Perception Verbs and Taste Adjectives in Kambaata and Beyond

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Introduction

The Ethiopian (or Ethio-Eritrean) sprachbund is a convergence area in which languages from three different families of the Afroasiatic phylum (Semitic, Cushitic and Omotic) and various Nilo-Saharan languages are spoken. The sprachbund is mainly defined by phonological, morphological and syntactic features (for a succinct summary see Crass 2006). The only publications so far that have been concerned with shared lexical features in these languages are Hayward (1991) and (2000). The author discusses data from Amharic (Semitic), Oromo (Cushitic) and Gamo (Omotic) and categorises the shared lexicalisation patterns that he observed into four groups (Hayward 2000: 630 ff.; see the definitions and illustrative examples in (1)-(4)). The lexeme triplets of Amharic (A.), Oromo (O.) and Gamo (G.) that are listed by Hayward are exact semantic matches of each other but are usually not cognate.

(1) Shared semantic specialisations: “[…] most Ethio-Eritrean languages have a single word to express a conceptual distinction that is generally lacking in, say, standard European languages” (Hayward 2000: 631); see, e.g., A. bäkkätä – O. rak’e – G. bawutides ‘die without ritual slaughter (of cattle)’ (ibid.).

(2) Shared polysemy: “[…] a word with two (or more) senses so distinct that a lexicographer might have difficulty in deciding whether or not to treat it as a case of homophony” (ibid.); see, e.g., A. k’ädda – O. waraabe – G. duhk’k’ides 1. ‘draw water’, 2. ‘copy’ (ibid.).

(3) Shared derivational pathways: “[…] an exactly equivalent derivational process is employed in forming a word” (ibid.); see, e.g., A. asfällägä – O. barbaachise – G. kosshides ‘need’, which are causative derivatives of the verb ‘want’ in all three languages (Hayward 2000: 632).

(4) Shared ideophones and idioms: see, e.g., the literal translation of ‘foreign country’ as “a person’s / someone’s country” and of ‘I caught a cold’ as “a cold caught me” in all three languages (ibid.).

Hayward presents a diverse list of semantically matching lexemes from various semantic fields. The present study attempts to pursue the analysis of shared lexicalisation patterns one step further and examines in detail the semantic architecture of two well-defined fields in one selected Ethiopian language. The present contribution intends to shed light on the relationships between the members of the semantic fields of perceptions verbs and taste adjectives/verbs in Kambaata, a Highland East Cushitic language of South Ethiopia. In doing so, I lay the groundwork for a comparison with related and geographically close languages; preliminary comparative results are discussed in § VII and when dealing with taste adjectives. In the concluding section a package of lexicalisation patterns possibly shared by languages of the Ethiopian sprachbund is presented.

Perception verbs

Viberg’s (1984) typological survey on perception verbs provides the framework against which the Kambaata data will be considered. In the field of perception, five sense modalities are distinguished: visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory and olfactory perception, or put differently, perception by means of one’s eyes, ears, skin/body, tongue and nose. There are (at least) two relevant semantic roles in a perception event: SOURCE (the experienced entity) and EXPERIENCER (the perceiving entity).

Footnotes:
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2 The Kambaata corpus consists of narratives, interviews and elicited data which were collected in the field between 2002 and 2007 as well as written text data from school books (Kambaattissata 1989). The Baskeet data presented below were collected during a fieldtrip in 2008/9.
Table 1 The basic paradigm of the verbs of perception (adapted from Viberg 1984: 125)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense modalities</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Copulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>P. looked at the birds.</td>
<td>P. saw the birds.</td>
<td>P. looked happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>P. listened to the birds.</td>
<td>P. heard the birds.</td>
<td>P. sounded happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>P. felt the cloth / to see how soft it was.</td>
<td>P. felt a stone under his foot.</td>
<td>The cloth felt soft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>P. tasted the food / to see if he could eat it.</td>
<td>P. tasted garlic in the food.</td>
<td>The food tasted good / bad / of garlic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>P. smelled the cigar / to see if he could smoke it.</td>
<td>P. smelled cigars in the room.</td>
<td>P. smelled good / bad / of cigars.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, three so-called “dynamic systems” cross-cut the five sense modalities: Viberg labels them “activity”, “experience” and “copulative”. Activities are defined as unbounded processes that are consciously controlled by a human agent. Experiences are defined as uncontrolled states or inchoative achievements. Viberg’s study, activities and experiences are both considered to be “experientier-based”, i.e. the experiencer is realised as the grammatical subject. Copulative expressions are defined as “source-based” states, with the source realised as the subject. Thus Viberg defines activities, experiences and copulatives by a combination of semantic criteria and grammatical criteria. In the present analysis of Kambaata, I deviate from Viberg’s terminology insofar as I consider perceptive events to be activities or experiences irrespective of the grammatical function of the experiencer and the source, which means that I also consider constructions in which the source is realised as the subject and the experiencer as an adjunct to be experiences if the process is a bound/non-controlled state or achievement. Copulatives are here understood to be expressions of perceptive states or achievements in which the experiencer is not overtly expressed.

Whereas Viberg (1984) is predominately concerned with intrafield polysemy, i.e. the polysemy of perception verbs within the physical perception domain, Vanhove (2008) focuses on the transfield polysemy patterns of perception verbs, i.e. the semantic associations between the domain of vision and hearing (i.e. physical perception) and mental/cognitive perception. Prompted by Viberg’s and Vanhove’s studies, I am interested in the following research questions: 1. Which modalities and which “dynamic systems” are lexically distinguished in Kambaata (and other Ethiopian languages) and what are common intrafield polysemy patterns in Ethiopian languages? 2. Which semantic associations can be discovered between physical perception verbs and verbs of mental/cognitive perception or, put differently, what are the transfield polysemy patterns of perception verbs in Kambaata and beyond?

Kambaata has three basic perception verbs: the verb *xuad*- with its prototypical meanings ‘see’, look at’, *maccoo*(cc)- with its prototypical meanings ‘listen, hear’ and *hansuus*- ‘smell’. The following analysis will focus on the polysemy of the visual and the auditory verbs. Due to a lack of data, the use of the olfactory verb cannot be thoroughly investigated.

I Visual perception

The verb *xuad*- is used, on the one hand, for vision EXPERIENCES, i.e. uncontrolled perception by means of one’s eyes, as illustrated in ex. (5).
The causative derivation of xuud- 'see, look at' → xuud-is- 'cause to see, cause to look at' is the most common way to express 'show, indicate, point out', as exemplified in ex. (9). Alternatively, the underived verb malah- 'show' can be used.

Apart from the general verb xuud- 'see, look at', Kambaata has various semantically more specific 'see' verbs; see, e.g., asi’mm- 'see in a distance', la’- ‘look at something intensively’, raabbat- ‘look at something intensively’, tíkk y- ‘look into someone’s eyes’, geeq- ‘stare’, illa’- ‘look at something in passing, while walking around’, hazzab- ‘watch someone secretly’.

Whereas xuud- has both an activity and an experience reading, the source-based verb lall- 'occur, appear, be seen, be visible' signals a visual EXPERIENCE in an unambiguous way. The verb takes the perceived entity as its subject and requires the non-controlling experiencer to be expressed by a dative NP or by an object suffix.

6 The expression of the experiencer is not obligatory; see the imperative lall-ihob 2SG.NOM ‘Don’t let (anybody) see you again!’.

The expression of the experiencer is not obligatory; see the imperative lall-ihob 2SG.NOM ‘Don’t let (anybody) see you again!’.
II Auditory perception

The verb *maccoo(cc)-* ‘hear, listen to’ displays the same experience-activity polysemy as the verb *xuud-* ‘see, look at’. Ex. (11) illustrates the use of *maccoo(cc)-* for the expression of a perceptual EXPERIENCE.7

(11) urr-úta qocc-eenáni-yan *maccooecé-emm*
door-F.ACC knock-3HON/ICO-DS hear-1SG.PVE
 ‘I heard him (HON) knocking at the door.’
(lit. “He (HON) knocked at the door (and) I heard it.”)

The use of *maccoo(cc)-* for the expression of a perceptual ACTIVITY is shown in ex. (12).

(12) m-dán *macc-áta uujj-ít macc-átyyoont?*
what-M.LOC hear-2PL.PCO hear-2PL.PROG
 ‘On what are you eavesdropping (lit. “dropping the ears to listen”)?’

Apart from the semantically general hearing verb *maccoo(cc)-* ‘hear, listen to’, Kambaata has a hearing verb *gons*- ‘listen to’ which only expresses auditory activities; see ex. (13). The use of the semantically even more specialised activity verb *caqás*- ‘listen secretly’/without being detected, eavesdrop’ is shown in ex. (14). Also consider the idiomatic expression in ex. (15) for a hearing EXPERIENCE, in which not the human experiencer but the perceptual organ is made the subject of the clause.

(13) *gons-*iyú á’n *shál-l-âgg-a-n*
listen-2PL.IMP easy-M.OBL=GA-M.OBL-N
aag-icc-itenánt-âng-a *ass-dâmm*
enter-CAUS1.MID-2PL.IPV,REL=GA-M.OBL do-1SG.IPV
 ‘Listen, I will make you understand it easily.’ (K3: 46)

(14) hannó már y-stáam=a *caqás*
please go-2SG.IMP say-3F.IPV,REL=RA-M.ACC listen_secretly-2SG.IMP
 ‘Please, go (there) (and) listen secretly to what they are saying!’

(15) mãcc-at *qakkichch-întka it-têe’u*
etar-F.NOM tiny-M.ACC=N> eat-3F.PVE
 ‘The ear has overheard (lit. “eaten”) a tiny bit.’

Perception verbs such as *xuud-* ‘see, look at’ and *maccoo(cc)-* ‘hear, listen to’ do not often govern object complement clauses (which would be marked by the enclitic =ga-morpheme)8 but what is seen or heard is expressed in a preceding imperfective converb clause; see ex. (5) and (11) above. The imperfective converb indicates simultaneity between the event of the converb clause and the main clause. The converb in such constructions is a 1S-form (see glosses), because the subject of the perceived event expressed in the converb clause and the subject of the perception event in the main clause have different referents.

The verbs *xuud-* ‘see, look at’ and *maccoo(cc)-* ‘hear, listen to’ are not restricted to the sense modalities of perception by means of one’s eyes and of one’s ears but Kambaata has a hearing verb *gons-* ‘listen to’ which only expresses auditory activities; see ex. (13). The use of the semantically even more specialised activity verb *caqás*- ‘listen secretly’/without being detected, eavesdrop’ is shown in ex. (14). Also consider the idiomatic expression in ex. (15) for a hearing EXPERIENCE, in which not the human experiencer but the perceptual organ is made the subject of the clause.

Apart from experiencers, the dative case marks recipients and beneficiaries (Treis 2008: 119f).

III Tactile perception

Kambaata does not have a separate verb ‘feel’. EXPERIENCES by means of one’s skin/body are expressed with the extended verb *maccooec-am-*, which is a passive derivative of the verb ‘hear, listen to’.9 Whereas in all the examples presented so far, the human experiencer was encoded as the subject of the perception verb and the source as the direct accusative-marked object, the expression of ‘feel’ requires that the source functions as the subject of the passive verb and the human experiencer as an object suffix10 on the verb or as a dative argument (if it is expressed in an independent (pro)noun phrase).11

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7 The verb ‘listen, hear’ has two stems, *maccooceco- and maccoo-,* the shorter of which is only used in combination with t-initial inflectional suffixes; see, e.g., *ayyoont* 2SG.PROG in ex. (12).
8 With perception verbs, =ga-marked object complement clauses are not ungrammatical but they are much less common and often interpreted as statements about how something is done.
9 The passive morpheme -am is realised as -an when preceding an alveolar consonant; see ex. (16).
10 Object suffixes can refer to or substitute for accusative, dative, ablative, ICP and locative arguments (Treis 2008: 345f). On the verb ‘feel’ the object suffix replaces a dative NP.
11 Apart from experiencers, the dative case marks recipients and beneficiaries (Treis 2008: 119f).
The source of a feeling is not necessarily expressed by a noun (as in ex. (16)), it can also be expressed by an imperfective converb clause (19) or by a subject complement clause (20). The respective subordinate clauses are marked by square brackets below.

Nothing can be said so far about which strategy is more common.

The passive form of the ‘hear’ verb is used only in constructions expressing feeling EXPERIENCES. Feeling ACTIVITIES, i.e. consciously controlled events of feeling (e.g. in a sentence like “Peter felt the cloth”, test frame: / to see how soft it was/ (Viberg 1984:125)) are expressed, among others, through multi-lexemic constructions headed by the vision verb xuud- ‘see, look at’. The multi-verb construction expressing ‘feel (actively)’ in ex. (21) consists of the converb form of af- ‘seize’ and the superordinate verb xuud- ‘see, look at’ and means literally “seize (and) see”. In ex. (22), the converb form of töff a- ‘seize’ combines with the superordinate verb xuud- ‘see, look at’.

12 Although the passive verbs ‘be heard’ and ‘feel’ are morphologically identical, Amberber (2001) shows that they have distinct (morpho-)syntactic properties in Amharic; see, e.g., that ‘feel’ requires the experiencer to be expressed by an object suffix, whereas this suffix is optional with ‘be heard’. The same is probably also true in Kambaata.

13 Nothing can be said so far about which strategy is more common.

(16) qás-ut maccoocc-án-te‘e
stabbing_pain-F.NOM hear-PASS-3F.PVE-1SG.OBJ

‘I felt stabbing pain.’ (lit. “Stabbing pain was heard for/to me.”)

(17) […] mőos-u-s aff-o-sá műnn-u
illness-M.NOM-3M.POSS seize-3M.PVO-3PL.OBJ.REL people-M.NOM

bub-bó=da mexx-u=r-úu
burn-3F.PVO=COND single-M.NOM=RA-M.NOM.CRD1

maccoocc-ám-ano-sáa
hear-PASS-3M.IPV-3PL.OBJ-NEG

‘[...] if (leprosy) patients burn (themselves), they don’t feel anything (lit. “something is not heard to/for them”).’ (K8: 49)

The respective subordinate clauses are marked by square brackets below.

(19) [wó’-u-s caal-á ikk-ó=g-u]
water-M.NOM-3M.POSS cold-M.ACC become-3F.PVO=RA-M.NOM

maccoocc-ámm-ó-s
hear-PASS-3M.IPV-3PL.OBJ

‘He felt that the water was cold.’ (lit. “That the water was cold was heard for/to him.”)

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which is headed by the verb xuud- ‘see, look at’ and which includes a convey form of the verbs ‘pierce’, ‘sip’, ‘bite off a tiny piece’ etc. A non-exhaustive list of multi-lexemic ‘taste’ constructions is given in ex. (24). There is no fixed verb-verb combination for the expression of ‘taste (actively)’; however, consultants considered qas-éen xuud- ‘pierce (and) see’ as the most appropriate translation.

Ex. (25) describes a tasting activity as “sip (and) see”, ex. (26) as “bite and see”.

Stating that a (certain) taste is tasted (lit. “heard”) is definitely not a common way to express one’s taste experience in Kambaata. Usually, statements about taste experiences are evaluative statements: instead of saying ‘I taste garlic in the soup’, one rather says ‘the garlic in the soup is tasteful’ or ‘the garlic is not tasteful’ (see the section on taste adjectives below). There is no non-borrowed mono-lexemic translational equivalent ‘taste (actively)’ in Kambaata. During elicitation, consultants usually provide the loan word qammas-, related to Amharic qämmässä. In Hudson’s Highland East Cushitic Dictionary (1989), the Amharic loan k’ammass is also provided as the translational equivalent of ‘taste’ in the wordlists of various languages closely related to Kambaata. Furthermore, k’ammass ‘taste’ is found in the Alaaba word list of Schneider-Blum (2007: 482). The analysis of Kambaata texts reveals that the only way to express a tasting activity, such as in the sentence “Peter tasted the food” (Test frame: /to see if he could eat it/), is by a multi-lexemic construction
first occurrence of xuud- in ex. (27) is meant to show. In an appropriate context, the verb xuud- ‘see, look at’ alone is sufficient to express a tasting activity.

(27) \[\ldots\] maxín-it wor-án-tee ag-eennó=r-a salt-F.NOM add-PASS-3F.PVE drink-3HON.IPV.REL=RA-M.ACC ikk-éé=da \[\ldots\] xuud-cenóta has-eemmiáach be_enough-3M.PVE.REL=COND see-3HON.PURP want-3HON.PVE.REL.ABL hikkán ag-eennó-sír-úchch drink-3HON.IPV-3M.OBL.REL=RA-M.ABL qah-únka mút-e od-úán aaqq-één small-M.ACC<N> one-F.OBL utensil-F.LOC take-3HON.PCO agur-één gubb-éen xuud-ééno leave-3HON.PCO sip-3HON.PCO see-3HON.IPV

‘If one wants to \textit{taste} (lit. “see”) whether there is enough salt in the drink, one takes a little bit from this drink with a tool (i.e. spoon), \textit{sips (it) (and)} \textit{tastes} (lit. “sees”) (it).

V Olfactory perception

Analogous to the domains of vision and hearing, activities and experiences do not seem to be distinguished in the olfactory domain, at least as far as one can tell from the sporadic utterances about smelling in the available corpus. In ex. (28), the verb \textit{hansuus-} ‘smell (vt)’ is used for an EXPERIENCE.

(28) boban-áta hansuushsh-eemm bad_smell-ACC smell-1SG.PVE

‘I smelled a bad smell.’

The translations of the substitutes of \textit{hansuus-} ‘smell’ in the avoidance register (\textit{ballishsháta}) of married women in ex. (29) indicate that the verb can also be used in an ACTIVITY sense.

(29) possible substitutes for \textit{hansuus-} ‘smell’ in the avoidance register: \textit{fixx a’-} ‘take a sniff of something’; \textit{akka’-} ‘inhale’ or \textit{guba’-} ‘inhale’

In the closely related language Alaaba, the cognate verb is also attested with an ACTIVITY interpretation; see ex. (30).

(30) tuhaan-á sh-ee-húu, bug-M.ACC kill-3M.PVE.REL=M.NOM.CRD1 hand-F.ACC.3M.PPOSQ hansuus-áin(o) smell-3M.IPV

‘The one who killed a bug also smells his hand.’ (Proverb) (Schneider-Blum 2007: 217)

There are various other strategies to express olfactory experiences in Kambaata. Utterances describing INTENSE EXPERIENCES may contain the lexeme \textit{ag-} ‘drink;’ see the negative experience in ex. (31) and the positive experience in ex. (32).

(31) caa’mm-áachch fooshsh-á ag-éenno shoe-M.ABL smell-M.ACC drink-3HON.IPV

‘One smells a bad smell from the shoes.’ (lit. “Smell is drunk from shoes.”)

(32) xininúta ag- xirinná ag- ‘perceive (lit. “drink”) the smell of roasted meat’ ‘perceive (lit. “drink”) the musk of the civet cat’

Like in the gustatory domain, olfactory experiences are, more often than not, evaluative statements without perception verbs; in such statements, the lexemes \textit{anj-} ‘smell (vi) good’ and \textit{bob-} ‘smell (vi) bad’ are common. The nouns \textit{anjanáta} ‘good smell, fragrance; spices’ and \textit{bobáta ~ bobanáta} ‘bad smell, stench’ are based on these verbs. Ex. (33) expresses a positive, ex. (34) a negative experience. The polysemous verb \textit{fooshsh-eeh-} ‘breathe; smell’ and the base noun \textit{fooshshá} (\textit{ballishsháta} of married women) in ex. (29) indicate that the verb can also be used by the human experiencer/perceiver is usually not expressed overtly in constructions with these source-based olfactory verbs.

\footnote{I have adjusted the glossing of the Alaaba data to the glossing of the Kambaata data.}
The tobacco smells good.

The wound is infected and smells bad.

If we don’t rinse our mouth well and if don’t brush our teeth [...] our mouth may smell bad. (K4: 118)

VI Intrafield and transfield polysemy of ‘see’ and ‘hear’ verbs

Vision and hearing are clearly lexicalised as distinct concepts in Kambaata (the same may be true in the modality of smell). There is no lexical differentiation of activities and experiences in the domain of vision and hearing (and, probably, also not in the domain of smelling).

Table 2 Perception verbs in Kambaata¹⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense Modalities</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>SEE</td>
<td>SEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>HEAR</td>
<td>HEAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling</td>
<td>SEE</td>
<td>HEAR-Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>SEE</td>
<td>HEAR-Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>SMELL</td>
<td>SMELL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁵ Copulatives do not occur in the table. The verb lall- ‘occur, be seen’ and the evaluative ‘smell (vi) good/bad’ verbs (§ V) and ‘have a (certain) taste’ verbs (see section on taste expression below) probably come closest to what Viberg understands to be “copulatives”. Note, however, that the experiencer can (optionally) be encoded on all these verbs.

In the domains of feeling and taste the distinction between activities and experiences is crucial: the verb xuud- ‘see, look at’ is used (mostly in multi-verb constructions) for the expression of activities in these domains, while the verb maccoo(cc)- ‘hear, listen to’ is employed for the expression of uncontrolled tactile and gustatory experiences. This means, outside the domain of vision, xuud- ‘see, look at’ is associated with controlled, deliberate perception. The verb maccoo(cc)- ‘hear, listen to’ is associated with uncontrolled perception outside the domain of hearing. Apart from this, there is indirect evidence that even in the domain of vision and hearing itself the ACTIVITY interpretation of the verb xuud- ‘see, look at’ and the EXPERIENCE interpretation of maccoo(cc)- ‘hear, listen’ is more prominent. Apart from specialised seeing and hearing verbs, Kambaata has another semantically quite general verb lall- ‘occur’ which is used to express a visual EXPERIENCE unambiguously (see § I) and a verb goms- ‘listen to’ (see § II) to express an auditory ACTIVITY unambiguously and one could argue that these verbs are needed because the dominant interpretation of xuud- is the controlled ‘look at’ and the dominant interpretation of maccoo(cc)- is the uncontrolled ‘hear’.

Apart from the polysemy of xuud- ‘see, look at’ and maccoo(cc)- ‘hear, listen to’ within the semantic field of physical perception (intrafield polysemy) demonstrated so far, transfield polysemmes of these verbs are also attested and will be discussed in the following section.

- ‘see, look at’ → ‘check, examine’

The text corpus uncovers that the verb xuud- ‘see, look at’ is often used to express that knowledge is acquired actively or that evidence is requested or looked for by a controlling agent, irrespective of the sensory organs involved in this process. An appropriate translation for xuud- in these contexts is ‘check’ or ‘examine’; consider ex. (36).

If we have stepped into a nail or a thorn or cut ourselves with a metal instrument, we might get tetanus. Therefore, it is good to go to the hospital quickly (and) be examined (lit. “seen”). (K4: 119)
• ‘see, look at’ → ‘consider, take into account’

The vision verb *xuud-* ‘see, look at’ is also used in the sense of ‘consider, take into account’, i.e. the verb can be used for cognitive processes, as shown in ex. (37)-(38).

(37) gat-ē kaashsh-ā kaa-fich-ē bīr-e *xuud*-u
     garden-F,GEN plant-M,ACC plant-M,ABL before-F,OBJ see-M,NOM
     hasis-anō duuh-āikh-ō at hakkkar-ō-ōo-tā-n?
     be necessary-3M,IVP,REL condition-PL2-F,NOM which.M,PL-ASSOC,F,PRED-F,COP2-Q
     ‘Before planting the plants, which (economic/environmental) conditions does one have to consider?’ (K8: 10)

• ‘see, look at’ / ‘hear, listen to’ → ‘experience (emotionally)’

Unlike in many other languages (see Vanhove 2008), the use of the general ‘see’ verb for ‘realise, understand, know’ is uncommon in Kambaata, only a few examples are attested in the corpus; consider the verb *xuud-* ‘see, look at’ in ex. (39) and the verb *lall-* ‘occur, appear, be seen, become visible’ in ex. (40). Note that in both constructions the experiencer is not encoded as the subject of the perception verb. The pronoun *-s* 3M,OBJ refers to the experiencer on the passivised verb in ex. (39); the pronoun *-i* 1SG,POSS in ex. (40) is found on the verb negating the intransitive *lall-* ‘occur’. Both pronouns refer to an indirect (dative) object.

(38) hór-unku gag-ā-s qotar-ā ass-aqq-i *xuud*-āno
     self-3M,ACC-3M,POSS clever-M,ACC do-MID-3M,PCO see-3M,IVP
     ‘Everybody considers himself/herself clever.’

• ‘see, look at’ → ‘visit’

Unlike in many other languages (see Vanhove 2008), the use of the general ‘see’ verb for ‘realise, understand, know’ is uncommon in Kambaata, only a few examples are attested in the corpus; consider the verb *xuud-* ‘see, look at’ in ex. (39) and the verb *lall-* ‘occur, appear, be seen, become visible’ in ex. (40). Note that in both constructions the experiencer is not encoded as the subject of the perception verb. The pronoun *-s* 3M,OBJ refers to the experiencer on the passivised verb in ex. (39); the pronoun *-i* 1SG,POSS in ex. (40) is found on the verb negating the intransitive *lall-* ‘occur’. Both pronouns refer to an indirect (dative) object.

(39) hujantoommi=r-u kaa’ll-āno=a=gg-a
     work,1PL,IVP,REL=RA-M,NOM help-3M,IVP,REL-M,COP2=GA-M,PRED
     *xuud*-ām-anó=é-hu
     see-PASS-3M,IVP-1SG,OBJ.NMZ1-M,NOM
     ‘I realise (lit. “it is seen to/for me”) that what we did is useful.’

• ‘see, look at’ → ‘visit’

Apart from *xa’mm-* ‘ask’, the verb *xuud-* ‘see, look at’ is commonly used to express ‘visit’; see ex. (41).

(41) hiz-ōo-’e xijj-ō=tannée
     brother-M,NOM-1SG,POSS become_sick-3M,IVP,REL=BE
     *xuud*-ē már-eemm see-M,DAT go-1SG,IPV
     ‘Because my brother was sick, I went to visit him.’

• ‘see, look at’ / ‘hear, listen to’ → ‘experience (emotionally)’

Emotional experiences can be expressed by means of *xuud-* ‘look, see’ or *maccoo*(c): ‘hear, listen to’, e.g. *boorashshánmaccoo*(c): ‘feel bored’ (lit. “hear boredom”) and *goorrítxuud-* ‘experience joy’ (lit. “see joy”).

• ‘hear’ → ‘heed, obey’

The use of the hearing verb is extended to the domain of “internal reception” (Vanhove 2008). Apart from the use of the Amharic loan *accod-um* ‘be ordered; obey’, the only way to express ‘heed, obey’ in Kambaata is through the use of the hearing verb; consider ex. (42).
wól-o man-ní sazan-áta maccoocc-fi hast-áno-ba’a
other-M.OBL people-M.GEN advice-F.ACC hear-M.DAT want-3.M.IPV-NEG

He does not want to heed other people’s advice.’

• ‘hear’ → ‘understand (a language)’

As in many Ethiopian languages, understanding is expressed in Kambaata as the
entrance of a fact for the benefit of the experiencer. The experiencer is either
encoded by an object pronoun on the verb aag- ‘enter’, as -he in ex. (45), or by an
independent dative noun phrase. The auditory perception verb maccoocc(ce)- ‘hear,
listen to’ is only used to express a specific type of understanding, namely
understanding a language; see ex. (44).16

áagg-ee-he-nód y-am-án-t xa’m-an-taamtf
enter-3M.PVE/2SG.OBJ=Q say-PASS-PASS-2SG.PCO ask-PASS-2SG.IPV.REL

‘When you are asked whether you understood (it) (lit. “whether (it) entered
for you”) [...]’. (Maatewoos Shagana 1992: 11)

The presented data provide some (but no compelling) evidence for the primacy of
vision (rather than hearing) over other sense modalities in Kambaata. In the
semantic field of physical perception, the vision and the hearing verbs are both
used for other modalities (feeling, tasting). However, the extended uses of the
hearing verb are associated with its derived (passive) form, while the seeing verb is
used for other modalities without requiring additional morphology. Furthermore, it

16 Unlike in many languages studied by Vanhove (2008), the semantic associations between ‘hear’
or ‘see’ and ‘understand’ are only marginal and verbs of ‘prehension’, i.e. ’take’, ‘seize’ and
‘grasp’ are, to the best of my knowledge, not used to express ‘understand’ in Kambaata (and
possibly neither in many other Ethiopian languages).

17 In translated texts (e.g. in Kambaata school books) the deverbal action/event noun
maccooccissháta, based on the causative maccoocc-is-, ‘make hear’ is used as a neologism for
‘perception’ (of whatever sense modality); ‘tactile perception’, e.g., is translated as haaroosí
maccooccishsháta (K8: 49), lit. “perception of touching, perception of stroking”.

seems that the transfield semantic associations of ‘see’ outnumber those of ‘hear’
(but more data is definitely necessary to substantiate this claim.).

VII Perception verbs in other Ethiopian languages

The intrafield and transfield polysemies of seeing and hearing verbs described for
Kambaata above are also attested in other genetically related and/or geographically
adjacent languages, at least as far as I can tell from a cursory overview of the
available sources. In the following section, examples from Semitic (S), Cushitic
(C) and Omotic (O) languages are provided.

a) ‘See’ in other Ethiopian languages

None of the other meanings attributed to the Kambaata visual perception verb
xuud- in § VI above seem to be unique in the Ethiopian context. Most Ethiopian
languages apply the same verb for visual experiences and visual activities; see, e.g.,
Amharic (S) ayyä ‘see, look at’ (Kane 1990b: 1282), Wolaitta (O) heh’ ‘see, look
at’ (Lamberti and Sottile 1997: 312) and Gedeo (C) usul- ‘see, look at’ (Hudson
1989: 382), to name just a few. Like Kambaata, various languages are attested to
use ‘see’ in the sense of ‘check’; see, e.g., Amharic (S) ayyä ‘test, check’ (Kane
1990b: 1282) and Sidaama (C) la’- ‘check’ (Kawachi 2007a: 256). In addition, the
use of the visual perception verb for ‘visit’ seems to be widespread; see, e.g., the
vision verb la’u in Alaaba (C) (Schneider-Blum 2007: 443), mo(o)’- in Hadiyya
(C) (Hudson 1989: 94), yef- / yí in Dime (O) (Mulugeta Seyoum 2008: 194) and
bekk’- in Baskeet (O). The use of the ‘see’ verb for ‘experience emotionally’ in
Kambaata is parallel to that of Amharic ayyä ‘experience (suffering, hardship)’
(Kane 1990b: 1282) as in makárawan ayyä ‘be distressed, miserable’ (lit. “see the
distress, misfortune”) (Amberber 2001: 59). Furthermore, a diachronic relation
between ‘see’ and ‘know’ is attested in Highland East Cushitic: the Hadiyya verb
la’- ‘know’ (Hudson 1989: 290) is cognate with the ‘see’ verbs in closely related
languages (e.g. Alaaba and Sidaama; see above).

In the Omotic language Baskeet, active tasting (45) and feeling (46) are also
expressed in multi-lexemic constructions including the visual perception verb
bekk’- ‘see, look at’; consider ex. (45)-(46) and compare them with ex. (21)-(22)
and ex. (25)-(27) in Kambaata.

áagg-ce-he-nód y-am-án-t xa’m-an-taamtf
enter-3M.PVE/2SG.OBJ=Q say-PASS-PASS-2SG.PCO ask-PASS-2SG.IPV.REL

‘Do you understand (lit. “hear”) the Kambaata language?’

In translated texts (e.g. in Kambaata school books) the deverbal action/event noun
maccooccissháta, based on the causative maccoocc-is-, ‘make hear’ is used as a neologism for
‘perception’ (of whatever sense modality); ‘tactile perception’, e.g., is translated as haaroosí
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áagg-ce-he-nód y-am-án-t xa’m-an-taamtf
enter-3M.PVE/2SG.OBJ=Q say-PASS-PASS-2SG.PCO ask-PASS-2SG.IPV.REL

‘When you are asked whether you understood (it) (lit. “whether (it) entered
for you”) [...]’. (Maatewoos Shagana 1992: 11)

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or ‘see’ and ‘understand’ are only marginal and verbs of ‘prehension’, i.e. ‘take’, ‘seize’ and
‘grasp’ are, to the best of my knowledge, not used to express ‘understand’ in Kambaata (and
possibly neither in many other Ethiopian languages).
(45) nam?-ánts-í besh-í=gall átt-ín
two-PL-NOM griddle-TV=ON remain-DS
pétán-indana máac'-inda d’ak’-í bekk'-íd-e
one-F-DEF ACC woman-F-DEF bite-CNV1 see-F-PPV-DEC
(46) yíntí yímmí írí d’im?-í bekk’-iánt-e!
2PL DEM2.F 3F press-CNV1 see-2PL-POLITE_IMP-DEC
íná áyssh-í wód’-a?
on_it meat-NOM be-Q
(47) arrabu k’as- ‘taste’ (Hudson 1989:149, 379) (lit. “pierce with tongue”)
(48) afaaniin qaba ‘taste’ (Gragg 1982: 311, 434) (lit. “seize with tongue”)
(49) laacc’- ‘lick, taste’ (Lamberti and Sottile 1997: 443)
(50) qámmisá ‘taste; fig. experience; drink, imbibe medicine or medicinal potion’ (Kane 1990a: 702)

b) ‘Hear’ in other Ethiopian languages

Most Ethiopian languages apply the same verb for auditory experiences and auditory activities; see, e.g., Amharic (S) sämma ‘hear, listen to’ (Kane 1990a: 462), Sidaama (C) mač’iísá- ‘hear, listen to’ (Kawachi 2007a: 121, 444) and Baskeet sisk- ‘hear, listen to’ in ex. (51)-(52).

(51) nažáddo koshš-ár sisk-íbt-e!
children-VOC do_well-CNV2 hear-2PL-IMP-DEC
‘(My) children, listen attentively!’

(52) k’ar-í […] wúmpítt-i wód’-dor gáy-i gá-áz-in
monkey-NOM backyard-LOC-TV be-? SS baboon-NOM say-REL-F-DEF
sisk-ír hear-M-IPV
‘Monkey […] was in the backyard and heard what Baboon said.’

The use of the auditory verb to express ‘understand (a language)’, demonstrated for Kambaata above, is also documented in Amharic (Kane 1990a: 462).

Furthermore, expressing tactile experiences by the passive form of ‘hear’ is a lexical “Ethiopianism” and as such included in Hayward’s list of shared lexicalisation patterns of the Ethiopian sprachbund (cf. Introduction); see Oromo d’aga’e ‘feel’ (PASS of d’aga’e ‘hear’), Gamo siyèttides ‘feel’ (PASS of síyides ‘hear’) and Amharic tā-sämma ‘feel’ (PASS of sämma ‘hear’) (Hayward 1991: 152). Consider the Amharic ex. (53), in which the passive morpheme tā- is totally assimilated to the stem-initial t of the verbal stem.18

(53) himām yi-s sämma-fált-al
pain 3ML-IPV-PASS-hear-1SG.OBJ-IPV
‘I feel pain.’ (Amberber 2001: 37) (lit. “Pain is heard (to) me.”)

Amberber (2001: 38) states explicitly that Amharic tā-sämma ‘feel’ can not be used for tactile ACTIVITIES or tactile COPULATIVES. He shows, furthermore, that “[tā-sämma ‘feel’] is used to express concepts which are un differentiated between ‘emotions’ and ‘sensations’, or feelings of ‘cognition’ and feelings of ‘the body’ respectively” (Amberber 2001: 37).19

It is known from the typological literature that ‘hear’ verbs are used to express ‘feel’ in many languages (see Viberg 1984). What is remarkable in the Ethiopian sprachbund is the fact that it is the PASSIVE derivative of ‘hear’ that developed

18 Note that Amberber (2001) uses schwa (ä) for the low central vowel here transcribed as ǝ.
19 Amberber’s glossing has been adapted to the conventions used in this article.
20 Kawachi (2007b) claims that the ‘hear’ can ‘n ot t be used for physical or mental feelings in Sidaama at all.
the meaning ‘feel’. In his overview of cross-linguistic polysemy patterns in the semantic field of perception verbs, Viberg (1984) does not discuss such a formal relation between ‘hear’ and ‘feel’.\(^\text{20}\) Outside the domain of hearing, the experriencer is always marked like a non-core argument and thus the grammatical encoding seems to reflect that the control of a feeling experriencer over the perceptive event is less than the control of a seeing or hearing experriencer (see also Amberber 2001).

Apart from auditory and tactile perception, the verb tē-sēmmā is used to express olfactory perception in Amharic (which is a use of the ‘hear’ verb so far not attested in Kambaata). Furthermore, expressions for gustatory perception can be built on the verb ‘hear’ in Amharic (Kane 1990a: 463).

**Taste adjectives**

In this section, the meaning and use of the most common Kambaata taste adjectives and verbs are discussed. It is shown that these lexemes do not match the physiologically determined basic tastes ‘sweet’, ‘salty’, ‘bitter’ and ‘sour’\(^\text{21}\) but that the semantic field of taste is carved up in a very different way.

**a) Good-tasting**

The inchoative-stative verb xe’- ‘taste sweet, taste good’ is the most frequent taste verb in the corpus. Whereas almost all other inchoative-stative verbs of the language have a corresponding adjective based on the same root (Treis 2008: 268-72), this taste verb lacks a corresponding adjective. Hence, the relative verb forms given in ex. (54) are used to modify a noun.

\[(54) \quad \text{xe’-áa} \quad \text{xe’-áa-taa} \]

\[\text{taste_good-3F.IPV.REL} \quad \text{taste_good-3F.IPV.REL} \]

‘which (M) tastes good’ ‘which (F) tastes good’

\(\text{xe’-áa-taa} \) is also associated with a pleasantly salty taste, as in ex. (55). The right amount of salt and other spices makes a dish to be described by xe’-.

\[(55) \quad \text{antabee’-i wóx-it higis-á xe’-áa-taa} \]

\[\text{chicken-M.GEN sauce-F.NOM much-M.ACC taste_good-3F.IPV.REL-FCOP2} \]

‘Chicken sauce tastes very good / tastes best.’

In the women’s avoidance vocabulary of Kambaata women (Treis 2005), maxinitá ‘salt’ is regularly substituted by xe’-aunchnitá ‘(the) tasty (one)’, which is the agentive adjective form of xe’- ‘taste good’. Delicious salty drinks and dishes may not have too much salt while the deliciousness of sweet drinks and dishes increases with the amount of sugar that is added to them. There is no lexeme in Kambaata which corresponds to the physiological salty taste. If the salty taste is delicious, speakers use xe’- ‘taste good’. Dishes with too much salt are characterised as “burning” (buxs- ‘burn’) (see section (e) below). A dish is only characterised with the derived adjective maxin-aasnū ‘salty, salt-containing’ (< maxinitá ‘salt’) if a contrast has to be established to a referent not containing salt or containing, e.g., sugar; consider ex. (56).

\[(56) \]

\[(a) \quad \text{bún-u maximitá-u-a} \quad \text{coffee-M.NOM salt-AAM-M.PRED-M.COP2} \]

‘The coffee contains salt / is salty.’

\[(b) \quad \text{bún-u buur-áa-u-a} \quad \text{coffee-M.NOM butter-AAM-M.PRED-M.COP2} \]

‘The coffee contains butter / is buttered.’

A very pleasant taste experience can be described with the verb xe’-‘, i.e. it is a very general evaluative taste term, most appropriately translated as ‘taste good’. Ex. (57) shows that it may also describe a pleasantly sour taste experience.

\[(57) \quad \text{bún-u xe’-áa-taa} \quad \text{coffee-M.GEN xe’-áa-taa} \]

‘The coffee is very good / tastes very good.’

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\(^{20}\) Oromo is one language of Viberg’s sample but in the table with the Oromo data (p. 154) the use of ‘hear’ (or the passive of ‘hear’) is not given as an option to express perceptual experiences in non-auditory domains.

In order to characterise a dish or a drink as having an unpleasant taste, a negative verb form of the inchoative-stative verb xe‘- ‘taste good’ has to be used. Interestingly, there is no general verb ‘taste bad’ in Kambaata, instead the palatability must be negated or the unpleasantness of a taste must be further specified.22

In metaphors, the verb xe‘- can be applied to non-food referents; see the characterisation of talk as “good-tasting” in ex. (58). A person’s voice (laağédá) and appearance (hautii) can be described as “good-tasting”, too.

(58) xáh-u xe‘-isis-án ag-áno word-M.NOM taste_good-CAUS-3M.IPOV drink-3M.IPOV ‘Talk is pleasant (at first), (but then) it drinks (i.e. fools) (you).’ (Proverb)

The imperative form of xe‘- ‘taste good’ is used in blessings for girls, which express the wish that the addressee may be liked and considered good-mannered by others; consider ex. (59).

(59) maxin-ē=g-a / malaab-ī=g-a xe‘!
saR-F.Gen=GA-M.OBL honey-M.Gen=GA-M.OBL taste_good.2SG.IMP ‘Be pleasant like salt / honey!’

The noun xe‘-má ‘taste; good taste’, which is based on the same stem as the verb xe‘- ‘taste good’, can be used neutrally to refer to the sensation perceived in one’s mouth or eva写着tively to describe a positive sensation. Furthermore, the noun has the meaning ‘value’; see ex. (60).

(60) zhaantil-i xe‘-má-i kabär dagg-óomm
umbrella-M.GEN taste-M.ACC today find-1SG.IPVO ‘I realised the value of an umbrella today.’

b) Bitter and sour

The inchoative-stative verb qaraar- ‘be(come)/taste bitter’ and the derived adjective qaraar-aashshá(-ta) ‘bitter’ are prototypically used to describe the taste of the leaves of the heebá-tree (possibly Vernonia amygdalina) and the taste of xeemú, a thick tapeworm medicine with a strong laxative effect, which is extracted from the blossoms of the xeemú-tree (Haagenia abyssinica). In addition to these, other types of medicine and spices (e.g. gambála xaqita ‘black cumin’), bile (dambiačéki), the growth centre of the enset plant (muli’ilá),23 and tobacco (tumbe’ú) were given as examples for products with a taste most appropriately described with qaraar- ‘be(come)/taste bitter’.

The tastes described by the lexeme qaraar- ‘be(come)/taste bitter’ are not necessarily negative and qaraar- cannot simply be considered the antonym of xe‘- ‘taste good’. Self-made beer (séela) and bean (“eye”) coffee (iilikchi bani) is appreciated when characterised as strong and qaraaraashshá(-ta) ‘bitter’. In the case of leaf (“ear”) coffee (mi’aau), however, a bitter taste must be avoided. If the leaves of the coffee tree are not pounded and then steamed or dried in the sun in order to reduce the bitter principles, the resulting drink (leaf coffee) is described with the inchoative-stative verb qamaraar- ‘be(come)/taste bitter’, a hyponym of qaraar- ‘be(come)/taste bitter’ and a taste verb which specifically describes the (unpleasant) bitterness of leaf coffee.

Apart from bitter tastes, the lexeme qaraar- ‘be(come)/taste bitter’ also seems to be applicable to food with a sour taste; one consultant used it to describe the taste of unripe fruits, e.g. oranges.

c) Fermented sour

Whereas the German lexeme sauer ‘sour, acidic’, for instance, covers naturally sour tastes (e.g. of oranges, apples) as well as sour tastes resulting from fermentation, these two types of sour tastes are clearly kept apart in Kambaata. The inchoative-stative verb shish ‘be(come)/taste sour, acidic’ and the corresponding adjective shish-d(-ta) ‘sour’ are only applied to sour tastes resulting from fermentation, irrespective of whether the sour taste is considered positive or negative. The lexeme is thus applied to fermented milk (azaitu ‘milk’, gimmáta

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22 Viber (1984: 153) mentions that Oromo has two evaluative taste verbs: m’au ‘taste good’ and had’aa ‘taste bad’. Gragg (1982), however, translates had’aa-u’u (in his transcription) as ‘be bitter’ [sic!]. Note that Kambaata has two antonymous evaluative verbs in the olfactory domain (see § V).

23 If it is fermented together with the pulp from the enset leaf sheaths it makes the enset food taste bitter.
azúta ‘churned milk’, zomború ‘first milk’) and milk products (e.g. ge’inú ‘yogurt’, buurú ‘butter’), dough of bread (baláta), different bread types (daabbúta ‘(wheat) bread’, injeerá ‘injera, tèf-pancake’), various fermented enset products (e.g. bu’llá ‘fermented enset flour’) and beer (seelú).

In the traditional avoidance register of Kambaata women (Treis 2005), the word for milk, azúta, is replaced by shishi (‘the) sour, acid, fermented (one’). In Kambaata (and elsewhere in Ethiopia) butter has to be fermented before it is consumed.

d) Tasteless

The inchoative-stative verb balj- ‘be(come) tasteless, bland, insipid’ and the corresponding adjective baljá(-ta) usually carry a negative connotation. The lack of salt, spices or red chilli pepper makes food baljá(-ta), consider ex. (61). Alternatively, insipid food can be characterised as ‘water’ or as “saying water-water”; see ex. (62).

(61) ti wóx-it balj-a-ta [= wó’-a-a] DDEM1.F,NOM sauce-F,NOM tasteless-F,PRED-F,COP2 water-M,PRED-M,COP2

‘This sauce is tasteless (= water).’


‘Bad potatoes taste watery (lit. “say water-water”) when one eats them.’

The lexemes balj- and baljá(-ta) are commonly used to characterise the taste of chilli pepper pods, which are, contrary to one’s expectation, not hot enough (63).


‘This chilli pepper pod is bland.’

Hotness is not considered a taste sensation in the technical sense, because, strictly speaking, this sensation is not perceived by the human taste buds but by thermoreceptors. Nevertheless, expressions for the hotness of food and drinks are discussed in this section because of a certain degree of terminological overlap. The verb buss- ‘burn (vt)’ (the causative form of bub- ‘burn (vi)’) is first of all used to describe the sensory experience caused by red or green chilli pepper. Hence, the utterance in ex. (65) has two possible interpretations.

(65) ti wóx-it buss-ítyáyyo-u DDEM1.F,NOM sauce-F,NOM burn-3F,IPV

‘This sauce is (i) hot (due to chilli pepper) / (ii) hot (high temperature).’

In the semantic field of taste, the verb is furthermore used to characterise a pleasantly sour taste of lemons (loommíta) and passion fruits (hoo’mmíta); it describes the sensation during the consumption of local brandy (haraqíta) and the unpleasant taste of food containing too much salt; see ex. (66).

(66) kán qess-á maxín-it hátá’ buss-ítyáyyo-u DDEM1.M,OBJL cheese-M,ACC salt-F,NOM be_too_much.3F,PCO burn-3F,PROG

‘There is too much salt in this cheese, it is burning.’

The adjective jallá(-ta) ‘tasteless, insipid, bland’ seems to be synonymous to baljá(-ta). Both lexemes can be applied metaphorically to characterise very stupid people.

Note that in the Cushitic language Dhaasanac the taste adjective menne ɲ ‘tasteless; ill-mannered’ is also used to describe human behaviour (Tosco 2003: 565).

24
Metaphorically extended, buss- can characterise painful, offensive words (bussitia laagáta ‘words which burn’) and certain types of pain (see ex. (19) above). While intense heat can only be “burning”, intense cold can be described as “burning” or “cutting”; see ex. (67).

(67) inq-úta       mur-áno-a     wó'-a
                    tooth-F.ACC  cut-3M.PIV.REL-M.COP2  water-M.PRED

‘It is very cold (lit. “teeth-cutting”) water.’

Depending on the intensity and the area where hotness is perceived, semantically more specific ‘burn’ verbs can be used to describe the sensation during the consumption of different types of chilli pepper. The following verbs are hyponyms of the semantically general buss- ‘burn’: The ideophonic compound verb hamáiss a ‘burn slightly’ describes the weak burning sensation during the consumption of mild pepper. The verb laade’ ‘burn extremely’ characterises the extreme sensation during the consumption of unbearably hot pepper. The verb buss- ‘burn’ furthermore seems to describe a slightly less extreme sensation than laade’ ‘burn extremely’; apart from using it in the context of pepper, it is also attested to describe unpleasant burning sensations in the mouth resulting from the consumption of spoiled, pungent-tasting tubers (e.g. qarab ‘taro’). The verb buss- ‘burn enormously’ was favoured when the burning sensation caused by pepper was not restricted to the interior of the mouth but also felt around the lips. Note that these specific ‘burn’ verbs all originate from the semantic field of combustion; only hamáiss a ‘burn slightly’ is (so far) restricted to the context of sensations caused by chilli pepper.

Taste expressions in other Ethiopian languages

The Kambaata basic taste terms are not congruent with the physiological basic tastes ‘sweet’, ‘bitter’, ‘salty’ and ‘sour’. Kambaata has a general evaluative lexeme xé- ‘taste good’, which can describe pleasant taste experiences irrespective of whether they are perceived as sweet, salty, bitter, or sour. But whereas the language has a general positive taste verb it lacks a corresponding negative taste verb. A salty dish is described with the verb xe’- ‘taste good’ if it is palatable or with the verb buss- ‘burn’ if it is inedible because of too much salt. The domain of sour taste is covered by the lexemes qarráar ‘taste bitter’ and shíshí ‘taste sour’, the former being used for natural sour tastes, the latter for sour tastes resulting from fermentation. The absence of taste is expressed by balájjita (tasteless, insipid, bland). The hotness of a dish is described by choosing from an array of verbs from the lexical field of combustion.

So far, little can be said about whether the lexicalisation patterns attested in the semantic field of taste in Kambaata are shared by the related Cushitic languages and by geographically adjacent Ethio-Semitic and Omotic languages. Lexical data on taste expressions are scarce in the literature on Ethiopian languages. However, there is reason to hypothesise that the other languages of the area share (at least some of) the taste concepts reflected in the Kambaata data.

In all Highland East Cushitic languages documented in Hudson (1989), a lexeme is attested that has ‘be sweet’ as its central meaning but which is also generally used to express ‘taste good’; see Burji d’ed’e ‘taste good, be sweet’ (p. 188), Gedeo t’em- ‘taste good, be sweet’ (p. 263), Hadiyya t’ee- ‘taste good, be sweet’ (p. 300), Sidaama c’omm- ‘(esp. of meat [sic!])’ (p. 357) ‘taste good, be sweet’. A general ‘taste good’ verb, ma’i-, is furthermore attested in Wolaitta (Omotic); Lamberti and Sottile (1997: 450f) trace its cognates in various Omotic and Cushitic languages. The Amharic verb t’aftiti’i is translated as ‘be sweet, taste sweet, be tasty, taste good, be delicious, be savoury’ (Kane 1990b: 2196).

Furthermore, Kambaata does not seem to be the only language which expresses bitter taste and (at least one type of) sour taste by one and the same lexeme; see, for instance, Oromo had’d’aar ‘sour, bitter’ (Gragg 1982: 434) and Alaaba k’araar ‘be bitter, be sour’ (Schneider-Blum 2007: 442). Furthermore, both languages have lexemes translated as only ‘sour’ / ‘become sour’, namely Oromo longággoso (Gragg 1982: 434) and Alaaba hollatu (Schneider-Blum 2007: 439) and it would be worth investigating whether these lexemes are by and large restricted to ‘sour due to fermentation’ like in Kambaata. The Amharic verb marárar is translated as ‘taste bitter, be sour or acid (green fruit)’ (Kane 1990a: 177),25 while for the verb k’amáit’ti’i the translations ‘be acid, be sour, turn sour (milk), to ferment (batter)’ are given.

Outlook

Apart from Hayward’s work (1991, 2000), research on the features of the Ethiopian sprachbund has up until today exclusively concentrated on grammatical aspects but disregarded shared lexicalisation patterns. This lack of interest can predominantly be explained by the unavailability of dictionaries and searchable text or lexical databases, which is most marked in Omotic languages. The dictionaries that are available usually contain only information on the canonical uses of a lexeme; little information can be gathered on the polysemy or semantic associations of a lexeme. The present paper should be considered as a very preliminary study of shared

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25 Other translations are ‘smell good, have a nice smell; be pleasant, pleasing, e.g. speech’ (Kane 1990b: 2196).
26 Other translations are ‘be distasteful, unpleasant; be angry, vexed, upset’ (Kane 1990a: 177).
lexicalisation patterns. It is intended to formulate the very first hypotheses about how the semantic field of physical perception and the semantic field of taste are carved up in the Highland East Cushitic language Kambaata and in genetically related and/or geographically adjacent languages. Admittedly, the comparison of Kambaata with other Ethiopian languages had to remain cursory but hopefully this study will stimulate more research on the lexical characteristics of Ethiopian languages (and beyond) in general, and on the lexical domains of perception verbs and taste expressions in particular. In this final section, I would like to propose the following package of lexicalisation patterns which could be used in combination to define lexical features of the Ethiopian sprachbund.

In languages of the Ethiopian sprachbund …

- the same verbal lexeme is used for vision experiences and activities;
- the same verbal lexeme is used for auditory experiences and activities;
- there is no separate verbal lexeme ‘taste’ (apart from a recent Amharic loan);
- there is no separate verbal lexeme ‘feel’;
- the passive form of the verb ‘hear’ is used (at least) for tactile and gustatory (possibly also olfactory) experiences; it is not used for tactile, gustatory or olfactory activities;
- the verb ‘see’ can be used for perceptive activities in non-visual sense modalities;
- the verb ‘hear’ has the meaning ‘understand (a language)’, apart from this ‘understand’ is expressed in a construction with the verb ‘enter’;
- there is a general evaluative verb-pair ‘smell good’ and ‘smell bad’;
- there is a general evaluative verb ‘taste good’ but no equally general verb ‘taste bad’;
- the lexeme ‘(become) bitter’ is also used to describe certain instances of ‘(become) sour’;
- there is a lexeme with the prototypical meaning ‘(become) sour (by fermentation)’;
- hotness (caused by chilli) is expressed in constructions with combustion verbs.

I do not want to claim that the individual polysemies or semantic associations presented here are cross-linguistically unique; there are, e.g., many languages in world that use ‘hear’ for other sense modalities. Instead, I propose the whole package of lexicalisation patterns as a feature of the Ethiopian sprachbund.

Further research will have to examine, in particular, to what extent the lexicalisation patterns found in the semantic fields of perception verbs and taste expressions in Kambaata are shared by other languages in Ethiopia, or whether the patterns are rather language-specific, contrary to my assumption. A comparison with related languages outside the Ethiopian language area will then have to be carried out in order to determine whether certain lexicalisation patterns can indeed be considered features of the Ethiopian sprachbund, whether they are inherited features, or whether they are even more widely attested on the African continent.

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