



The syntactic features and emotional impact of Xitsonga interjections



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The syntactic features and emotional impacts of interjections in Xitsonga have been largely overlooked in existing literature. This article aims to close this gap by exploring these aspects. Employing a qualitative approach, the data were collected through corpus-based methods by extracting relevant words, phrases and sentences featuring interjections from published Xitsonga drama texts. The data were purposefully sampled and subsequently subjected to content analysis. The article was written following the principles of prototype theory. The findings revealed that Xitsonga interjections can occur at the beginning, middle and end of a sentence or occupy various positions within a sentence, and they are used to convey the speaker's emotional state, such as surprise, distress, fear, remembrance, frustration or anger. The article also notes that interjections can function as standalone utterances (holophrases) or adjuncts, enhancing emotional expression while maintaining grammatical integrity. Their placement significantly influences the emotions conveyed. The article further illustrates how juxtaposing interjections can heighten emotional intensity, showcasing their versatility in expressing complex emotional states. This applies to both primary and secondary interjections in Xitsonga. These findings suggest that interjections are an integral part of the Xitsonga, serving important syntactic features and expressing a range of emotional states.

Contribution: This article enhances our understanding of Xitsonga by exploring the diverse syntactic features and emotional effects of interjections, an area that has received little attention. Drawing on data from published Xitsonga drama texts, the article reveals that interjections can appear at the beginning, middle or end of a sentence or occupy various positions, each carrying different emotional impacts. Using prototype theory as a framework, the article demonstrates that interjections function as standalone utterances (holophrases) or adjuncts, encompassing both primary and secondary forms. These insights deepen our understanding of Xitsonga's interjections, closing a research gap and contributing valuable knowledge to the fields of syntax and semantics.

Keywords: Xitsonga; interjections; primary interjections; secondary interjections; syntactic features; emotional impact.

Introduction

Xitsonga is a language of significant cultural value, with millions of speakers in Mozambique, South Africa, Eswatini and Zimbabwe (Machaba 2011). Owing to historical events, the naming of this language has resulted in multiple ethnonyms in various countries (Mathebula 2014). In South Africa, it is known as Xitsonga, whereas in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, it is recognised as Xichangana (Nkuna 2015). This language is classified as S50 in Guthrie's (1967–1971) Bantu language classification scheme (Hlungwani 2003; Vratsanos & Kadenge 2017). This implies that it is linguistically and geographically less closely related to other Southern Bantu languages, notably Chishona, Tshivenda, Sesotho and isiZulu, which are categorised as S10, S20, S30 and S40, respectively (Gunnink, Chousou-Polydouri & Bostoen 2022). It is also associated with many dialects which are mutually intelligible and spoken in different communities. Xitsonga also shares structural features with other Bantu languages, such as an agglutinative morphology, morpheme richness, a noun class system, subject-verb-object word order and intonation (Zerbian 2007). Ultimately, Xitsonga exemplifies the rich linguistic diversity of the Bantu language family and is a crucial connection to the cultural and historical heritage of its speakers across Southern Africa.

Like other languages, Xitsonga is rich in interjections, linguistic elements used to express thoughts, emotions, ideas and information. Stange (2016:20) describes interjection as a 'syntactically independent, meaningful, semi-automatic exclamation providing an insight into the speaker's current emotional state of mind'. On the other hand, Cruz (2009) defines interjections as an immediate and spontaneous communicative element used by individuals to express feelings,

attitudes or reactions to perceived stimuli. They also convey intricate and nuanced human emotions and are shaped by factors such as syntax independence and limited phonetic stability (Yang 2019). Interjections in various languages can be categorised into primary and secondary interjections. Primary interjections are standalone words that can only be used to express emotion, whereas secondary interjections can be used as other parts of speech, such as nouns, verbs or adjectives, before being used to communicate mental states (Ameka 1992; Ameka & Wilkins 2006; Cruz 2017; Libert 2019; Norrick 2014; Wierzbicka 1992). Primary interjections, such as *oh!* *ah!* *ugh!* *hey!* and *ouch!* are universal interjectional words not derived from other speech parts, while secondary interjections, like *Jesus!* *sorry!* *damn!* and *my God!* evolved from words of other classes (Ameka 1992; Libert 2019; Matamala 2007). These interjections are distinct linguistic elements that show the intricate relationship between language and human emotions as well as linguistic variation.

Interjections have been extensively studied across various languages. They have been studied in languages such as isiXhosa (Andrason & Matutu 2019); Dutch (Schelfhout et al. 2005); Chinese (Mao 2020); and English (Jovanovic 2004), among others. The focus of these studies was on morphology, semantics, phonology, syntactic properties and other linguistic features. However, the syntactic features and emotional impact of interjections are underexplored in Xitsonga. The lack of a comprehensive study in this area hinders our understanding of the syntactic features and emotional impact of interjections in Xitsonga. Therefore, this article aims to address this gap and contribute to the body of knowledge by exploring the syntactic features and emotional impact of interjections in Xitsonga. The article intends to accomplish the following objectives: (1) to investigate the prevalence and distribution of interjections within Xitsonga sentences; (2) to identify the specific emotional states and reactions conveyed by Xitsonga interjections in different positions within sentences; and (3) to examine the role of Xitsonga interjections as independent utterances and their ability to add emphasis without altering the essential meaning of a sentence. This article is structured into six sections, beginning with the introduction. In the 'Literature review' section, a concise overview of existing literature regarding the syntactic features and emotional impact of interjections is presented. 'Theoretical framework' presents an overview of the theoretical framework. 'Research methodology' offers a description of the study's research methodology. 'Data presentation and analysis' then provides the data presentation and analysis. Finally, in 'Conclusion,' the study concludes and contemplates potential avenues for future research.

Literature review

Syntactic position and function of interjections

The syntactic position of interjections plays a critical role in shaping their meaning and communicative function. Jovanovic (2004) argues that in English, interjections are typically found at the beginning or end of sentences, although

they can also appear in medial positions. The positioning affects their emotional intensity, with strong emotional interjections like 'Oh!' often initiating sentences to indicate surprise or alarm, while milder interjections such as 'alas' are used at the end of sentences to express a reflective mood. Jovanovic concludes that the placement of interjections impacts their syntactic independence, with those at the beginning often forming loose adjuncts or disjuncts. These observations underscore how syntactic placement in English not only affects sentence flow but also intensifies meaning.

Similarly, Schelfhout and colleagues (2005) explore the syntactic positioning of interjections in Dutch and find that interjections in this language typically occur in the initial or final position of clauses. The placement is influenced by factors such as text type and the emotional intensity of the interjection. Strong emotional interjections tend to appear at the beginning, while those that serve to focus attention are placed at the end. This reveals a cross-linguistic tendency to associate initial interjections with stronger emotional or attentional functions. The authors also note that longer interjections are more likely to occur in the final position in Dutch, especially in spoken language, suggesting that placement is a flexible phenomenon influenced by text type and function.

Expanding the analysis to isiXhosa, Andrason and Matutu (2019) examine the syntactic role of interjections in this Bantu language and find that they are often holophrastic, functioning independently as complete utterances. In isiXhosa, interjections resist syntactic integration and maintain their independence, even when part of larger utterances. They frequently occupy peripheral positions and are separated by commas or ellipses, suggesting a phonological disjunction that emphasises their communicative significance. This pattern resonates with Jovanovic's findings in English, highlighting that peripheral positioning is common across languages.

Mao (2020) compares the syntactic positions of interjections in English and Chinese, revealing similarities in both languages. Interjections in English and Chinese can occur in the initial, medial or final positions, with strong interjections like 'Oh!' (English) or '啊' (Chinese) often placed at the beginning of sentences to convey strong emotions. Medial interjections serve as amplifiers or commentary on the surrounding sentence, while final interjections may serve to reinforce or summarise the sentence's mood. Both languages demonstrate that interjections are structurally flexible but emotionally charged elements within communication. This suggests a universal linguistic trend where interjections operate at the boundaries of syntactic rules while fulfilling essential communicative functions.

Communicative and pragmatic roles of interjections

Interjections serve not only syntactic but also communicative and pragmatic functions, often acting as markers of emotional or cognitive states. In their analysis of New Testament Greek,

Andrason and Mañas (2021) find that interjections in this ancient language are often used to express strong emotions or draw attention. For instance, the interjection [οὐαί] (ouai!) signifies sorrow or judgement, while [ἀμήν] (amen!) communicates agreement or certainty. These interjections, similar to their counterparts in other languages, are largely independent of the surrounding grammatical structure but play a crucial role in communicating the speaker's intent.

Jing (2021), utilising the framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), explores the interpersonal functions of interjections in English film dialogue. The study distinguishes between minor speech functions (exclamations, alarms, calls) and latched functions (expletives, vocatives), emphasising that interjections are essential in initiating or responding to communicative moves. This classification illuminates the crucial role interjections play in communication, acting as vehicles for interpersonal meaning rather than mere emotional outbursts. For instance, an exclamation like 'Wow!' in a conversation initiates an interpersonal move, while latched interjections like 'huh' expect a compliant response from the interlocutor. Jing's analysis demonstrates that interjections contribute significantly to conversational flow and interpersonal meaning, especially in informal contexts.

Relevance theory provides a framework for understanding the communicative functions of interjections in *Ga*, a *Kwa* language spoken in Ghana. Ollennu (2017) analyses the interjections in natural *Ga* conversations and observes that their meaning varies depending on tone and context. Interjections such as 'hmmm' can express agreement, while 'waat' may convey excitement. The spontaneity and emotional richness of *Ga* interjections underscore their importance in everyday communication, with their meaning shaped by intonation and immediate social context. The study also notes the role of repetition for emphasis, as seen when the interjection 'kpa' (meaning 'stop') is repeated to convey strong emotion.

Cultural and linguistic significance of interjections

Interjections are not only communicative tools but also bear cultural significance, reflecting the values and emotional expressions of different speech communities. Romain, Emmanuel and Ngowah (2016) explore the role of interjections in two Bantu Grassfield languages, Awing and Yemba, in Cameroon. The study highlights the cultural importance of mother tongue interjections in preserving linguistic heritage and argues for their inclusion in literacy programmes. For example, the Awing interjection 'Lnoù!' expresses assurance, while the Yemba interjection 'A'p̄p̄!' conveys surprise. These interjections, deeply rooted in the cultural context of their speakers, serve as important markers of identity and social interaction.

Norrick (2009) provides further insight into the pragmatic roles of interjections, differentiating between primary and secondary interjections in English. Primary interjections like

'oh' are typically used to initiate conversational turns and reflect a change in the speaker's cognitive state, while secondary interjections like 'wow' function as pragmatic markers that signal contrast or elaboration in conversation. Norrick's analysis emphasises the open-ended nature of interjections, which allows for the constant inclusion of new items into the language. This flexibility, coupled with their universal pragmatic functions, suggests that interjections are a distinctive class of speech acts with significant communicative potential.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical assumption that underpins the study is prototype theory, which was developed by cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch in the 1970s. Prototype theory is a cognitive linguistics theory that proposes that the syntactic structure of interjections is influenced by the prototype nature of specific interjections within a given linguistic system rather than rigorous grammatical rules (Ameka 1992; Ameka & Wilkins 2006; Andrason & Mañas 2021; Andrason & Matutu 2019; Stange 2016). According to this assumption, certain interjections may be closely related to the prototype of a typical interjection, exhibiting specific syntactic patterns, often used in sentence-initial positions or isolation. This theory significantly implicates linguistics by offering a valuable framework for studying syntactic features and the emotional impact of interjections. It identifies interjections as a peripheral class within the sentence category, belonging to syntactically independent, intonationally and semantically complete communicative units (Cuenca 2000; Matamala 2009). Prototype theory is crucial in studying the syntactic features and emotional impact of interjections, as it provides insight into their flexible and graded nature, suggesting that they may not conform to rigid categorisations but align with prototypes encapsulating their distinctive features. Therefore, the prototypicality of interjections can enhance our comprehension of Xitsonga's syntactic features, emotional impact and connection to other grammatical categories.

Research methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design. This design involves a straightforward description of the data's contents that is structured in a systematic manner (Lambert & Lambert 2012). The descriptive design was particularly well suited for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the syntactic properties and emotional impacts of Xitsonga interjections. The study employed a qualitative approach, providing tools for in-depth analysis of the linguistic and emotional features of interjections within existing data. This method provides flexibility, comprehensive insights and a holistic understanding of diverse contexts, focusing on non-numerical analysis (Ugwu & Eze Val 2023). The data for this study were collected using a corpus-based method from three Xitsonga drama texts: *Byi le Tintihweni* (2005) by Lubisi, *Xivoni xa Vutomi* (2008) by Shabangu and *Vadyondzi va Namuntlha* (2015) by Makhubele. The corpus-based method involves the collection of large natural language texts, either

written or spoken, that represent the natural state of language (Bobojon o'g'li 2020; Cheng 2012; Coxhead 2020). The corpus-based approach enabled the researcher to gather a large volume of relevant words, phrases and sentences with interjections to conduct a detailed analysis of the phenomenon. The researcher employed purposive sampling to intentionally select words, phrases and sentences with interjections to answer the research problem, which were then analysed using content analysis. This method enables researchers to analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of specific words, themes or concepts within a given text (Renz, Carrington & Badger 2018). Through content analysis, the extracted data were carefully coded and analysed, making it possible to identify recurring syntactic features, the frequency of interjections and the specific contexts in which they were used. Moreover, content analysis also facilitates the exploration of how these interjections convey emotional nuances within the texts.

Data presentation and analysis

This section examines the syntactic features and emotional impact of interjections in Xitsonga, particularly their position within sentences, and the various communication purposes influenced by their placement. Muthoka (2019) emphasises that the position of an interjection in a conversation or utterance significantly influences the understanding and meaning of the specific interjection. Interjections in Xitsonga, as in other languages, can be employed at various syntactic positions. In this study, the central focus of our analysis is on the placement of interjections within Xitsonga sentences, examining their presence at the initial, medial and final positions of a sentence, as well as their ability to stand independently as complete sentences. The study also explores instances where Xitsonga interjections take different positions within a single sentence. The analysis includes both categories of interjections, namely primary and secondary interjections.

Initial sentence position

In Xitsonga, interjections may occur in the initial position of a sentence. The initial position of an interjection is its placement at the beginning of a sentence or phrase, often considered independent, meaning it is not grammatically or functionally related to other word classes in the sentence (Nugroho & Setyaningsih 2019). When interjections are placed at the beginning of a sentence in Xitsonga, they serve to immediately convey the speaker's emotional state or reaction. The positioning allows for a direct and impactful expression of feelings, setting the tone for the rest of the sentence or conversation, as demonstrated in Example 1:

- 1 (a) **Hadisa:** *Huree!* Se a wu na nkingha wena. [[Interjection of confidence] *Huree!* Now you have no problem yourself.] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 36)
- (b) **Khambule:** *Hawu!* A mi titwi kahle? [[Interjection of surprise] *Hawu!* You are not feeling well?] (*Byi le Tintihweni*, p. 62)
- (c) **Jimmy:** *Exi!* Wa tiva mbilu ya mina yi vava ngopfu he Voni? [*Eish!* You know, my heart is very sore, Voni?] (*Vadyondzi va Namuntlha*, p. 126)

The interjections '*Huree!*', '*Hawu!*' and '*Exi!*' function as emotional markers in the provided texts, respectively signalling self-confidence, surprise and distress. These interjections are positioned at sentence beginnings and followed by exclamation points to intensify emotional expression. For instance, '*Huree!*' as a primary interjection is employed by Hadisa to bolster his claim to Misery of being a capable traditional healer. Similarly, '*Hawu!*' expresses Khambule's shock upon hearing the illness of Professor Xirilo. The interjection '*Exi!*', a secondary Xitsonga transliteration of the English '*Eish!*', conveys Jimmy's anguish over his girlfriend's infidelity. In terms of prototype theory, these interjections can be seen as prototypical examples of their respective emotional categories in communication. They serve as adjuncts, enhancing emotional impact without altering sentence structure. Adjuncts are nonessential elements that provide extra information but are not crucial for grammatical integrity (Ernst 2001; Sailor & Schütze 2013). Thus, removing interjections '*Huree!*', '*Hawu!*' and '*Exi!*' maintains grammatical correctness but significantly diminishes the emotional impact of the utterances. Xitsonga interjections can also be independent utterances in a sentence, separated by a comma from other word classes, as illustrated in Example 2:

- 2 (a) **Mafada:** (Hi ku vilela.) *Eish*, ndzi hupile hi mhaka yo disturb hi matoya lama. [[Worried] *Eish*, I missed because I was disturbed by these cowards.] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 50)
- (b) **Man. Nkuzana:** Hay, mina a ndzi kholwi leswaku hi yena loyi. [Hay, I can't believe that's him] (*Byi le Tintihweni*, p. 71)
- (c) **Jean:** Oh, a ndza ha mi tivisanga, i Thuli Zondo. [Oh, I forgot to introduce her to you, it's Thuli Zondo.] (*Byi le Tintihweni*, p. 46)

In this example, the interjections '*Eish!*', '*Hay!*' and '*Oh!*' initiate each sentence, separated by a comma to communicate the emotions of concern, surprise, disbelief and remembrance. Mafada uses '*Eish!*' to express concern after missing a snooker shot because of a loss of concentration while interacting with Thomas and Khangela. Man. Nkuzana's '*Hay!*' powerfully conveys both surprise and disbelief following her visit to see Professor Xirilo in the hospital. This expression serves as an emotional response to something unexpected or difficult to accept, reinforcing the speaker's astonishment. Jean's '*Oh!*' indicates remembrance upon realising that he forgot to introduce Thuli Zondo to Professor Xirilo. These interjections also function independently as adjuncts, adding emotional context without altering the grammatical structure of each sentence. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) elucidate that this syntactic feature also allows interjections to have a prominent and impactful role in conveying the speaker's emotions or emphasising a point. These interjections exemplify prototype theory by serving as prototypical expressions of their respective emotions. Their initial placement within sentences amplifies emotional impact, highlighting the speaker's affective state.

Xitsonga interjections can also be juxtaposed in the initial position to signify intense emotions. When interjections are juxtaposed in the initial position, they create a strong emphasis on the emotions being expressed, as shown in Example 3:

- 3 (a) **Sukani:** *Hm, mawaku, mi ta ya dya tinyama. [Hm, lucky you, you are going to feast.] (Byi le Tintihweni, p. 11)*
- (b) **Misery:** *(Hi ku chava) Yoo, mhane, se nyoka leyi nga titsondela la a yi nga ndzi lumi ka bava? [(Frightened) Yoo, mhane (Oh, mother), so the snake that coiled here will not bite me, sir?] (Xivoni xa Vutomi, p. 34)*
- (c) **Bayizani:** *(A rila hi xihluku) Yoo, please, Valerie, ndzi rivalele hikuba la ndzi nga kona ndza tshwa swange hi le tiheleni. [(Crying bitterly) Yoo, please, Valerie, forgive me because where I am burning as if I am in hell.] (Xivoni xa Vutomi, p. 152)*

In these instances, the speakers' emotions are conveyed through interjections placed at the beginning of each sentence, separated by a comma. In 3(a), Sukani uses 'Hm' and 'mawaku' to express desire after Professor Xirilo mentions his invitation to a wedding. In 3(b), Misery uses 'Yoo' and 'mhane' to convey fear upon seeing a snake while entering Hadisa's consultation room. In 3(c), Bayizani employs 'Yoo' and the English interjection 'please' to express intense remorse and guilt, pleading for forgiveness after his wife Valerie divorces him because of his extramarital affair with Ella. The juxtaposed interjections function as adjuncts, adding emotional context without altering the grammatical structure of the sentences in the initial position.

In Xitsonga, a single interjection may be duplicated, triplicated or repeated a number of times to emphasise the intensity of the feelings communicated in the initial position. This approach emphasises the importance of distribution and repetition in influencing the emotional impact of a sentence, as presented in Example 4:

- 4 (a) **Ella:** *(Hi ku hlundzaka) Heyi, heyi, heyi, u nga ni hlanyeli, swi xaviwe hi mavito ya mani swilo sweswo? [(Angrily) Hey, hey, hey, don't be crazy, in whose name were those things bought?] (Xivoni xa Vutomi, p. 147)*
- (b) **Professor Xirilo:** *Well, well, well, a ku nga bihanga kambe mina a ndzi titwa ndzi ri ekhotsweni ro pfumala mafasitere. [Well, well, well, it was not bad, but I felt like a person who is in a prison without windows.] (Byi le Tintihweni, p. 5)*
- (c) **Sarah:** *(A karhi a helela hi matimba) Yoo, yoo, yoo, yoo, yoo! [(Losing strength) Yoo, yoo, yoo, yoo, yoo!] (Xivoni xa Vutomi, p. 190)*

In the examples above, the interjections 'Heyi' and 'Well' in 4(a) and 4(b) are triplicated at the beginning of each sentence to demonstrate escalating anger and mild disapproval, respectively. They are separated by commas, functioning as both independent utterances and adjuncts. In 4(a), Ella uses 'Heyi' to express anger after Bayizani demands the return of household appliances he bought during their relationship. In 4(b), Professor Xirilo repeats the interjection 'Well' to express mild disapproval and mixed emotions regarding an event he attended. He acknowledges that although the experience was not entirely negative, it still left him feeling constrained. This interjection was directly adopted from English into Xitsonga dialogue to convey the speaker's emotions.

In 4(c), Sarah repeats 'Yoo' five times to signify intense pain and mental suffering after drinking the concoction given by Solly to terminate her pregnancy. The repetition of interjections emphasises the increasing intensity of the speakers' emotions, providing rapid insight into their heightened states of mind. Placing interjections at the beginning effectively captures the reader's or listener's attention and sets the tone and mood of the conversation or narrative.

Medial sentence position

The medial position of an interjection in a sentence refers to its placement in the middle, rather than at the beginning or end, of a sentence or utterance. Andrason and Mañas (2021) assert that while this position is less common than introducing an interjection at the beginning of a sentence, it can still be effectively used to convey emotions or reactions. Interjections can be positioned in the middle of a sentence to accentuate the reported speech or the speaker's monologue (Mykhaylenko 2016). In Xitsonga, interjections are used in the medial position of a sentence to emphasise the speaker's state of mind or create a dramatic effect. In this position, Xitsonga interjections are used to disrupt thought or action, indicating a sudden emotional response or shift in focus. This position allows for a more nuanced portrayal of emotions within the sentence context, as presented in Example 5:

- 5 (a) **Elizabeth:** *(A ri karhi a hlekelela.) A ndzi vuli yunifomo ya xikhongelo wenuo, ndzi vula nala! [(Laughing) I do not mean the prayer uniform (wenuo) you! I mean the mourning cloth!] (Xivoni xa Vutomi, p. 27)*
- (b) **Magaza:** *Hambikona xikhalabyana lexiya Zuma xa vatla heyi, phela loko Lulu u nga xi langutangi kahle, sesi wa kona a helerile. [Even so, that old man Zuma carves well, hey, if one does not look at Lulu carefully, one will think she is her sister as she resembles her completely.] (Xivoni xa Vutomi, p. 175)*
- (c) **Misery:** *Hileswaku, eeeee, ndzi lava ku pfuniwa n'wina bava. [This means, eeeee, I need some help, sir.] (Xivoni xa Vutomi, p. 34)*

In the examples above, the interjections 'wenuo,' 'heyi' and 'eeee' are inserted in the middle of sentences, separated by commas. The interjection 'wenuo' in 5(a) is used by Elizabeth to clarify and resolve confusion after she calls mourning cloths uniforms, which had confused Misery. In 5(b), the interjection 'heyi', used by Magaza, conveys admiration or surprise, emphasising the impressive quality of Zuma's carving and Lulu's resemblance to her sister. In 5(c), the interjection 'eeee' expresses Misery's intense emotional plea for help after visiting the traditional healer Hadisa. The repetition of 'e' intensifies Misery's sense of urgency and desperation, indicating to Hadisa that she is in distress and urgently needs assistance. This emotional weight elevates 'eeee' beyond a mere filler; it effectively conveys Misery's feelings and enhances the overall message. These interjections function as adjuncts, providing emotional nuance without

altering the sentence's grammaticality. Alessandra (2019) noted that interjections in this position enhance the emotional tone and nuance of the sentence, conveying specific emotional and phonic variations independently of the sentence's main structure.

Final sentence position

Interjections in Xitsonga can also occur at the end of a sentence or utterance, sometimes separated by a comma, except for rare instances of obsolete interjections (Jovanovic 2004). The speakers use this position to emphasise their emotional reaction or tone as a final remark, often providing a strong representation of their feelings, as shown in Example 6:

- 6 (a) **Tebogo:** Bra Sai *xem!* [Bra Sai, *shame!*] (*Byi le Tintihweni*, p. 15)
- (b) **Talenta Munene:** Xana Sathana u ndzi ringela yini *minoo?* [Why does the Devil tempt me?] (*Vadyondzi va Namuntlha*, p. 160)
- (c) **Xitlhanyi:** (Hi ku hlundzuka) Loko a ndzi nga lo kho, ndzi yima hi milenge ndzi ku phandela ntirhonyana lowu wa vubalana a wu ta va u ri kwihi Namuntlha lovha *ndziwena!* [{Angrily} If I had not taken the trouble to find you this unimpressive clerical job, where would you be today, *you lazy person!*] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 111)

In the examples above, '*xem!*', '*minoo?*' and '*ndziwena!*' are interjections positioned flexibly at the end of the sentences to evoke strong emotional responses, namely sympathy, pain and anger. In 6(b), Tebogo uses '*xem!*' to express sympathy towards Simon (Bra Sai) upon learning of his wife Sukani's affair with Professor Xirilo. In 6(b), '*minoo?*' reflects pain as Talenta Munene mourns her son Fumani's suicide. In 6(c), Xitlhanyi uses '*ndziwena!*' to express anger after a disagreement with her husband Albert over the ethics of giving exam answers to learners. These interjections, marked by exclamation and question marks, provide crucial emotional context and enhance the intensity of the speaker's feelings without changing the fundamental meaning of the sentences. Positioned at the end, they serve as adjuncts, adding emotional closure or emphasis.

The standalone utterance position

It may also be possible in Xitsonga for interjections to stand alone, forming complete sentences or utterances despite technically not being sentences. Mykhaylenko (2016) points out that interjections can function as complete sentences or expressions without any additional words or context. Interjections in this position, punctuated with an exclamation mark, function as holophrases, indicating a distinct feeling or reaction. In linguistics, holophrases are single words or utterances that convey complete ideas or sentences, encapsulating more complex meanings within context (Andrason & Mañas 2021; Andrason & Matutu 2019; Mao 2020). It often symbolises an entire sentence or idea expressed in just one word, extending beyond the conventional meaning of that symbol (Brink 2020). In this position, interjections functioning as holophrases in Xitsonga provide a concise and direct way to express emotions, as shown in Example 7:

- 7 (a) **Xiluva:** *Mh!* [*Mh!*] (*Vadyondzi va Namuntlha*, p. 66)
- (b) **Mamabolo:** (A hlamarile) *Mani?* [{Surprised} *Who?*] (*Byi le Tintihweni*, p. 37)
- (c) **Hinkwavo:** *Hayikho!* [*No!*] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 46)

In the examples above, '*Mh!*', '*Mani?*' and '*Hayikho!*' are interjections that stand alone and function as complete utterances, expressing emotions of agreement, surprise and clear denial or disagreement, respectively. They are punctuated with exclamation or question marks to indicate the intensity of the emotions being conveyed. In 7(a), Xiluva's use of the primary interjection '*Mh!*' serves as a brief, nonverbal acknowledgement or muted reaction to Jimmy's call, indicating that she is listening without providing a detailed verbal response. In 7(b), the interjection '*Mani?*' punctuated with a question mark by police officer Mamabolo expresses surprise upon hearing the name of the person they were seeking after he killed the university lecturer Lekgetla, adding an emotional layer to the conversation and highlighting Mamabolo's unexpected reaction. According to Yatno and colleagues (2018), a word ending with a question mark can be considered an interjection when it expresses an immediate reaction, such as surprise or disbelief, or prompts a response without forming a complete question. In 7(c), Matimu and Tiyani (Hinkwavo) use '*Hayikho!*' collectively to express clear denial or disagreement when their father, Sunday, asks if they have eaten. This interjection serves as a straightforward and emphatic negation, indicating that they have not eaten since returning from church. The positions of the interjections in each sentence allow for the direct and immediate expression of feelings in response to a situation or stimulus. Poggi (2009) elucidates that interjections are more primal than sentences, as they convey a vast array of meanings within a single linguistic unit. Therefore, using interjections as standalone utterances is a concise and powerful approach for expressing emotions in casual or conversational settings, promoting brevity and immediacy.

Occupying different positions within a single sentence

Other than occupying one specific position highlighted above, it may be possible for interjections to occupy two or more of the positions mentioned above within a single sentence to emphasise the intensity of the speaker's emotions (Andrason & Matutu 2019). They can be used in various positions within a single sentence to simultaneously convey various emotions and reactions. In Xitsonga, a single sentence can contain both initial and medial interjections, as illustrated in Example 8:

- 8 (a) **Sarah:** (A ri karhi a hleka) *Aa*, se i xitamina xa yini manjheni na wena u hi hlekisaka Thom, *e-e*, ndzi vula wena Solly. [{Laughing} *Aa*, now what is the stamina about now, you make us laugh Thom, *no*, I mean you, Solly.] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 18)
- (b) **Sarah:** (Hi ku gomela) *Yoo*, hambileswi Solly a nge te ndzi nga byeli munhu, *yooo*, ndzi nga fa va nga tivi ni lexi nga ndzi dlaya. [{Groaning} *Yoo*, although Solly said I should not tell anyone, *yooo*, I might die without them knowing what killed me.] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 190)

In the examples above, the use of interjections in both initial and medial positions within a single sentence allows the speaker to convey nuanced and varied emotions. In 8(a), Sarah's initial interjection 'Aa' reflects her surprise when Solly mentions his exercise regimen during their hotel stay. The medial interjection 'e-e' introduces a moment of self-correction, emphasising Sarah's point about exercising in the hotel room. In 8(b), the initial interjection 'Yoo' conveys an immediate burst of pain by Sarah after taking a concoction given by Solly to terminate her pregnancy. The interjection 'yooo' in the medial position intensifies her deep pain and concern that she might die without her family knowing the cause of her death. This demonstrates how using both initial and medial interjections can significantly enhance the emotional impact of an utterance.

Interjections in Xitsonga can also potentially take the initial and final positions in a single utterance. In Example 9, it is evident that various nuances of thoughts and expressions are being conveyed within a single sentence:

- 9 (a) **Misery:** *Huu*, swi ri wa titwa masiku lama Florence, *neh!* [(interjection of surprise and admiration) *Huu*, it means you are financially well nowadays Florence, *neh!* {is that not so!}] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 22)
- (b) **Professor Xirilo:** *Yooo*, *movha wa minooo!* [Yooo, my car!] (*Byi le Tintihweni*, p. 30)
- (c) **Man. Xirilo:** (A mpfikula) *Yooo*, nuna wa *minooo!* [(Snivelling) *Yooo*, my husband!] (*Byi le Tintihweni*, p. 71)

In the examples above, the speakers effectively convey high levels of emotions such as surprise, admiration, agreement, frustration and pain by using different interjections in both the initial and final positions of a single sentence. This approach aligns with the principles of prototype theory, which suggests that certain linguistic elements are more central or prototypical in expressing specific categories of meaning (Burov & Karpov 2023; Priatelova 2020). In 9(a), the primary interjection '*Huu*' expresses Misery's surprise and admiration for Florence's wealth and lifestyle, while the interjection '*neh!*' confirms her assumption that Florence is financially well off, as she seeks affirmation of her perception. In 9(b), the initial interjection '*Yooo*' provides a rapid explosion of frustration from Professor Xirilo upon hearing from police officer Mphahlele about the death of Albert Thabang Lekgetla. This frustration stems from knowing that Lekgetla was using his car, while the secondary interjection '*minooo!*' at the end emphasises the pain Professor Xirilo feels about both the death and his car, which was found burned at the crime scene. In 9(c), Man. Xirilo uses the primary interjection '*Yooo*' at the beginning to express her frustration upon seeing her husband, Professor Xirilo, admitted to the hospital with a serious illness. He was found to have advanced-stage human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). The interjection '*minooo!*' at the end intensifies her deep pain and distress upon seeing her husband lying in the hospital. It is also important to note that the sentence structure involves a comma at the beginning and an

exclamation mark at the end to separate interjections from other parts of the sentence. Therefore, interjections in both the initial and final positions of a sentence can significantly enhance its emotional impact, creating a dynamic and dramatic statement of the speaker's emotions, as highlighted by prototype theory, effectively conveying heightened emotional states within linguistic structures.

In some cases, a single sentence in Xitsonga may incorporate interjections in both middle and final positions for added emphasis and emotional expressiveness, as shown in Example 10:

- 10 (a) **Elizabeth:** (Hi ku khumbeka emoyeni) U nga xisiwi, Misery, a ku na byala byi nga oxa xivindzi *wenoo*, i phoyizeni *liyaa!* [(Sombrely) Don't be deceived, Misery, no beer has caused cirrhosis, *wenoo* {you!} it is a poison, that one!] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 27)
- (b) **Midlayi:** Hi ri masiku lawa ku tirha xidemokirasi *papoo*, *vana ni vatswari va bula xin'wana ni xin'wana swin'we n'winoo!* [I say, nowadays it's the democracy that is at play, *papoo* {father!}, children and parents discuss anything together, *n'winoo!* {yours!}] (p. 71)

In the examples above, Xitsonga interjections are strategically positioned in the medial and final positions within a single utterance to enable speakers to convey complex emotional messages. These interjections are classified as secondary, as they are all derived from other parts of speech, such as nouns and pronouns. In 10(a), the interjection '*wenoo*' in the medial position of Elizabeth's response expresses disbelief or incredulity. She uses it to emphasise her certainty that it was poison, not beer, that caused the cirrhosis, countering Misery's misunderstanding with a definitive statement. The final interjection '*liyaa!*' expresses emphasis or certainty, reinforcing her point about the cause of cirrhosis, indicating her confidence in her statement. Similarly, in 10(b), the medial interjection '*papoo*', used by Midlayi to her husband Khombo, expresses a casual or reflective emphasis on the statement about democracy at play. It adds a conversational tone, highlighting Misery's observation about the open and democratic discussions between children and parents. The final interjection '*n'winoo!*' conveys affirmation or agreement, underscoring the notion that such open communication is a significant and accepted part of contemporary life. This strategic positioning of interjections creates nuanced emotional layers, amplifying the speaker's message and intent.

In some cases, a single sentence in Xitsonga may include interjections in the initial, medial and final positions. This can also occur in emotional or expressive situations where the speaker expresses a variety of emotions or reactions within a single sentence, as illustrated in Example 11:

- 11 (a) **Mafada:** (Hi ku chuha) *Yoo*, *mhanee*, ndzi tidlele *minooo!* [(Frightened) *Yoo*, *mhanee* {Oh, mother}. I got myself into trouble, *minooo!* {oh, myself}] (*Xivoni xa Vutomi*, p. 62)
- (b) **Mafada:** (Hi ku xavelela) *Heyi, heyi*, Bra Dave, *watch!* [(Pleading) *Hey, hey*, Bra Dave, *watch!*] (p. 61)

In the examples above, the combination of interjections at the initial, medial and final positions within a single sentence allows the speaker to express nuanced emotional reactions and emphasise their thoughts. In Example 11(a), the initial interjection 'Yoo' reflects Mafada's intense fear and despair as he suddenly grasps the severity of the situation he faces. The medial interjection 'mhane' acts as a cry for sympathy or a plea for help, often directed at a maternal figure, underscoring Mafada's feelings of helplessness and regret. The final interjection 'minoo!' highlights Mafada's deep personal distress and self-blame, reflecting his awareness of the consequences of his actions and his lament over his lost ambitions. The juxtaposed interjection 'Heyi' in the initial and medial positions serves to catch attention urgently in Example 11(b). In the first instance, it is used to draw Teacher David's (Bra Dave) focus to something important or imminent. The repetition in the second instance emphasises Mafada's urgency and desperation, underscoring his heightened emotional state, likely fear or panic. In the final position, the interjection 'watch!' conveys a sense of urgency and caution. Mafada is feeling anxious or fearful about the potential consequences of involving the police. It is a direct command intended to alert Bra Dave to the danger or risk associated with that action, emphasising the need to be careful and reconsider the decision. Overall, these interjections convey Mafada's fear, regret and self-reproach as he faces the severe consequences of his mistakes. They reflect his desperation, urgency and fear as he tries to get Bra Dave's attention and prompt him to take notice of something critical. Therefore, the use of interjections in the initial, middle and final positions of a sentence can create a powerful emotional statement, demonstrating their versatility in modifying the tone and intensity of a message.

Conclusion

This article reports on the syntactic features and emotional impact of interjections in Xitsonga sentences. The findings reveal that Xitsonga interjections can occur at the beginning, middle and end of sentences or occupy various positions within a sentence, expressing a broad spectrum of emotions. These include surprise, panic, distress, fear, remembrance, frustration, anger, disbelief, desperation and pain, among others. When placed at the beginning of sentences, interjections elicit an immediate emotional response, while those situated in the middle or at the end provide more nuanced emotional layers or function as a concluding emotional remark. They can act as standalone utterances (holophrases) or adjuncts, enriching emotional expression without altering the grammatical structure. The article also highlights how interjections can be duplicated, triplicated and juxtaposed to emphasise emotional intensity, showcasing their versatility in expressing complex emotional states. Their punctuation in the sentence depends on their position, impact and context, leading to the use of exclamation marks, question marks or commas. This applies to both primary and secondary interjections in Xitsonga. These syntactic features enhance emotional expression and communicative brevity, aligning with prior research on how the syntactic positioning of

interjections affects emotional interpretation in various languages. The study's findings also support prototype theory, indicating that interjections function as prototypical expressions of emotion across different languages. Future research could expand on these insights by exploring the morphological features, phonological processes and pragmatic functions of interjections in various discourse settings in Xitsonga and utilising advanced techniques like natural language processing for a deeper analysis. This would further enhance our understanding of interjections in Xitsonga and their broader implications in linguistic studies.

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Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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