf-**lab**-á*   *ut-ichch-ú*
      needle-**APRX**-M.ACC   thorn-SGV-M.ACC

      'a needle-like thorn'

In contrast to some other Cushitic languages in which the existence of adjectives is debatable (see, for instance, Banti 1988; Mous 2012: 358, 377–379), Kambaata has a clearly identifiable adjective word class, which is defined on the basis of morphosyntactic criteria. Apart from many morphologically simple adjectives, Kambaata has several adjectivising processes that allow for the creation of a theoretically unlimited number of derived adjectives (see Alemu 2016, which contains not less than 1731 (sub-)entries labelled "sc", the language-internal abbreviation for "adjective").[1]

This paper focusses on a synchronic analysis of the Kambaata approximative derivation from a typological perspective. Earlier work on Kambaata adjectives has overlooked this derivational process, even though fairly detailed descriptions of the inflectional and derivational morphology of adjectives are found in Treis (2008: 254–302; 2011; 2017a: 349–351). The paper also proposes a likely diachronic source for the approximative morpheme and thus seeks to enrich the discussion of possible sources of approximative morphology cross-linguistically. Finally, this study wants to further our understanding of adjectival derivational processes in Cushitic – a field that is hitherto hardly explored (see the very brief notes in Mous 2012: 379; Shay 2014: 581).

The discussion is structured as follows. After a brief general introduction into the language and the data collection methodology in Section 2, I sketch the typological profile of the language and introduce the defining features of open word classes in Section 3. Section 4 gives an overview of Kambaata's adjectivising processes. Section 5, the core of the paper, discusses the morphology, syntax and semantics of approximative adjectives, shows that

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[1] The label "sc" stands for *su'mm-caakkisaanchu* 'adjective'; an analysis of this term is later provided in (22).

an overarching meaning can be attributed to *-lab* and points out competing processes with an approximative meaning. Section 6 discusses the likely origin of the *-lab* derivation and proposes a grammaticalisation chain. Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. The language

2.1 Classification and speaker area

The Kambaata language (ISO-code 639-3: ktb, Glottolog code: kam1316) is spoken by the Kambaata, Xambaaro and Donga people, who settle around the Hambarrichcho massif in southern Ethiopia, about 300 km southwest of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. According to the last census, Kambaata has more than 600,000 speakers (Central Statistical Agency 2007: 74), the large majority of which live in the Kambaata-Xambaaro Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State. Kambaata belongs to the Highland East Cushitic branch of the Cushitic family (Afroasiatic phylum). The immediate neighbours of the Kambaata are speakers of other Highland East Cushitic languages (Hadiyya [hdy] and Alaaba [alw]) and Ometo languages of the Omotic family (Wolaitta [wal] and Dawro [dwr]). Amharic [amh], the Ethiopian lingua franca, is the most important second language of Kambaata speakers.

2.2 Orthography

The official Kambaata orthography is based on the Roman script (Treis 2008: 73–80; Alemu 2016) and used with minimal modifications to transcribe the data in this article. The following graphemes are not in accordance with IPA conventions: <ph> /p'/, <x> /t'/, <q> /k'/, <j> /dʒ/, <c> /tʃ'/, <ch> /tʃ/, <sh> /ʃ/, <y> /j/ and <'> /ʔ/. Geminate consonants and long vowels are marked by doubling, e.g. <shsh> /ʃː/ and <ee> /eː/. Nasalisation is marked by a macron, e.g. <ā> /ã/. Consonant clusters consisting of a glottal stop and a simplex sonorant are spelt as trigraphs, e.g. <'rr> /ʔr/, to distinguish them from laryngealised sonorants, e.g. <'r> /r'/. The minor adaptations to the official orthography made in this contribution concern the additional marking of phonemic stress by an acute accent and the consistent notation of the phonemic glottal stop whenever it occurs in word-medial and word-final position.

2.3 Data collection

The data for this paper comes from a corpus of recorded narratives and conversations, my field notes of volunteered or elicited data as well as a corpus of locally published written texts. In the fieldwork data collected between 2002 and 2007 in the Kambaata-Xambaaro Zone, no derivates with *-lab* are attested – which explains why this process is not addressed in Treis (2008). The first two attestations are in a recording of a conversation made in 2016, which permitted the elicitation of some additional examples. The database on *-lab* derivates was significantly extended when Alemu's (2016) dictionary was published. The monolingual definitions that follow each lexical entry in this comprehensive work are a rich data source for the study of the approximative derivation; the definitions contain altogether as many as 61 types (144 tokens) of *-lab* derivates. In a fieldtrip in 2018, I extracted these examples from the dictionary, discussed their forms and meanings with two native speakers (dwd, swd) and asked them to exemplify their use in near-natural sentences or mock-dialogues, i.e. question-answer or statement-comment pairs of two imagined interlocutors. In the following years (2019–2022), 14 more *-lab* tokens were obtained, at different occasions, in solicited and unsolicited data from three different speakers (ts, dwd and ayz). Finally, the recently published collection of Kambaata idioms (Alamu 2022) contains 9 additional examples. At present, my database contains altogether 84 types of *-lab* derivates (209 tokens).

Three categories of data are distinguished by the labels after each example: (i) recorded, spontaneously produced data (marked by the initials of the recorded speaker's name, the date and the file number), (ii) written data (marked by a literature reference) and (iii) data elicited and volunteered in the field and in remote fieldwork sessions (labelled "elicited"). In the elicitation process, translation elicitation was intentionally avoided. Speakers were instead provided with word forms for which they formulated example sentences or dialogues, or they were asked to paraphrase or reformulate existing examples.

3. Typological profile and word classes

Kambaata has a head-final constituent order; the final element in a sentence is usually a fully finite main verb or a copula. The language is agglutinating-fusional and (almost)

exclusively suffixing. Apart from a number of closed classes, the following open word classes can be defined morphosyntactically: verbs, nouns, adjectives, ideophones and interjections. Verbal, nominal and adjectival roots are bound. Lexical roots and derivational morphemes are undetermined for stress, while inflectional morphemes consist of a segmental component and a suprasegment (stress) that is realised, dependent on the grammatical category to be marked, on a specific syllable of the inflected word form.

Kambaata is a nominative-accusative language. The nominative is the subject case; the accusative marks direct objects and certain adverbial constituents, and also serves as the citational form of nouns. Nouns are obligatorily marked for gender (masculine vs. feminine). The assignment of grammatical gender is mostly arbitrary, with the exception of nouns referring to human beings and higher animals, where it is sex-based; see, e.g., the arbitrary assignment of masculine gender to the term for a whole enset leaf,[2] *habar-á*, and of feminine gender to the term for an enset leaf from which the midrib was torn off and which is used as underlay, padding or wrapping, *faatt-áta* (Tab. 1). Nouns distinguish nine case forms, all of which are marked by a segmental suffix and a specific stress pattern. Stress is phonemic and serves – either alone or in combination with a segmental suffix – to distinguish between grammatical forms of one lexeme. Nouns are categorised into altogether 21 declensions (Treis 2008: 103).

Tab. 1: Case paradigm of a masculine noun (declension M1 in *-á*) and a feminine noun (declension F1a in *-áta*)

Case form	*habar-á* (M) 'enset leaf'	*faatt-áta* (F) 'enset leaf without the midrib'
Accusative	*habar-á*	*faatt-áta*
Nominative	*habár-u*	*fáatt-at*
Genitive	*habar-í*	*faatt-á*
Dative	*habar-íi(ha)*	*faatt-áa(ha ~ ta)*
Ablative	*habar-íichch*	*faatt-áachch*
Instrumental/comitative/perlative	*habar-íin*	*faatt-áan*
Locative	*habar-áan*	*faatt-áan*
Oblique/vocative	*habár-a*	*fáatt-a*
Predicative (with COP2)	*habár-a*	*fáatt-a*

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[2] Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*) is a food plant cultivated in the highlands of southern Ethiopia.

Adnominal adjectives, numerals and demonstratives agree with their head noun in case and gender. The case system of adnominals is reduced to three forms: nominative, accusative and oblique. Adjectives fall into five declensions (Treis 2008: 256), of which one is exemplified in Table 2.

Tab. 2: Case/gender inflection of an adjectival modifier: The example of *farr-á(ta)* 'bad' (declension A1)

Case form	**M**	**F**
Accusative	*farr-á*	*farr-áta*
Nominative	*fárr-u*	*fárr-at*
Oblique	*fárr-a(a)*	*fárr-a(ta)*

The oblique form of adnominals signals agreement with a non-nominative, non-accusative head noun; see *tordúm-aa* before the instrumental head noun in (4).

(4) *Bu'll-í* *hogob-úta* ***tordúm-aa*** *birr-íin*
enset_flour-M.GEN donkey_load-F.ACC ten-M.OBL birr-M.ICP

hir-éenno
buy-3HON.IPFV

'(In the old days,) one bought a donkey load of enset flour for (lit. with) 10 (Ethiopian) birr.' (EK2016-02-23_003)

An adjective (or a numeral) may also function as the head of an NP.[3] As such, it has the same case-marking potential as a noun and is marked for one of the nine nominal cases (Tab. 1); see, e.g., the adjective in the instrumental-comitative-perlative (ICP) case in (5) and the nominative and accusative adjectives in (6). As NP head, the adjective adopts the gender of the omitted head noun, which is masculine in (5) and (6).

(5) ***Hiil-íin*** *hoshsh-ó-o(hu)* *hāy-íin*
bad-M.ICP pass_the_day-3M.PFV.REL-NMZ1.M.NOM front_leg-M.ICP

kad-áno
kick-3M.IPFV

[Proverb] 'The one who has passed the day with a bad one (i.e. in bad company) kicks with the front legs.' (Alamu & Alamaayyo 2017: 80)[4]

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[3] In contrast to adjectives and numerals, demonstratives distinguish between adnominal and pronominal forms.

[4] Stress marks, glosses and translations of all data cited from local Kambaata publications are mine.

(6)   *Kánn*   *wud-í*   **qoxar-á**   *hikkáaph*   *wud-í*
     A_DEM1.M.OBL   side-M.GEN   strong-M.ACC   A_DEM4.M.OBL   side-M.GEN

     qoxár-u   *uujj-ee'-íichch*   *ís*   *Leegáam-o-ot*
     strong-M.NOM   make_fall-3M.PFV.REL-ABL   3M.NOM   L.-M.OBL-COP3

     'If the strong one (i.e. strong wrestler) of that side (over there) takes down the strong one of this side, he is (called) "Leegaamo".' (EK2016-02-23_001)

The feminine adjective *hiil-at* 'bad' in (7) refers to an implicit plural referent – note that two (of three) plurative markers in Kambaata are grammatically feminine (Treis 2014: 115).

(7)   *Wól-it*   **híil-at**   *iill-ít*   *ul-tún-ka-'nne*
     other-F.NOM   bad-F.NOM   reach-3F.PFV.CVB   touch-3F.JUS-NEG3-2PL.OBJ

     [Blessing:] 'May other bad (things) not reach (and) affect you (PL)!' (AN2016-02-19_001)

Adjectival predicates agree with their subject in gender, are marked for the predicative (pred) case and combine with the ascriptive-identificational copula *-(h)a(a)* (M.COP2)/ *-ta(a)* (F.COP2), as in (8).[5]

(8)   *Tí*   *hóol-ch-ut*   *abb-ís-s*
     A_DEM1.F.NOM   sheep-SGV-F.NOM   exceed-CAUS1-3F.PFV.CVB

     moos-áan-ch-u-ta
     disease-AG-SGV-F.PRED-F.COP2

     'This sheep (F) is very sickly.' (Saint-Exupéry 2018: 14)

As seen in the glosses of the preceding examples, verbs inflect for aspect, mood, polarity and dependency status. All verbs apart from verbal nouns carry simple or bipartite subject indexes. Direct and indirect objects can be expressed by suffixed pronouns at the right edge of the inflected verb (7).

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[5] Numeral and demonstrative predicates take a different copula: -V*t* (COP3).

4. Overview of adjectival derivation and compounding

Kambaata has a large class of basic adjectival lexemes, such as *farr-á(ta)* 'bad' (Tab. 2). All simple, underived adjectival roots in the language have a corresponding inchoative-stative property verb of the same root, i.e. *farr*-Case+Gender [ADJ] 'bad' – *farr*-Subject+TAM [v] 'be(come) bad'. It is still unclear whether one should assume that inchoative-stative verbs are derived from adjectives, or vice versa, through conversion, or that the word class of property concepts is underspecified, allowing for both adjectival and verbal inflection (Treis 2008: 269).

Kambaata also has five productive derivational processes to create adjectives on the basis of nominal, verbal, ideophonic and adjectival roots (Tab. 3), the first four processes are briefly addressed in this section, the approximative derivation is discussed in detail in the following. All derivational morphology (in bold) is found between the root and the adjectival case/gender inflection; the latter is realised as *-á/-áta*, *-ú/-íta*, *-ú/-úta* in the accusative (= citational) masculine/feminine form, depending on the declension of the resulting derived adjective.

Tab. 3: Productive adjectivising derivations

Derivation	Morphological structure	Example
Proprietive	Noun-***aam***-Case+Gender	e.g. *orc-á* 'mud' > *orc-**aam**-ú* (M)/*-íta* (F) 'muddy'
Agentive	Verb/Noun-***aan***-Number-Case+Gender	e.g. *dimb-* 'be(come) drunk' > *dimb-**aan**-ch-ú(ta)* 'drunkard'
Resultative	Ideophone-***eem***-Case+Gender	e.g. *dákk=y-* 'be hidden' > *dakk-**eem**-á(ta)* 'hidden'
Caritive	Noun-***beel***-Case+Gender	e.g. *wozan-á* 'heart' > *wozan-**beel**-ú(ta)* 'forgetful (lit. heartless)'[6]
Approximative	Adjective/Verb/Noun/etc.-***lab***-Case+Gender	e.g. *mux-á(ta)* 'wet' > *mux-(i)**lab**-á(ta)* 'a bit wet'

Proprietive adjectives attribute to the head noun they modify the property of possessing, being full of, containing or being characterised by N, i.e. the nominal root on which they are based (Treis 2008: 274–277); see, for instance, *buur-ú* 'butter' > *buur-aam-ú/-íta* 'containing butter (e.g. coffee)' and *fool-i* 'soul' > *fool-aam-ú/-íta* 'soul-having (i.e. living)' (9).

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[6] The heart is the seat of the mind in Kambaata.

Proprietive adjectives can express a time-stable property, e.g. *maq-aam-ú/íta* 'strong (lit. having strength)' < *maq-óo* 'strength', or a temporary property, which enables reference to someone (or something) standing out from a group, e.g. a girl who is *boos-aam-íta* 'water pot-having' (< *boos-ú* 'water pot') is probably accompanied by girls who do not carry a water pot. Proprietive adjectives take the case/gender markers *-ú* (M.ACC)/*-íta* (F.ACC).

(9)   *Mann-íi*   *gizz-íi*   *reh-ée=hanníi*
        people-M.DAT   domestic_animal-M.DAT   die-3M.PFV.REL=NMZ3.M.DAT

        *fool-**aam**-íi*   *jabá*
        soul-PROP-M.DAT   bless.INTJ

        'Bless (the coffee) for the people, for the domestic animals, for the dead, for the living (lit. soul-having)!' (AN2016-02-19_001)

The agentive derivation takes verbal (and to a lesser extent nominal) roots as basis for adjectives expressing 'who/which verb-s; who/which is engaged in noun'; see, e.g., *mogga'-aan-ch-ú(ta)* 'who (m/f) steals' < *mogga'-* [verb] 'steal' and *zeem-aan-ch-ú(ta)* 'who (m/f) is engaged in herding' < *zeem-áta* [noun] 'herding'. The referents characterised by these agentive adjectives can be habitual/professional agents just as well as occasional/one-off agents (consult Treis 2011 for other less common meanings of the agentive derivation). The derivational morpheme *-aan* is obligatorily followed by a number marker, either *-ch* SGV or *-n* PLV3, and the case/gender morpheme *-ú* (M.ACC)/*-úta* (F.ACC); see (8).

The resultative derivation takes a simple or reduplicated ideophone as input and conveys that a referent has undergone the process expressed by the ideophone and is therefore now "ideophoned" (Treis 2008: 283–285; forthcoming: Section 3.4.1), e.g. *qonfo'll-eem-á(ta)* 'dented' < *qonfó'll=y-* 'get a dent, be dented' and *luf~luf-eem-á(ta)* 'soft, malleable, fluffy' < *lúf~lúf=y-* 'be(come) soft, malleable, fluffy'.[7] In addition to the 26 examples given in Treis (2008: 283–284; forthcoming: Section. 3.4.1), Alemu (2016) contains 38 resultative derivates as entries or in the monolingual definitions; all *-eem* derivates are deideophonic.

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[7] Ideophones obligatorily combine with a light verb to inflect. In the examples given here, the enclitic element =*y-* is the light verb 'say'.

The caritive morpheme *-beel* generates denominal adjectives with the meaning 'N-less, not having N'.[8] It either attaches to the nominal root or (with a small number of nouns ending in a long vowel) to the genitive form; it is followed by the case/gender markers *-ú* (M.ACC)/ *-úta* (F.ACC). In Treis (2008: 277), the caritive derivation was too hastily characterised as "seldom used", whereas Alemu's (2016) dictionary shows that it is in fact fairly productively applicable, at least in written Kambaata. See, for instance, *bonx-beel-ú(ta)* 'leafless, without leaves' < *bonx-á* 'leave(s)' and *seer-beel-ú(ta)* 'illegal, without rules' < *seer-á* 'rule, law'. However, most caritive adjectives attested in the written corpus are best considered semantically transparent *ad hoc*-creations and the result of the generalisation of a hitherto only weakly productive derivational schema. Lexicalised caritives that are not *ad hoc* but widely shared across the speech community are, e.g., *wol-beel-ú(ta)* 'countless' < *woll-úta* 'counting, number', *wozan-beel-ú(ta)* 'forgetful (lit. heartless)' < *wozan-á* 'heart', *su'mm-beel-é* 'first week of July (lit. nameless)' < *su'mm-á* 'name', *maq-ee-beel-úta* 'pregnant (lit. powerless)' < *maq-ée* (F.GEN) 'of power', *hagar-beel-ú(ta)* 'indescribable, uncategorisable, ugly (lit. typeless)' < *hagar-á* 'type', *man-beel-(ch)-ú(ta)*[9] 'foreign, without relatives in the area (lit. peopleless)' < *mann-á* 'people'. Many of these established caritives are semantically idiosyncratic.

Finally, Kambaata can also create new adjectives through compounding. Compound adjectives are suprasegmentally and inflectionally indistinguishable from derived adjectives; they differ from the latter only in the fact that compounding combines two lexical roots. One prominent and fairly productive type of compound adjective consists of a numeral plus a nominal root, e.g. *mat-* 'one' + *ill-íta* 'eye' > *mat-ill-á(ta)* 'one-eyed' (see Treis 2017a for numerous examples). A second type combines a nominal root with the verbal root *agud-* 'seem, resemble',[10] e.g. *bun-agud-á(ta)* 'coffee-like, coffee-coloured; (neolog.) brown' (< *bun-á* 'coffee'), *ann-agud-á(ta)* 'resembling one's father' (Alamu 2022: 24) (< *ann-á* 'father') and *am-agud-á(ta)* 'resembling one's mother', an adjective which has

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[8] In earlier works on Kambaata morphology, the derivation with *-beel* has been called "privative". To avoid confusion with the use of "privative" in the sense of 'fake, non-authentic' in the introduction and other papers in this Special Issue, I have decided to re-label *-beel* a "caritive" morpheme, in accordance with Oskolskaya (2020) and the research project "Grammatical periphery in the languages of the world: A typological study of caritives" (www.caritive.org).

[9] The *-ch* morpheme marks the singulative (SGV).

[10] In Treis & Deginet (2019: 229), adjectives with *-agud* were erroneously considered to be the result of a similative derivational process.

given rise to the proper noun *Am-agud-é*[11] for a cow resembling its mother. Finally, a third compound type links two nominal roots, the second of which is *manka'-á* 'behaviour, manners', as, e.g., in *oos-manka'-á(ta)* 'child-like, young person-like' (< *oos-úta* 'children, young persons'). This compound type will concern us further in Section 5.3. All compound adjectives receive the default case/gender markers of the A1 declension: *-á* (M.ACC)/*-áta* (F.ACC).

5. Approximative derivation

5.1 Morphology

The morphological structure of approximative adjectives is sketched in Fig. 1. The derivational morpheme *-lab* is attached to a simple root or a derived stem.

		Approximative derivation		Case/gender inflection
A – N – V stem		(epenthetic *-i*)	*-lab*	*-á* (M.ACC)
Root	(Derivation)			*-áta* (F.ACC)

Fig. 1: Morphological structure of approximative adjectives

If the morpheme is suffixed to roots or stems ending in a consonant cluster, one either observes epenthesis or cluster simplification to avoid an illicit consonant sequence (10); the choice of either strategy is speaker-dependent, sometimes there is even variation in the pronunciation or spelling of one and the same speaker or author.

(10)   *gambal-**lab**-á(ta) ~ gamball-i-**lab**-á(ta)* 'blackish' (< *gamball-á(ta)* 'black')
         (Alamu 2022: 7; Alemu 2016: 812)

Approximative adjectives are categorised into declension A1, marked by *-á* (M)/*-áta* (F) in the accusative (= citational) form. The inputs of the approximate derivation are lexemes of different word classes; compared to other adjectivisers (cf. Tab. 3), the approximative derivation has the least selection restrictions. In my database, adjectives, verbs and common nouns constitute about one third of the inputs each (Tab. 4). Inputs from other word classes

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[11] The case/gender morpheme *-é* is the accusative morpheme of the largest declension of feminine names (Treis 2008: 103).

are only marginally attested; sometimes the word class of the base cannot be unequivocally determined.

Tab. 4: Inputs of the approximative derivation across word classes

Base	Simple	Extended	All
Adjective	22	5	27
Verb	19	4	23
Common noun	27	1	28
Proper noun	1	-	1
Ideophone	1	-	1
Numeral	1	-	1
Undetermined	3	-	3
Total	74	10	**84**

Extended stems on which approximative adjectives are based may be derivates of the agentive (ag) (11), singulative (sgv) (11), middle (mid) (12), reciprocal (mid-pass) (13) and maybe also other, still unattested derivational mechanisms.

(11) (…) *húj-i-'*   *mereer-aan-ch-i-**láb**-a-ta*
work-F.NOM-1SG.POSS   middle-AG-SGV-EP-**APRX**-F.PRED-F.COP2

'(…) my work is fair-to-middling/somehow okay.' (Saint-Exupéry 2018: 21)

(12) *uucc-aqq-**lab**-á*
beg-MID-**APRX**-M.ACC

'almost begging (for one's benefit)'

(13) *boroo<'>rr-am-**lab**-á*
insult<MID>-PASS-**APRX**-M.ACC

'almost insulting (and provoking a fight with) each other'

Like other adjectives, approximative adjectives can themselves be the input of the abstract noun derivation, marked by *-im* (14) or *-oom* (15), which expresses a quality, state or condition.[12]

(14) *shiish-**lab**-im-áta*
sour-**APRX**-QUAL1-F.ACC

'slight sourness, slight acidity' (Alemu 2016: 797)

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[12] The morphemes *-im* and *-oom* are rivaling suffixes for the derivation of quality nouns. It is not yet clear what determines the use of either morpheme in this function. The suffix *-oom* has a second function of deriving status nouns, e.g. *meent-oom-áta* 'womanhood' < *meent-ú* 'women' (Treis 2008: 154–156, 171–174).

(15)   *mux-**lab**-oom-áta*
         wet-**APRX**-QUAL2-F.ACC

         'dampness, slight wetness' (Alemu 2016: 821)

5.2 Morphosyntax

Just like other simple and derived adjectives (Section 3), approximative adjectives are used in four syntactic functions. As adnominal modifiers in the NP, they agree in case and gender with the head noun, e.g. with a masculine nominative subject ('leaf') in (16) and, in its oblique form, with a feminine locative adjunct ('on feather(s)') in (17); recall also (1) and (3).

(16)   *bull-i-**láb**-u*   *bónx-u*   *yoo-sí*
         grey-EP-**APRX**-M.NOM   leaf-M.NOM   COP1.3-3M.OBJ.REL

         biix-am-ú   *sarb-umb-ú*   *haqq-á*
         break-PASS-M.ACC   do_fast-3M.NEG5-M.ACC   tree-M.ACC

         (Definition of a plant species:) 'a tree that has greyish leaves and does not break easily' (Alemu 2016: 759)

(17)   *xabar-**láb**-ata*   *ball-éen*   *wójj-u*
         ash-**APRX**-F.OBL   feather-F.LOC   white-M.ACC

         xéf~xéf=y-ee-sé-e (…)
         RED~be_speckled.IDEO=say-3M.PFV-3F.OBJ.REL-NMZ1.M.ACC

         (Excerpt of the definition of "guinea fowl":) 'white speckles being on ash-like feathers (…)' (Alemu 2016: 1157)

Approximate adjectives can become heads of NPs without further measures (such as nominalisation) being taken; see (18) and further on (39).

(18)   *ang-áta*   *aa'll-eemmá*   *zakk-óon*   *moosh-sh-íi*
         hand-F.ACC   wash.MID-3HON.PFV.REL   after-M.LOC   dry-CAUS1-M.DAT

         dagla'll-eennó   *oddish-**lab**-á*
         use-3HON.IPFV.REL   clothes-**APRX**-M.ACC

         (Definition of "towel":) 'a clothes-like (thing) which one uses to dry (one's) hands after one has washed them' (Alemu 2016: 319)

In their third syntactic function, as heads of non-verbal predicates, they agree in gender with the overt or retrievable subject and combine with the ascriptive-identificational

copula (COP2);[13] the masculine copula *-(h)a(a)* in (19) is determined by the masculine subject 'father', the feminine form *-ta(a)* in (11) by the feminine subject 'work'.

(19)   *Ánn-u*   *qeraa'rr-i-**láb**-a-a,*
         father-M.NOM   tall-EP-**APRX**-M.PRED-M.COP2

         béet-u-s-ma   *gabbán-ch-u-a*   *bagáan*
         son-M.NOM-3M.POSS-CFOC   short-SGV-M.PRED-M.COP2   CNTR

         (A says: 'All family members are short.' – B corrects him/her:) 'The father is a bit tall, his *son* is short, though.' (Elicited, 3/2018)

Finally, approximative adjectives can be used as adverbial modifiers. As such, they are invariantly marked for the masculine accusative case. The accusative does not only mark direct objects but also certain adverbial constituents, see, e.g., the simple adjective *qahúnka* '(for) a little (while)' in adverbial function in (24). In (20), the approximative adjective is an adverbial modifier to a subordinate verb (converb). See also (2).

(20)   *Sikk-i-**lab**-á*   *maram-án*   *márr-ee-haa,*
         drag_oneself-EP-**APRX**-M.ACC   walk-3M.IPFV.CVB   go-3M.PRF.REL-M.COP2

         zuuq-qáa   *man-ch-ó=b-a*
         massage-3F.IPFV.REL   person-SGV-F.GEN=PLC-M.ACC

         'He almost dragged himself to the masseuse.' (Elicited, 3/2018)

The word class of the base has no influence on the syntactic function that the approximative adjective can adopt. Irrespective of whether the base is an adjective, verb or noun, the derived form can be used in all syntactic functions permitted to adjectives. In (21), we see the use of a deverbal approximative as a modifier in a noun phrase. This is to be compared with (16) and (17), which show deadjectival and denominal approximatives in modifying function in the NP.

(21)   *geeq-**láb**-ata*   *ill-éen*   *xuud-ú*
         stare-APRX-F.OBL   eye-F.ICP   look-M.ACC

         'to look in a kind of staring way (lit. look with almost staring eyes)' (Alemu 2016: 535)

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[13] Kambaata has four copulas whose intricate distribution is explained in Treis (2008: chap. 10).

After having shown in this and the preceding section that the outputs of the approximative derivation are undoubtedly adjectival in nature, I turn to the semantics of *-lab* in the next two sections.

5.3 Meaning

The analysis of the meaning of the approximative derivation takes a native speaker's perspective as a preliminary starting point. In Alemu's dictionary (2016: 635), we find an entry *-laba*, labelled *B*(*otokonnuta*) '(neolog.) affix', defined as in (22).

(22)	*su'm[m]-caakk-is-aan-ch-óon*	*botokonn-ámm*
	noun-become_light-CAUS1-AG-SGV-M.LOC	attach-PASS.3M.PFV.CVB

kotim-á	*bikk-á*	*ih-ú*	*kul-is-aan-ch-ú*
less-M.ACC	amount-M.ACC	become-M.ACC	tell-CAUS1-AG-SGV-M.ACC

(Definition of *-laba*:) '(something) that signals a lesser amount (/degree) (when) attached to an adjective (lit. noun-enlightener)' (Alemu 2016: 635)

The monolingual definition points out two important aspects: the approximative derivation takes adjectives as its base and expresses a reduced (attenuated) degree of a property. Both statements need to be qualified. Firstly, as has been shown in Section 5.1, adjectival roots are not the only possible inputs. In the following, I will show, furthermore, that attenuation is only one of several related meanings of the approximative derivation. The meanings of the approximative are dependent on the word class of the base but seem close enough to be subsumable under an overarching meaning of approximation, understood as deviation from a prototypical realisation.

5.3.1 Attenuated property

The first two attestations of approximative forms that occurred in a recording of natural speech are utterances with the colour adjective 'yellowish' (23).

(23)	*Baar-**lab**-áta*	*ík-k*	*fad-dóo'u,*
	yellow-**APRX**-F.ACC	become-3F.PFV.CVB	go_away-3F.PFV

hikkánne-n
P_DEM2.M.OBL-EMP

'She (= the chameleon) became yellowish, just there.' (TD2016-02-11_001)

Colour terms are among the most frequent bases of *-lab* in written texts, with 'reddish' at the top of the list in Table 5.

Tab. 5: Attestations of attenuated colour adjectives in written texts

Colour adjective	Translation	Source
*biiishsh-(i)-**lab**-á(ta)*	'reddish'	(Saint-Exupéry 2018: 19; Alemu 2016: xxvi, 29, 128, 216, 229, 261 307, 225, 842, 844, 1010, 1045)
*gamball-(i)-**lab**-á(ta)*	'blackish'	(Alemu 2016: 464, 812, 868; Alamu 2022: 7)
*bull-(i)-**lab**-á(ta)*	'greyish'	(Alemu 2016: 161, 759, 778)
*wojj-(i)-**lab**-á(ta)*	'whitish'	(Alemu 2016: 160, 1061)
*bun-agud-**lab**-á(ta)*	'brownish'	(Alemu 2016: 163)

Although colours are the most common adjectival inputs, also other property lexemes undergo the approximative derivation, e.g. 'wet' in (24), 'fat' in (25) and 'poor' in (26).

(24) A: *Oddíshsh-at*   *tadá*   *mool-táa'u,*   *aag-ís-i!*
        clothes-F.NOM   by_now   become_dry-3F.IPFV   enter-CAUS1-2SG.IMP

    B: *Mux-i-**láb**-a-a<n>ta,*   *qah-ú<n>ka*
        wet-EP-**APRX**-F.PRED-F.COP2<EMP>   small-M.ACC<EMP>

        hád-a-n   *egér-tun*
        outside-F.OBL-EMP   wait-3F.JUS

    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 little (while).'
    (Elicited, 3/2018)

(25) *Āā,*   *gaan-**láb**-a-ta,*   *mereer-áan-ch-u-ta*
      yes.INTJ   fat-**APRX**-F.PRED-F.COP2   middle-AG-SGV-F.PRED-F.COP2

    (Context: A asks whether a person is corpulent. – B replies:) 'Yes, she is somewhat fat, middle(-sized).' (Elicited, 6/2022)

(26) *Kám,*   *bux-ichch-i-**láb**-a-a<n>ka,*
      INTJ[objection]   poor-SGV-EP-**APRX**-M.PRED-M.COP2<EMP>

    áff-ee-si   *bors-á*   *xuud-dáanti-bay?!*
    seize-3M.PRF-DEF.REL   bag-M.ACC   see-2SG.IPFV-BAY

    (Context: A says: 'He wears a beautiful coat, he must be rich.' – B replies:) 'No! He is fairly poor, you see the bag that he carries, don't you?' (Elicited, 3/2018)

On a scale from the lowest to the highest degree of a property, deadjectival approximatives cover a vague domain between the two poles. While the *-lab* derivate in (24) expresses a low degree of wetness, i.e. 'a bit wet, almost dry' (see also the recommendation to wait 'a little' for it to dry), the rephrase that follows the *-lab* derivate in (25) shows that the speaker considers the degree of fatness to be in the middle of two body size extremes. Many deadjectival approximatives express a degree that is slightly reduced when compared to the norm: the attenuated colour in (23) is not a full, prototypical yellow, and the person in (26) is not poor but close to being poor. Deadjectival approximatives have been paraphrased, as in (27), with an adverbial *qah-únka* 'a bit'.

(27) *Ánn-u*   *oos-óochchi-s*   *qah-ú<n>ka*
      father-M.NOM   children-F.ABL-3M.POSS   small-M.ACC<EMP>

      qeráa'rr-u-a
      tall-M.PRED-M.COP2

      Solicited periphrasis of (19): 'The father is a bit taller than his children (= who are all short).' (Elicited, 6/2022)

Many deadjectival approximatives confirm Alemu's (2016: 635) intuition, as cited in (22), in that they express an attenuated degree of a property. As the position of approximative-marked properties on a scale between non-realisation and prototypical realisation is vague, they are translated, depending on the context, as 'a bit [PROPERTY], [PROPERTY]-ish, fairly [PROPERTY], almost [PROPERTY]'.

5.3.2 Similarity and near-identity in manner

In my database, 23 different deverbal adjective types are attested, of which 16 are found in Alemu (2016). A selection of simple and extended verbal stems is presented in (28)–(30). Note that a sequence of a middle and a passive morpheme as in (30) marks the reciprocal (Treis in press: Section 4.4).

(28) *maqees-**lab**-á*   'in a kind of forceful 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'

(29)   *uucc-aqq-**lab**-á*

         beg-MID-**APRX**-M.ACC

         'almost begging (for one's benefit)'

(30)   *boroo<'>rr-am-**lab**-á*

         insult<MID>-PASS-**APRX**-M.ACC

         'almost insulting (and provoking a fight with) each other'

The use of deverbal approximatives in context is illustrated in (31)–(32). The approximative derivation has little influence on the verbal argument structure. Even after having undergone adjectivisation, the verbal base *uucc-aqq-* 'beg for one's benefit' in (31) can still govern an accusative direct object, the tea house boy.[14]

(31)   *Ciil-íi*   *daabb-úta*   *háshsh*   *bors-áan-ta-'*
         infant-M.DAT   bread-F.ACC   want.1SG.PFV.CVB   bag-M.LOC-LNK-1SG.POSS

         gizz-á   *xuujj-oommí=da*   *bácc-o.*
         money-M.ACC   see-1SG.PFV.REL=COND   be_absent-3M.PFV

         Shay-í   *min-í*   *adab-áa*   *uucc-aqq-(i)-**lab**-á*
         tea-M.GEN   house-M.GEN   boy-M.ACC   beg-MID-EP-**APRX**-M.ACC

         ass-eemmi=dá-a   *kámm-o-'e*
         do-1SG.PFV.REL=COND-ADD   reject-3M.PFV-1SG.OBJ

         (Context: Person reports about an incident at 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/almost begged the tea house boy (i.e. the seller), he rejected (to give the bread) to me.' (Elicited, 3/2018)

(32)   *M-á*   *y-ee=dá-a*   *dag-im-bá'a.*
         what-M.ACC   say-3M.PFV=COND-ADD   know-3M.NIPFV-NEG1

         *Gis-i-**lab**-á*   *ih-áne-et*
         sleep-EP-**APRX**-M.ACC   become-1SG.IPFV.CVB-COP3

         maccoocc-eemmí-ihu
         hear-1SG.PRF.REL-NMZ1.M.NOM

         (Context: A: 'What did he say?' – B:) 'I don't know whether he said anything. I heard (something but) I was kind of sleeping.' (Elicited, 3/2018)

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[14] Deverbal agentive adjectives also continue to govern accusative objects (Treis 2012: 242–243). It is unknown whether deverbal approximative (like agentive) adjectives can also govern adverbial constituents.

As seen in (31)–(32), deverbal -*lab* adjectives express an approximate, often near-identical manner of doing something, a 'kind of VERB-ing' or an 'almost (but not quite) VERB-ing manner'. Whereas deadjectival forms (Section 5.3.1) convey a vague, more or less reduced degree of a property, the relationship between the event expressed by the verbal base *vs.* the event expressed by the deverbal approximative is a relationship of close similarity or near-identity. Deverbal approximatives are approximating in the literal sense, in that they come close to the prototypical realisation of an event. The near realisation of an event expressed by a deverbal approximative is especially evident with achievement verbs such as *ub-* 'fall', as in (33) about a near-accident situation.

(33) *Órc-u*   *shúrr=a'-í-yan-s*
      mud-M.NOM   slip.IDEO=do-3M.PFV.CVB-DS-3M.OBJ

      *ub-**lab**-á*   *íkk*   *fanqáll-o*
      fall-**APRX**-M.ACC   become.3M.PFV.CVB   return-3M.PFV

      'The mud made him slip, he almost fell down (but) caught himself.' (Elicited, 6/2022)

The appropriateness of the translation 'almost VERB-ing' is also supported by the periphrasis of (34) in (35). Here a deverbal approximative is paraphrased with the verb *hoog-* 'miss, not do, fail to realise (here: the mistake)'.

(34) *Luus-**lab**-á*   *íkk*   *fanqall-óomm*
      make_a_mistake-**APRX**-M.ACC   become.1SG.PFV.CVB   return-1SG.PFV

      'I almost made a mistake (but then) changed course (lit. returned).' (Elicited, 3/2018)

(35) *Lúushsh*   *hóogg*   *dagg-óomm*
      make_a_mistake.1SG.PFV.CVB   miss.1SG.PFV.CVB   come_to_know-1SG.PFV

      Periphrasis of (34): 'I almost made a mistake (but then) became aware (of it) (lit. I made a mistake, missed, come to know).' (Elicited, 3/2018)

5.3.3 Similarity in quality or character

Denominal approximative adjectives characterise something as 'similar to/almost like noun in quality or character, of the same type'. My database contains 28 different denominal adjective types, of which some are attested several times; see (36)–(37). Denominal approximatives create *ad hoc* categories (in the sense of Mauri 2017, to which the reader is

referred for a typological survey of the linguistic means to construct *ad hoc* categories). *Ad hoc* categorization is an exemplar-driven, context-dependent abstraction process. Based on one salient exemplar, e.g. the weteechchu-tree in (36), which can be assumed to be known to all Kambaata speakers, a superordinate category is built for which no established term exists in Kambaata, i.e. the class of objects that are like the weteechchu-tree. This novel superordinate category includes both the explicit exemplar and other members that share a specific property with it. The property has to be inferred by the interlocutor from the linguistic or extra-linguistic context; in the case of weteechchu-like objects, the culturally salient property is having slow-burning fragrant wood.

(36)   *wet-eechch-**lab**-á*   *haqq-á*
          tree_sp-SGV-**APRX**-M.ACC   tree-M.ACC

          'a *weteechchu*-like tree' (Alemu 2016: 147, used for the definition of the lesser-known tree species *boolima*)

In (37), an *ad hoc* category of objects made from fabric is established, based on clothes as the salient exemplar with this particular property. The approximative derivation is amply exploited in the monolingual dictionary definitions in Alemu (2016), where the *ad hoc* categories based on a salient member are recruited to characterise other, less-known members of the category, e.g. the *boolima*-tree, a tree that also has fragrant wood (36), and a towel, a modern-day object, which is made of the same material as clothes (37).

(37)   *oddishsh-**lab**-á*
          clothing-**APRX**-M.ACC

          'a clothing-like, garment-like (thing)' (Alemu 2016: 319, used in the definition of a towel)

Denominal approximatives are used as case/gender-agreeing modifiers in the NP in (36) and (38) and as NP heads in (37) and (39). They can equally well be used as predicates or adverbial modifiers.

(38)   *Oot-á*   *al-íichch*   *marf-**lab**-á*   *ut-ichch-ú*
       hedge-F.GEN   top-M.ABL   needle-**APRX**-M.ACC   thorn-SGV-M.ACC

       áff   *wáall-o*
       seize.3M.PFV.CVB   come-3M.PFV

       'He brought a needle-like thorn from the hedge (e.g. to take out a splinter).' (Elicited, 3/2018)

(39)   *Ann-i-sí*   *urr-óon*   *min-**lab**-á*
       father-M.GEN-3M.POSS   front_yard-F.LOC   house-**APRX**-M.ACC

       uurr-íshsh-ee'u
       stand-CAUS1-3M.PRF

       'He has built a kind of a house/a house-like thing (= not a proper house in the speaker's mind) in his father's front yard.' (Elicited, 3/2018)

Denominal approximatives are paraphrasable by similative constructions, as two consulted native speakers pointed out (40). Kambaata has an enclitic =g- 'manner; like' (see Treis 2017b; Treis 2018 for detailed descriptions), which marks, among other, the standard of comparison in similative and equative constructions.

(40)   *wet-eechch-í=**g**-a*   *yóo*   *haqq-á*
       tree_sp-SGV-M.GEN=SIM-M.ACC/OBL   COP1.REL   tree-M.ACC

       Periphrasis of (36): 'a tree which is like the *weteechchu*-tree' (Elicited, 6/2022)

Denominal approximatives tend to express a similarity in nature, character or function and less so in physical appearance. This observation is captured, for instance, in contrasting pairs such as the (neo-)compound adjective *bun-agud-á(ta)* 'coffee-coloured' (< *bun-* 'coffee' + *agud-* 'resemble') and the approximative adjective *bun-(i)-lab-á* 'coffee-like', of which the first form – according to native speaker intuitions – is preferred to characterise the colour of an object, while the second form is preferred to characterise objects that have the same function, significance or way of consumption.

5.3.4 Negative connotations and semantic idiosyncrasies

Even though approximatives can have a negative connotation, as seen in (39) where the speaker belittles somebody's house through the use of *min-lab-á* 'kind of house, house-like (thing)', they most often seem to have a neutral connotation, as the numerous other examples in this contribution show.

The approximative derivation is semantically regular and the meaning of derivational outputs predictable. This stands in contrast to other adjectivising derivations that display a certain degree of semantic idiosyncrasy – see, for instance, the caritive adjectives and their idiosyncratic translations mentioned in Section 4. So far only one approximative form is attested in an idiomatic expression, see the denumeral approximative in (41).

(41)   *Xah-á-s*   *xább=át-t*
        thing-M.ACC-DEF   do_well.IDEO=do-3F.PFV.CVB

        makk-is-sim-bá'a,   *mát-u*
        be_convenient-CAUS1-3F.NIPFV-NEG   one-M.NOM

        *tordum-**láb**-a-a=rr-a*
        ten-**APRX**-M.OBL-COP2=NMZ4-M.PRED

        (Possible context: conversation about a disorganised event) 'They have not arranged the things (e.g. the talks) well, everything is a mess (lit. one is ten-like ones).'
        (Elicited, 3/2018)

One other deverbal approximative is known to have a (slightly) unpredictable figurative meaning (42), which possibly motivated Alemu to integrate it into the dictionary (2016: 1002).

(42)   *Torr-i-**lab**-á*   *hírr*   *waall-óomm*
        throw-EP-**APRX**-M.ACC   sell.1SG.PFV.CVB   come-1SG.PFV

        'I sold it very cheap (lit. almost like throwing) and came back (home).'
        (Elicited, 3/2018)

5.4 Competing strategies

In the preceding sections, periphrases of approximative forms have helped shed light on certain aspects of the meaning of the *-lab* derivation. In this section, I briefly address near synonyms of approximatives as they are attested in Alemu (2016). In the Kambaata dictionary, compound adjectives of which the second element is the nominal root of *manka'-á* (M) 'humility, behavior, manner(s), norm(s)' sometimes occur in the same contexts or as periphrases of denominal approximatives (Section 5.3.3). Compare the descriptions of two bird species with ash-coloured feathers in (43) and (44), one of which uses a compound adjective with *manka'-*, the other a derived adjective with *-lab*.

(43) *xabar-**manká'**-u*   *hagár-u*   *yoo-sé*
      ash-**manner**-M.NOM   colour-M.NOM   COP1.3-F.OBJ.REL

      cii'-á   *sheef-á*
      bird-F.GEN   species-M.ACC

      (Definition of *handarchúta* 'pigeon':) 'a bird species of ash-like colour'
      (Alemu 2016: 439)

(44) *xabar-**láb**-at*   *báall-it*   *yoo-sé*   *zigraa'-í*
      ash-**APRX**-F.NOM   feather-F.NOM   COP1.3-3F.OBJ.REL guinea_fowl-M.GEN

      sheef-á   *ík-k*   *gabb-áta*   *ciichch-úta*
      species-M.ACC   become-3F.PFV.CVB   mid_sized-F.ACC   bird.SGV-F.ACC

      (Definition of *heedoorchúta* 'partridge':) 'a mid-sized bird of the guinea-fowl family
      with ash-like feathers' (Alemu 2016: 340)

We also find two dictionary entries of attenuated colours. In the first entry, a *manka'*-compound is defined by a deadjectival approximative (45); in the other case, a deadjectival approximative is defined by a *manka'-* compound (Alemu 2016: 161).

(45) *baar-**manka'**-á*   [Definition:] *feeg-á*   *baar-á*
      yellow-**manner**-M.ACC   bright-M.ACC   yellow-M.ACC

      ih-umb-ú;   *baar-**lab**-á*
      become-3M.NEG5-M.ACC   yellow-**APRX**-M.ACC

      'yellowish' [Definition:] 'not being bright yellow, yellowish' (Alemu 2016: 87)

Alemu (2016) contains altogether 40 *manka'-* compounds, none of which have a verb as first element.[15] No *manka'-* compounds are attested in my natural fieldwork data. The vast majority of the similative and attenuative *manka'-* compounds in the dictionary are unheard of by my language assistant (Deginet Wotango Doyiso, personal communication); he provided, however, the examples in (46)–(47) in order to illustrate the use of two compounds that he believed to be shared by the speaker community. It seems possible that *manka'* compounds only compete with approximatives in certain regiolects or sociolects of Kambaata.[16]

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[15] Two compounds are also attested in schoolbooks: *oos-manka'-á(ta)* 'child-like, young person-like', *meneraal-manka'-á(ta)* 'mineral-like' (Kambaata Education Bureau 1989: 6.121; 8.100, 102, 104).

[16] Interestingly, the noun *manka'a* 'behaviour, norm' is found in the glossary of Tadesse's (2015: 339) Hadiyya grammar – which could mean that *manka'á* is a Hadiyya loanword used in a certain geographical area or by a certain Kambaata speaker group. Until some decades ago, Kambaata was under strong cultural and political influence from Hadiyya, which is reflected, among others, in Hadiyya personal names in today's

(46) *Oos-**manká'**-a-a<n>ka,*
children-**manner**-M.PRED-M.COP2<EMP>

batá'   *y-ée=da*   *lamoodúm-a-at*
become_many.3M.PFV.CVB   say-3M.PFV.REL=COND   twenty-M.OBL-COP3

(Possible context: How old could he be? – Answer:) 'He is (still) child-like/young person-like, he is at most 20 (years old).' (Elicited, 11/2019)

(47) *Beenaar-í*   *wud-íin*   *yóo*   *mánn-u*
B.-M.GEN   side-M.ICP   COP1.3.REL   people-M.NOM

*Hadiy-**manká'**-a-a*
Hadiyya-**manner**-M.PRED-M.COP2

'The (Kambaata) people in the Beenaara area are Hadiyya-like/half-Hadiyya.' (Elicited, 11/2019)

Data in Alemu (2016) also illustrates a strategy that potentially competes with verb-based approximatives. Verbs that combine with an undetermined ending *-xaachch-á* are found to express 'almost verb-ing' (see Section 5.3.2), e.g. *ub-xaachch-á* 'almost fall' (Alemu 2016: 335). However, this particular word formation process and the examples given could not (yet) be confirmed – which leaves the question of competing morphological strategies of the *-lab* derivation open for future research.

6. Diachrony

The Kambaata approximative morpheme *-lab* is most likely linked to a verb root *lab-* that we find in related Highland East Cushitic languages; see *lab-* 'resemble, seem' in Gedeo [drs], Sidaama [sid], Hadiyya [hdy] and Libido [liq] (Hudson 1989: 123; Crass n.d.). The verb root is not (or: no longer) known in Kambaata and, to the best of my knowledge, also unattested in Alaaba and K'abeena (Kambaata's closest relatives; shared ISO-code 639-3: [alw]).[17] The meaning 'resemble, seem' is instead expressed by *agud-* in Kambaata (48), a

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oldest generation and in loanwords in certain semantic domains. Hadiyya loanwords are especially common in the Kambaata spoken along the borders to Hadiyya.

[17] Kambaata has a verb *lab-* 'lure; woo, court (a woman)', which is not semantically related but merely homophonous to Highland East Cushitic *lab-* 'resemble, seem' (Deginet Wotango Doyiso pers. comm.; Alemu 2016: 635).

verb which is not attested in Highland East Cushitic languages outside the Kambaata-Alaaba-K'abeena group.[18]

(48)   *Bahír-u-s*   *cíil-u*   *ann-íichchi-s*   *abb-á*
    elder-M.NOM-DEF   infant-M.NOM   father-M.ABL-3M.POSS   more-M.ACC

    am-á-s   **agud**-*áno-a*
    mother-F.ACC-3M.POSS   **resemble-**3M.IPFV.REL-M.COP2

    'The eldest son resembles his mother more than his father.' (Elicited, 9/2021)

The Kambaata approximative derivation in the synchronic Stage 2 probably has its origin in a compounding process that combined two lexical roots, the second of which was the verb **lab-* 'resemble' (49), cf. Stage 1.

(49)   Possible historical development:

    Stage 1   →   Stage 2

    Compound adjective: Derived adjective

    Root 1 + Root 2 (**lab-*) + Inflection   Root 1 + APRX-Derivation + Inflection

A parallel compounding process is attested with the verb root *agud-* 'resemble' in synchronic Kambaata – see the adjectival noun-verb compounds like the neologism *bonx-agud-á(ta)* '(neolog.) green' (< *bonx-á* 'leaves' + *agud-* 'resemble') and similar examples mentioned at the end of Section 4. Like all compound adjectives, the *-lab* derived approximative adjectives belong to declension A1, which is another small piece of evidence that the latter might have developed out of compounds.[19]

When at one point in time the verb stem **lab-* 'resemble' was no longer used on its own, became obsolete and/or was ousted by *agud-*, the element *-lab* in compounds turned from a verbal root into a derivational affix. The change in morphological status and the loss of the link to an existing lexeme was possibly accompanied by semantic bleaching and abstraction as well as an extension of use, which allowed the *-lab* derivation to take lexemes of different word classes as its input. The details of this process remain, however, speculative and undocumented.

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[18] There is, possibly, a historical link between Kambaata *agud-* 'resemble, seem' and the Sidaama similative morpheme *-gede*, that we find, for instance, in examples in Kawachi (2007).
[19] Note, however, that A1 is also by far the biggest adjectival declension.

The compounding process with *agud-* 'resemble' is still transparent to modern Kambaata speakers. Interestingly, coinages of colour terms that are *agud-* compounds can serve as the input of the approximative derivation, see (50), which shows that speakers do not consider *agud-* and *-lab* to be functionally equivalent.

(50)   *bun-agud-**lab**-á*
        coffee-seem-**APRX**-M.ACC
        'brownish (lit. coffee-seeming-ish)' (Alemu 2016: 163)

The contributions assembled in this special issue discuss different source domains for approximative morphology (the reader is invited to consult the introduction to this issue for an overview and references to the individual chapters). I have shown in this section that the diachronic source of the Kambaata approximative morpheme *-lab* goes back to a verb expressing resemblance. Regarding its origin, the Kambaata approximative is thus comparable to other approximative markers that have developed from items expressing resemblance or similarity, such as the English *-like* suffix and the German *-ähnlich* and *-gleich* suffixes (Hüning & Schlücker 2023).

7. Summary

The Kambaata approximative derivation is a productive, albeit less frequently attested adjectivising derivational mechanism if compared, for instance, to the very common proprietive and agentive derivations. However, Alemu (2016) makes extensive use of the approximative derivation in the monolingual definitions of the entries in his dictionary, and native speakers are able to spontaneously come up with new examples. The fair degree of productivity of the approximative derivation helped base the analysis in this paper on a total of 84 different derivates.

The approximative derivation has few (if any) selection restrictions for the base to which it attaches. The outputs of the derivational process are clearly adjectival in nature, as shown by their agreement behaviour. Approximative adjectives belong to the largest adjectival declension. Syntactically, approximatives, just like basic adjectives, can be used as modifiers in the NP, as heads of the NP, in predicative and in adverbial function, irrespective of the word class of their base.

The meaning of the approximative derivation is, to a certain extent, dependent on the word class of its input. With adjectival bases, approximative adjectives express a vague, more or less attenuated degree of a property, deverbal approximatives express a similar, often near-identical realisation of an event, and denominal approximates express a similarity in nature, character or function and create *ad hoc* categories. The meanings are subsumable under an overarching meaning of approximation, understood as deviation from a prototypical realisation. It is unclear whether Kambaata has word formation processes that compete with the approximative derivation – the allegedly synonymous formations attested in Alemu (2016) could not (yet) be confirmed.

The Kambaata approximative morpheme must have emerged – in the recent history of the language – from an independent lexeme, *lab-* 'resemble', which is no longer in use in the language but still found in related Highland East Cushitic language. From a Cushitic perspective, the Kambaata approximative derivation is unique of its kind. No related language has so far been reported to have a morphological process to express approximation.

Abbreviations

1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person
A_	adjectival
ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
ADD	additive ('also', 'and')
AG	agentive
APRX	approximative
BAY	negative rhetorical question
CAUS1	simple causative
CFOC	contrastive focus
CNTR	contrastive
COND	conditional
COP1	existential-locative copula *yoo-*
COP2	ascriptive-identifiational -(*h*)*a*(*a*)-/-*ta*(*a*)-copula
COP3	ascriptive-identifiational V*t*-copula
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
DEF	definite

DEM1   proximal demonstrative
DEM2   medial demonstrative
DEM4   distal demonstrative
DS   different subject
EMP   emphasis
EP   epenthesis
F   feminine
GEN   genitive
HON   honorific, impersonal
ICP   instrumental-comitative-perlative
IDEO   ideophone
IMP   imperative
INTJ   interjection
IPFV   imperfective
JUS   jussive
LNK   linker
LOC   locative
M   masculine
MID   middle
NEG1   standard negator
NEG3   jussive negator
NEG5   relative negator
NIPFV   non-imperfective
NMZ1   nominaliser -V
NMZ3   nominaliser =*hann*
NMZ4   nominaliser =*r*
NOM   nominative
OBJ   object
OBL   oblique
P_   pronominal
PASS   passive
PFV   perfective
PL   plural
PLC   place nominaliser =*b*
PLV3   plurative -*n*
POSS   possessive
PRED   predicative
PRF   perfect
PROP   proprietive
QUAL   quality noun derivation
RED   reduplication
REL   relative
SG   singular
SGV   singulative

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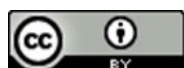
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