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“*Eish* it’s getting really interesting”: borrowed interjections in South African English

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Abstract: This article offers a descriptive account of seven interjections, *eish*, *yho*, *tjo*, *sho*, *hayi*, *hau*, and *mxm*, which are adopted from different local South African languages into South African English. It investigates the frequencies, orthography, syntactic position, collocational forms and discourse-pragmatic roles of these seven interjections, through the lens of pragmatic borrowing and postcolonial corpus pragmatics. The data were retrieved from the South African segment of the Global Web-based English corpus and underwent quantitative and qualitative analysis. The findings indicate that the interjections are all emotive interjections, which mostly express negative emotions, except *hayi*, which is a phatic interjection that is largely used to show disapproval of some information. All the interjections favour clause-initial position except *mxm*, which is a loan interjection that represents the kiss-teeth or suck-teeth oral gesture that is common in some parts of Africa and the Caribbean. The article affirms that these loaned interjections accentuate the distinction of South African English from other varieties of English.

Keywords: borrowed interjections; corpus pragmatics; postcolonial pragmatics; South African English

Kgutsufatso: Pampiri ena ya dipatlisiso e fana ka tlaleho ya makgotsi a suping, *eish*, *yho*, *tjo*, *sho*, *hayi*, *hau* le *mxm*, a amohetsweng ho tswa dipuong tse fapaneng tsa Afrika Borwa ho ya Senyesemaneng sa Afrika Borwa. Pampiri e etsa dipatlisiso ka makgetlo ao makgotsi ana a hlahang ka ona puong ya senyesemane, mokgwa oo a ngolwang ka ona, mokgwa oo a hlahang ka ona polelong, hore na a sebediswa mmoho le mantswe a feng le hore na mosebetsi wa makgotsi ana puong ke o feng. Pampiri ena e sebedisa teori ya corpus pragmatics le postcolonial pragmatics ho hlalosa tse fumanweng diphuputsong. Data ile ya fumanwa ho tswa karolong ya Afrika Borwa ya Global Web-

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based English corpus mme ya etswa tlhahlobo ya palo le ya boleng. Diphuputso di bontsha hore makgotsi kaofela ke a amang maikutlo mme hangata ke maikutlo a fosahetseng, ntle le *hayi* eo yona e sebediswang haholo ho bontsha ho hanana le taba e itseng. Makgotsi kaofela a hlaha qalong ya polelo, ntle le *mxm* eo e leng lekgotsi le adimilweng dikarolong tse ding tsa Afrika le Caribbean. Diphuputso di tiisa hore makgotsi a adingwang dipuong tsa Afrika Borwa a totobatsa phapang ya senyesemane sa Afrika Borwa ho mefuta e meng ya senyesemane.

Mantswe a sehlooho: Makgotsi a adimilweng; corpus pragmatics; pragmatics ea postcolonial; Senyesemane sa Afrika Borwa

1 Background to the study

South Africa is home to about fifty-three languages, with twelve of these as official languages: Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, SePedi, SeSotho, SeTswana, SiSwati, Sign Language, TshiVenda and XiTsonga (Eberhard et al. 2023; Statistics South Africa 2023). English is not indigenous to South Africa, as British colonisers entered the country in different phases during the 19th century and settled in various parts of the country, including the Eastern Cape, the present-day Kwa-Zulu Natal and Johannesburg (Botha et al. 2021). English later became an official language together with Dutch in 1910 and with Afrikaans in 1925. By 1948, Dutch lost its official status, and by 1994, nine other languages became official languages. Sign Language was included within the list of official languages in July 2023.

Apart from being an official language, English is also the fifth leading home language in South Africa, surpassed only by isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans and SePedi, according to the 2023 South African census. It is noted that a lot of South Africans with African languages as their home languages, especially if they live in metropolitan centres, can speak up to five languages (Botha et al. 2021). As a result, the numerous languages and cultures with which English co-exists influence its use in South Africa. There are diverse varieties of South African English (SAfE): Black South African English, Cape Flats English, Indian South African English, and White South African English. While Black South African English is a second language (L2) variety, the others are first language (L1) English varieties. Scholars have noted that these different varieties have some similarities (van Rooy 2021; Zerbian 2015). It is also been argued that SAfE is at Schneider's (2007) nativisation phase with some strong indications of it progressing to the endonormative stabilisation stage (Bekker 2019; Collins 2022).

Several studies exist on the different varieties of SAfE covering phonological (e.g. Bekker and van Rooy 2015; du Plessis and Bekker 2014), lexico-semantic (e.g. Wasserman 2019), morphosyntax (e.g. de Vos 2013; van Rooy 2021), and sociolinguistic (e.g. Coetzee-Van Rooy 2021) aspects. However, less attention has been paid to the pragmatic aspects of SAfE and these include pragmatic markers (PMs; e.g. Huddleston and Fairhurst 2013; Lochner 2019), speech functions (e.g. Kasanga 2006; Kasanga and Lwanga-Lumu 2007) and politeness features (Bharuthram 2003; Kasanga and Lwanga-Lumu 2007). There are fewer studies that deal with interjections. Even rarer is the analysis of interjections that are borrowed from local South African languages into SAfE (e.g. de Klerk 2006; Unuabonah 2022). For example, Unuabonah (2022) explores a few interjections such as *ja* and *ag* that are adopted from Afrikaans into SAfE but does not investigate interjections that are borrowed from diverse indigenous South African languages, including isiXhosa and isiZulu into SAfE. Although Unuabonah and Mtembu (2023) examine borrowed pragmatic items from indigenous South African languages into SAfE, these are limited to PMs such as *nje* and *mara*, which are different from interjections. Therefore, this paper aims to expand the research landscape of pragmatic borrowing in SAfE by providing a descriptive account of seven interjections, i.e., *eish*, *yho*, *tjo*, *sho*, *hayi*, *hau* and *mxm*, which are taken from different local South African languages and used in SAfE. Although some of these interjections can be found in the Dictionary of South African English (DSAE 2023), others such as *eish* and *mxm* cannot. Moreover, apart from dictionary entries, there is no comprehensive study of these interjections in SAfE and this necessitates their analysis using corpus linguistic methods that will guarantee a systematic exploration of the loaned interjections. It is likely that these borrowed interjections will appear more in Black South African English than other varieties of SAfE; however, the South African section of GloWbE covers the English language usage of South Africans, regardless of the varieties they use. Instances that show the use of these loaned interjections in the South African segment of GloWbE are exemplified in (1)–(7):

- (1) There you go again: one camera and lens only! **Eish!** I am not too much of a camera specific person. (GloWbE 307)
- (2) OMG you guys! i totally love Senzo, that guy can act **yho!** that last scene where Jase was confessing! it was brilliant!! (GloWbE 81)
- (3) # **tjo**, man united have been coached by Sir Alex since 1986, 26 Nov. (GloWbE 78)
- (4) with all the achievements, your parents are proud ... # **Sho!** I've given a lot of myself to be in this position (GloWbE 43)

- (5) Noance I'm so happy for you I know you've wanted this job. **Hayi** guys you are making me rethink now (GloWbE 48)
- (6) Salt, dripping and mealie-meal; that's all. I said, ' **Hawu!** How am I going to cook these things? (GloWbE 48)
- (7) **Mxm**, I'll take down MJ any day, I thought to myself. # (GloWbE 29)

The following are the paper's objectives:

- (i) to investigate the rate of recurrence, orthography, and syntactic positioning of *uish*, *yho*, *tjo*, *shu*, *hayi*, *hau*, and *mxm* in SAfE; and
- (ii) to explore the collocational forms and discourse-pragmatic roles of the seven interjections in SAfE.

This section has discussed existing research on South African English, and it has clearly identified the problem, purpose and objectives of the study. Section 2 discusses interjections from a functional/pragmatic viewpoint, pragmatic borrowing and postcolonial corpus pragmatics, while Section 3 presents the data and research method. Section 4 outlines the results, while Section 5 is a discussion of the findings. Section 6 provides the conclusions of the study.

2 Theoretical framing

There have been changes and developments in the theoretical framing of interjections from being non-linguistic elements that essentially signal emotions to linguistic items used in expressing users' emotions and opinions (Dingemanse 2024). This paper examines interjections from a functional viewpoint, where interjections are viewed as syntactically autonomous, context-constrained, and partially spontaneous exclamations that reveal a user's emotive and perceptual state and aid discourse organisation (Norrick 2015; Stange 2016). Interjections may be categorised using form and function. The formal sub-categories include primary and secondary interjections. Primary interjections (e.g. *aha*, *yuck*) are words that basically function as interjections (Norrick 2015) while secondary interjections (e.g. *man!*, *no!*) are those that originally belong to other parts of speech, such as adjectives and adverbs, but which may also signal the emotive and cognitive state of the user (Ameka 1992a). The functional categories comprise cognitive, phatic, conative and emotive interjections (Norrick 2015; Stange 2016). Conative interjections (e.g. *psst*) are used to invite a person's attention or request a feedback, while phatic interjections (e.g. *uh*) are used to create and sustain communication, by offering feedbacks in continuing interaction (Ameka 1992b; Stange 2016). Emotive interjections (e.g. *argh*) reveal the feelings

of the user, whereas cognitive interjections (e.g. *hmm*) point toward the user's awareness and thinking while making an expression (Ameka 1992a; Stange 2016). It is possible for some interjections to perform one or more functions based on the context, such as in the case of phatic interjections which may also be cognitive (Ameka 1992b; Stange 2016).

In this article, interjections are explored from the angle of Andersen's (2014) theory of pragmatic borrowing as well as Stange's (2016) categorisation of interjections. This article also adopts a postcolonial corpus pragmatic approach, which merges the principles of corpus pragmatics and postcolonial pragmatics. Postcolonial pragmatics investigates pragmatic features found in utterances collected from postcolonial societies that capture the transference of local languages and cultures to a European language and the other way round, due to a previous colonial contact (Anchimbe 2018; Anchimbe and Janney 2011). Corpus pragmatics, in turn, focuses on the quantitative and qualitative study of pragmatic features located within language data that are stored in computer corpora (Rühlemann and Aijmer 2015). Pragmatic borrowing focuses on the process and effects of adopting pragmatic elements, including interjections, address terms and politeness markers from one language into a target language. It also deals with the orthography, scope, associations, positioning, distribution, semantics, and pragmatic functions of these pragmatic elements (Balteiro 2018). Thus, these theories and approaches are apt for the current article that covers interjections that are adopted from local South African languages into SAfE, using data that have been stored in a computer corpus.

Borrowed interjections have been examined in different African Englishes, which are usually spoken in multilingual contexts. For instance, studies have addressed interjections including *bambi* and *wamma* in Ugandan English (Meierkord and Isingoma 2021), *tufia* and *eya* in Nigerian English (e.g. Honkanen 2022), *kumbe* in Kenyan English (Muro and Unuabonah 2022), *eti* in Tanzanian English (Unuabonah and Muro 2022) and *ei* and *ehe* in Ghanaian English (Anderson et al. 2024). Most of these borrowed interjections are emotive interjections, with a few functioning as phatic and cognitive interjections (Unuabonah 2020). Generally, it is noted that these borrowed interjections are one of the distinct characteristics of postcolonial varieties of English (Isingoma 2016), which aid in projecting a shared ethnic/national identities of the users (de Klerk 2006; Honkanen 2020). They are also useful in indicating solidarity and engagement (de Klerk 2006) as well as informality, which is helpful in closing social distance (Amuzu et al. 2018). It is, thus, necessary to also explore other loaned interjections in SAfE and account for their frequencies, syntactic position, spelling stability, collocational forms and discourse-pragmatic roles.

3 Research methodology

Utterances that include any of the following seven interjections, namely, *eish*, *yho*, *tjo*, *sho*, *hayi*, *hau*, and *mxm*, transferred from indigenous South African languages into SAfE, serve as the data for the study. The utterances were obtained from the South African section of GloWbE, which covers 45,364,498 words, drawn from diverse South African online texts, including weblogs and online newspapers (Davies 2013). GloWbE, as a whole, comprises 1.9 billion words of online texts derived from 20 countries where English is a first or second language and covers written online utterances as they are naturally constructed by the users of the variety (Davies 2013). The rationale for choosing the South African section of GloWbE is that it incorporates the usage of the English language by different South Africans irrespective of the SAfE varieties they use, unlike other SAfE corpora which only comprise isiXhosa English (de Klerk 2006) or predominantly White South African English (Jeffery 2003). The seven interjections were selected as they occurred at least 20 times in the corpus and had not been systematically studied in the literature. It is equally noted that people of a particular nation can contribute to other countries' websites (Mukherjee 2015; Nelson 2015), but the prevalence of the interjections in the South African section and their non-appearance or very limited presence thereof in other sections of GloWbE signify that the interjections are unique to the South African section.

The analysis of the data was informed by the quantitative and qualitative methods that were employed. An asterisk was appended to the seven interjections (e.g. *yho**, *tjo**) and these were checked in GloWbE, to recover variations that could emerge in the online corpus. Other variants captured in the DSAE were also included. The corpus was explored using its own software located on its website. The extracted data were then manually checked so as to exclude samples where the interjections featured in indigenous South African languages, as in (8), which is in isiXhosa. Other excluded utterances comprise instances where the interjections were recurrent, as in (9), where they capture the name of a person, as in (10) or the name of an object, as in (11). The remaining rejected examples were those that arose due to misspelling, as in (12), or where the interjections were used metalinguistically, as in (13):

- (8) So im readng yo comments **yho** utata omncinci ugcewele amandla ngoku ndakuthini ndicela abo (GloWbE 5)
- (9) Suffering for those who do nt! **Eish! Eish! Eish!** # Cinekal Well I belive in the UK the Queen is on (GloWbE 325)
- (10) In 1991, Rev **Hawu** Mbatha succeeded Mr Ernie Hilder to become the first black Radio Zulu Manager. (GloWbE 25)

- (11) Likewise for the GPU, because it sits in a **MXM** slot and the storage subsystem (GloWbE 32)
- (12) This, my friend, does not **sho** intelligence or insight, but rather displays ignorance and foolishness. (GloWbE 8)
- (13) to exhort or chide, and “nee” means “no”. “**Haai**” is untranslatable in this context, but also means “shark” in Afrikaans (GloWbE 36)

Following the manual search, a raw count of the remaining instances of the interjections was conducted. The relative frequencies were then calculated based on a rate of per million words (pmw). The borrowed interjections were closely studied and their distinct features counted. The study specifically examined the following characteristics of the interjections: positioning, orthography, collocational forms, and their discourse-pragmatic roles.

4 Results

The results reveal that *eish* ($N = 278$; 6.1 pmw) has the highest rate of occurrence, with *yho* ($N = 179$; 3.9 pmw), *hayi* ($N = 155$; 3.4 pmw), *tjo* ($N = 87$; 1.9 pmw), *sho* ($N = 55$, 1.2 pmw), *hau* ($N = 37$; 0.8 pmw) and *mxm* ($N = 28$, 0.6 pmw) trailing behind. These interjections are described in the succeeding sub-sections, based on their orthography, syntactic positions, co-occurrence with other discourse-pragmatic features (DPFs), and their discourse-pragmatic roles.

4.1 *Eish* in SAfE

Eish /eɪʃ/ is a widely utilised interjection borrowed from isiXhosa, which is employed to express varieties of emotions, including excitement, anger and shock. *Eish* occurs mostly at clause-initial ($N = 223$) position, and less often at clause-final ($N = 52$) position, as in (14) and (15), in that order. It may also appear alone ($N = 3$), as in (16).

- (14) # **Eish**, so much to work though, but I give good dollar, I think (GloWbE 13)
- (15) # I am starting tomorrow ... have at least 30 kgs to lose **eish**. Have tried every diet in the book and well we shall see. (GloWbE 25)
- (16) But isn't that about all Africa is famous for!! # **Eish** ...!!! # CAN SOUTH AFRICA SURVIVE GIVEN THE FOLLOWING? (GloWbE 317)

Eish rarely collocates with other DPFs at 27 % ($N = 75$) of all the instances of *eish*, and when it does, it collocates with local interjections such as *ja ne*, PMs such as *but* and *mara*, and address terms such as *guys*, such as (17), (18), (19) and (20), respectively.

- (17) # **Eish** ... ja ne ... it happens, whether this one is real or not (GloWbE 16)
- (18) Maybe I should go to the gym tonight ... but **eish** its so cold!!! # (GloWbE 28)
- (19) # I am so excited about the party this weekend! **Eish** mara we can't bring plus ones and I am super shy! *nervous* # (GloWbE 79)
- (20) # **Eish** guys I feel like strangling Khetiwe I mean she used to be a village girl (GloWbE 40)

Eish can be used to signal excitement, pride and surprise, as in (21), (22) and (23), respectively:

- (21) whether he is really dead or Khetiwe came just on time. **Eish** it's getting really interesting and am sitting on the edge of my seat (GloWbE 45)
- (22) Cos I'm such a cook and especially this winter, **eish** I like my soups ... But I guess that the goal is much more bigger (GloWbE 29)
- (23) The smile on my face when Senzo told Phenyio how after only being a Dlomo for like a week and now he thinks he is the top dog, **eish** wow. (GloWbE 55)

In (21), the writer uses *eish* to express excitement at the events in a soap opera, whereas in (22), the author utilises *eish* to reveal a sense of pride in her cooking; in (23), the writer makes use of it to show surprise at the thoughts of an actor in a soap opera.

Eish may also be used to signal emotions of irritation, anger and regret, as in (24), (25) and (26), in that order:

- (24) # **eish** this luck thing of late late goals has to cease ... Its irritatin # (GloWbE 221)
- (25) (granny had taken them with her to church without telling anyone, **eish**!) ... # (GloWbE 2)
- (26) # **eish** yah neh i was so close but temptation got the better of me (GloWbE 24)

In (24), the writer utilises *eish* to signal irritation at recent disappointments, while in (25), the author makes use of it to indicate anger at the actions of their grandmother. In (26), the user employs *eish* to express regret of succumbing to temptation; *yah neh* is an Afrikaans DPF, which may be used to indicate a “vague expression of agreement or assent” (DSAE 2023).

On other occasions, *eish* may be employed to indicate emotions of worry and shock, as in (27) and (28), respectively:

- (27) Also been struggeLing with sinus and cough **eish** can't seem to get beta # (GloWbE 26)
- (28) Sandra will go and confess to her dad that they got jiggly. **Eish** how that works exactly for your dad to be your spiritual advisor mmmmmm? (GloWbE 56)

In (27), the writer uses *eish* in order to express their worry over their sickness, while in (28), the author utilises it to signal their shock at Sandra's proposed confession to her father.

4.2 *Yho* in SAfE

Yho /jɔ(:)/ is from isiXhosa and it is spelt in different ways: <yho> (*N* = 68), <yoh> (*N* = 39) and <yhooo> (*N* = 29), <yhoo> (*N* = 19), <yhoooo> (*N* = 9), as in (29), (30), (31), (32) and (33), respectively. Other variants such as <yhu>, <yhuu> and <yhuuu> occur less than five times each, showing that <yho> is the most preferred spelling. *Yho* occurs in clause-initial (*N* = 138), clause-final (*N* = 40) and clause-medial (*N* = 1) positions, as in (29), (30) and (31), correspondingly, indicating that it appears most frequently in clause-initial position.

- (29) Just plain stupid! # **Yho** thi is scary people I'm glad I've taken a break on relationships (GloWbE 2)
- (30) my pants tore eish phuck was so embarrassed mara it was great **yoh**. (GloWbE 25)
- (31) # Kerrie sweets I am back **yhooo** after weeks of absenteeism!!! Anyway I missed y'all too much!! (GloWbE 18)

Yho rarely collocates with other DPFs at 27.4 % (*N* = 49) of all the instances of *yho*, and when it does, it co-occurs with address terms such as *Ella*, English PMs such as *so*, borrowed interjections such as *hayi*, and borrowed PMs such as *mna*, as in (32), (33), (34) and (35), respectively.

- (32) it kept him so busy he forgot to submit the teasers lol # **yhoo** Ella so much drama, lmao at the malawian doctor, is she that desperate (GloWbE 20)
- (33) # Kerrie Haaaaa haaaaa **yhoooo** so it is just a mixture of both Biology + Chemiology = Bio-Chem!! (GloWbE 7)

- (34) that is not a conversation between me and my husband ... **yho**ooo hayi I would never post something that personal ... it's one of those jokes (GloWbE 10)
- (35) sweetchilledlemonade you are the best partner in crime. # **Yhuuuuuuuuuuuu**, mna i have no words shem. (GloWbE 1)

Yho is largely used to express surprise, as in (36), but it can also be used to signal excitement, sympathy and shock, as in (37), (38) and (39), respectively:

- (36) UN that security and veto votes are unconstitutional and our Dlamini-Zuma chairing the AU. **Yoh** you guys are biased. (GloWbE 29)
- (37) # **Yho** things are just about to become really interesting on Generations. (GloWbE 5)
- (38) # **yoh** girl i feel sorry for you # your are a victim of selfish men out (GloWbE 27)
- (39) Just plain stupid! # **Yho** thi is scary people I'm glad I've taken a break on relationships (GloWbE 2)

In (36), the author makes use of *yho* to signal their surprise at the biased opinions of their interlocutors, whereas in (37), the writer utilises it to express excitement at the turn of events in the soap opera “Generations”. The user in (38) employs *yho* to indicate sympathy for a lady in the interaction, while the author in (39) uses it to express shock at what people go through in relationships.

Yho can also be used to express anxiety, worry, disgust and displeasure, as in (40), (41), (42) and (43), respectively:

- (40) who ever is going to baseline tomoro ... gudluck, ul nid it. mara **yoh** im so nervous ... (GloWbE 22)
- (41) # **Yho**ooooo this is bad yazi at sum point I thot I had prblms but nah ths (GloWbE 1)
- (42) The Dj's are forever yap yapping and play less music **yho**ooo! It's like listening to talk radio the whole day (GloWbE 2)
- (43) Minnie is also boring to follow. Her deep tweets DEPRESS me **yho**! (GloWbE 37)

In (40), the user employs *yho* to indicate their anxiety over a proposed trip to baseline the following day, while in (41), the writer uses it to signal their worry over a problem. In (42), the author utilises *yho* to express their disgust over a DJ's music, while in (43), the user employs it to express their displeasure over Minnie's tweets.

4.3 *Hayi* in SAfE

Hayi /hai/ originates from isiXhosa; it is translated as ‘no’ and is used in denying, disagreeing or rejecting an idea (Andrason and Dlali 2020). In the South African segment of GloWbE, it is spelt in diverse ways by online users. These include <hayi> ($N = 80$), <hai> ($N = 48$), <haai> ($N = 24$), <haii> ($N = 2$) and <haayi> ($N = 1$), as in (44), (45), (47), (48) and (50), respectively, which indicates that the *hayi* is the dominant spelling. *Hayi* has a higher rate of occurrence at clause-initial ($N = 131$) than at clause-final ($N = 30$) position, as in (44) and (45), in that order:

(44) # **hayi**, mina all this lobola talks makes me want to get lobolad now!!
(GloWbE 11)

(45) I so loved Aaliyah, reminds me of my varsity years. **hai** # (GloWbE 18)

Hayi collocates often with other DPFs at 54.7 % ($N = 91$) of all instances of *hayi* in the SAfE data. It may co-occur with the interjection *no*, which is the English version of *hayi*, as in (46). It may also co-occur with address terms such as *man*, as well as local and English PMs such as *wena* and *shame*, as in (47), (48) and (49), respectively:

(46) she was an extra with a few links. **Hayi** no, I was expecting her to dominate with her usual gorgeous, fabulous self (GloWbE 31)

(47) we compliment or even celebrate someone without bringing in B*, **haai** man we say we do nt like her mar the way she creeps in (GloWbE 1)

(48) # **haii** wena y do u hv to b so jealous lik this (GloWbE 1)

(49) **hayi** shame all Khapela wants is HIS KHETHIWE!!! (GloWbE 65)

(50) # kakapana I believe you! What we saw last nite **haayi** bandla!
(GloWbE 1)

As indicated earlier, *hayi* is largely used to express disapproval and other negative mental states of rejection and disagreement, as in (51), (52) and (53), respectively:

(51) # **hayi** Bongi you not nice. Why you let me suffer for two full weeks
(GloWbE 18)

(52) as if we need a new party, not that ANC. That ANC ... **hayi**. It is not right.
(GloWbE 2)

(53) There is a fire coming. ‘I said:’ Man. **Hayi**. Fokkof. ‘I thought she was just playing, but she forced me’ (GloWbE 1)

The author in (51) uses *hayi* to express his disapproval of Bongi's actions, whereas the writer in (52) makes use of it to signal a rejection of the ANC; in (53), the writer employs *hayi* to indicate disagreement with his interlocutor that there was a fire coming.

Hayi is also used to express emotions of despair, dismissal and disgust, as in (54), (55) and (56), respectively:

- (54) # **Hayi** shem i give up i am just not into fashion nje (GloWbE 19)
- (55) too arrogant for my liking when she said "I know you love me" **hayi** suka¹ so what if Khapela loves her ... she has proved it that the relationship (GloWbE 61)
- (56) # eish, Caleb, Caleb, **hayi** maan, what kind of a father is he maar! (GloWbE 56)

The user in (54) employs *hayi* to indicate their despair at not being into fashion, while in (55), the writer uses it to signal their dismissal of a character's behaviour in a soap opera; in (56), the author utilises *hayi* to express disgust at the behaviour of a father.

Hayi can be utilised to signal emotions of worry, annoyance and surprise, as in (57), (58) and (59), correspondingly:

- (57) # Ntando who? **Hai** manje uZahara is going to loose her virginity (GloWbE 28)
- (58) Luntu is such a drama queen, **hayi**! As for Akhona, she should read between the lines (GloWbE 70)
- (59) one of the male students came with a sick note saying he had menstruation cramps. **hai** # (GloWbE 70)

In (57), the writer utilises *hayi* to indicate that they are worried that uZahara will lose her virginity, while in (58), the writer signals their annoyance at Luntu's behaviour through *hayi*. The author of (59) is surprised that a male student could send in a note that he had menstrual cramps, and employs *hayi* to indicate this surprise.

Hayi can also be used to indicate acceptance, doubt, a contrary opinion and thought, as in (60), (61), (62) and (63), respectively:

- (60) (as they do not have their own recipe and standard) **39;1848;TOOLONG **hai** u might be right (GloWbE 46)
- (61) **Hayi** maan you guys are you sure that's Loulou? (GloWbE 94)

1 *Suka* is an isiXhosa word, which means 'go away'.

- (62) # **Hayi** but mina i don't balme celbs for telling some followers crap
(GloWbE 13)
- (63) That's not nice, however, how someone features themself in it, **haai** ... no
one can control that y'knw. (GloWbE 34)

Hayi is used to indicate acceptance of someone else's opinion in (60), and is also employed to express doubt about who the addressee claims to have seen in (61). The writer in (62) further utilises *hayi* to portray a contrary opinion that they do not blame celebrities for saying nonsense to their followers, while the author of (63) uses it to express the writer's thoughts about how no one can control how someone else presents themselves.

4.4 *Tjo* in SAfE

Tjo /tʃəʊ/ is from Sotho languages (SeSotho, SeTswana and SePedi). *Tjo* may be written in the online texts as <tjo> (*N* = 71), <tjoo> (*N* = 6), <tjooo> (*N* = 6), <tjoooo> (*N* = 2), <tjooooo> (*N* = 2) and <tjjo> (*N* = 1), which underscores the dominance of the <tjo> spelling. Some examples are listed in (64)–(68). *Tjo* is found more regularly at clause-initial (*N* = 60) than at clause-final (*N* = 27) position, as in (64) and (65), correspondingly:

- (64) Heard in morning live only to get to school and Mathekga confirmed it. **Tjo**, i
was not a die hard fan, but the pain I felt! (GloWbE 6)
- (65) have to live with such people in real life full of hate and anger **tjoo** #
(GloWbE 1)
- (66) # **Tjooo** nna mmawe!!!! My husband weigh over 102 cm – (GloWbE 2)

Tjo co-occurs less often with other DPFs at 30 % (*N* = 26) of all instances of *tjo* in the data, and such co-occurrences may be with English PMs such as *now*, interjections such as *hai* as well as terms of address, including *Leungo*, as in (67), (68) and (69), correspondingly:

- (67) # 18 in. for R750. **tjooooo** now thats a bargain yooo!!!. To think i paid more
(GloWbE 1)
- (68) Something not adding up. # **Tjjo** hai shem pipol are cruel eyo phela this is
not the first (GloWbE 1)
- (69) # **Tjo** Leungo you are strong! The way I can't stomach Motswedding fm?
(GloWbE 18)

As cited in all the examples, *tjo* is utilised to signal emotions of disbelief. For example, the user in (66) employs *tjo* to express disbelief at her husband's weight, whereas in (67), the writer makes use of *tjo* to signal disbelief at the bargain she found. In (68), the writer makes use of *tjo* to indicate her disbelief at people's cruelty, which is emphasised by the use of *hai* (no) and *shem* (shame) that indicate disapproval of such cruelty.

4.5 *Shu* in SAfE

Shu /ʃu/ originates from isiXhosa, isiZulu and Southern Sotho; it also originates from Afrikaans *sjoe* (DSAE 2023), and shares the same functions with *tjo*. Thus, it may be a case of interjections sharing phonological properties and reinforcing each other. Interestingly, the <shu> orthography has been overridden by other spellings, such as <sho> (*N* = 19), <sjoe> (*N* = 14), <shoo> (*N* = 11), <shuuu> (*N* = 5), <shuu> (*N* = 5), with only two instances of <shu> itself, as shown in (70), (71), (72), (73), (74), and (75), respectively. SAfE users prefer to use *shu* more regularly at clause-initial (*N* = 51) than at the clause-final (*N* = 5) position, as in (71) and (72), respectively.

- (70) I'm sure they will again and again;) # **Sho!** Some super good answers yet again! Looks like Zen Mechanics is up there (GloWbE 42)
- (71) # But **sjoe** ja, I feel sorry for the police. The police has to fix everything (GloWbE 11)
- (72) hai nna i have tried all possible lead to get them ... **shoo** ... # (GloWbE 10)
- (73) # Hey **shuuu** So when is mwande leavin Will ngamla get caught # (GloWbE 8)

Shu rarely co-occurs with other DPFs since it appears in 10.9 % (*N* = 6) of all cases in the data and the few ones include English and local PMs (e.g. *but*, *ja*), interjections (e.g. *wow*) and address terms (e.g. Galfrend), as in (71), (74) and (75), respectively:

- (74) # thank you Dhee ... wow, **shuu!** and Choppa? # (GloWbE 4)
- (75) I guess rubbing shoulder with the mighty up there gets you a scoop. **shu!** Galfrend # (GloWbE 1)

Like *tjo*, *shu* is mainly employed to indicate disbelief, as in (76), but it may also signal feelings of sadness, worry and fright, as in (77), (78) and (79), respectively:

- (76) that is one partner who'll always be able to help her lol! # **Sho**, can't believe I took so long to type these few lines (GloWbE 32)

- (77) # Moodie: **Sjoe**, these are very difficult circumstances. You should have been an editor 10 years (GloWbE 12)
- (78) Queen's been irritating him for some time. **shuu** this thing of partners finding out their spouses are in "serious" relationships (GloWbE 3)
- (79) I can only imagine that OKAPI when it is open and READY to cut ... **shuuu** must be a very scary sight ... one that I wouldn't wan na experience (GloWbE 4)

In (76), the writer utilises *shu* to express her disbelief at how long they took to type some lines, whereas in (77), the author signals their sadness about their interlocutor's situation using *shu*. In (78), the author employs *shu* to indicate their worry about relationships between partners and their spouses, while in (79), the writer utilises it to express fear and anxiety at the thought of *okapi*² being brought out to stab a person.

4.6 *Hawu* in SAfE

Hawu /ha:u/ is from isiZulu and it is used to express feelings of disbelief or emphasise a point. It may be spelt as <hawu> (*N* = 23) or as <hau> (*N* = 14), as in (80) and (81), respectively. It occurs more regularly at clause-initial position (*N* = 21) than at clause-final position (*N* = 14), as in (80) and (81), correspondingly. It may also occur alone (*N* = 2), as in (82):

- (80) # Hahahaha! **Hawu** Nemo, you changed it for real! Please donate the other username (GloWbE 13)
- (81) When is GAIL coming back from maternity **hau**! Gail and Hermanus put lekker spice in RC! (GloWbE 20)
- (82) "Petrol Attendant:" **Hau**? "Thabiso:" Do you have a problem Sir? (GloWbE 20)

Hawu co-occurs less often with other DPFs at 32.4 % (*N* = 12) of all instances in the data; these include address terms (e.g. *guys*), PMs (e.g. *but*, *shame*) and interjections (e.g. *heeee*), as in (83), (84) and (85), respectively:

- (83) Word of advice don't re-introduce yourself sizwile. **Hawu** guys this family must grow so ya'll are welcome! # (GloWbE 11)

² *Okapi* is a knife that criminals often use to stab and kill people; it is often found in men's pockets as a protective weapon.

- (84) Sure she must just give the man ikhekhe **hawu** but shame lol she is scared phela (GloWbE 29)
- (85) # Hayi Gegelegege where did you get that!!! Heeee **hawu** people are HOW kante??? (GloWbE 24)

Hawu is largely used to express disbelief, as in (86), but it can also be used to indicate emphasis and annoyance, as in (87) and (88), respectively:

- (86) # **Hawu**, does Tshidi think that she can bribe everyone? Rules apply to everybody # (GloWbE 31)
- (87) # But guys u should tell us the names of the bloggers in the pics **hau**. Hopefully the next one some of us we'll be there too # (GloWbE 17)
- (88) # Fana just pay the danm thing and stop complaining! **Hawu!** # (GloWbE 10)

The use of *hawu* in (86) is an expression of disbelief about Tshidi's actions, while in (87), it is used to emphasise the directive given to the addressee to name the bloggers in the pictures. In (88), it is further employed as an expression of annoyance at Fana's complaints.

4.7 *Mxm* in SAfE

Mxm is used to represent an oral gesture that is formed by extending the lips and drawing air in loudly, making it an onomatopoeic interjection used to express annoyance. It captures the suck-teeth or kiss-teeth sound, which appears common in some parts of Africa and the Caribbean (Patrick and Figueroa 2002; Rickford and Rickford 1976; Unuabonah and Daniel 2020). It occurs slightly more commonly at clause-final ($N = 16$) than at clause-initial ($N = 12$) position, as in (89) and (90), in that order.

- (89) # no! the tsunamii is back **mxm** # i just luv gen these days (GloWbE 16)
- (90) She's grooming you boss!!! # **Mxm** this is bull shit there no such thing (GloWbE 2)

<*Mxm*> is the predominant spelling, besides one example each of <*mxxxxm*> and <*mxnm*>, as in (91) and (92), respectively.

- (91) # Dat FAMILY is a fake nje **mxxxxm** Amen Ntaksay i feel blessed alredi:) # (GloWbE 1)
- (92) the spot when they were damaging property and causing havoc!!!! **MNXM!!!!** (GloWbE 1)

Mxm rarely co-occurs with other DPFs since it appears in 10.7 % ($N = 3$) of the total number of instances in the data. The few ones include local and English PMs such as *mina* and *anyway*, as in (93), as well as the interjection *lol* and address term *Thabure*, as in (94).

(93) **mxm** anyway mina i want to know which one is malome Thabure
(GloWbE 21)

(94) # Lol **mxm** Thabure I'm starting to hate because you don't like the plain Jane
(GloWbE 20)

In all cases, *mxm* is used to express annoyance or irritation at someone's words or actions. For instance, in (93) *mxm* signals the writer's annoyance at the return of a tsunami, whereas in (94), the author expresses their annoyance at a family that is described as fake.

5 Discussion of results

The objectives of this study were to examine the frequencies, spelling stability and syntactic positioning of *eish*, *yho*, *tjo*, *shu*, *hayi*, *hau*, and *mxm* in SAfE, and to explore the collocational forms and discourse-pragmatic roles of the seven interjections in SAfE. In the next sub-sections, we discuss the implications of the results for SAfE, as well as for world Englishes as a whole.

5.1 Frequencies, positions and spelling stability of the interjections in SAfE

The findings reveal that *eish* is the most frequent interjection among the seven interjections explored in this article, trailed by *yho* and *hayi*, which may be linked to the varieties of emotions they display, ranging from excitement, surprise and annoyance to worry and shock. In the South African component of GloWbE, all three interjections are only outnumbered by Afrikaans *ja*, which functions both as a PM and as an interjection (Unuabonah 2022). This attests to the spread of these isiXhosa interjections in SAfE. The high frequency of *eish*, *yho* and *hayi* may also be linked to the fact that they are all borrowed from isiXhosa, which is the second biggest home language in South Africa (Botha et al. 2021). The relevance of interjections is particularly evident in isiXhosa because it is a language rich in interjections. It has almost 350 interjections that are fully grammaticalised and lexicalised (Andrason and Matutu 2019). The prevalence of interjections in isiXhosa and on the large

number of isiXhosa speakers may explain why interjections such as *eish*, *yho* and *hayi* become very common, even among users of other African languages. In respect of the remaining four: *tjo*, *shu*, *hawu* and *mxm*, they largely express only one type of emotion, which may have led to their low frequencies when compared with the previous three. However, *tjo*, *shu* and *hawu* occur more frequently than some other SAfE interjections, such as Afrikaans *ag* (Unuabonah 2022), which may be due to the fact that these three are sourced from diverse South African languages, including SeSotho, SeTswana and SePedi (*tjo*), isiXhosa, isiZulu, Southern Sotho and Afrikaans (*shu*) and isiZulu (*hawu*). IsiZulu itself is the largest home language in South Africa.

Concerning positioning, all the interjections except *mxm* favour the clause-initial position, which is expected as most interjections tend to occur in that position (Stange 2016). The kiss-teeth or suck-teeth oral gesture represented by *mxm* in SAfE tends to occur in clause-final position, a position taken by representations of this oral gesture in other African countries (Unuabonah and Daniel 2020). This confirms that the interjection *mxm*, derived from the suck-teeth or kiss-teeth oral gesture, is not as spontaneous or semi-automatic as other interjections (Unuabonah and Daniel 2020). Aside from the fact that *mxm* is a onomatopoeic interjection, which makes it different from others, its preference for the clause-final position may be linked to the fact that culturally it is an undesirable gesture, which would require the user to consider the situational context before producing the gesture.

Regarding spelling stability, *eish* appears to be the most stable since it does not have different spelling variants. *Yho*, *tjo* and *shu* appear to have more spelling variants, which is linked to the repetition of the vowels <o> and <u> in <yhoo>, <tjoo> and <shuuu>. The repetition of these vowels reflects the depth of or emphasis on the emotions expressed by these interjections, which can be heard in the lengthening of the vowels in speech. Such replications occur due to the constraints of a written context, where users have to find a means to express the depth of their emotions (Darics 2013). Similar replications are also found in other borrowed DPFs, which signal emotion or emphasis in different African varieties of English (Unuabonah 2021; Unuabonah and Anderson 2023).

5.2 Collocational forms and discourse-pragmatic roles of the borrowed interjections in SAfE

With respect to the collocational forms, the results show that aside from *hayi* which co-occurs relatively often with other DPFs, the other interjections scarcely co-exist with other DPFs. This limited co-occurrence is also seen in other DPFs in SAfE, which rarely co-occur with other DPFs (Unuabonah 2022; Unuabonah and Mabena under review). One thing is clear though: on the few occasions when these interjections co-

occur with other DPFs, they co-occur with DPFs from other South African languages, apart from the South African language from which the concerned interjection is borrowed. This can be seen in the combination of isiXhosa *eish* with Afrikaans *ja ne* (see 17) and isiXhosa *hayi* with isiZulu *mina* (see 44), which may be expected considering that South Africans who have a local language as a home language may speak up to five South African languages (Botha et al. 2021). Moreover, there is increased interaction between South Africans of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Botha et al. 2021), which leads to language familiarity (Rubdy and Alsagoff 2013). Since interjections are easily adopted by people within a short time period (Sauciuc 2006), South Africans may easily pick up interjections that belong to other ethnic groups. Similar situations exist in other African English varieties that are spoken in multi-lingual contexts (Unuabonah 2020).

As regards the discourse-pragmatic functions, all the interjections except *hayi* are emotive interjections, which are used to express different kinds of emotions ranging from negative to positive emotions. *Hayi* is mainly a phatic interjection (Andrason and Dlali 2020) that is used to indicate disapproval or disagreement with some information. This can also be seen in other functions such as indicating acceptance, doubt, a contrary opinion or thought. Nevertheless, in some cases, it behaves as an emotive interjection which expresses emotions of despair, disgust and annoyance. Aside from *eish* and *yho*, which express a few positive emotions such as excitement and pride amid other several negative emotions, the other interjections basically express negative emotions. It has been suggested that L2 users are likely to express negative emotions more in their L1 in which they have greater proficiency than their L2 (Cohrssen-Hernandez 2021). It is further affirmed that situations that trigger emotions such as anger, annoyance and despair seem to compel speakers (despite their English competence) to emphasise their self-identity, which is better expressed through their indigenous languages (Mabena and Sobane 2022). Thus, it is possible that SAfE speakers resort to the use of these borrowed interjections in order to express negative emotions. A search for negative English emotive interjections such as *ugh* ($N = 47$) and *yuck* ($N = 36$) (without removing repeated utterances) shows that they occur less frequently than *eish*, *yho*, *hayi*, *tjo* and *shu* in the South African segment of GloWbE. Overall, as Matras (2000) suggests, L2 users are more likely to borrow and use PMs (and by extension, interjections) from their L1 in informal contexts, such as weblogs and discussion forums, where they are not required to exercise maximum mental effort. Altogether, these show that the interjections are multifunctional and are capable of performing different functions at the same time, which may have impacted their frequent use by South Africans, as noted also in other African varieties of English (Unuabonah and Anderson 2023; Unuabonah and Daniel 2020; Unuabonah and Muro 2022).

6 Conclusion

This study has investigated the use of seven borrowed interjections, *eish*, *yho*, *tjo*, *shu*, *hayi*, *hau* and *mxm* in SAfE, using data collected from the South African section of GloWbE, a corpus that captures the English language usage of South Africans that belong to different ethnic groups. Thus, the study accentuates the impact of local South African languages on SAfE on the pragmatic plane. By combining postcolonial pragmatics and corpus pragmatics in examining the South African data, the paper has expounded systematically and comprehensively the features and functions of these borrowed interjections in SAfE. The study shows the co-occurrence of interjections that belong to different South African languages, lending credence to the spread of these interjections beyond users of one ethnic group, which however may need to be further substantiated with studies that also involve the collection of sociolinguistic data from users. Scholars may also interrogate loaned interjections in other Southern African varieties of English such as Lesotho English and Namibian English, which share some comparisons with SAfE.

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