

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
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The text will be updated before the
term begins. **BEGINNER'S**

SOMALI GRAMMAR

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This is work in progress. Read it critically!

Feel free to contact me with comments.

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§ 1. The Somali Speaking Areas

Somali is spoken by more than 25 million people, making it approximately the 10th largest language in Africa and 70th largest in the world. Most Somali speakers live in five states in the Horn of Africa, but there is also a large diaspora that can be found practically all around the world.

<i>State</i>	<i>No of speakers</i>	<i>Official language</i>	<i>Previous colonial power</i>
Djibouti	ca 0.5 mill.	French, Arabic	France
Ethiopia	ca 6.5 mill.	national: Amharic; regional: Somali	
Kenya	ca 2.5 mill.	English, Swahili	Britain
Somalia	ca 9–11 mill.	Somali	Italy
Somaliland ¹	ca 4 mill.	Somali	Britain
elsewhere	1–3 mill.		

§ 1.1 Regional Variation within Standard Somali

There are certain differences in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation between the individual Somali regions. The differences in grammar and pronunciation are quite small, but the differences in the vocabulary are more noticeable. To a certain degree one could compare the different varieties of Somali with English, Spanish or French in various countries around the world, with German in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Luxemburg, or with Swedish in Sweden and Finland.

§ 1.1.1 Variation in the Pronunciation

The largest difference in the pronunciation concerns the phoneme /dh/, a voiced retroflex stop² (cf. § 3.2). This phoneme is not used to the same extent in the whole Somali speaking area. In the north-western parts of the area (slightly simplified: Somaliland, Djibouti and the northern part of the Somali region of Ethiopia) /dh/ may occur in any position in a word. In

¹ Somaliland declared itself independent from Somalia in 1991, but no other country has recognised Somaliland so far. In practice, however, Somaliland functions as an independent state with its own parliament, currency, army etc.

² Approximately like Swedish and Norwegian /rd/, similar to /d/, but pronounced with the tip of the tongue touching a point higher up (farther back) on the roof of the mouth.

the rest of the area /dh/ normally doesn't occur after a vowel. After a vowel /r/ is used instead of /dh/. Both ways of pronouncing and spelling are considered equally correct in standard Somali.

After a vowel there is a regional variation between /dh/ and /r/.

gabádh^N or **gabár^S** *girl*

ádhi^N or **ári^S** *goats and sheep*

In the beginning of words /dh/ is used in all regions.

dhálo *bottle, glass (as material)*

Also after a consonant /dh/ is used in all regions.

gabdhó *girls*

§ 1.1.2 Variation in word forms

A few nouns which often end in /o/ in the middle and the southern parts of the Somali speaking area have a tendency to end in /a/ in the northern parts. This happens, e.g., in the numbers **lábo/lába** *two* and **toddóbo/toddóba** *seven*, but this variation is especially frequent in the end of women's names.

Sáhra^N / **Sáhro^S**, **Faadúma^N** / **Faadúmo^S**, **Caásha^N** / **Caásho^S**

Personal preferences in combination with geographic factors influence the choice of form. The forms which end in /o/ may by some speakers be perceived as more typically Somali, maybe because the forms in /a/ resemble the European and Arabic form of these names, however both forms have an equal status in the standard language.

§ 1.1.3 Variation in the Vocabulary

The differences between regions are easiest to notice in the vocabular.

qáre^S or **xábxab^N** *watermelon*

jaálle^S or **húrdi^N** *yellow*

ukún^S or **béed^N** *egg*

With respect to loanwords, the middle and southern parts of Somalia were for many decades mainly influenced by Italian, whereas Somaliland was instead influenced by English. In Ethiopia there has also been some influence from Amharic, and in Djibouti from French. The largest influences in all Somali speaking are however from Arabic, but today the influence of English is rapidly growing in all Somali areas, just like in many other parts of the world.

usbúuc (from Ar. 'usbuu^c), **wíig^N** (from En. week), **sitimáan^S** (from It. settimana) or **toddobáad** (purely Somali) all meaning *week*

shukumáan^S (from It. asciugamano) or **tuwáal^N** (from En. towel) both meaning *towel*

§ 2. The Script

Somali was introduced as the official language of Somalia on 1 January 1973 after a decision announced by the government on 21 October 1972. It was decided that Somali was to be written with the Latin script. Earlier, Arabic script as well as a few scripts especially invented for Somali had also been used to some extent. The choice of the Latin script was mainly due to economical considerations as most of the typewriters and printing presses in the country had been used to write the previous colonial languages, i.e. Italian in the south, middle and east, and English in the northwest.

§ 2.1 The Alphabet

The traditional order of the letters in the Somali alphabet is

B, T, J, X, KH, D, R, S, SH, DH, C, G, F, Q, K, L, M, N, W, H, Y, A, E, I, O, U.

This is the order of the letters in the Arabic alphabet, and it should probably be regarded as a symbolic remedy to those who in the 1950's and 1960's wanted to establish the Arabic script for Somali.

The traditional order isn't, however, used very much for practical purposes, e.g., when arranging the words in a dictionary or a list of names in alphabetical order.

The only situation in which the traditional order is applied regularly is when the letters of the alphabet are used for numbering sub-sections in a numbered list.

1. b) Muqdisho
t) Hargeysa
j) Boosaaso
2. b) Jabbuuti
t) Jigjiga
j) Kismaayo
x) Garoowe

§ 2.2 Orthography

Somali spelling and the use of punctuation marks has never been thoroughly regulated by any institution or in any reference book. There are however quite a few rules scattered throughout different schoolbooks as well as a fifty year old tradition to take guidance from. The spelling in printed texts is after all relatively homogenous, and when it is not, it is most often possible to find a consensus regarding which spelling of a specific word should be considered the “best” one.

§ 2.3 Capital Letters

In Somali, capital letters are used in almost the same way as in English, i.e., in names, including the names of the months and the days of the week, as well as in words denoting nationalities and languages. It is also quite common to write the names of the seasons and the four cardinal directions with a capital letter.

Soomáaliya	<i>Somalia</i>
Soomaáli	<i>a Somali</i>
af Soomaáli	<i>Somali (language)</i>
Sábtí	<i>Saturday</i>
Abríil	<i>April</i>
Jiiláal / jiiláal	<i>winter/summer (warm and dry season, Dec.–Feb.)</i>
Koonfúr / koonfúr	<i>south</i>

§ 2.4 Double Letters

Double letters are used in Somali to represent longer vowels (**aa, ee, ii, oo, uu**) and more intense consonants, namely the three stops **bb, dd, gg** and the four sonorants **ll, mm, nn, rr**. The rest of the consonants are never doubled, even though some speakers pronounce them as slightly longer or more intense in certain words.

The following rules are particularly important.

§ 2.4.1 -gg-/-dd- in nouns with a suffix

If a masculine noun ends in **-g**, all forms with a determiner suffix will be written (and pronounced) with a double (intense) **-gg-** due to assimilation of the /k/ in the suffix with the /g/ in the stem.

búug <i>book</i>	búugga	<i>the book</i>	< *búug-ka
	búuggayga	<i>my book</i>	< *búug-kayga
	búuggaaga	<i>your book</i>	< *búug-kaaga

If a feminine noun ends in **-d**, all forms with a determiner suffix will be written (and pronounced) with a double (intense) **-dd-** due to assimilation of the /t/ in the suffix with the /d/ in the stem.

bisád <i>cat</i>	bisádda	<i>the cat</i>	< *bisád-ta
	bisáddayda	<i>my cat</i>	< *bisád-tayda
	bisáddaada	<i>your cat</i>	< *bisád-taada

§ 2.4.2 -nn- in the 1st and 2nd person plural

The verb endings in the 1st person plural (**-nay, -naa, -na, -no**) contain a double **-nn-** in all instances where the **-nn-** occurs between two vowels. The same is also true for the possessive endings in the 1st and 2nd person plural (**-eenna** *our*, **-iinna** *your*), as well as the long personal pronouns in the 1st person plural (**annaga, innaga** *we*) and the short subject pronoun (**aannu** *we*).

Waa in aynu ilaalinnaa nadaafadda ilaha biyaheenna.

We have to look after the hygiene in our sources of water.

Cuntada kama maaranno. *We can't manage without food.*

§ 3. The Sound System

Compared to many other languages, the Somali spelling reflects the pronunciation in a very straightforward way.

§ 3.1 Vowels

Somali has five letters representing vowels: **i, e, a, o, u**. The most frequent way of pronouncing each of these vowels is approximately the same as in many other languages that have five vowels, e.g., Spanish or Czech. One could also compare them to the pronunciation of the vowels in the English words *swim, bed, car, more, shoe*.

§ 3.1.1 Light and heavy vowels

The Somali vowel system is however more complex than the spelling reveals, as each vowel letter may be pronounced in two different ways. There is a second, somewhat less frequent way of pronouncing each letter, and those sounds are produced with a kind of larger tension in the throat. These sounds are traditionally referred to as **HEAVY** vowels and they occur in certain words.

<u>Somali letter</u>		<u>words with ordinary vowels</u>
i	appr. as in English	<i>sit</i>
e		<i>less</i>
a		<i>arm</i>
o		<i>hot</i>
u		<i>soup</i>

<u>Somali letter</u>		<u>words with heavy vowels</u>
i	appr. as in English	<i>police</i>
e		<i>convey</i>
a		<i>apple</i>
o	French	<i>sœur</i>
u	French	<i>sur</i>

It is however important to stress that these are only approximations indicating how the sounds are perceived. The sounds are actually produced in quite different ways. The European "heavy" vowels are simply pronounced by positioning the tongue somewhat further towards the front of the mouth, whereas the Somali heavy vowels are rather produced by means of a tension in the throat.

Unfortunately the research into the Somali heavy vowels is quite limited, and it is therefore not possible to present any exact principles for the use of the heavy vowels. It is also not noted systematically in existing dictionaries which type of vowels is pronounced in individual words. Therefore, the best advice is simply to listen carefully to Somali speakers and imitate their pronunciation.

It is however very seldom the case that only this subtle difference in vowel quality makes two words differ from each other. The pronunciation also seems to differ slightly between regions and possibly also between individual speakers.

In order to transcribe heavy vowels different systems have been proposed: a comma, a cedilla, or a "tail" under the letter, e.g., **ı̣**, **ę**, **ą**, **ọ**, **ụ**, or two dots above the letter, i.e., **ï**, **ë**, **ä**, **ö**, **ü**. If needed, ordinary vowels may be underlined, i.e., **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**.

§ 3.1.2 Short and long vowels

All the Somali vowels, both the ordinary ones and the heavy ones, occur both as short and long. The long vowels are written as double.

u <i>to, for</i>	versus	uu <i>he, it</i>
i <i>me</i>	versus	ii <i>to me, for me</i>
ku <i>in, on; you</i>	versus	kuu <i>to you, for you</i>

§ 3.1.3 Diphthongs

Somali has three diphthongs. Their spelling and pronunciation may vary a bit: **ey/ay**, **ow/aw**, **oy**. It has never been regulated for standard Somali whether one should write <ey> and <ow>, which often might be closer to the pronunciation, or <ay> and <aw>. In the 1970's the spelling with <ey> and <ow> was somewhat more frequent than it is nowadays. At present, especially <ay> has become evidently more common than <ey>.

§ 3.2 Consonants

More than half of the 22 Somali consonants are pronounced in almost the same way as in English. This applies to **b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, s, sh, t, w, y**. The sounds /t/ and /k/ are followed by a distinct burst of breath (aspiration), just like in English.

Somali has three **DIGRAPHS** (combinations of two letters representing a single sound): <dh>, <kh> and <sh>.

The sound <dh> (illustrated on [YouTube](#), [Wikipedia](#)) is very similar to Swedish and Norwegian /rd/. It is similar to /d/, but pronounced with the tip of the tongue touching a point higher up (farther back) on the roof of the mouth.

The sound /j/ is pronounced in two different ways, mainly depending on region. It is either more voiced (like <j> in Eng. *joke, Jane, Jeep*) or more voiceless (like <ch> in Eng. *choke, chain, cheap*). In today's standard Somali, it seems to have become common to pronounce /j/ as rather voiceless in the north and as quite voiced in the south. Listen carefully to native speakers.

A single <**b, d, g**> between two vowels is pronounced as somewhat "softer" or "slacker", like the sounds [β, ð, γ] which are characteristic for, e.g., Modern Greek and Spanish in words such as *adiós, saber, pagar*. The [ð] is of course similar to English <th> in *this*.

Hibo♀, **Liibaan**♂, **Hodan**♀, **Idil**♀, **Ladan**♀, **Faadumo**♀, **Magan**♂, ...

Double <**bb, dd, gg**> are however pronounced more distinctly and with some extra energy, quite similar to the corresponding English consonants in words like *hobby, sudden, beggar*.

The /r/ often sounds a bit different from how it is pronounced in English and most other European languages. There is often a larger number of flaps with the tip of the tongue and the stream of expired air is stronger, so that more noise is created through friction or turbulence. Sometimes this sound also becomes voiceless at the end of words. Listen to native speakers and imitate them.

Also double <**ll, mm, nn, rr**> are pronounced with some extra energy and duration.

The letters <**c, kh, q, x, '** > represent sounds that are similar to their Arabic counterparts: **c** = ع, **kh** = خ, **q** = ق, **x** = ح, **'** = ء.

The <**c**> ([YouTube](#)) is rather similar to a very voiced /h/. Pronouncing /h/ the air flow is given a free passage through the throat, but when pronouncing /c/ the tongue root is pushed backwards against the back of the throat in order to constrict the air flow into a narrow channel, thereby causing turbulence. This sound is often perceived by Europeans as a "creaky" /a/. For Somalis, however, there is no doubt that this sound is a consonant.

Cali[♂], **Cumar**[♂], **Cabdi**[♂], **Jaamac**[♂], **Sacdiya**[♀], **Nimco**[♀]

The <**kh**> ([YouTube](#)) is similar to <ch> in German *Bach* or Scottish *Loch Ness*.

Khadra[♀], **Sheekh**[♂], **Khaalid**[♂], **Kheyre**[♂], **Khadiijo**[♀]

The sound /kh/ is a bit exotic in Somali. It occurs almost exclusively in words of Arabic origin. Therefore, some speakers have a tendency to replace it with /q/.

The <**q**> is rather similar to /k/ or /g/, but the tongue is pushed backwards towards the so called uvula instead of up towards the hard palate. Voiced

pronunciation (similar to /g/) is more common between vowels ([YouTube](#)), whereas voiceless pronunciation (similar to /k/) is more common at the beginning and end of words.

Muqdisho, Qarshi[♀], Ruqiya[♀], Cabdiqani[♂], Qaali[♀]

The <x> ([YouTube](#)) is rather similar to a voiceless /h/, but in order to pronounce /x/ the tongue root needs to be pushed backwards against the back of the throat (the pharynx), in order to constrict the air flow into a narrow channel, causing friction or turbulence. This sound is often perceived by European as a "breathier" /h/.

Farxiyo[♀], Xasan[♂], Maxamed[♂], Maxamuud[♂], Xamdi[♀], Xaddiyo[♀], Axmed[♂]

The letter <'> is pronounced as a so called "glottal stop", as in the Cockney pronunciation *bu'er* for *butter*. It is produced by a rapid closure, bringing the vocal folds together, as when holding one's breath. When the air flow is then released again, this sound emerges.

Israa'iil, Sa'iir; Daa'uud[♂], Faa'iso[♀]

The letters <p, v, z> are not used in Somali since the corresponding sounds are not phonemes, i.e., used to differentiate between Somali words. However, the sound [p] sometimes occurs as a voiceless version of /b/ at the end of words and before another voiceless consonant, as in **kab** *shoe*, **kabta** *the shoe*. The letter <z> and the sound [z] is sometimes encountered in words of Arabic origin, such as the woman's name **Zamzam**. Some speakers prefer to pronounce it with a voiced [z], but the purely Somali pronunciation [samsam] is more frequent, and the purely Somali spelling is of course **Samsam**.

§ 3.2.1 Intense consonants

Some Somali consonants exhibit a "double", more "intense" version alongside the simple consonant. These more intense consonants are pronounced more distinctly, with more energy, and with a slightly longer

duration. There is variation between regions as well as speakers. Listen carefully to native speakers.

Only seven intense consonants are spelled as double: <**bb, dd, gg, mm, nn, rr, ll**>. Also some of the other consonants are in some regions pronounced intensely in certain words, but they are never written with a double consonant in standard Somali.

§ 3.3 Stress or high tone

The realisation of word stress in Somali differs from the way stress is realised in most European languages, where it is mainly a question of realising a certain syllable or vowel with more energy. In Somali the main feature of a stressed vowel is that it is pronounced with a higher pitch or a higher tone than the rest of the word.

The Somali stress gives the word a "melody", and the position of the high tone in the word can sometimes serve to differentiate between words that are otherwise identical. In English there are often stress differences between nouns and verbs as in *We're going to **record** a **record***. Also in Somali stress often serves to distinguish between grammatical categories.

ínan *boy*

áfartan *these four*

héés *sing!*

mádow *darkness*

bád wéyn *a big sea*

inán *girl*

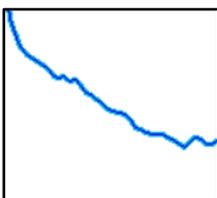
afártan *forty*

heés *song*

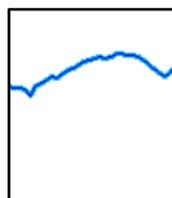
madów *dark (adj.)*

badwéyn *ocean*

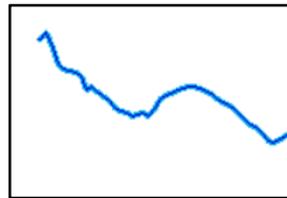
The pitch tracks below show the pitch level in some of these words. (The pitch is measured by the speed of the vibrations creating the sound.)



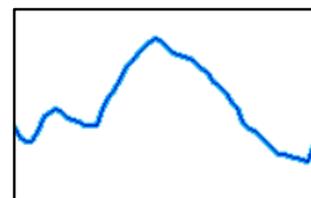
ínan
boy



inán
girl



bád wéyn
a big sea



badwéyn
ocean

§ 3.4 Phonotactics

The phonotactics describes the general principles that govern the ways sounds may be combined into words in a certain language.

§ 3.4.1 Limitations on syllable structure

Many European languages allow syllables that begin or end with two, three, or occasionally even more consonants, as in the English plural form *scripts*.

The Somali syllable structure is very limited. There may not be more than **one** consonant + **one** vowel + **one** consonant in a Somali syllable. This means that Somali words can only begin and end with a single consonant, and inside words there may not be more than two consonants next to each other between vowels.

These limitations have a large impact on loanwords, as their syllable structure often needs to be adjusted, either by insertion of vowels, or by deletion of consonants.

gram > Somali: **garaam**
ambulance > Somali: **ambalaas**

§ 3.4.2 Restrictions on /m/, /t/, /k/

Another restriction in the Somali sound system is the fact that Somali syllables normally do not end with an /m/, /k/ or /t/. Instead /n/, /g/ and /d/ are used as replacements.

Aádan *Adam*, **fílin** *film*, **macállin** *teacher* (from Arabic *mucallim*)
tágsi *taxi*,
buskud *biscuit, cookie*

This may lead to sound changes between different forms.

macállin *teacher*, but **macallimád** *female teacher*
tártan *competition*, but **tartámayaa** *is competing*

Exceptions however occur in a small number of newer loanwords, e.g., **átam** *atom*, **garáam** *gram*, and in certain older, but very common borrowings from Arabic, e.g., **mu híim** *something important*, **nidáam** *system, plan* **Isláam** *Islam*, **ixtiráam** *respect, affection*, as well as in a few proper names, e.g., **Ibraáhim** (m.), **Sámsam** (f.).

Another exception to this principle is that /m/, and not /n/, is pronounced before /b/, since that is much easier to say. Today people usually write **-mb-**, but in the 1970's it was very common to write **-nb-**, probably due to the fact that corresponding words are spelled < **نـب** > (nb) in Arabic.

cámbe (cánbe) *mango*

There are however a few words where **-nb-** is the absolutely predominant spelling, above all **balanbaális** *butterfly* and **baranbáro** *cockroach*.

§ 4. Morpho-phonology

Morpho-phonology deals with sound changes that occur when endings are added to words, either to **DERIVE** (i.e. create) new words, or to **INFLECT** words (i.e. create different grammatical forms of words).

§ 4.1 Alternations of /k/ and /t/

The morphemes /k/ and /t/ frequently serve to mark masculine and feminine gender. In verb forms /t/ also marks the 2nd person.

Both these consonants are altered in different way after certain sounds.

After	/k/ becomes	/t/ becomes
/g/	g	
/d/		d
/a/, /u/, /w/	g	d
/i/, /y/	g	d / s ⁱ
/e/, /o/	h	d
/c/, /h/, /x/, /kh/, /q/, /' /	∅ ⁱⁱ	d
/dh/		∅ ⁱⁱ
/l/ ⁱⁱⁱ		sh

ⁱ⁾ /s/ in verbs; ⁱⁱ⁾ ∅ means that /k/ or /t/ disappears; ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ /l/ disappears;

These alternations are very important for the definite article as well as the demonstrative and possessive endings, but they also occur in certain verb endings as well as in some other morphemes.

§ 4.1.1 The adjectives *jecél*, *nool*

The Somali adjectives **jecél** *fond* (of something), **nóol** *living, alive* end in /l/. When such adjectives are followed by a verb form that begins with /t/, e.g., **tahay** *is* (feminine) the alternation mentioned above occurs: /l+/t/ > /sh/.

wáa uu jecél yahay *he is fond of it, he likes it*

wáa ay jecéshahay *she is fond of it, she likes it*

< jecél + tahay

Since this consonant alternation affects both the adjective and the verb, the two words have to be written as one in the feminine.

§ 4.2 Distant assimilation

Assimilation means that one sound is influenced by another so that they become (more) similar. In some cases a vowel in the stem of a word is affected by a vowel in an ending that is added. This is especially common when the ending contains an /i/ or a /u/.

§ 4.2.1 Distant assimilation across –h–

The most frequent type of distant assimilation is triggered by endings that begin with an /h/. If the ending contains the vowel /i/ or /u/ after the /h/, then an /a/ that precedes the ending is replaced by the same vowel as the one in the ending, i.e., /i/ or /u/.

aábbe <i>father</i>	aabbá-ha <i>the father</i>	aabbú-hu <i>the father (subj.)</i> aabbí-hiis <i>his father</i>
shimbiró <i>birds</i>	shimbirá-ha <i>the birds</i>	shimbirú-hu <i>the birds (subj.)</i> shimbirí-hiisa <i>his birds</i>
ilkó <i>teeth</i>	ilká-ha <i>the teeth</i>	ilkú-hu <i>the teeth (subj.)</i> ilkí-hiisa <i>his teeth</i>

In the spoken form of words, one can often also hear the influence of a following /e/ or /o/, but such sound changes are usually not reflected by the orthography. The most frequent spelling is, e.g., **ilká-hooda** *their teeth*, **ilká-heeda** *her teeth*, but some people sometimes reflect this type of assimilation in writing, especially in certain expressions, e.g.

aabbáha <i>the father</i>	aabbá-heed (aabbé-heed) <i>her father</i>
	aabbá-hood (aabbó-hood) <i>their father</i>

Sometimes some people also apply this type of assimilation in the stem of masculine nouns when the stem ends in /x/ or /c/ and the definite,

In a small number of words an /i/ is inserted instead.

maalmó	/maal_m/-	maalín	<i>day</i>
xubnó	/xub_n/-	xubín	<i>member; body part</i>

§ 5. Contractions

In Somali, two or even more words often merge into a single word under certain circumstances. Sometimes this only means that the words are written together without being separated by an empty space, but most of the time it also means that some sound is altered or lost.

Some contractions are **OBLIATORY** while others are **OPTIONAL**.

§ 5.1 Optional contractions

§ 5.1.1 Sentence particle + subject pronoun

In colloquial Somali, sentence particles (i.e. sentence **type** particles and **focus** particles) are usually contracted with the short subject pronouns (except *la one*). These contractions also occur in written Somali in a more casual style. Some examples:

wáa aan → wáan

wáa aad → wáad

wáa uu → wúu

wáa ay → wáy

baa uu → buu

baa ay → bay

maxáa uu → muxúu !!

maxáa ay → maxáy

wáxa aan → wáxaan

wáxa aad → wáxaad

wáxa uu → wúxuu !!

wáxa ay → wáxay

ayáa uu → ayúu

ayáa ay → ayáy

§ 5.2 Obligatory contractions

In verb phrases, many types of contractions are obligatory. The indefinite subject pronoun *la one*, the object pronouns, the prepositions and the negation **má** all belong to the type of words that merge with each other.

These contractions are pronounced as one word. Only the very last part is stressed and pronounced with a high tone.

§ 5.2.1 Contracted prepositions

If there is more than one preposition in the same clause, they have to merge with each other. Between vowels /k/ changes to /g/ and between two occurrences of **ú** an extra /g/ is inserted as a "buffer".

ú + ú > ugú	<i>to ... to</i>
ú + kú > ugú	<i>to ... in/on</i>
ú + ká > ugá	<i>to ... from</i>
ú + lá > ulá	<i>to ... with</i>
kú + ká > kagá	<i>in/on ... from</i>
kú + lá > kulá	<i>in/on ... with</i>
ká + lá > kalá	<i>from ... with</i>

Not the vowel alternation in **kú + ká > kagá**:

Gaari-daméerkiisa waxa uu kagá shaqeeyaa magaaláda.

donkey-cart-his FINALFOCUS he with-from works the-town

With his donkey cart he works in the city.

The example contains **gaari-dameerkiisa + kú** *with his donkey cart* and **magaaláda + ká** *in the city* (literally: *from the city*).

Also note that the form **ugú** has two different meanings.

ugú < ú + kú: **Sideé** baa aad biyáha **gúriga** nadiif **ugú** kaydsataa?
In what manner do you keep the water clean *in the house*?
= *How do you keep the water fresh at home?*

ugú < ú + ú **Maxaa** aynu **dabka** **ugú** baahan nahay?
For what are we in need *of the fire*? = *What do we need fire for?*

§ 5.2.2 Contractions with the pronoun 'la'

The indefinite subject pronoun **la** *one* and the prepositions obligatorily merge into one word. The subject pronoun **la** *one* always comes first whereas the preposition **lá** *with* always comes last.

la + ú	→	loó !!	one ... to	/a/ + /u/ > /oo/
la + kú	→	lagú	one ... in/on	
la + ká	→	lagá	one ... from	
la + lá	→	lalá	one ... with	
ú + lá	→	ulá	to ... with	
kú + lá	→	kulá	in/on ... with	
ká + lá	→	kalá	from ... with	

Meeláhan waxa **loó** yaqaan iláha biyáha.

*These places **one** knows **as** springs of water.
= ... are known as water springs.*

§ 5.2.3 Contractions with object pronouns

(i)na + ú > (i)noó !!	to us / us ... to	/a/ + /u/ > /oo/
(i)na + kú > (i)nagú	in us / us ... in	
(i)na + ká > (i)nagá	from us / us ... from	
(i)na + lá > (i)nalá	with us / us ... with	

Cuntádu xóog baa ay **inoó** yeeshaa.

*The food causes strength **for us**. = Food gives us strength.*

§ 5.2.4 Contractions with the negation *má*

The negation **má** *not* merges with a preceding preposition, object pronoun or the indefinite subject pronoun **la** *one*.

Biyáha **kamá** maaranno. We **don't** manage **without** water.

§ 5.2.5 Longer contractions

Also more than two words are often contracted.

inagagá < ina + kú + ká

Dábka wáxa **inagagá** baqdá dugáagga.

*The wild animals are scared off **from us by the fire**.*

§ 5.2.6 The particle *baa* after nouns in *-o/-a*

The focus particle **baa** / **ayaa** normally merges with feminine nouns ending in **-a/-o**, e.g. **Aamíno + baa > Aamínaa**

§ 6. Nouns

Somali nouns are divided into two groups or grammatical genders: MASCULINE nouns and FEMININE nouns. This is similar to the situation in, e.g., French or Arabic. The gender of a noun is an important key to its grammatical behaviour, since nouns can take on a number of different endings, even several endings after each other, so that a single word may sometimes become quite long.

The most important endings are the plural endings, the definite article endings as well as the possessive and the demonstrative endings. The latter correspond to the English definite article and the possessive and demonstrative determiners, which in English are independent words. Somali also has subject endings (see § 13.1.1) that mark the subject of a clause.

§ 6.1 The gender of nouns

Every Somali noun belongs to one of the two genders: masculine or feminine. For most of the nouns, it is not a biologically motivated division, but a purely grammatical division. For example, the words **xáas** *wife* and **sác** *cow* are grammatically masculine.

In most cases, however,

- nouns that denote female creatures are feminine;
- nouns that denote male creatures are masculine;
- nouns that end in **-o** or **-ad** are feminine, e.g., **qaáddo** *spoon*, **bisád** *cat*;
- nouns that end in **-e** are masculine, e.g., **fúre** *key*.

For other nouns the written form unfortunately does not reveal the gender. The position of the stress (realised as a high tone) does however, in most nouns, reflect the gender of the word, hence for most nouns it is possible to hear the gender.

§ 6.1.1 Nouns with gender variation

A small amount of nouns are used with different gender by different persons and/or in different parts of the Somali speaking area. A very important word of this type is **rooti** *bread*.

roótiga / **rootída**

the bread

§ 6.1.2 Stress in nouns

When discussing the position of the high tone (the realisation of Somali stress), it is important to understand that long vowels consist of two vowel positions, whereas a short vowel only consists of one vowel position. This is straight-forwardly reflected by the Somali spelling.

The vast majority of masculine nouns have the high tone on the second last vowel position, while the vast majority of feminine nouns have their high tone on the last vowel position. Exceptions are mainly the nouns ending in **-e/-o/-a** in the singular (see § 6.1.3).

Among nouns having a short final vowel, feminine words therefore have their high tone on the last syllable, whereas masculine nouns have the high tone on the second last syllable.

MASK.

ínan

boy

kúrsi

chair

áqal

house

FEM.

inán

girl

bisád

cat

gabádh

girl

In nouns that have a long vowel in the final syllable, both masculine and feminine words have their high tone on that final syllable, but in different ways. The reason for that is that only one of the two vowel positions in the long vowel is pronounced with higher tone than the rest of the word.

In masculine nouns, the first part of the long vowel carries the high tone, and then the tone falls through the long vowel up until the end of the word.

In feminine nouns only the last part of the long vowel carries the high tone, resulting in a rising tone through the long vowel until the tone reaches its peak at the end of the word.

MASK.		FEM.	
géed	<i>tree, plant</i>	beér	<i>garden, field, plantation</i>
dukáan	<i>shop</i>	khudaár	<i>vegetables and fruit</i>
míis	<i>table</i>	liín	<i>citrus fruit</i>

In words with only one short vowel, it is however impossible to hear the gender. You simply have to memorise it.

MASK.		FEM.	
nál	<i>lamp, electric light</i>	káb	<i>shoe</i>

§ 6.1.3 Nouns in *-e/-o/-a*

The nouns that in the singular end in **-o/-a** (feminines) or **-e** (masculines) follow different rules. When these words are pronounced in isolation, without any context, they are most often pronounced with the high tone on the second last vowel position. However, if the word is part of a phrase or a sentence, it is most often pronounced with the high tone on the last vowel position.

magaálo	<i>town, city</i>	magaaló yar	<i>a small town</i>
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§ 6.1.4 Exceptions

There are a few exceptions to the principles for the placement of tone described above.

A small number of masculine nouns have the high tone on the final vowel position. Such nouns often end in /aa/, /i/ or /r/.

dilaá	<i>murderer</i> , qoraá	<i>writer</i>		
abtí	<i>maternal uncle</i> , maroodí	<i>elephant</i> , ratí	<i>pack camel</i> , webí	<i>river</i>
adeér	<i>paternal uncle</i> , dhakhtár	<i>doctor; clinic</i> , reér	<i>family</i>	
xafiís	<i>office</i>			

Among feminine nouns, especially women's names often have their high tone on the second last vowel position.

Lúul, Máryan

The names of many cities as well as countries ending in **-(i)ya** have their high tone on the fourth vowel position counting from the end.

Áfgooye a city close to Mogadishu, **Gároowe** the capital of Puntland
Ítóobiya *Etiopien*, **Kéenya** *Kenya*, **Soomáaliya** *Somalia*

§ 6.2 The Indefinite Form of Nouns

Somali doesn't have any indefinite article, just an indefinite form of nouns. Words like **kúrsi** or **bisád** can therefore be translated either as *chair, cat* or *a chair, a cat*, whichever is more suitable in the English context.

§ 6.3 The Definite Singular of Nouns

The Somali definite article is not a word, it is an ending.

-ka for masculine nouns: **más** *snake* **máska** *the snake*

-ta for feminine nouns: **káb** *shoe* **kábta** *the shoe*

The initial consonant of the definite article suffix changes its shape according to the immediately preceding sound (see § 4.1).

After the sounds /g, aa, i, y, w/ the masculine article becomes **-ga**.

gúri, gúriga *the house*

After the sounds /e, o/ the masculine article becomes **-ha**.

At the same time /e, o/ are replaced by /a/. The high tone is on this /a/.

aábbe, aabbáha *the father*

After the sounds /c, h, x, kh, q, ' / the masculine article becomes just **-a**.

libáax, libáaxa *the lion*

After the sounds /d, i, y, w, o, c, h, x, kh, q, ' / the feminine article becomes **-da**.

mindí, mindída *the knife*

After /dh/ the feminine article becomes just **-a** in writing, but /dh/ is pronounced more intensely.

gabádh, gabádha *the girl*

After /l/ the feminine article becomes **-sha**, and the /l/ disappears.

bíl, bísha *the month/crescent*

The high tone is generally not affected by the addition of the definite article suffix.

macállin, macállinka; macallimád, macallimáda *the teacher*

Only in words that end in /o/ or /e/ the high tone is "shifted" to the final vowel position before the definite article suffix. At the same time, both /o/ and /e/ also change into /a/.

fúre, furáha *the key*

sheéko, sheekáda *the story*

§ 6.4 The Indefinite Plural of Nouns

There are four ways to create the plural of Somali nouns.

1. FEMININE nouns with a singular in **-o** have a plural that ends in **-oóyin**.

hoóyo	<i>mother</i>	hooyoóyin	<i>mothers</i>
magaálo	<i>city</i>	magaaloóyin	<i>cities</i>

2. MASKULINE nouns with a singular in **-e** have a plural that ends in **-ayaál**.

aábbe	<i>father</i>	aabbayaál	<i>fathers</i>
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3. MASKULINE nouns with only one syllable in the singular usually form their plural by reduplication. First the vowel **-á-** is added and then the final consonant of the singular form is repeated.

más	<i>snake</i>	masás	<i>snakes</i>
wiil	<i>boy, son</i>	wiilál	<i>boys, sons</i>

4. All other nouns have a plural that ends in **-ó**.

úl (f.)	<i>stick</i>	uló	<i>sticks</i>
baabúur (m.)	<i>car</i>	baabuurró	<i>cars</i>

Often, however, different sound changes occur before this ending.

§ 6.4.1 More about feminine plural forms in **-ó**

Feminine nouns that don't end in **-o** in the singular simply add **-ó** to make the word plural.

sariir	<i>bed</i>	pl. sariiró	<i>beds</i>
káb	<i>shoe</i>	pl. kabó	<i>shoes</i>
bisád	<i>cat</i>	pl. bisadó	<i>cats</i>

If the stem ends in **-i** then a **-y-** is inserted before the plural ending **-ó**.

mindí	<i>knife</i>	pl. mindiyó	<i>knives</i>
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§ 6.4.2 More about masculine plural forms in –ó

Maskuline nouns that do not end in –e in the singular and contain more than one syllable take the ending –ó in the plural.

Before the ending –ó, the consonants /b/, /d/, /r/, /l/, /n/, and /m/ are normally doubled, but not /g/.

saaxíib	<i>friend</i>	pl. saaxiibbó
baabúur	<i>car</i>	pl. baabuurró
xayawáan	<i>animal</i>	pl. xayawaannó
tártan	<i>competition</i>	pl. tartammó

After other sounds, which are not doubled, the consonant –y– is inserted before the plural ending. The same holds for compounds ending in /d/ and many foreign borrowings.

dálag	<i>crop</i>	pl. dalagyó
mágac	<i>name</i>	pl. magacyó
libáax	<i>lion</i>	pl. libaaxyó
webí	<i>river</i>	pl. webiyó
falkaab-meeléed	<i>adverbial of place</i>	pl. falkaab-meeleedyó
insaym	<i>enzym</i>	pl. insaymyó

However, if the stem already ends in /y/, only –ó is added.

éray	<i>word</i>	pl. erayó
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§ 6.4.3 Complicated Plural Forms of Nouns

(a) Some words have a stem that ends in two consonants. Since a Somali word cannot end in two consonants, an additional vowel has to be inserted in the singular form. It is almost always a copy of the vowel that is already present in the stem of the word.

sg. /xar_f/	>	xáraf (m.)	<i>letter (of the alphabet)</i>
pl. /xar_f/-/o/	>	xarfó	<i>letters</i>

(b) A few words have a stem ending in a consonant + /y/. In those words the singular instead ends in the vowel /i/.

sg. /gur_y/	>	gúri (m.)	<i>house</i>
pl. /gur_y/-/o/	>	guryó	<i>houses</i>

(c) If the stem ends in /m/ or /k/, this fact is not evident from the singular form. These sounds may only occur if they are followed by a vowel. Therefore, the word's stem is only evident in the plural. In the singular, the alternations /m/ > /n/ and /k/ > /g/ must occur word finally.

sg. /weydiim/	>	weydiín (f.)	<i>question</i>
pl. /weydiim/-/o/	>	weydiimó	<i>questions</i>
sg. /tim/	>	tín (f.)	<i>a stand of hair</i>
pl. /tim/-/o/	>	timó	<i>(strands of) hair</i>
sg. /nim/	>	nín (m.)	<i>man</i>
pl. /nim/-/am/	>	nimán	<i>men</i>

(d) In some words vowel insertion and consonant alternation occur at the same time.

sg. /gac_m/	>	gacán (f.)	<i>arm, hand</i>
pl. /gac_m/-/o/	>	gacmó	<i>arms, hands</i>
sg. /il_k/	>	ílig (m.)	<i>tooth</i>
pl. /il_k/-/o/	>	ilkó	<i>teeth</i>

In a few words the inserted vowel is not a copy of the vowel already present in the stem.

sg. /maal_m/	>	maalín (f.)	<i>day</i>
pl. /maal_m/-/o/	>	maalmó	<i>days</i>

§ 6.4.4 Irregular Plural Forms of Nouns

(a) A small number of monosyllabic masculine nouns with a long vowel do not form their plural through reduplication, but with the ending **-ó**.

géed (m.) *tree, plant* pl. **geedó** *trees, plants*
reér (m.) *family* pl. **reeró** *families*

(b) A couple of words take the plural ending **-yaabó** or **-yaaló**.

sí (f.) *manner* pl. **siyaabó** or **siyaaló** *manners*
wáx (m.) *thing* pl. **waxyaabó** or **waxyaaló** *things*

(c) A few masculine nouns do not form a plural according to the general rules for masculine nouns. Instead the regular plural form of the corresponding feminine noun is used.

walaál, walaálka *the brother*
walaál, walaásha *the sister* pl. **walaaló** *siblings*
sánnad, sánnadka *the year*
(**sannad**) pl. **sannadó** *years*

(d) A small group of nouns have an irregular plural form alongside the regular form.

abtí *maternal uncle* **abtíga** pl. **abtiyó / abtiyáal**

In a few instances there is a difference in meaning.

íl *eye; spring, source* **ísha** pl. **indhó** *eyes*
iló *springs, sources*

§ 6.5 The Definite Plural of Nouns

The plural definite form depends on the gender of the noun and the final sound of the word. For masculine nouns also the length of the word plays a crucial role.

§ 6.5.1 The definite plural of feminine nouns

In the plural, feminine nouns take the definite article **-ka**, **-ha**.

If the indefinite plural ends in **-oóyin** the definite article is **-ka**.

hoóyo	hooyáda	hooyoóyin	hooyoóyinka	<i>the mothers</i>
magaálo	magaaláda	magaaloóyin	magaaloóyinka	<i>the cities</i>
tíro	tiráda	tiroóyin	tiroóyinka	<i>the numbers</i>

If the indefinite plural ends in **-ó**, the definite form will end in **-áha**.

káb	kábta	kabó	kabáha	<i>the shoes</i>
bisád	bisádda	bisadó	bisadáha	<i>the cats</i>
meél	meésha	meeló	meeláha	<i>the places</i>
íl	ísha	indhó	indháha	<i>the eyes</i>

§ 6.5.2 The definite plural of masculine nouns

(a) Masculine nouns with TWO SYLLABLES in the indefinite plural form have a definite form ending with **-ka**, **-ga**, **-ha**, **-a**.

Fel! Hittar inte referenskölla. (b) The major part of this type of nouns consists of monosyllabic masculine nouns that form their plural by reduplication. They have the same definite article both in the singular and in the plural.

qóys	qóyska	qoysás	qoysáska	<i>the families</i>
áf	áfka	afáf	afáfka	<i>the mouths, the languages</i>
sán	sánka	sanán	sanánka	<i>the noses</i>
míis	míiska	miisás	miisáska	<i>the tables</i>
bás	báska	basás	basáska	<i>the buses</i>

(c) A small number of other masculine nouns have a plural form in **–ó** with just two syllables. Their definite form ends in **–áha**.

géed	géedka	geedó	geedáha	<i>the trees, the plants</i>
gúri	gúriga	guryó	guryáha	<i>the houses</i>
ílig	íligga	ilkó	ilkáha	<i>the teeth</i>
xáraf	xárafka	xarfó	xarfáha	<i>the letters</i>

(d) Masculine nouns with MORE THAN TWO SYLLABLES in the indefinite plural form take the definite article **–ta, –da, –sha**.

(e) Masculine nouns with an indefinite plural in **–ayaál** have a definite plural form ending in **–ayaásha**.

aábbe	aabbáha	aabbayaál	aabbayaásha	<i>the fathers</i>
fúre	furáha	furayaál	furayaásha	<i>the keys</i>

(f) All other regular masculine nouns have a definite plural form ending in **–áda**. The majority of masculine nouns belong to this type.

xayawáan	xayawáanka	xayawaannó	xayawaannáda	<i>the animals</i>
baabúur	baabúurka	baabuurró	baabuurráda	<i>the cars</i>

§ 6.5.3 Irregular Definite Plural Forms of Nouns

(a) All masculine nouns that form their plural through reduplication of the consonant /l/ and whose stem contain a LONG VOWEL have a definite plural form in **–ásha**.

wíil	wíilka	wiilál	wiilásha	<i>pojarna</i>
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(b) A few masculine nouns don't have a regular plural form. Instead the plural of a corresponding feminine noun is used and the definite form ends in **–áha**.

walaál, walaálka	<i>the brother</i>	
walaál, walaásha	<i>the sister</i>	pl. walaaló <i>siblings, walaaláha</i>

sánnad, sánnadka *the year*

(sannad**da**)

pl. sannad**ó, sannadáha**

The word **sánnad** *year* is mostly used as masculine in the singular, but always as feminine in the plural.

(c) A few words are completely irregular.

wáx (m.) *thing, wáxa*

pl. wax**yaabó, waxyaabáha**

or wax**yaaló, waxyaaláha**

§ 6.6 Arabic Plural Forms

In Arabic it is common to form the plural through vowel alternation in the stem of the word. Some such forms are used also in Somali. The definite article is then **-ta** or **-da**.

saaxíib, saaxíibka *the friend*

Arabic pl. **asxaáb, asxaábta** *the friends*

regular pl. **saaxiibbó, saaxiibbáda** *the friends*

kúrsi, kúrsiga *the chair*

Arabic pl. **kuraás, kuraásta** *the chairs*

regular pl. **kursiyó, kursiyáda** *the chairs*

This Arabic pattern has sometimes also spread to borrowings from other languages.

búug, búugga *the book*

Arabic pl. **buugaág, buugaágta** *the books*

regular pl. (rare) **buugág, buugágga** *the books*

§ 6.7 The Counting Form of Nouns

After numbers larger than **hál** *one* as well as after certain other words that express quantification Somali nouns are not used in their plural form, but in a special **COUNTING FORM**. Only feminine nouns with the plural ending **-ó** have a separate counting form that ends in **-ood**. For all other nouns the counting form is equal to the singular form.

Masculine		Feminine	
búug – buugaág	<i>book – books</i>	bisád – bisadó	<i>cat – cats</i>
hál buug	<i>one book</i>	hál bisad	<i>one cat</i>
labá buug	<i>two books</i>	labá bisadood	<i>two cats</i>
baabúur – baabuurró	<i>car – cars</i>	hoóyo – hooyoóyin	<i>mother -s</i>
hál baabuur	<i>one car</i>	hál hooyo	<i>one mother</i>
labá baabuur	<i>two cars</i>	labá hooyo	<i>two mothers</i>

The numeral and the following noun constitute a noun phrase. The end of a noun phrase is often marked by a high tone, but to do so is not obligatory.

labá hooyó	or	labá hooyo	<i>two mothers</i>
labá bisadoód	or	labá bisadood	<i>two cats</i>

§ 6.8 Countability

Some English nouns are very rarely used in the plural, e.g. *childhood, flour, Andrew, London*. Also in Somali there are many such words. There are also many words that are completely impossible to put in the plural.

§ 6.8.1 General use of the singular

Some objects, such as *garlic*, are easily countable, but they are hardly used in the plural anyway. The singular form doesn't really say anything about the amount in question. This principle is applied to many more nouns in Somali, especially in the category of fruit and vegetables, e.g. **móos^S/múus^N** *banana(s)*, **liín** *citric fruit(s)*, but also, e.g., **kallúun** *fish*. It is very unusual to put such words in the plural.

§ 6.8.2 Collective nouns

English collective nouns are e.g. *police, staff, cattle*. The typical trait of a collective nouns is that the form carries no plural ending, but the word refers to several persons or objects. In English there is often a variation between the singular and plural form of verbs used with such nouns, e.g. *The staff is/are very efficient*. A minimal difference in meaning may however be perceived by some speakers.

Somali has a very large number of collective nouns, i.e. nouns with a singular form that makes reference to several persons or objects, e.g.

carruúr (f.)	<i>children</i>	dúmar (m.)	<i>women</i>
rág (m.)	<i>men</i>	lo' (f.)	<i>dairy cattle</i>
ádhi^N / ári^S (m.)	<i>goats and sheep</i>	digáag (m.)	<i>chicken</i>

§ 6.8.3 Nouns with singular, plural & collective form

A number of Somali masculine nouns have a feminine collective form alongside the regular plural form.

	SINGULAR		PLURAL
MASC.	baabúur, baabúurka		baabuurró, baabuurráda
	<i>car the car</i>		<i>cars the cars</i>
	búug, búugga		buugaág, buugaágta
	<i>book the book</i>		(buugág, buugágga)
	COLLECTIVE		<i>books the books</i>
FEM.	baabuúr, baabuúrta		
	<i>cars the cars</i>		
	buúg, buúgta		
	<i>books books</i>		

There are also a few cases where a singular form is derived from the collective form with a suffix.

	COLLECTIVE		
MASC.	digáag, digáagga		
	<i>chicken, hens</i>		
	SINGULAR		PLURAL
FEM.	digaagád, digaagádda		digaagadó, digaagadáha
	<i>hen</i>		<i>hens</i>

§ 6.8.4 Nouns with only singular & collective form

Some nouns don't have any plural form, only a masculine singular form and a feminine collective form.

	SINGULAR	NO PLURAL
MASC.	Soomaáli , Soomaáli <i>ga</i> <i>the Somali</i>	—
	árday , árday <i>ga</i> <i>the pupil</i>	—
	COLLECTIVE	
FEM.	Soomaalí , Soomaalí <i>da</i> <i>the Somalis</i>	
	ardaý , ardaý <i>da</i> <i>the pupils</i>	
	or ardó , ardá <i>da</i> <i>the pupils</i>	

There are also a few cases where a singular form is derived from the collective form with a suffix.

	COLLECTIVE	
MASC.	haweén , haweén <i>ka</i> <i>the women</i>	
	SINGULAR	NO PLURAL
FEM.	haweéney , haweéney <i>da</i> <i>the woman</i>	—

§ 6.8.5 Group nouns

There are also collective nouns that denote a group of objects, e.g. *family*. These groups are however countable and can be put in the plural in the ordinary way.

sg. coll.	qóys	<i>a family</i>
pl. coll.	qoysás	<i>families</i>
sg. coll.	géel	<i>a herd of camels</i>
pl. coll.	geelál	<i>several herds of camels</i>

§ 6.9 Generic definite form

Generic use of a noun means that the noun is used in a generalising way with reference to the whole category of such objects, not with reference to any specific, existing object or objects. In English the definite singular form is sometimes used this way, e.g. *Why does the spider have eight legs?* It is as if you treated one spider as a prototype for all the spiders in the world. This is also possible in Somali.

Díinku waxa uu léeyahay lugó gaagaaban. *The turtle has short legs.*

For countable nouns in English, the generic use of **definite** singular is synonymous with a generic use of **indefinite** plural, and you can also say *Why do spiders have eight legs?*

In Somali, however, the **definite** form is preferred in the generic sense, also in the plural.

Shimbirúhu ukún ayéy dhalaan. *Birds lay eggs.*

For uncountable mass nouns, English doesn't differentiate between specific and generic meaning, e.g. *I bought milk* vs. *I love milk*, whereas French does, e.g. *J'ai acheté du lait* vs. *J'aime le lait*. Somali, just like French and Arabic, also prefers the definite form in the general meaning, i.e. when not referring to any specific object, but to the whole category.

Wáxa ay toshaa dhárka. *She sews clothes.*

Wáa uu jecél yahay liínta. *He is fond of citric fruit.*

§ 6.10 Plural Only Nouns

(a) Two Somali nouns denoting substances only have a plural form. English nouns of this type are *leftovers* and *oats*.

biyó	<i>water</i>	biyáha	<i>the water</i>
caanó	<i>milk</i>	caanáha	<i>the milk</i>

These nouns are plural (not feminine singular) since

- the high tone is normally on the plural ending **–ó**,
- the definite form ends in **–áha**,
- the verb is in the plural when these nouns serve as the subject.

(b) The plural forms **habló** *girls*, **idó** *sheep* and **xooló** *cattle* also lack a corresponding singular form, but as expected they do denote several living beings. The exceptional thing about them is that if you want to say something about a single individual, you have to choose another, synonymous word, e.g. **gabádh** / **gabár** or **inán** for *girl* and **sác** *cow* or **díbi** *bull, ox* etc.

§ 6.11 The Vocative

Many languages have special grammatical forms expressing that a word or a phrase is used in order to address a person (or even a thing). In Somali this function is expressed by a high tone on the initial vowel position.

Mácallin! is used to address a teacher, whereas **macállin** is used to talk about a teacher.

Fáadumo!, **Máxamed!** are used to address these persons, whereas **Faadúmo**, **Maxámed** are used to talk about them.

The vocative can also be formed of feminine noun phrases by adding the ending /ey/ written as **-ey**, **-eey**, **-ay**, **-aay**, **-oy**, **-ooy**. If one gets very emotional even more than two vowels may sometimes be written.

Bisádda yaréey! *Dear little cat!*

Digaagádéy! *Hey, hen!*

The vocative ending for masculine nouns and phrases is **-ow/-oow**.

Daanyéerów! *Hey, monkey!*

§ 7. Formation of Nouns

Somali nouns are formed in similar ways as English nouns. There are both compounds and words which are formed by adding different endings.

wada <i>together</i> + jír <i>body</i>	> wadajír (m.) <i>unity, solidarity</i>
beeró <i>fields</i> + -le, -ley	> beeraále (m.) <i>farmer</i> beeraléy (f. coll.) <i>farmers</i>

§ 7.1 Persons

The ending **-e** is used to form many words that denote a person who carries out a certain task.

baraa <i>teaches</i>	báre (m.) <i>teacher</i>
beér <i>field</i> , falaa <i>cultivates</i>	beerfále (m.) <i>farmer</i>

Another, less common ending with the same meaning is **-aá**.

qoraa <i>writes</i>	qóre / qoraá (m.) <i>writer, author</i>
reér <i>family</i> , guuraa <i>moves</i>	reer-guuraá (m. coll.) <i>nomads</i>

The ending **-le** denotes an owner of the object or somebody who has a job connected to the object. A vowel immediately before the suffix **-le** normally becomes long.

dukáan <i>shop</i>	dukaánle (m.) <i>shopkeeper, shop assistant</i>
tágsi <i>taxi</i>	tagsiile (m.) <i>taxi driver</i>

§ 7.1.1 Female persons

The ending **-ád** is commonly used to form corresponding feminine nouns to masculine nouns denoting persons.

MASCULINE	FEMININE
macállin	macallimád <i>teacher</i>
árday	ardayád <i>student, pupil</i>

–ley corresponds to the masculine –le.

dawaárle *tailor* **dawaarley** *seamstress* < **dawaar** *sewing machine*

–to sometimes corresponds to the masculine –e, whereas –so corresponds to –ye.

MASCULINE

FEMININE

adeége **adeégto** *servant* < **adéeg** *service*

kalkaaliye **kalkaaliso** *nurse*

§ 7.1.2 Collectives

The two feminine ending –ley and –to/–so are also used to form nouns denoting several persons as a collective

MASC. SG.

FEM. COLL.

beeraále *farmer*

beeraléy *farmers*

kalluumayste *fisherman*

kalluumaysáto *fishermen*

§ 7.2 Things

The suffix –e is also used to form words denoting tools.

furaa *opens*

fúre *key*

The suffix –o is used to form different kinds of nouns.

sheegaa *says, tells*

sheéko *story*

The suffix –áal is used to form nouns denoting the result of an action.

qoraa *writes*

qoráal *text, writing*

The suffix –i is sometimes used to form abstract nouns.

baahán *needing*

baahí *need*

Just like the English word *smile* may be both a verb and a noun, Somali also has many pairs of a verb and a noun where it is not clear which word is derived. Both consist of only a root and grammatical endings.

béer! *plant!, cultivate!* **beér** *a field, a plantation*
beer-aa *plants, cultivates* **beér-ta** *the field, the plantation*

§ 7.3 Verbal Nouns

In English, nouns are most commonly formed from verbs with the ending *-ing*, but some other endings also occur less frequently, e.g. *-ment*: *move*, *movement*.

The most common endings serving to derive nouns from verbs are:

-íd (or sometimes **-ís**) if the imperative (see § 11.9) ends in a consonant,

qoraa *writes*, **qór!** *write!*, **qoríd -da** (f.), **qorís -ta** (f.) *(the) writing*

-n (or sometimes **-s**) if the imperative ends in **-i**,

akhriyaa *reads*, **ákhri!** *read!*, **akhrín -ta** (f.), **ákhris -ka** (m.) *(the) reading*

-n if the imperative ends in **-ee** (which changes into **-ay-** / **-ey-**),

sameeyaa *makes*, **samée!** *make!*, **samayn/sameýn -ta** (f.) *(the) making*

-sho if the imperative ends in **-o** (which changes into **-a-**).

booqdaa *visits*, **booqó!** *visit!*, **booqásho -da** (f.) *(the) visit(ing)*

bartaa *learns*, **baró!** *learn!*, **barásho -da** (f.) *(the) learning*

Somali verbal nouns often correspond to English *to* + infinitive.

Sáhra waa ay jecéshahay ákhriska. *Sahra likes reading/to read.*

Some verbal nouns have developed special meanings and usages.

horreeyaa *is up front, comes first* **ugú horreýntii** *first of all*
weydiyaa *asks* **weydiin -ta** *question*

§ 7.4 Compounds

There are several different types of compound nouns with regard to their structure. The common trait is that a compound noun only has one high tone and only one definite article at the end of the compound.

bád wéyn *a big sea*

badwéyn *an ocean*

bádda wéyn *the big sea*

badwéynta *the ocean*

Many are formed just by joining two stems, as in the example above.

Others are formed with the addition of a suffix, often **-éed** or **-e**.

éray *word*, **su'aál** *question*

eraysu'aaléed *question word*

mádax *head, chief*, **wéyn** *big*

madaxweýne *president*

Some are formed in even more complex ways.

mágac *noun*, **ú** *for*, **yaal** *stands*

magacuyáal *pronoun*

Many compounds show a lot of spelling variation. Traditionally, joint writing has been recommended, but today separate writing has become very common, and hyphens are also used sometimes.

eraysu'aaleed / **eray su'aaleed** / **eray-su'aaleed** *question word*

magacuyáal / **magac u yaal** / **magac-u-yaal** / **magac uyaal** *pronoun*

§ 8. Numeric nouns

(a) In Somali, numerals are not a separate word class. They are simply nouns, just like *pair*, *trio* or *dozen* are nouns in English. When an ending is added to a noun phrase containing a numeral, the ending is added to the numeral, not the following noun. The noun after the numeral is in the counting form (see § 6.7), which does not permit the addition of any other endings.

labá wiil	<i>two boys</i>
labáda wiil	<i>the two boys</i>
labádiisi wiil	<i>his two sons/boys, you know</i>

(b) The Somali numbers 2–8 are feminine nouns, whereas all higher numbers are masculine. **Ków** (1) is feminine, whereas **hál** (1) and **éber** (0) are masculine. The numbers 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, and 100 have a high tone that is exceptional with respect to the gender of the word.

0	éber (m.)		
1	ków (f.) / hál (m.)	10	tobán (m.)
2	lábo / lába (f.)	20	labaátan (m.)
3	sáddex (f.)	30	sóddon (m.)
4	áfar (f.)	40	afártan (m.)
5	shán (f.)	50	kónton (m.)
6	líp (f.)	60	líxdan (m.)
7	toddóbo / toddóba (f.)	70	toddobaátan (m.)
8	siddéed (f.)	80	siddeétan (m.)
9	sagaál (m.)	90	sagaáshan (m.) /l/+t/ > /sh/
		100	boqól (m.)
		200	labá boqol
		300	sáddex boqol ...

(c) In complex numbers, **ków** is used, but when reading a sequence of figures, such as a phone number, **hál** is used. Also when telling the number of objects, i.e., when there is only one object of some kind, **hál** is used.

kow iyo toban *eleven*

saddex, hal, afar, siddeed *three, one, four, eight* (e.g., a PIN code)

hal buug *one book*

(d) Tens from 20 to 90 contain the suffix **-tan/-ton**, a contraction of the word **tobán** *ten*. The initial /t/ of the suffix is adapted to the preceding consonant in the same way as in the definite article, but it remains unchanged after a vowel. The preceding vowel, however, becomes long.

§ 9. Pronouns

Somali has fewer genuine pronouns than English. Nouns dominate in Somali and are also used as equivalents to many English pronouns or pronominal adverbs. Such nouns are often combined with demonstrative endings such as **-kan** / **-tan** *this*, **-kaa(s)** / **-taa(s)** *that* (see § 9.3) or interrogative endings such as **-keé** / **-teé?** / **-má?** *which?* (see § 9.5).

qóf <i>person</i>	= <i>somebody, someone</i>
wáx <i>thing</i>	= <i>something</i>
sí <i>manner</i>	sídan <i>like this, this way, (in) this manner</i> sídaa(s) <i>like that, that way, (in) that manner</i> sideé? <i>how?, what way, (in) what manner</i>
hál <i>place</i>	háلكan <i>here, (in, to) this place</i> háلكaa(s) <i>there, (in, to) that place</i> halkeé? <i>where?, (in, to) which place?</i>
xág <i>side, direction</i>	xaggeé? <i>where?</i>
kól <i>moment</i>	kólkaa(s) <i>then, (in) that moment</i>
már <i>moment</i>	márkaa(s) <i>then, (in) that moment</i>
wákhti/wáqti <i>time</i>	waqtigeé? / wakhtigeé? <i>when?, (at) what time?</i>
goór <i>moment</i>	goormá? <i>when?, (at) what time?</i>
	and many more...

§ 9.1 First Person Plural: *we, us, our*

In Somali it is possible to make a distinction between two different meanings of the pronouns *we, us, our*. Standard Somali has (especially in a higher stylistic register) including and excluding forms, depending on whether one wants to include or exclude the person(s) spoken to.

In colloquial Somali, however, most speakers don't make this distinction, and one of the forms has been generalised for both functions.

An example of the distinction might be when some parents tell their children that *We are going to a party on Saturday*. This might mean that the children have to stay at home (excluding them from the *we*) or that they can also come (including them in the *we*). In standard Somali it is possible to express this distinction through different forms of the pronoun *we*.

	including	excluding
Independent pronominal noun	innága	annága
Short / clitic subject pronoun	aynu	aannu
Short / clitic object pronoun	ina	na
Short / clitic object pronoun + ú	inoó	noó
Possessive pronoun	kéenna, téenna	kaayága, taayáda

§ 9.2 Personal Pronouns

	SHORT SUBJECT FORMS		SHORT OBJECT FORMS	
1 p. sing.	aan	<i>I</i>	i	<i>me</i>
2 p. sing.	aad	<i>you</i>	ku	<i>you</i>
3 p. sing. m.	uu	<i>he, it</i>	–	<i>him, it</i>
3 p. sing. f.	ay	<i>she, it</i>	–	<i>her, it</i>
1 p. plur.excl.	aan / aannu	<i>we</i>	na	<i>us</i>
1 p. plur.incl.	aynu / aan	<i>we</i>	ina	<i>us</i>
2 p. plur.	aad / aydin	<i>you</i>	idin	<i>you</i>
3 p. plur.	ay	<i>they</i>	–	<i>them</i>

In Somali there are no object pronouns in the 3rd person corresponding to *him, her, it, them*. If a verb normally takes an object and there isn't any word in the clause expressing such an object, then the object has to be deducted from the preceding context and an object pronoun has to be added in a translation into English.

Waan siraynaa. *We will deceive them/her/him.*

Aabbihiis wuxuu siiyey shan shilin. *His father gave him five shillings.*

This also applies if there is a preposition in the clause, but no noun for that preposition to refer to.

Waxay ku tiri, “Ma kartid.” *She said to him: – You can’t do it.*

Immisa shilin baa u soo hartay?

How many shillings remained for her/him/them?

Lo’du waa xayawaan waxtar leh. Maxaa aynu ka helnaa?

Cows are useful animals. What do we get from them?

§ 9.2.1 The Indefinite Subject Pronoun *la*

Like many other languages Somali has an indefinite subject pronoun: **la**. It is equivalent to French *on* and German *man*, and it often corresponds to *one* or *you* or *they* in English. It is used more frequently in Somali than in the other languages since Somali doesn’t have a passive construction.

Albaábka waxa lagú sameeyay lóox.

They have made the door with wood. = The door is made of wood.

§ 9.2.2 Noun Forms of Personal Pronouns

Alongside the short personal pronouns there are also longer forms which function as nouns. They end with the definite article, and they are used for additional clarity or emphasis.

1 p. sing.	aníga	<i>I, me</i>
2 p. sing.	adíga	<i>you</i>
3 p. sing. masc.	isága	<i>he, him, it</i>
3 p. sing. fem.	iyáda	<i>she, her, it</i>
1 p. plur.excl.	annága	<i>we, us (excluding you)</i>
1 p. plur.incl.	innága	<i>we, us (including you)</i>
2 p. plur.	idínka	<i>you</i>
3 p. plur.	iyága	<i>they, them</i>

Since these forms behave like any other noun they also take the subject ending **-u** when they are used as the subject of a clause.

§ 9.2.3 Obligatory short object pronouns

The short object pronouns in the 1st and 2nd person must always be used, even if the longer pronominal nouns are used for clarity or emphasis.

Adíga yáa ku ilaaliya? *Who takes care of you?*

you who.FOC **you**.OBJ watches.out

§ 1.1.1 The reflexive object pronoun *is*

The pronoun **is** corresponds to both ...*self* and *each other*.

Xáaskii Díinku wáy is qarisay. *The Turtle's wife hid herself.*

Sahró iyo Áxmed wáa ay is eegeen. *Sahra and Ahmed looked at each other.*

Way islá hadlayaan. *They talked with each other.*

It is also used in the 1st and 2nd person.

Wáa aan is qariyay. *I hid myself.*

Wáa aad is qarisay. *You hid yourself.*

Wáa aan is qarinnay. *We hid ourselves.*

Wáa aad is qariseen. *You hid yourselves.*

§ 9.3 Demonstrative pronouns

The independent demonstrative pronouns have two different gender forms in the singular and one common form in the plural.

	MASC.SING.	FEM.SING	PLURAL	
<i>the</i>	ka	ta	kúwa	<i>the</i>
<i>this</i>	kán	tán	kúwan	<i>these</i>
<i>that</i>	kaá	taá	kúwaa	<i>those</i>
<i>that one over there</i>	kaás	taás	kúwaas	<i>those over there</i>
<i>that one, you know</i>	kií	tií	kúwii	<i>those, you know</i>

The singular forms of these pronouns are also added as endings to nouns, both in the singular and in the plural. The initial consonant of the demonstrative ending is always identical to the consonant of the definite article. See § 4.1 and § 6.3.

kábta	<i>the shoe</i>	mindída	<i>the knife</i>
kábtan	<i>this shoe</i>	mindídan	<i>this knife</i>
kábtaas	<i>that shoe</i>	mindídaas	<i>that knife</i>
kábtii	<i>that shoe, you know</i>	mindídii	<i>that knife, you know</i>
kabáha	<i>the shoes</i>	mindiyáha	<i>the knives</i>
kabáhan	<i>these shoes</i>	mindiyáhan	<i>these knives</i>
kabáhaas	<i>those shoes</i>	mindiyáhaas	<i>those knives</i>
kabíhii ⁶	<i>those shoes, y.k.</i>	mindiyíhii	<i>those knives, you know</i>
báska	<i>the bus</i>	gúriga	<i>the house</i>
báskan	<i>this bus</i>	gúrgan	<i>this house</i>
báskaas	<i>that bus</i>	gúrigaas	<i>that house</i>
báskii	<i>that bus, you know</i>	gúrigii	<i>that house, you know</i>
basáska	<i>the buses</i>	guryáha	<i>the houses</i>
basáskan	<i>these buses</i>	guryáhan	<i>these houses</i>

⁶ /i/ in the suffix spreads across /h/ so that a preceding /a/ becomes assimilated. See § 4.2.1.

basáskaas	<i>those buses</i>	guryáhaas	<i>those houses</i>
basáskii	<i>those buses</i>	guryíhii	<i>those houses</i>

§ 9.3.1 The use of the placeholders *ka, ta, kuwa*

This shortest form of the demonstratives is used as a dummy pronoun or a placeholder, e.g. when a modifier is used without a head noun.

ka kale	<i>the other (one)</i>	kuwa kale	<i>the other ones</i>
ka cusub	<i>the new one</i>	ka labaad	<i>the second one</i>

§ 9.3.2 The use of the proximal forms in *-an*

The morpheme **-an** is used to refer to objects close by, and a variation is at hand between the more neutral **-an** and the marked southern **-aan**.

kábtan	<i>this shoe</i>	mindídan	<i>this knife</i>
(kábtan ^s)		(mindídan ^s)	
báskan	<i>this bus</i>	gúriḡan	<i>this house</i>
(báskan ^s)		(gúriḡan ^s)	

§ 9.3.3 The use of the distal forms in *-aas*

The morpheme **-aas** is used to refer to objects at a distance.

§ 9.3.4 The use of anaphoric forms in *-aa*

When the demonstratives in **-aas** are not used to refer to a distant object, but to refer to something previously mentioned or otherwise emerging from the context, the final **-s** is often dropped, so that the pronouns and suffixes just end in **-aa**.

§ 9.3.5 The use of the demonstrative forms in *-ii*

The forms in *-ii* are mainly used. They are however also used in certain other contexts

(a) The basic function is to refer to objects that are not present, but are considered to be known from before to both the speaker and the listener.

(b) Sometimes the speaker only pretends that the object is known to the listener, or implies that it ought to be known to most people. This is often the case with prominent characters in different stories.

(c) It is further used in expression of time when referring to the past.

(d) It is used when telling the time.

Waa immisadii?	<i>What time is it?</i>
Waa shantii.	<i>It's five o'clock.</i>
Waa saddexdii iyo badhkii.	<i>It's half past three.</i>

(e) It is also used in expression of time with a general reference, i.e. when not referring to any specific point in time.

Maalintii ilayska waxa aynu ka helnaa qorraxda.	<i>During the day we get light from the sun.</i>
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(f) Furthermore, it is used in distributive expressions of repetition and frequency. An important case are expressions of percentage.

§ 9.4 Possessive pronouns

The independent possessive pronouns have two different gender forms in the singular and a one common form in the plural.

The owner is:	The owned object is:			
	MASC.SING.	FEM.SING.	PLURAL	
1 SG.	káyga	táyda	kúwayga	<i>mine</i>
2 SG.	káaga	táada	kúwaaga	<i>yours</i>
3 SG. M.	kíisa	tíisa	kúwiisa	<i>his, its</i>
3 SG. F.	kéeda	téeda	kúweeda	<i>hers, its</i>
1 PL. EXCL.	kaayága	taayáda	kúwayāga	<i>ours</i>
1 PL. INCL.	kéenna	téenna	kúweenna	<i>ours</i>
2 PL.	kíinna	tíinna	kúwiinna	<i>yours</i>
3 PL.	kóoda	tóoda	kúwooda	<i>theirs</i>

Functioning as a subject, these possessive pronouns end in **-u**. See § 13.1.1.

The singular forms of these pronouns are also added as endings to nouns, both in the singular and in the plural. The initial consonant of the possessive ending is always identical to the consonant of the definite article. See § 4.1 and § 6.3.

kábta	<i>the shoe</i>	mindída	<i>the knife</i>
kábtayda	<i>my shoe</i>	mindídayda	<i>my knife</i>
kábtaada	<i>your shoe</i>	mindídaada	<i>your knife</i>
kábteeda	<i>her shoe</i>	mindídeeda	<i>her knife</i>
kábtooda	<i>their shoe</i>	mindídooda	<i>their knife</i>
kabáha	<i>the shoes</i>	mindiyáha	<i>the knives</i>
kabáhayga	<i>my shoes</i>	mindiyáhayga	<i>my knives</i>
kabáhaaga	<i>your shoes</i>	mindiyáhaaga	<i>your knives</i>
kabáheeda	<i>her shoes</i>	mindiyáheeda	<i>her knives</i>
kabáhooda	<i>their shoes</i>	mindiyáhooda	<i>their knives</i>

báska	<i>the bus</i>	gúriga	<i>the house</i>
báskayga	<i>my bus</i>	gúrigayga	<i>my house</i>
báskaaga	<i>your bus</i>	gúrigaaga	<i>your house</i>
báskiisa	<i>his bus</i>	gúrigiisa	<i>his house</i>
báskooda	<i>their bus</i>	gúrigooda	<i>their house</i>
basáska	<i>the buses</i>	guryáha	<i>the houses</i>
basáskayga	<i>my buses</i>	guryáhayga	<i>my houses</i>
basáskaaga	<i>your buses</i>	guryáhaaga	<i>your houses</i>
basáskiisa	<i>his buses</i>	guryíhiisa ⁷	<i>his houses</i>
basáskooda	<i>their buses</i>	guryáhooda	<i>their houses</i>

Notice that at the end of the possessive pronouns and endings, there is actually a definite article, e.g., **gúrigayga** *my house*. Also in many other languages the possessive pronouns are used together with the definite article, e.g., Italian *la mia casa* = **gúrigayga** *my house*.

§ 9.4.1 Short possessive endings

After a small number of nouns that denote family and friend relationships between two persons, special shorter forms of the possessive endings are used, without the final definite article.

FULL FORMS			SHORT FORMS	
-kayga	-tayda	<i>my</i>	-kay	-tay
-kaaga	-taada	<i>your</i>	-kaa	-taa
-kiisa	-tiisa	<i>his, its</i>	-kiis	-tiis
-keeda	-teeda	<i>her, its</i>	-keed	-teed
-kayaga	-tayada	<i>our (excl.)</i>	-kayo	-tayo
-keenna	-teenna	<i>our (incl.)</i>	-keen	-teen
-kiinna	-tiinna	<i>your</i>	-kiin	-tiin
-kooda	-tooda	<i>their</i>	-kood	-tood

⁷ /i/ in the suffix spreads across /h/ so that a preceding /a/ becomes assimilated. See § 4.2.1.

Words that are used with the short possessive endings are above all **hoóyo** *mother*, **aábbe** *father*, **waálid** *parents*, **walaál** *sibling*, **habaryár** *maternal aunt*, **abtí** *maternal uncle*, **eéddo** *paternal aunt*, **adeér** *paternal uncle*, **ayeéyo** *grandmother*, **awoówe** *grandfather*, **saaxiib** *friend*, **saaxiibád** *female friend*.⁸

hooyáday	<i>my mother</i>	aabbáhay	<i>m father</i>
hooyádaa	<i>your mther</i>	aabbáhaa	<i>your father</i>
hooyádiis	<i>his mother</i>	aabbáheed	<i>her father</i>
hooyádood	<i>their mother</i>	aabbáhood	<i>their father</i>

The full possessive endings are however used with nouns that do not exclusively denote relationships between two persons, such as **nín** *man* (*husband*), **wíil** *boy* (*son*), **gabádh/gabár** *girl* (*daughter*), as well as the collective noun **carruúr** *children*. You can be a man without having a wife, or a child without having parents.

Also, if a modifier is added, for example an adjective, the full possessive endings will be used.

saaxiibáday	<i>my (girl)friend</i>
saaxiibádayda cusub	<i>my new (girl)friend</i>

§ 9.4.2 Implied possessive relations

In possessive constructions where a person is associated with something whose sole "possessor" this person isn't, it is common to use a plural possessive marker.

Aaminá aabbáhood	<i>Amina's (and her siblings') father</i> (lit. <i>Amina their father</i>)
Rooblé fásalkooda	<i>Roble's (and his classmates') class</i> (lit. <i>Roble their class</i>)

⁸ Also in Italian there is a similar distinction between, e.g., *la mia casa* 'my house', with the article, and *mia sorella* 'my sister', without it.

§ 9.4.3 Partitive use of possessive suffixes

The possessive endings are commonly used in so called partitive constructions after words that express some kind of measure. With numbers the full possessive suffixes are used, but with certain other nouns the short possessive suffixes are generally preferred.

labadooda	<i>both of them, the two of them</i>
qaarkood	<i>part of them, some of them</i>
badankood	<i>many of them</i>
dhammaántood	<i>all of them</i>
kúlligeen, kulligood	<i>all of us, all of them</i>

§ 9.4.4 Possessive + demonstrative suffix

The demonstrative endings can be added after the possessive endings instead of the definite article that is part of the full possessive forms.

Cumar wuxuu dhammeeyay mundulkiisii.

*Omar has completed **his** hut, **you know**.*

§ 9.5 Interrogative pronouns

Almost all interrogatives in Somali contain one of the two interrogative morphemes /ee/ and /ma/.

	MASC.SG	FEM.SG.	PLURAL	
<i>who?</i>	ayó			
<i>who?, which?</i>	kúma	túma	kúwama	<i>what persons?</i>
<i>what?</i>		maxáy		
<i>which one?</i>	keé	teé	kúwee	<i>which ones?</i>

The singular forms **keé** and **teé** may also be added as endings to nouns, both in the singular and in the plural. The high tone then disappears from the stem of the noun. The initial consonant of the possessive ending is always identical to the consonant of the definite article. See § 4.1 and § 6.3.

INDEF. FORM	DEF. FORM	INTERROGATIVE FORM	
xág <i>side, direction</i>	xágga	xaggeé?	<i>which direction?, where?</i>
hál <i>place</i>	hálka	halkeé?	<i>which place?, where?</i>
éray <i>word</i>	érayga	eraygeé?	<i>which word?</i>
erayó <i>word</i>	erayáda	erayadeé?	<i>which words?</i>

Dhárka Xasan waa midabkeé? *Which colour are Hassan's clothes?*

With certain nouns the interrogative ending **-ma** is often preferred.

INDEF. FORM	INTERROGATIVE FORM	
goór <i>moment</i>	goormá? / goorteé?	<i>which moment? when?</i>

§ 9.5.1 Interrogative use of possessive forms

When asking for someone's name, **short** possessive endings are used with an interrogative effect. In order to signalise this interrogative function, the high tone is lost on the noun itself and only realised on the ending, in a similar manner as with the interrogative ending **-eé**.

Magacáa? ⁹ *(What's) your name?*

Magacéed? *(What's) her name?*

Magaciis? *(What's) his name?*

⁹ Notice that /k/ is lost after a stem that ends in /c/.

§ 10. Adjectives

Somali doesn't have as many basic, non-derived adjectives as English. Some of the most frequent ones are:

adág <i>hard</i>	cád <i>white, light</i>	culús <i>heavy</i>
cusúb <i>new</i>	dhéer <i>long, tall</i>	dhów <i>close</i>
fóg <i>distant</i>	fudúd <i>light, easy</i>	jecél <i>fond (of)</i>
madów <i>black, dark</i>	nóol <i>living, alive</i>	wéyn <i>big</i>
xún <i>bad</i>	yár <i>little, small</i>	

§ 10.1.1 Adjectives Derived from Nouns

Quite many adjectives are derived from nouns through different suffixes that often end in **-n** such as **-án**, **-sán**, **-óon**.

wanáag <i>something good</i>	wanaagsán <i>good</i>
fárax <i>happiness</i>	faraxsán <i>happy</i>
gáab <i>shortness, something short</i>	gaabán <i>short</i>
qurúx <i>beauty</i>	qurxoón <i>beautiful</i>

Many adjectives are also derived from nouns through the suffix **-eéd**.

Soomaáli <i>a Somali</i>	Soomaaliyeéd <i>Somali</i>
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A few are derived through the use of **-aad**.

kiimíko <i>chemistry, chemicals</i>	kiimikaád <i>chemical</i>
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§ 10.1.2 Ordinal Numbers

Ordinal numbers are adjectives. They are all formed in a regular way by adding the adjectival suffix **-aad** to the cardinal noun.

1 = ków	<i>one</i>	1aad = koowaád / kowaád	<i>first</i>
2 = lába / lábo	<i>two</i>	2aad = labaád	<i>second</i>
3 = sáddex	<i>three</i>	3aad = saddexaád	<i>third</i>

4 = áfar	four	4aad = afraad / afaraad	fourth
5 = shán	five	5aad = shanaad	fifth

§ 10.1.3 Adjectives Derived from Verbs

Adjectives derived from verbs may be referred to as PARTICIPLES or DEVERBAL ADJECTIVES. They are formed through the addition of the ending *-án* or *-sán*.

sawiraa, sawirtaa <i>draws</i>	sawirán <i>drawn</i>
qoraa, qortaa <i>writes</i>	qorán <i>written</i>
sameeyaa, samaysaa <i>does, makes</i>	samaysán <i>done, made</i>

§ 10.2 The Inflection of Adjectives

Somali adjectives have very few inflectional forms. The gender and definiteness of a noun has no effect on an accompanying adjective.

gabár yar <i>a small girl</i>	wíil yar <i>a small boy</i>
gabárta yar <i>the small girl</i>	wíilka yar <i>the small boy</i>

§ 10.2.1 The Distributive Form

Adjectives inflect for something rather similar to a plural form through reduplication of the beginning of the word. In most adjectives the initial syllable is repeated, but some irregularities exist.

BASE FORM		DISTRIBUTIVE FORM
yár	<i>little</i>	yaryár
wanaagsán	<i>good</i>	wanwanaagsán
gaabán	<i>short</i>	gaagaabán
dhээр	<i>long</i>	dhaadhээр
wéyn	<i>big</i>	waawéyn

This form expresses a repetition or spreading (distribution) of the quality, either to different objects or to different parts of an object. Therefore this form doesn't automatically occur together with nouns in the plural.

Furthermore, it may occur together with nouns in the singular, especially collective nouns as well as mass nouns composed of several small parts.

dád waaweyn *grownup people, adults*, **carruúr yaryar** *small children*

cáws dhaadheer *long grass* (since each straw is long)

It is not obligatory to use the distributive form, but with common adjectives it is very frequently used. With less common adjectives, however, this form is less frequent.

§ 10.3 The Comparative Degree

To express the equivalent of the English comparative degree, the preposition **ká** *than, from, of* is placed before the adjective. In Somali there is no comparative form of the adjective itself.

Shan waa ay ká yar tahay siddéed. *Five is less than eight.*

(lit. *Five it is little from eight.*)

§ 10.4 The Superlative Degree

The equivalent of the English superlative degree is expressed by the particle **ugú** *(the) most, the very -st* which expresses a meaning similar to *the most* or *the very*.

ugú wéyn *(the very) biggest, the most big*

§ 11. Verbs

Almost all Somali verbs are inflected in a completely regular and predictable way. There are only six irregular verbs.

Just like in French, German, Finnish, Russian, Arabic and many other languages, there are different verb forms in Somali for the first person (*I, we*), the second person (*you*) and the third person (*he, she, it, they*) in the singular as well as in the plural. In the third person singular there are also different forms for the masculine (*he*) and the feminine (*she*), as in Arabic.

§ 11.1 The Presens Tense

The suffix /aa/ expresses the present tense.

The suffix /t/ expresses the 2nd person (*you*), both singular and plural, as well as in the feminine 3rd person singular (*she*).

The suffix /n/ expresses the plural (*we, you, they*).

1 sg.	<i>I</i>	-aa	heesaa	<i>I sing</i>
2 sg.	<i>you</i>	-taa	heestaa	<i>you sing</i>
3 sg.m.	<i>he, it</i>	-aa	heesaa	<i>he sings</i>
3 sg.f.	<i>she, it</i>	-taa	heestaa	<i>she sings</i>
1 pl.	<i>we</i>	-naa	heesnaa	<i>we sing</i>
2 pl.	<i>you</i>	-taan	heestaan	<i>you sing</i>
3 pl.	<i>they</i>	-aan	heesaan	<i>they sing</i>

§ 11.2 The Past Tense

The past tense is expressed by the suffix /ay/, which is however replaced by /ee/ before /n/. The suffixes expressing person and number are exactly the same as in the present tense.

1 sg	<i>I</i>	-ay	heesay	<i>I sang</i>
2 sg	<i>you</i>	-tay	heestay	<i>you sang</i>
3 sg.m.	<i>he, it</i>	-ay	heesay	<i>he sang</i>
3 sg.f.	<i>she, it</i>	-tay	heestay	<i>she sang</i>
1 pl.	<i>we</i>	-nay	heesnay	<i>we sang</i>
2 pl.	<i>you</i>	-teen	heesteen	<i>you sang</i>
3 pl.	<i>they</i>	-een	heeseen	<i>they sang</i>

There is only one past tense in Somali, corresponding to all the three past tenses in English: PAST (*sang*), PRESENT PERFECT (*has sung*), PAST PERFECT (*had sung*). Somali however has aspects, just like English. See § 11.4 and § 11.6.

§ 11.3 Sound alternations

The regular verbs can be divided into three different groups, also called CONJUGATIONS, with just a few tiny differences between those groups.

However, quite a few different sound alternations occur in all groups, depending on the last sound of the stem and the first sound in the ending.

In the examples below, only the present tense forms are given, but of course, the exact same alternations also occur in the past tense.

§ 11.3.1 Type 1 verbs

This group contains mainly verbs with a stem ending in a consonant.

(a) If the stem ends in /d, y, w, c, h, x, kh, q, ' / a following /t/ becomes /d/ just as it does in the different suffixes that are added to nouns. See § 4.1.

1 sg	bood-aa <i>jumps</i>	dhac-aa <i>falls; happens</i>
2 sg	bood-daa	dhac-daa
3 sg.m.	bood-aa	dhac-aa
3 sg.f.	bood-daa	dhac-daa
1 pl.	bood-naa	dhac-naa
2 pl.	bood-daan	dhac-daan
3 pl.	bood-aan	dhac-aan

(b) The /t/ in the suffixes merges with a preceding /l/ in the stem. The result is /sh/.

1 sg	hel-aa <i>finds, gets</i>
2 sg	heshaa
3 sg.m.	hel-aa
3 sg.f.	heshaa
1 pl.	hel-naa
2 pl.	heshaan
3 pl.	hel-aan

(c) The /t/ in the suffixes merges with a preceding /dh/ in the stem. The result is a long /dhdh/. This is however not reflected in the spelling, since the letter <dh> is never doubled.

Such forms with /dh/ occur mainly in the north-west. The same verbs are usually pronounced with a /r/ in the south and east, which does not give rise to any sound alternations.

1 sg	hadh-aa ^N <i>remains</i>	har-aa ^S <i>remains</i>
2 sg	hadhaa [had dh haa]	har-taa
3 sg.m.	hadh-aa	har-aa
3 sg.f.	hadhaa [had dh haa]	har-taa
1 pl.	hadh-naa	har-naa
2 pl.	hadhaan [had dh haan]	har-taan
3 pl.	hadh-aan	har-aan

(d) If the stem ends in /k/ or /m/, this consonant alters with /g/ and /n/ before endings beginning with a consonant. The reason is that /k/ and /m/ can only occur if directly followed by a vowel.

1 sg	buk-aa <i>is ill</i>	tartam-aa <i>competes</i>
2 sg	bug-taa	tartan-taa
3 sg.m.	buk-aa	tartam-aa
3 sg.f.	bug-taa	tartan-taa
1 pl.	bug-naa	tartan-naa
2 pl.	bug-taan	tartan-taan
3 pl.	buk-aan	tartam-aan

(e) If the stem ends in two consonants, they must be separated by an inserted vowel when the following ending begins with a consonant. A cluster of three consonants is impossible in Somali. Usually, it is the vowel already present in the stem that is copied.

1 sg	gudb-aa <i>passes</i>	dalb-aa <i>requests</i>
2 sg	gudub-taa	dalab-taa
3 sg.m.	gudb-aa	dalb-aa
3 sg.f.	gudub-taa	dalab-taa
1 pl.	gudub-naa	dalab-naa
2 pl.	gudub-taan	dalab-taan
3 pl.	gudb-aan	dalb-aan

(f) Some verbs exhibit both vowel insertion and consonant alternation.

1 sg	ord-aa <i>runs</i>	ark-aa <i>sees</i>
2 sg	orod-daa	arag-taa
3 sg.m.	ord-aa	ark-aa
3 sg.f.	orod-daa	arag-taa
1 pl.	orod-naa	arag-naa
2 pl.	orod-daan	arag-taan
3 pl.	ord-aan	ark-aan

1 sg	hadl-aa <i>talks</i>	kulm-aa <i>meets</i>
2 sg	hadashaa ¹⁰	kulan-taa
3 sg.m.	hadl-aa	kulm-aa
3 sg.f.	hadashaa	kulan-taa
1 pl.	hadal-naa	kulan-naa
2 pl.	hadashaan	kulan-taan
3 pl.	hadl-aan	kulm-aan

The inserted vowel in the last verb is unexpected, since it is not a copy of the vowel in the root.

¹⁰ As usual, /l/ + /t/ > /sh/. See § 4.1.

§ 11.3.2 Type 2 verbs

This group contains mainly verbs with a stem ending in /i/ or /ee/.

When the ending begins with a vowel, the consonant /y/ is inserted as a buffer between the vowel of the stem and that in the suffix.

(a) A /t/ in the ending changes to /s/ after the vowel /i/.

Between two vowels the ending in the 1st person plural becomes /nnaa/.

1 sg	siiyaa <i>gives</i>	fiiriyaa <i>looks</i>
2 sg	sii-saa	fiiri-saa
3 sg.m.	siiyaa	fiiriyaa
3 sg.f.	sii-saa	fiiri-saa
1 pl.	siinnaa	fiirinnaa
2 pl.	sii-saan	fiiri-saan
3 pl.	siiyaan	fiiriyaan

(b) A final long /ee/ in the stem changes to the diphthong /ey/, most often written <ay>, when the ending begins with a consonant.

A /t/ in the ending changes to /s/ also after the consonant /y/.

1 sg	sameeyaa <i>does, makes</i>	
2 sg	samey-saa or samay-saa	
3 sg.m.	sameeyaa	
3 sg.f.	samey-saa or samay-saa	
1 pl.	samey-naa or samay-naa	
2 pl.	samey-saan or samay-saan	
3 pl.	sameeyaan	

(c) A few verbs exhibit a variation between type 1 and type 2.

According to type 2 we find the alternation /t/ > /s/ after /i/.

According to type 1 we find the alternation /t/ > /d/ after /i/.

1 sg	akhriyaa reads	akhriyaa reads
2 sg	akhri-saa	akhri-daa
3 sg.m.	akhriyaa	akhriyaa
3 sg.f.	akhri-saa	akhri-daa
1 pl.	akhrinnaa	akhrinnaa
2 pl.	akhri-saan	akhri-daan
3 pl.	akhriyaan	akhriyaan

§ 11.3.3 Type 3 verbs

This group contains mainly verbs with a stem ending in /t/. As a beginner it is easy to mistake such masculine 3rd person singular forms for feminine forms. This /t/ is used to derive new verbs, especially autobenefactive verbs, from other verbs or of nouns. Autobenefactive verbs express actions that have some positive effect for the person carrying out the action.

Type 3 verbs have two different inflectional stems, one when the ending begins with a vowel and another when the ending begins with a consonant.

Before an ending that begins with a consonant, the stem ends in a vowel and that stem is therefore called the VOWEL STEM.

Before an ending that begins with a vowel, the stem ends in a consonant and that stem is therefore called the CONSONANT STEM.

Notice that the 1st person plural always ends in **-nnaa** in type 3 verbs.

(a) In the most basic cases, the consonant stem ends in /t/ whereas the vowel stem ends in /a/.

1 sg	hayst-aa <i>holds, has</i>	dhigt-aa <i>studies</i>
2 sg	haysa-taa	dhiga-taa
3 sg.m.	hayst-aa	dhigt-aa
3 sg.f.	haysa-taa	dhiga-taa
1 pl.	haysa-nnaa	dhiga-nnaa
2 pl.	haysa-taan	dhiga-taan
3 pl.	hayst-aan	dhigt-aan

Other verbs of this type:

bart-aa, bara-taa *learns*

(b) After the consonants /d, y, w, c, h, x, kh, q, '/, the stem final /t/ is replaced by /d/. See § 4.1.

1 sg	booqd-aa <i>visits</i>
2 sg	booqa-taa
3 sg.m.	booqd-aa
3 sg.f.	booqa-taa
1 pl.	booqa-nnaa
2 pl.	booqa-taan
3 pl.	booqd-aan

(c) Many verbs of type 3 have a consonant stem ending in /ad/, whereas the vowel stem just ends in /a/. This always happens after a cluster of two consonants, as well as after certain single consonants such as /k/ and /sh/.

1 sg	gashad-aa <i>puts on (clothes)</i>
2 sg	gasha -taa
3 sg.m.	gashad-aa
3 sg.f.	gasha -taa
1 pl.	gasha -nnaa
2 pl.	gasha -taan
3 pl.	gashad-aan

Other verbs of this type:

bogsadaa	bogsataa	<i>recovers</i>
dhaansadaa	dhaansataa	<i>fetches water</i>
kaydsadaa	kaydsataa	<i>keeps, stores</i>
karsadaa	karsataa	<i>cooks for oneself</i>
tukadaa	tukataa	<i>prays</i>

(c) Several verbs of type 3 have a consonant stem ending in /aad/, whereas the vowel stem just ends in /aa/. This mainly happens in verbs that are derived from adjectives.

1 sg	dhammaad-aa <i>finishes, ends</i> (intransitive)
2 sg	dhammaa -taa
3 sg.m.	dhammaad-aa
3 sg.f.	dhammaa -taa
1 pl.	dhammaa -nnaa
2 pl.	dhammaa -taan
3 pl.	dhammaad-aan

This verb is derived from the adjective **dhan** *whole, all*, which has the stem /dhamm/.

(e) A few verbs of type 3 have a /t/ preceded by a vowel in the consonant stem. In such verbs the vowel stem ends in /da/.

1 sg	qaat -aa <i>takes</i>
2 sg	qaada-taa
3 sg.m.	qaat -aa
3 sg.f.	qaada-taa
1 pl.	qaada-nnaa
2 pl.	qaada-taan
3 pl.	qaat -aan

Other verbs of this type:

wataa **wadataa** *drives, leads, carries*

(f) A few verbs of type 3 have a consonant stem that in the north-west ends in /dhdh/ [dh:], whereas in the south and east it ends in /rt/ (and inflects in the basic way). The intense pronunciation of /dhdh/ [dh:] is of course not reflected by the spelling. The vowel stem ends in /dha/ in the north-west and /ra/ in the south and east.

1 sg	xidh -aa ^N	[xidh dh -aa]	xirt -aa ^S <i>puts on (clothes)</i>
2 sg	xidha -taa	[xidh a -taa]	xira -taa
3 sg.m.	xidh -aa	[xidh dh -aa]	xirt -aa
3 sg.f.	xidha -taa	[xidh a -taa]	xira -taa
1 pl.	xidha -nnaa	[xidh a -nnaa]	xira -nnaa
2 pl.	xidha -taan	[xidh a -taan]	xira -taan
3 pl.	xidh -aan	[xidh dh -aa]	xirt -aan

(g) A couple of verbs have a vowel stem ending in /o/ instead of /a/.

1 sg	socd -aa <i>walks</i>
2 sg	soco -taa
3 sg.m.	socd -aa
3 sg.f.	soco -taa
1 pl.	soco -nnaa
2 pl.	soco -taan
3 pl.	socd -aan

Other verbs of this type:

noqdaa **noqotaa** *becomes*

§ 11.4 The Infinitive

The infinitive has two different endings depending on the verb type, i.e. whether the stem ends in a consonant or in a vowel. Verbs of type 1 take the ending **-i**, which is the used after a consonant, whereas verbs of type 2 and 3 take the ending **-n**, used after a vowel. In the infinitive, there is always a high tone on the last vowel position of the stem, before the ending.

		present	infinitiv	
Type 1	-i	qor-taa	qór-i	<i>write</i>
Type 2	-n	akhri-saa	akhrí-n	<i>read</i>
		samay-saa	samaý-n	<i>do, make</i>
Type 3	-n	haysa-taa	haysá-n	<i>have, hold</i>
		soco-taa	socó-n	<i>walk</i>

The Somali infinitive form is far less frequently used than the English infinitive. It only occurs together with a few auxiliary verbs such as **doonaa**, **doontaa** *will*, **jiray**, **jirtay** *used to*, **karaa**, **kartaa** *can*, **waayaa**, **waysaa** *can't*, **lahaa**, **lahayd** *would (have)*...

The auxiliary always follows after the infinitive.

Cali wuu bogsán doonaa. *Ali will get well.*

Sáhra wáxa ay samaýn kartaa waxyaabó badan.

Sahra can do many things.

Corresponding to most other usages of the English infinitive, Somali applies the verbal noun. See § 7.3.

Waa ay jecél yihiin ákhriska. *They like to read.*

§ 11.5 Progressive verb forms

Somali, just like English, has simple and progressive verb forms, but only in the present and the past tense. The progressive forms contain the progressive suffix /ay/. It precedes the person, number and tense endings.

In all progressive forms a following /t/ changes to /s/ since the progressive suffix ends in /y/.

There is always a high tone on the last vowel position before the progressive suffix /ay/.

	SIMPLE PRESENT		PROGRESSIVE PRESENT	
1 sg	heesaa	<i>I sing</i>	heésayaa	<i>I am singing</i>
2 sg	heestaa		heésaysaa	
3 sg.m.	heesaa		heésayaa	
3 sg.f.	heestaa		heésaysaa	
1 pl.	heesnaa		heésaynaa	
2 pl.	heestaan		heésaysaan	
3 pl.	heesaan		heésayaan	
	SIMPLE PAST		PROGRESSIVE PAST	
1 sg	heesay	<i>I sang</i>	heésayay	<i>I was singing</i>
2 sg	heestay		heésaysay	
3 sg.m.	heesay		heésayay	
3 sg.f.	heestay		heésaysay	
1 pl.	heesnay		heésaynay	
2 pl.	heesteen		heésayseen	
3 pl.	heeseen		heésayeen	

In verbs of type 2 and 3, the progressive suffix is always preceded by an /n/, since the progressive forms are based on the infinitive.

2.	siiyaa, siisaa	<i>gives</i>	sií-n-ay-aa	<i>he is giving</i>
	akhriyaa, akhrisaa	<i>reads</i>	akhrí-n-ay-aa	<i>he is reading</i>
	sameeyaa, samaysaa	<i>does</i>	samay'-n-ay-aa	<i>he is doing</i>

In type 3, the vowel stem is used before /n/ of the progressive forms.

	C-STEM, V-STEM		V-STEM	
3.	booqdaa, booqa-taa	<i>takes</i>	booqá-n-ay-aa	<i>he is visiting</i>
	qaataa, qaada-taa	<i>visits</i>	qaadá-n-ay-aa	<i>he is taking</i>
	socdaa, soco-taa	<i>walks</i>	socó-n-ay-aa	<i>he is walking</i>

§ 11.5.1 Progressive present tense expressing near future

Similarly as in English, the Somali present progressive may be used to express actions in an immediate future.

Béri waxaan ká dul boódayaa Maroodí.

Tomorrow I'm jumping over the Elephant.

§ 11.5.2 Verbs without progressive forms

Some verbs are very rarely used in the progressive forms. Above all verbs denoting states (not actions) belong to that group.

rabaa, rabtaa *wishes, wants*

léeyahay, léedahay *has, owns*

haystaa, haysataa *holds, has*

Also, the verb stem **doon-** has developed a meaning difference between the simple and the progressive forms. The simple forms **doonaa, doontaa** are used as future tense auxiliary, corresponding to English *will*, whereas the progressive forms **doónayaa, doónaysaa** are have the modal meaning *wants (to)*.

§ 11.6 The Habitual Past Tense

The habitual past consists of the infinitive of the main verb followed by the auxiliary **jiray**, **jirtay** *used to* in the simple past.

1 sg	waa aan	heési jiray	<i>I used to sing</i>
2 sg	waa aad	heési jirtay	<i>you used to sing</i>
3 sg.m.	waa uu	heési jiray	<i>he used to sing</i>
3 sg.f.	waa ay	heési jirtay	<i>she used to sing</i>
1 pl.	waa aan	heési jirnay	<i>we used to sing</i>
2 pl.	waa aad	heési jirteen	<i>you used to sing</i>
3 pl.	waa ay	heési jireen	<i>they used to sing</i>

The habitual past tense expresses actions that occurred repeatedly in the past.

Maalín waliba waa uu waraabín jiray moxóggii.

Every day he used to water the cassava. / Every day he watered the cassava.

As shown in the example, the auxiliary *used to* is not obligatory in English. In Somali, however, the habitual past is consequently used to describe actions that were repeated in the past.

§ 11.7 The Future Tense

The future tense consists of the infinitive of the main verb followed by the auxiliary **doonaa**, **doontaa** *will* in the simple present tense.

1 sg	waa aan	heési doonaa	<i>I will sing</i>
2 sg	waa aad	heési doontaa	<i>you will sing</i>
3 sg.m.	waa uu	heési doonaa	<i>he will sing</i>
3 sg.f.	waa ay	heési doontaa	<i>she will sing</i>
1 pl.	waa aan	heési doonnaa	<i>we will sing</i>
2 pl.	waa aad	heési doontaan	<i>you will sing</i>
3 pl.	waa ay	heési doonaan	<i>they will sing</i>

The future tense is used to express predicted actions in the future.

Waa uu bogsán doonaa. *He will get well.*

In order to express actions in an immediate future, less as a prediction and more as a fact, the present progressive is often used instead of the future tense.

§ 11.8 Survey of tenses and aspects

		ASPECT:		
TENSE:		SIMPLE	PROGRESSIVE	HABITUAL
PAST		<i>I sang</i>	<i>I was singing</i>	<i>I used to sing</i>
	1 sg	heesay	heésayay	heési jiray
	2 sg	heestay	heésaysay	heési jirtay
	3 sg.m.	heesay	heésayay	heési jiray
	3 sg.f.	heestay	heésaysay	heési jirtay
	1 pl.	heesnay	heésaynay	heési jirnay
	2 pl.	heesteen	heésayseen	heési jirteen
	3 pl.	heeseen	heésayeen	heési jireen
PRESENT		<i>I sing</i>	<i>I am singing</i>	
	1 sg	heesaa	heésayaa	
	2 sg	heestaa	heésaysaa	
	3 sg.m.	heesaa	heésayaa	
	3 sg.f.	heestaa	heésaysaa	
	1 pl.	heesnaa	heésaynaa	
	2 pl.	heestaan	heésaysaan	
	3 pl.	heesaan	heésayaan	
FUTURE		<i>I will sing</i>		
	1 sg	heési doonaa		
	2 sg	heési doontaa		
	3 sg.m.	heési doonaa		
	3 sg.f.	heési doontaa		
	1 pl.	heési doonnaa		
	2 pl.	heési doontaan		
	3 pl.	heési doonaan		

§ 11.9 Reduced verb forms

The full inflection of Somali verbs generally consists of **five** distinct forms: *he=I; she=you(SG); we; you(PL); they*.

Alongside the full inflection, there is also a reduced inflection with only **three** distinctive forms: *he=I=you=they; she; we*.

SIMPLE PRESENT	FULL FORMS	REDUCED FORMS
1 sg.	heesaa	heesa <i>sings</i>
2 sg.	heestaa	heesa
3 sg. m.	heesaa	heesa
3 sg. f.	heestaa	heesta
1 pl.	heesnaa	heesna
2 pl.	heestaan	heesa
3 pl.	heesaan	heesa

The reduced verb inflection only has the suffix **-t-** in the 3rd sg. fem. (*she*) and the suffix **-n-** in the 1st pl. (*we*). Furthermore, the present tense forms have a short **-a** instead of the long **-aa** of the full forms.

There are reduced forms for all the tenses and aspects.

		ASPECT:		
TENSE:		SIMPLE	PROGRESSIVE	HABITUAL
PAST		heesay	heésayay	heési jiray
	3 sg.f.	heestay	heésaysay	heési jirtay
	1 pl.	heesnay	heésaynay	heési jirnay
PRESENT		heesa	heésaya	
	3 sg.f.	heesta	heésaysa	
	1 pl.	heesna	heésayna	
FUTURE		heési doona		
	3 sg.f.	heési doonta		
	1 pl.	heési doonna		

The reduced forms are used in two contexts:

- in main clauses, if the subject of the clause is focused,
- in relative subordinate clauses, if the clause does not contain any word expressing the subject, i.e. the subject of the subclause is the head noun (the antecedent) of the subclause.

Often, the Somali reduced verb forms correspond to participles in other languages, e.g. English participles in *-ing*.

bisad hurdaya *a cat that is sleeping = a sleeping cat*

Some Somali reduced verb forms correspond to adjectives in other languages.

general **soó socd-a** *the following, next*

f. sg. **soó socio-ta**

In other grammatical descriptions of Somali, the REDUCED verb forms are also referred to as SHORT, ATTRIBUTIVE or RELATIVE verb forms, or as the RESTRICTED verb paradigm.

§ 11.10 The Subjunctive Mood

The subjunctive mood forms express actions that are not taking place in the real world. They may be imaginary, wished for, hoped for, or simply not occurring at all. These forms are therefore mainly used in wishes, in subordinate clauses and in negative clauses.

ASPECT:			
TENSE:	SIMPLE	PROGRESSIVE	HABITUAL
PAST SUBJUNCTIVE			
	heesin	heésayn(in)	heési jirin
PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE			
1 sg	heeso	heésayo	
2 sg	heesto / heestid	heésayso / heésaysid	
3 sg.m.	heeso	heésayo	
3 sg.f.	heesto	heésayso	
1 pl.	heesno	heésayno	
2 pl.	heestáan	heésaysáan	
3 pl.	heesáan	heésayáan	
FUTURE SUBJUNCTIVE			
1 sg	heési doono		
2 sg	heési doonto / heési doontid		
3 sg.m.	heési doono		
3 sg.f.	heési doonto		
1 pl.	heési doonno		
2 pl.	heési doontáan		
3 pl.	heési doonáan		

The present subjunctive ends in **-o** instead of **-aa**, whereas the forms in **-aan** are written in the same way in both the subjunctive and the ordinary present tense. However, the subjunctive **-áan** has a high tone on the

second to last vowel position, pronounced as a falling tone over the duration of the long /aa/.

In the 2nd person singular, there are two alternative endings: **-to** or **-tid**. The longer one has a somewhat higher stylistic value.

In the past subjunctive there aren't different forms for the different persons and numbers, only one common form that generally ends in **-in**.

	SIMPLE	PROGRESSIVE
Verb Type 1	-in	-aynin / -ayn
Verb Type 2 & 3	-nin / -n	-naynin / -nayn

§ 11.10.1 Negative forms of the present progressive

The present progressive can be negated in two different ways.

	NEGATION + SUBJUNCTIVE	INFINITIV + "NEGATION VERB"
1 sg.	má heésayo	heési maayo <i>I'm not singing</i>
2 sg.	má heésayso	heési mayso / maysid
3 sg. m.	má heésayo	heési maayo
3 sg. f.	má heésayso	heési mayso
1 pl	má heésayno	heési mayno
2 pl	má heésaysáan	heési maysáan
3 pl	má heésayáan	heési maayáan

§ 11.10.2 Reduced Subjunctive Forms

When there are at the same time two reasons to use the subjunctive forms, special reduced forms are used instead of the full forms presented above.

The reduced subjunctive forms do not differentiate between past and present tense, nor between different persons and numbers.

ASPECT:			
TENSE:	SIMPLE	PROGRESSIVE	HABITUAL
PAST SUBJUNCTIVE	heesin	heésayn(in)	heési jirin
PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE	heesin	heésayn(in)	
FUTURE SUBJUNCTIVE			heési doonin

The reduced subjunctive forms occur mainly used in negative subordinate clauses.

§ 11.10.3 The Optative Construction

The optative consists of the the subjunctive forms of the verb preceded by the short subject pronoun in the 1st and 2nd person, and by the sentence particle **há** in the 3rd person.

1 sg	aan heéso	<i>let me sing</i>
2 sg	aad heésto / heéstid	<i>you should sing</i>
3 sg.m.	há heeso	<i>let him sing</i>
3 sg.f.	há heesto	<i>let her sing</i>
1 pl.	aan heésno	<i>let's sing</i>
2 pl.	aad heéstaan / heésteen	<i>you should sing</i>
3 pl.	há heesaan / heeseen	<i>let them sing</i>

Instead of the subjunctive forms in **-aan**, the past tense forms in **-een** are frequently used.

§ 11.10.4 The Conditional Construction

The conditional consists of the infinitive of the main verb followed by the irregular auxiliary **lahaa**, **lahayd** *would (have)* in the simple past tense.

1 sg	waa aan	heési lahaa	<i>I would have sung</i>
2 sg	waa aad	heési lahayd	<i>you would have sung</i>
3 sg.m.	waa uu	heési lahaa	<i>he would have sung</i>
3 sg.f.	waa ay	heési lahayd	<i>she would have sung</i>
1 pl.	waa aan	heési lahayn	<i>we would have sung</i>
2 pl.	waa aad	heési lahaydeen	<i>you would have sung</i>
3 pl.	waa ay	heési lahaayeen	<i>they would have sung</i>

The conditional is used in sentences with a conditional clause to express that the situation is not a real possibility any more.

The construction is also used in subclauses to express a future action from the perspective of the past.

§ 11.11 The Imperative Mood

The imperative singular form has no ending. It therefore equals the stem of the verb.

The imperative plural form takes the ending **-a**.

In the imperative, the high tone is always on the second to last vowel position, with the exception of verbs of type 3, whose imperative singular form ends in **-ó**.

Type 1.

SIMPLE PRESENT, 3 SG.				IMPERATIVE		
MASC.	FEM.			SG.	PL.	
sawir-aa	sawir-t-aa	<i>draws</i>		sáwir	sawír-a	<i>draw!</i>

In type 2 verbs, the buffer consonant /y/ is inserted between the vowel of the stem and the vowel of the plural ending.

akhri-y-aa	akhri-saa	<i>reads</i>	ákhri	akhrí-y-a	<i>read!</i>
shaqee-y-aa	shaqey-saa	<i>works</i>	shaqée	shaqée-y-a	<i>work!</i>

In type 3 verbs, the vowel stem is used in the singular and the consonant stem in the plural. However, the final vowel of the vowel stem is /o/ in the imperative, not /a/, since its position is now word final.¹¹

booqd-aa	booqa-taa	<i>visits</i>	booqó	boóqd-a	<i>visit!</i>
qaat-aa	qaada-taa	<i>takes</i>	qaadó	qaát-a	<i>take!</i>

¹¹ The same type of alternation is found in feminine nouns like **hooyo** *mor*, **hooyáda** *modern*, with /o/ in word final position, but /a/ when a suffix is added.

§ 11.12 Irregular verbs

Somali has six irregular verbs. They are partly inflected through prefixes. The two most irregular verbs are **yahay** *is* and **leeyahay** *has*. The other four are **yaallaa** *lies*, **yaqaannaa** *knows*, **yimaaddaa** *comes*, and **yiraahdaa** *says*.

§ 11.12.1 The inflection of ‘yahay’

PRESENT	<i>is</i>			REDUCED
1 sg.	ahay	1 pl.	nahay	all persons
2 sg.	tahay	2 pl.	tihiin	ah
3 sg. m.	yahay	3 pl.	yihiin	
3 sg. f.	tahay			
NEGATIVE	<i>isn't</i>			
1 sg.	má ihi (ahi)	1 pl.	má ahin (ihin)	
2 sg.	má tihid	2 pl.	má tihin	
3 sg. m./f./pl.	má aha			
PAST	<i>was</i>			
1 sg.	ahaa	1 pl.	ahayn	
2 sg.	ahayd	2 pl.	ahaydeen	
3 sg. m.	ahaa	3 pl.	ahaayeen	
3 sg. f.	ahayd			
NEGATIVE	<i>wasn't</i>			
all persons	má ahayn			
INFINITIVE	<i>be</i>			
	ahaán			
IMPERATIVE	<i>be!</i>			
2nd sg.	ahów			
2nd pl.	ahaáda			

§ 11.12.1a The use of 'yahay'

(i) If the predicative complement is a noun, no verb is necessary corresponding to English *is/are*. The particle **waa** tells that the clause is a statement.

Aamina waa macallimad. *Amina is a teacher.*

Gacantu waa wasakh. *The hand is dirty.*

the.hand STATEMENT dirty.thing

(ii) If the predicative complement is an adjective the verb **yahay is** is used.

Gacantu waa yár tahay. *The hand is small.*

hand.the STATEMENT small is

(iii) The reduced verb form **ah**, used with focused subjects, is omitted after an adjective. The symbol **×** is used to represent the omitted verb.

Wáx baa ká maqan ×. *Something is missing.*

thing FOC from missing (is)

Eraygeé baa kú habboon × sáwirka?

which.word FOC for suitable (is) the.picture

Which word is suitable for the picture?

§ 11.12.1b Different equivalents of English 'is'

yahay - is = has a quality

jiraa - exists, is present

joogaa - stands, stays, is present

yaallaa - is positioned, lies (about objects)

§ 11.12.2 The inflection of ‘leeyahay’

This verb has emerged through merger of the adjectival root /leh/ *owning, having* and the verb *yahay is*.

PRESENT	<i>has</i>			REDUCED
1 sg.	leeyahay	1 pl.	leenahay	all persons
2 sg.	leedahay	2 pl.	leedihiin	leh
3 sg. m.	leeyahay	3 pl.	leeyihiin	
3 sg. f.	leedahay			
NEGATIVE	<i>hasn't</i>			
1 sg.	má lihi	1 pl.	má lihin	
2 sg.	má lihid	2 pl.	má lihidin	
3 sg. m./f./pl.	má laha			
PAST	<i>had</i>			
1 sg.	lahaa	1 pl.	lahayn	
2 sg.	lahayd	2 pl.	lahaydeen	
3 sg. m.	lahaa	3 pl.	lahaayeen	
3 sg. f.	lahayd			
NEGATIVE	<i>hadn't</i>			
all persons	má lahayn			
INFINITIVE	<i>have</i>			
	lahaán			

§ 11.12.2a Different equivalents of English ‘has’

leeyahay - something that you own or have a relation to, but don't carry with you

haystaa - something that you carry with you, have, hold or use, but not necessarily are the owner of

§ 11.12.3 The inflection of ‘yaallaa’

PRESENT	1 SG.	aallaa	/ aal	<i>lies, is</i>
	2 SG.	taallaa	/ taal	
	3 SG.M.	yaallaa	/ yaal	
	3 SG.F.	taallaa	/ taal	
	1 PL.	naalnaa / naallaa	/ naal	
	2 PL.	taallaan	(taalliin)	
	3 PL.	yaallaan	(yaalliin)	
PAST	1 SG.	aallay	/ iil	/ iillay
	2 SG.	taallay	/ tiil	/ tiillay
	3 SG.M.	yaallay	/ yiil	/ yiillay
	3 SG.F.	taallay	/ tiil	/ tiillay
	1 PL.	naallay / naalnay	/ niil	/ niillay / niilnay
	2 PL.	taalleen	/ tiilleen	
	3 PL.	yaalleen	/ yiilleen	
INFINITIVE		ooli		
IMPERATIVE		óol, oólla		

This verb has no progressive forms

§ 11.12.4 The inflection of ‘yaqaannaa’

PRESENT	1 SG.	aqaannaa / aqaan	<i>knows</i>
	2 SG.	taqaannaa / taqaan	
	3 SG.M.	yaqaannaa / yaqaan	
	3 SG.F.	taqaannaa / taqaan	
	1 PL.	naqaannaa / naqaan	
	2 PL.	taqaannaan / taqaanniin	
	3 PL.	yaqaannaan / yaqaanniin	
PAST	1 SG.	aqaannay / iqiin	/ iqiinnay
	2 SG.	taqaannay / tiqiin	/ tiqiinnay
	3 SG.M.	yaqaannay / yiqiin	/ yiqiinnay
	3 SG.F.	taqaannay / tiqiin	/ tiqiinnay
	1 PL.	naqaannay / niqiin	/ niqiinnay
	2 PL.	taqaanneen / tiqiinneen	
	3 PL.	yaqaanneen / yiqiinneen	
INFINITIVE		aqoon	
IMPERATIVE		aqów, aqaáda	

This verb has no progressive forms

§ 11.12.5 The inflection of ‘yimaaddaa’

PRESENT	1 SG.	imaaddaa	<i>comes</i>
	2 SG.	timaaddaa	
	3 SG.M.	yimaaddaa	
	3 SG.F.	timaaddaa	
	1 PL.	nimaadnaa	
	2 PL.	timaaddaan	
	3 PL.	yimaaddaan	
PAST	1 SG.	imid	/ imi (imaadday)
	2 SG.	timid	/ timi (timaadday)
	3 SG.M.	yimid	/ yimi (yimaadday)
	3 SG.F.	timid	/ timi (timaadday)
	1 PL.	nimid	/ nimi (nimaadnay)
	2 PL.	timaaddeen	
	3 PL.	yimaaddeen	
IMPERATIVE	kaálay, kaaláya^N imów, imaáda^S		
INFINITIVE	iman^N / imaan^S		
PROGRESSIVE	imanayaa^N / imaanayaa^S		

§ 11.12.6 The inflection of ‘yiraahdaa’

PRESENT	1 SG.	iraahdaa^S / idhaahdaa^N / dhahaa^S <i>says</i>
	2 SG.	tiraahdaa / tidhaahdaa / dhahdaa
	3 SG.M.	yiraahdaa / yidhaahdaa / dhahaa
	3 SG.F.	tiraahdaa / tidhaahdaa / dhahdaa
	1 PL.	niraahnaa / nidhaahnaa / dhahnaa
	2 PL.	tiraahdaan / tidhaahdaan / dhahdaan
	3 PL.	yiraahdaan / yidhaahdaan / dhahaan
PAST	1 SG.	iri / idhi / dhahay
	2 SG.	tiri / tidhi / dhahday
	3 SG.M.	yiri / yidhi / dhahay
	3 SG.F.	tiri / tidhi / dhahday
	1 PL.	niri / nidhi / dhahnay
	2 PL.	tiraahdeen / tidhaahdeen / dhahdeen
	3 PL.	yiraahdeen / yidhaadheen / dhaheen
IMPERATIVE		dheh, dhaha
INFINITIVE		oran / odhan / dhihi
PROGRESSIVE		oranayaa / odhanayaa / dhahayaa

§ 11.13 Formation of verbs

A verb and a noun often have exactly the same stem. It is then difficult to say which is derived from the other.

beér -ta <i>field, plantation</i>	beeraa, beertaa <i>plants, grows</i>
ciyaár -ta <i>play, game, dance</i>	ciyaaraa, ciyaartaa <i>plays, dances</i>
heés -ta <i>song</i>	heesaa, heestaa <i>sings</i>
sháah -a <i>tea</i>	shaahaa <i>drinks tea, has tea</i>
tártan -ka <i>competition</i>	tartamaa, tartantaa <i>competes</i>

§ 11.13.1 Verbs in –iyaa derived from nouns

kulayl <i>heat</i>	kulayliyaa, kulaylisaa <i>heats something</i>
qabow <i>cold</i>	qaboojiyaa, qaboojisaa <i>cools something</i>
nadiif <i>clean thing</i>	nadiifiyaa, nadiifisaa <i>cleans something</i>

§ 11.13.2 Verbs in –oobaa derived from nouns

biyo <i>water</i>	biyoobaa, biyowdaa <i>becomes water, melts</i>
wasakh <i>dirt, filth</i>	wasakhoobaa, wasakhowdaa <i>becomes dirty</i>

§ 11.13.3 Verbs in –aadaa derived from adjectives

This is a very common suffix that can be added to practically all adjectives.

kulul <i>warm, hot</i>	kululaadaa, kululaataa <i>becomes warm</i>
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§ 11.13.4 Verbs in –eeyaa derived from adj. or nouns

These verbs are derived both from adjectives and from nouns denoting qualities. They denote an action that makes the object of the verb gain the quality in question.

kulul <i>heat</i>	kululeeyaa, kululaysaa <i>heats something</i>
fudud <i>easy</i>	fududeeyaa, fududaysaa <i>makes something easy, simplifies</i>

yar *small* **yareeyaa, yaraysaa** *makes something small, reduces*
wasakh *dirt, filth* **wasakheeyaa, wasakhaysaa** *makes something dirty*

§ 11.13.5 Verbs in –iyaa derived from other verbs

These verbs are causatives. They typically express that a person makes something happen or that one person makes somebody else do something.

aadaa, aaddaa *X goes, X sets off*
 aaddiyaa, aaddisaa *Z leads/takes X = makes X go/move*
buuxaa, buuxdaa *X is full*
 buuxiyaa, buuxisaa *Z fills X = makes X become full*
guuraa, guurtaa *X moves*
 guuriyaa, guurisaa *Z copies X = Z makes X move*
karaa, kartaa *X boils*
 kariyaa, karisaa *Z boils/cooks X, = Z makes X boil*
qalloocaa, qalloocdaa *X bends*
 qalloociyaa, qalloocisaa *Z bends X = Z makes X bend*
uraa, urtaa *X smells*
 uriyaa, urisaa *Z smells X, Z feels X's smell*

Notice that the /i/ of the suffix sometimes influences an /a/ in the root. If the root end in /x/, /c/ or /' / the /a/ tends to change to /i/, otherwise to /e/.

baxaa, baxdaa *X comes out*
 bixiyaa, bixisaa *Z takes out X = Z makes X come out*
galaa, gashaa *X enters*
 geliyaa, gelisaa *Z inserts X = Z makes X enter/go in*

The /i/ of this suffix also makes /g/, /q/, /l/ and /w/ change into /j/.

joogaa, joogtaa *X stands, stops*
 joojiyaa, joojisaa *Z stops X = Z makes X stand/stop*
qallalaa, qallashaa *X dries, becomes dry*
 qallajiyaa, qallajisaa *Z dries X = Z makes X dry*

§ 11.13.6 Verbs in –siiyaa

These verbs are also causatives. They are formed through the addition of the simple verb **siiyaa** *gives* and they express that a person carries out some action that has an impact on another person or an object.

faham -ka *understanding*

fahamsiiyaa, fahamsiisaa

Z makes X understand Y, Z explains Y to X

dareen -ka *feeling*

dareensiiyaa, dareensiisaa *Z makes X feel Y*

socod -ka *motion*

socodsiiyaa, socodsiisaa *Z puts X in motion*

§ 11.13.7 Verbs in –sadaa derived from other verbs

These verbs usually express an action that is somehow beneficial to the person carrying it out.

kariyaa, karisaa *boils, cooks (food)*

karsadaa, karsataa *cooks for oneself*

joogaa, joogtaa *is situated, stands*

joogsadaa, joogsataa *stops*

fiiriyaa, fiirisaa *looks at X*

u fiirsadaa, fiirsataa *observes X*

An /l/ in the root merges with the /s/ and gives /sh/.

kaaliyaa, kaalisaa *supports, helps*

kaashadaa, kaashataa *gets support, gets help*

§ 12. Phrases

A simple Somali clause consists of three types of phrases:

- NOUN PHRASES,
- A PARTICLE PHRASE,
- A VERB PHRASE.

The order of the phrases is quite free. Only the position of the particle phrase is restricted to somewhere before the verb phrase.

The word order within the phrases is however fixed.

Often there is only one distinct high tone per phrase, namely the first one, and the following potential high tones are pronounced less distinctly.

§ 12.1 The Noun Phrase

In Somali the head noun is always the first word of the noun phrase. Determiners and modifiers always follow the head noun. This means that an adjective follows after its noun.

The end of a noun phrase is often marked by a high tone, but doing so is not obligatory. Often, there is only one distinct high tone per noun phrase, while other "potential" high tones are not realised distinctly.

bisádda yár	or bisádda yar	<i>the little cat</i>
subáx wanaagsán!	or subáx wanaagsan!	<i>good morning!</i>
sheekó gaabán	or sheekó gaaban	<i>a short story</i>

§ 12.1.1 Nouns without a context

When a noun ending in **-o/-a/-e** is used on its own, out of context, not as part of any phrase or clause, most speakers pronounce a high tone on the second to last vowel position. Otherwise they usually pronounce it on the last vowel position.

magaálo	<i>a city</i>
magaaló wéyn	<i>a big city</i>

báre *a teacher*
baré wanaagsan *a good teacher*

§ 12.1.2 Nouns as modifiers

Modifiers follow after the noun that they modify.

(a) In Somali the owner of an object may simply be placed after the owned object. The owned object is generally in the definite form.

The end of the noun phrase is often marked by a high tone on the final vowel position of the modifier, but they may also be pronounced without any distinct high tone.

dúgsiga Sahrá or **dúgsiga Sahra** *Sahra's school*

For masculine modifier nouns this generally means that their high tone is shifted from the second to last vowel position, or that they are pronounced without any distinct high tone at all.

Áxmed *Ahmed*
gúriga Axméð or **gúriga Axmed** *Ahmed's house*

(b) Women's names that do not end in **-o/-a** often have their high tone on the second last vowel position. Such an "irregular" feminine tone generally remains unchanged also as a modifier.

dukáanka Máryan *Maryan's shop*

(c) If the owner is in the definite form, the high tone remains in its original position, but sometimes an additional high tone may be heard at the end of the phrase.

baabúurka macállinka ~ baabúurka macállinká *the teacher's car*

(d) Also other types of phrases where one noun functions as a determiner of another noun have the same structure and word order. In the vast majority of cases both nouns occur in their definite form.

khatárta jídka	<i>the danger of the road</i>
dhakhtárka ilkáha	<i>dentist (lit. the doctor (of) the teeth)</i>

(e) Possession may also be expressed through another construction, where the owner is mentioned first, followed by the possessed object which then needs to have a possessive ending added to it.

Áxmed gúrigiisa	<i>Ahmed's house (lit. Ahmed his.house)</i>
or gúriga Axmed	<i>Ahmed's house (lit. the.house (of) Ahmed)</i>

(f) When the construction describes a close family or friend relation, only the construction with the possessive ending can be used.

Sahrá hooyádeed	<i>Sahra's mother</i>
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§ 12.1.3 Several nouns in a row

When one noun after the other modify the immediately preceding noun the result sometimes becomes a quite long phrase.

ilaalínta nadaafádda iláha biyáha	<i>the protection of the hygiene of the sources of the water</i>
	<i>protecting the hygiene of the water sources</i>

In principle, such phrases can be translated into English by inserting *of* between the nouns, but other solutions are often more elegant.

§ 12.1.4 Modifier phrases with ‘ah’

Somali doesn't have as many adjectives as English. Instead, nouns are often qualitatively modified by other nouns. The two nouns are then usually connected through the reduced verb form **ah** *being*.

nín Soomaáli ah *a Somali man, a Somali*

a.man a.Somali being

gabár dhallinyaró ah *a teenage girl, a teenager*

a.girl youth being

shaáti bulúug ah *a blue shirt*

a.shirt a.blue.thing being

§ 12.1.5 Modifier phrases with ‘leh’

Another common way of connecting a modifier noun to a head noun is the reduced verb form **leh** *having*, which often may also be successfully translated as *with*.

surwáal mídabka dambáska leh *grey trousers, ash coloured trousers*

trousers the.colour the.ash having

qadó hílib badán leh *a lunch with a lot of meat*

a.lunch meat much having

§ 12.1.6 Modifier phrases with ‘badan’

Yet another common way of constructing a qualitative modifier phrase is to use the adjective **badán** *much* as connector.

baaskíil qurúx badan ¹² *a beautiful bike (a bicycle of great beauty)*

a.bicycle beauty much

¹² There is an interesting structural similarity between **beauty-full** and **qurúx badan**.

§ 12.1.7 Agreement in definiteness

When a noun is used as a modifier of another noun, also when connected through, e.g., **ah** *being, that is*, **leh** *having, that has, with* or **badán** *much*, both nouns in the phrase must be either indefinite or definite. In other words the two nouns agree in definiteness.

maalínta Jimcáha ah *(on) Friday* (lit. *(on) the day that is the Friday*)

nín Soomaáli ah *a Somali man* (lit. *a man that is a Somali*)

nínka Soomaáliiga ah *the Somali man* (lit. *the man that is the Somali*)

baaskíilka qurúxda badan *the beautiful bicycle*

§ 12.1.8 Noun phrases expressing amount

Since the Somali numbers are nouns they constitute the head noun of phrases expressing amounts. Therefore any suffixes are added to the numeric noun, not to the following "counted" noun.

labádaas reer *those two families*

sáddexdayda buug *my three books*

§ 12.1.9 Counting uncountable nouns

(a) Nouns are generally divided into COUNTABLE and UNCOUNTABLE nouns, depending on whether they may form a plural or not. In languages in general, numbers tend to be used only before countable nouns. That is basically the situation also in Somali, but since the numerals are nouns in Somali, their meaning is rather something like **lába** *two items*, **sáddex** *three items*... Therefore they can actually be used also with uncountable nouns that express collections of individually discernible objects, e.g. **nácnac** *candy, sweets*, **carruúr** *children* or **múus** *bananas*. However, the numeral must be connected to the following noun through the reduced verb form **ah** *being* that is added after the noun representing the counted objects.

toddobá nácnac ah *seven candies* (eg. *seven items that are candy*)

sáddex carruúr ah *three children* (eg. *three items that are children*)

(b) The same is true for the question word **ímmisa?** *how many?, how much?*

ímmisa múus ah? *how many bananas?*

how.many.items banana(s) being

(c) It is also common to add a noun that is typically used for counting the kind of objects in question. A very general such word is **xábbo** *seed* which is used similarly to English *pieces, units* before a great variety of words.

sáddex xabbó oo múus ah *three bananas*

three.items units and banana(s) being

Since the head noun **sáddex** now has two modifiers after each other, the connector **oo** has to be added between the two modifiers. See § 12.1.10.

(d) Also when some kind of measure precedes a noun denoting a substance, the substance is followed by the reduced verb form **ah** *being*.

xabbád harúur ah *a seed of sorghum*

a.seed sorghum being

§ 12.1.10 More than one modifier

If a head noun has more than one modifier, the connector word **oo** *and* is usually inserted between the modifiers. Notice that numerals are nouns and that they function as the head of their noun phrase.

labá gabdhood oo walaaló ah *two sisters (lit. two girl siblings)*

two.items girls and siblings being

sáddex wiil oo walaaló ah *three brothers (lit. three boy siblings)*

three.items boys and siblings being

labá waxtar oo kale *two other benefits*

two.items benefits and other

If the second modifier expresses a quality that is crucial for identifying the head noun among other similar objects, then the connector **ee** *but (more specifically)* is used instead of **oo** *and*. This is especially true when it comes to expressing ownership or other kinds of belonging or association.

dúgsiga hoose ee Shéekh Bashiir *Sheikh Bashir's primary school*
macállinka af-Soomaáliga ee Xasan *Hassan's teacher of Somali*
dhárka dúgsiga ee Xasan *Hassan's clothes for school*

The same also applies also to other types of modifiers that serve to define or identify the objects intended by the head noun.

magacyada kala duwan ee qaybaha jirkeenna
the different names of the parts of our body

This is not about any kind of different names, but specifically the names denoting the parts of our body.

§ 12.1.11 Relative clauses as modifiers

Also a relative clause that carries information necessary in order to identify the object it refers to is preceded by the connector **ee** “specifically”.

Maxáa uu ahaa dhárka cusub ee Faadumó loó iibiyay?
*What were the new clothes **that** they bought for Faduma?*

Without the relative clause it would be impossible to tell what new clothes are meant in a family where all the children have been given new clothes. Therefore, under the circumstances, the relative clause is essential.

A relative clause that is not felt to be essential in this way is not introduced by a connector if the relative clause is the first modifier phrase directly after the head noun. If it is not the first modifier phrase, the relative clause must be preceded by the connector **oo** *and*.

Shéeg magacyáda labá ciidood oo Isláamku léeyahay.
*Say the names of two feasts **that** Islam has.*

Qór labá waxtar oo kale oo uu dábku léeyahay.
Write two other benefits that fire has.

In a context where the teacher already has talked about the benefit of fire, the relative clause is not essential in order to know what to write about.

§ 12.1.12 The phrase *ká mid ah*

The equivalent of the English preposition *of* expressing a selection within a set is commonly rendered by the Somali phrase **ká mid ah** *being one of*.

Qór sáddex ká mid ah iláha biyáha.

Write three of the sources of water.

(i.e. three that are one of the sources of water.)

maalín maalmáha ká mid ah *one day which is one of the days*

one day of the days = one of those days

This construction is necessary since Somali prepositions may not connect two nouns. A verb must always be involved.

§ 12.1.13 Adjectives after *-kii/-tii*

After nouns with the demonstrative endings **-kii/-tii** (expressing that something is expected to be previously known) adjectives must be followed by the reduced past tense form **ahaa** (m. & pl.) or **ahayd** (f.sg.) *that was*. These forms are obligatorily contracted with the preceding adjective as **-aa/-ayd**, since the root **ah-** disappears after adjectives.

digaagáddii yarayd	<i>that hen (you know) that was little</i>
rootigii fiicnaa	<i>that bread (you know) that was good</i>
wíilkeedii yaraa	<i>her son/boy (you know) that was little</i>
gabádhiisii weynayd	<i>his daughter/girl (you know) that was big</i>

Of course, in most instances it would be more idiomatic to just translate these phrases as *the little hen, the good bread, her little son, his big daughter*.

§ 12.1.14 Prepositions before verbal nouns

An important exception to the principle that prepositions can't precede a noun concerns verbal nouns, mainly those in **-id**, **-n** and **-asho**. Such Somali verbal nouns can often be translated into English as *to + infinitive*.

ka ilaalínta wasákhda jírka *to protect the body against dirtiness*

Such prepositions do not have a high tone since they actually serve as a prefix in a derived, complex noun. Therefore the preposition is sometimes written together with the verbal noun, but more often it is not.

§ 12.1.15 The Particle –ba

The particle **–ba** has a reinforcing function. The most idiomatic translations may vary quite a bit. In affirmative declarative clauses it may correspond to *also, all, every*.

“Má rabno,” ayey *sáddexduba* kú jawaabeen.

*“We don’t want to,” *all three* replied to her*

§ 12.2 The Verb Phrase

The verb phrase constitutes the predicate part of a clause. Besides the finite verb also the following words are maximally included in the verb phrase:

1. the indefinite subject pronoun **la** *one/you/they*;
2. one of the object pronouns
i *me*, **ku** *you* (SG), **na** *us* (EXCL), **ina** *us* (INCL), **idin** *you* (PL), **is** *oneself*;
3. the preposition **ú** *to/for, in* (a manner);
4. the preposition **kú** *in/on/at, with* (a tool);
5. the preposition **ká** *from/of, about* (a topic), *than*;
6. the preposition **lá** *(together) with*;
- 7a. the negation **má** *not*;
- 7b. a short subject pronoun (in a particle phrase with the negation);
8. a second object pronoun
kay *me*, **kaa** *you* (SG), **kayo** *us* (EXCL), **keen** *us* (INCL), **kiin** *you* (PL);
9. a directional particle **soo** *here* (*there*), **sii** *away*;
10. a distributional particle **kala** *apart*, **wada** *together*;
11. a positional particle
ag *near*, **dhex** *between*, **dul** *above*, **hoos** *under*, **hor** *before, in front*,
kor *above...*;
12. an adjective as a predicative complement;
13. one or two verbs in the infinitive;
14. a verb inflected for person/tense/mood.

The word order within the verb phrase is fixed according to the above list.

The elements 1–7a are obligatorily contracted into one word. In these contractions certain sound changes occur. See § 5.2.

The directional and distributional particles have a concrete basic meaning, but in many instances they are also used with a more abstract meaning. See § 12.2.10 and § 12.2.11.

§ 12.2.1 Prepositions

Somali prepositions do not behave exactly like English prepositions do, but they still have a lot in common. The important difference is that English has a large number of prepositions, and they are mainly used before nouns, whereas Somali has only four genuine prepositions, expressing four very basic meanings, and these four prepositions must be placed before a verb or an adjective indicating the kind of relation that holds between this verb or adjective and a noun or noun phrase. This makes good sense if we acknowledge that prepositions serve to connect two other words and express their relation to each other. To put the preposition before one of those words (the noun) in English really isn't more "natural" than to put it before the other word (the verb) in Somali.

Sometimes something similar actually happens also in Swedish.

Jag pekade redan tidigt **på** problemet.

I pointed already early at the.problem.

≈ Jag **påpekade** redan tidigt problemet.

Already early on, I pointed out the problem.

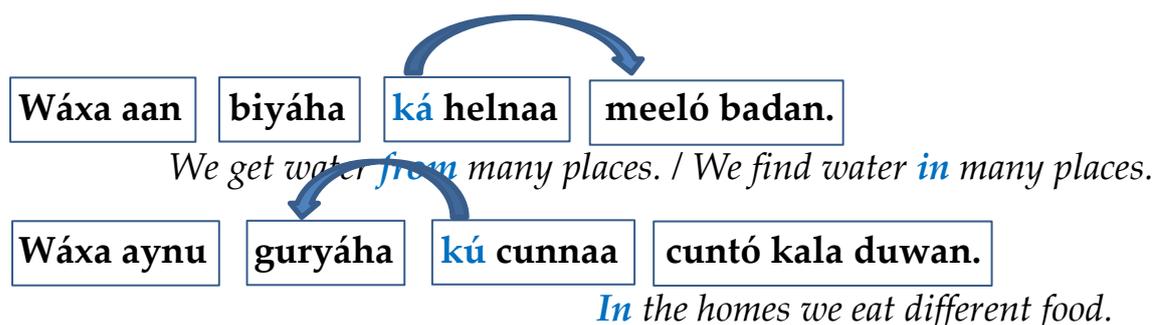
Man tog alla privilegier **från** generalen.

one took all privileges from the.general

≈ Man **fråntog** generalen alla privilegier.

All privileges were taken away from the general.

The Somali prepositions are always part of the verb phrase, and from that position they point to or refer to one of the noun phrases in the clause. It is however only the context that reveals which noun (phrase) a specific prepositions is referring to.



In practically all languages that have prepositions, their use is partially unpredictable. Certain head words (basically verbs and adjectives) simply require a certain preposition, sometimes without a very logical reason. It is therefore important to learn verbs and adjectives together with their required preposition.

§ 12.2.1a The preposition *ú*

The preposition *ú* is used in the following main functions.

(i) The spatial GOAL of a motion: *to*.

Xaáwo halkeé bay *ú* socotaa? *Where is Hawo going?*

Dugsiga ayaa ay *u* socotaa. *She is going to school.*

(ii) RECIPIENT or BENEFICIENT: *to, for*

Recipients or beneficiaries are usually persons receiving something and benefiting from some action.

Kallúunka waxa ay *ú* shiílaysaa qóyskooda.

She is frying/grilling the fish for her family.

Warkii Cali baa aan *u* sheegay. *I told the news to Ali.*

(iii) PURPOSE: *to, for, as*

Biyáha waxa aynu *ú* isticmaalnaa cabbitaan.

We use water for drinking / as a drink.

(iv) MANNER: *in, like*

To express manner, the preposition *ú* is very often used together with the noun *si* *manner, way* corresponding to English *in a ... way* or *in a ... manner*.

Sidee bay dadka tuulo-joogga ahi *u* nadiifiyaan ilaha biyahooda?

In what way do the people in the village keep their sources of water clean?

Biyaha waxa aynu *u* isticmaalnaa siyaabo kala duwan.

We use water in different ways.

Si fiican isugu garaac iskujirkaas.

way good self.in.in hit that. mixture [isku garaacaa = whips together]

Whip that mix together properly.

Sidaas ayaa uu socdaalkii u dhammaystay.

The journey ended in that way / like that.

Sidee baa aad u nadiifisaa gurigaaga?

what.manner FOC you in clean your.house

How do you clean your house?

Sometimes the noun **hab** *manner, method, order* is used instead of **si**.

U dhig weerooyinkan habka ay isugu xigaan.

Place these sentences in the order in which they are interrelated.

In certain types of manner adverbials the preposition **ú** is used without any accompanying noun like **si(da)** or **hab(ka)**.

Laba-labo u shaqeeya.

Work in pairs.

U baxa dibedda, ka dibna u ciyaara kooxo kala duwan.

Go outside, and then play in different groups.

(v) Special uses of the preposition **ú**:

aad ... ú *to a high degree, a lot, much, very* is used as an adverbial of degree together with both adjectives and verbs.

Carruurtaaydu aad baa ay u fiican tahay.

my.children high.degree FOC they to good are

My children are very good.

ú fiirsadaa, ú fiirsataa *looks at*

Ú fiirsó *nínka.*

Look at the man.

ú baahán yahay *is in need of, has need for, needs*

Wáxa aynu ú baahán nahay cuntó.

FOC we for needing are food

We are in need of food. = We need food. / We are hungry.

ú ég yahay is similar to

Kabahaygu kuwaaga ayaa ay u eg yihiin.

my.shoes yours FOC they to similar are

My shoes are similar to yours.

§ 12.2.1b The preposition *kú*

NB! Somali also has an object pronoun **ku** *you* (SG). See § 9.2.

The preposition **kú** is used in the following main functions.

(i) Position: *in, on*.

Teneggan subag baa ku jira.

In this container there is butter.

Xasan waxa uu ku nool yahay Boosaaso.

Hassan lives in Bosaso.

Sahra waxa ay kalluun ku iibinaysaa suuqa.

Sahra is selling fish at the market.

Waxa ay biyaha ku rartaan awrtooda.

They load water onto their camels.

Immisa wiil ayaa fasalka ku jira?

How many boys are there in the class?

Sometimes the noun phrase governed by the preposition is only implied.

Ku buuxi shaqalka oo akhri erayga!

Fill in the vowel and read the word!

(ii) Tool: *with*.

Erayadan far fiican ku qor.

Write these words with a nice handwriting.

Isku qallaji shukumaan nadiif ah.

oneself.with dry towel clean.thing being

Dry yourself with a clean towel.

Also the money used to buy something *for (with)*, as well as the languages a person speaks, are expressed as tools in Somali.

Shan shilin waxa ay ku iibsatay liin.

five.items shilling FOC she with bought CITRIC.FRUIT

For five shillings she bought citric fruit.

Anigu waxa aan ku hadlaa afka Ingiriiska iyo afka Carabiga.

I FOC I with speak THE.LANGUAGE THE.ENGLISH AND THE.LANGAUGE THE.ARABIC

I speak English and Arabic.

Sometimes it may be difficult to draw a clear line between position and tool.

Dabka waxa aan ku karsannaa cuntada.

the.fire FOC we with/on cook THE.FOOD

With / On the fire we cook food.

(iii) circumstance

Carruurtu habeen walba gaajo baa ay ku seexdaan.

the.children night every HUNGER FOC they in fall.asleep

The children fall asleep hungry every night.

(iv) abstract aim of goal: *to, for*

Eraygee baa ku habboon sawirka?

WHICH.WORD FOC for suitable the.picture

Which word suits the picture?

(v) the listening interlocutor: *to*

Waxa uu ku yiri xaaskiisa, "Ma kartid."

FOC he to said his.wife NOT YOU.CAN

He said to his wife: – You can't (do that).

"Ma rabo," ayaa ay ku jawaabtay.

NOT I.WANT FOC she to replied

– I don't want to, she replied to him.

(vi) with reference to something: *regarding*

ku saabsan yahay – *is about, tells about, discusses*

Qoraalkani waxa uu ku saabsan yahay qoyskayga.

text.this FOC it about regarding is FAMILY-MY

This text is about my family.

§ 12.2.1c The preposition *ká*

NB! Somali also has the demonstrative pronoun **ka** *the, this*.

The preposition **ká** is used in the following main functions.

(i) Origin or source: *from, of*.

Webi Shabeelle meeshee buu ka yimaadaa?

From what place does the river Shabeelle come?

Guuleed dugsiiga waxa uu ka yimaadaa laba iyo tobanka iyo barka.

Guled comes from school at half past twelve.

In Somali, just like many other languages, certain abstract actions (t.ex. *buys, finds, is seen*) are perceived as originating *from* a certain place, whereas in English they are generally perceived as more static, happening *in* a certain place.

Waxa aan biyaha ká helnaa meelo badan.

We find water in many places / get water from many places.

Magacow cuntada kala duwan ee sawirka ka muuqata.

Give the names of the different foods shown in the picture.

Badda ayaa uu kalluun ka dabanayaa.

He catches fish in the sea. (lit. from the sea)

Dugsiiga maxaa aad ka barataa?

What do you learn at school? (lit. from the school)

(ii) Material: *of*

Markaa burkii ayey ka samaysay rooti.

Then she made bread of the flour.

(iii) Topic: *about*

Ka hadal sawirrada.

Talk about the pictures.

Hodan waxa ay wax ka qortay xeebta.

Hodan wrote something about the coast.

(iv) Comparison: *than*

Soddon waa ay ka yar tahay konton.

Thirty is less than fifty.

Faadumo waa ka dheer tahay Caasho.

Faduma is taller than Asha.

(v) The semantic "object" of certain intransitive verbs: *in, on*

Lug baa uu ka dhaawacmay.

LEG FOC he in was.hurt

He was hurt in a leg.

(vi) In certain fixed phrases.

Ká jawáab su'aaláhan.

Answer these questions.

Waxa uu ká shaqeeyaa dukáankiisa yar.

He works in his little shop.

Waa uu ká helaa iyáda.

He likes / fancies her.

§ 12.2.1d The preposition *lá*

NB! Somali also has the indefinite subject pronoun **la** *one, you, they*. See § 9.2.1.

The preposition **lá** has only one main function.

(i) Company: *(together) with*.

Waxa uu la socdaa saaxiibkiis.

He walks together with his friend.

Sahra waxay **la** ciyaaraysaa **Farxiya**.

Sahra is playing with Farhiya.

(ii) It is also used in a few fixed phrases.

la tahay, in ... – *thinks, believes that ...*

Waxa ay ila tahay in aanu taas samayn karayn.

FOC it me.with is that not.he that do could.

I don't think that he could do that. (lit. I think that he could not do that.)

§ 12.2.1e Complex "preposition phrases"

The content of the phrase *near Mogadishu* may also be rendered by the more complex phrase *in the vicinity of Mogadishu*. The exact location is expressed by the noun *vicinity* which in turn is preceded by the preposition *in*. Further examples are *in front of the house, on top of the cupboard*. Such complex constructions are even more frequent in Somali than in English.

The Somali equivalent of most English prepositions are expressions involving a combination of one of the four basic prepositions and a noun that expresses the precise relation or location. Such nouns take a possessive suffix.

MASC.SING.	FEM.SING.	PLURAL	
agtiisa	agteeda	agtooda	<i>near, close to</i>
hoostiisa	hoosteeda	hoostooda	<i>under</i>
dhexdiisa	dhexdeeda	dhexdooda	<i>inside, between</i>

Which of the three forms to choose depends on the gender and number of the noun that the "position noun" refers to.

Ku sawir bisad kursiga hoostiisa.

in draw cat the.chair its.underside

Draw a cat under the chair.

Saynab qoyskoodu waxa uu kú nool yahay bádda ágteeda.

Saynab their.family.SUBJ FOC it in living is the.sea its.vicinity

Saynab's family lives in THE VICINITY OF THE SEA = NEAR THE SEA.

Waxa aan **ku** arkaa **biyaha dhexdooda** digaagad.

FOC I in see the.water its.middle hen

I see a hen in THE MIDDLE OF THE WATER = DOWN IN THE WATER.

§ 12.2.1f Variation in the use of prepositions

In certain constructions, some variation is at hand in the use of prepositions.

ú dhow / kú dhow *close to*

Booqó iláha biyáha ee kú dhow / ú dhow dúgsigaaga.

visit the.sources the.water that to close to close your.school

Visit the sources of water that are close to your school.

ká caawiyaa (kú caawiyaa) – *help (someone) with (something)*

Waxa ay **kú / ká caawisay** Cáli shaqo-gúriga.

FOC she with helped Ali THE.HOMEWORK

She helped Ali with the homework.

Sometimes the variation seems to be geographically conditioned.

§ 12.2.2 Object pronoun + preposition

An object pronoun and a following preposition are not always semantically related, even though they merge into one word. The preposition may refer to a noun phrase elsewhere in the sentence.

Digaagáddii waxa ay iská dhex aragtay biyíhii.

the.hen.you.know FOC it itself.from middle saw the.water.you.know

The hen saw itself down in the water.

Iskú qalláji shukumáan nadiif ah.

oneself.with dry towel clean.thing being

Dry yourself with a clean towel.

§ 12.2.3 The negation **má**

The negation **má** comes directly after possible object pronouns and prepositions, and they all merge into one word.

Igamá dul boódi kartid. (< i + ka + ma)

*You can **not** jump **over** me.*

§ 12.2.4 Directional particles

The particle **soó** expresses a motion towards the place/position where the subject of the clause is located.

Examples

The particle **sií** expresses a motion away from the place/position where the subject of the clause is located.

Examples

This motion is not always concrete. It may also refer to time and other phenomena that in an abstract way may be perceived as moving towards us, e.g. the expression **soó socdá** *coming, following*.

Ku qor erayada **soo socda buuggaaga layliga.**

Write the *following* words in your exercise book.

The particle **soó** is also used to express the COMPLETION of an action, whereas the particle **sií** expresses CONTINUATION.

Laakiin dhulkii ayaa uu ka **soo bixin waayey.**

*But he failed to extract it **towards himself** from THE GROUND.*

dv. But he failed to pull it out of THE GROUND.

§ 12.2.5 Distributional particles

kala, wada

§ 12.2.6 Positional particles

A few nouns have developed into particles that occur in the verb phrase.

dul *surface, top* **dul taallaa** *lies on top (of something)*

§ 12.2.6a Preposition with positional particle

A positional adverb can be used together with a preposition in order to make the reference more precise.

Digaagaddii iyaduna waxa ay iska dhex aragtay biyihii.

the.hen.you.know she.also FOC she herself.from middle saw the.water.you.know

*The hen, she too saw herself **down in the water**.*

The combination **ka dul** most often corresponds to English *over* expressing a motion surmounting an "obstacle".

Waan ka dul boodi karaa. *I can jump over it.*

Igama dul boodi kartid. *You can't jump over me.*

§ 12.3 The Particle Phrase

Every simple Somali clause contains a special word that determines which kind of clause it is, e.g. statement, question, request, wish or possibility, and also if the clause is affirmative or negative. These little words are called **SENTENCE PARTICLES**. Together with a subject pronoun they constitute the particle phrase.

The particle phrase can maximally contain

- a **particle** expressing the **TYPE** of clause or the **FOCUS** of the clause
- a short clitic **pronoun** that expresses the **SUBJECT** of the clause.

§ 12.3.1 Sentence particles

(a) Sentence particles expressing TYPE OF CLAUSE:

waa/wáa expresses that the clause is an affirmative statement or a question with a question word.

This particle has a high tone only if the following word doesn't. It is toneless if the following word has a high tone.

má expresses that the clause is a negative statement.

In this type of clause the verb is in the subjunctive form. This particle always has a high tone.

ma/má expresses that the clause is a question that requires yes/no as the answer.

This particle has a high tone only if the following word doesn't. It is toneless if the following word has a high tone.

× The lack of any particle expresses that the clause is a command or request. The verb is in the imperative form.

ha expresses warnings and prohibitions.

This particle is always toneless.

há expresses wishes and indirect commands in the 3rd person.

This particle always has a high tone.

(b) Sentence particles expressing FOCUS:

Focus is an important function expressed by three different sentence particles. Focus means that a word or a phrase is foregrounded or emphasised. In English that is most often achieved by pronouncing focused words with extra energy or prominence. In Somali, focus is not expressed with the voice, but through three special function words, called FOCUS PARTICLES.

ayáa / báa express that the noun phrase immediately preceding the particle is focused. **Ayaa** and **baa** are synonymous and mutually exchangeable, even though **ayaa** is often perceived as a bit more formal, and **baa** as slightly more colloquial.

wáxa / waxáa express that the noun phrase at the end of the clause is focused.

The three focus particles only occur in affirmative statements and questions.

The focus particles **báa/ayáa** are often omitted after the interrogative suffix **-eé**. It is therefore possible to say that the suffix **-eé** itself expresses focus when there is no other sentence particle in the clause.

§ 12.3.2 Short subject pronouns

The following subject pronouns occur in the particle phrase. See § 9.2.

aan	<i>I / we</i>
aad	<i>you</i>
uu	<i>he / it</i>
ay	<i>she / it / they</i>
aannu	<i>we (excluding you)</i>
aynu	<i>we (including you)</i>
aydin	<i>you (pl.)</i>

NB!

La one occurs at the beginning of the verb phrase.

§ 12.3.3 Obligatory subject pronouns

In declarative clauses there is normally a short subject pronoun. The short subject pronoun has to be used even if there is another, long subject pronoun in the clause.

Anigu waa **aan** weyn ahay, **adiguna** waa **aad** yar tahay.

I am big and you are little.

§ 12.3.4 Omission of the short subject pronoun

(a) If the subject of the clause is focused short subject pronouns are never used.

Warsame **geed baa** uu beeray. **Naasir baa** geedkii waraabiyay.

Warsame planted a TREE. NAASIR watered the tree.

(b) If the predicate contains no verb, only a noun phrase, short subject pronouns are never used.

Sáhro **waa** macallimád. *Sahra is a teacher.*

(c) In clauses with the particle **waa** the short subject pronouns **uu** *he, it* and **ay** *she, it, they* are often omitted if the predicate consists of an adjective + the verb **yahay** *is*.

Gabádhu **waa** (ay) **wéyn tahay**.

The girl is big.

Dukáanku **waa** (uu) **yár yahay**.

The shop is small.

(d) Also in clauses with other verbs in the predicate, the short subject pronouns in the 3rd person are sometimes omitted after the particle **waa**.

Walaalkay **waa joogay**.

my.brother DECL was.present

My brother was there.

Baskii **waa yimid**.

The bus has arrived.

(e) It is also very common to omit the short subject pronoun if the subject noun phrase occurs between the particle phrase and the verb phrase.

Example

§ 13. Simple clauses

A Somali simple clause or main clause normally contains a particle phrase and a verb phrase. The particle phrase **always** precedes the verb phrase.

Wáa uu yimid. *He has arrived.*

One or more noun phrases may occur anywhere in the clause, sometimes also between the particle phrase and the verb phrase.

Besides the fact that the particle phrase always precedes the verb phrase, there are no simple rules for the order of the phrases in a clause. The order depends on how one chooses to structure and present the information. It is common to start with facts that are already familiar and finish with new information.

§ 13.1 Declarative clauses

(a) A declarative clause with no focused noun or noun phrase must contain the particle **waa**. Normally, there is also a short subject pronoun. This particle phrase normally goes right before the verb phrase.

Ardaydu waa ay akhrínayaan. *The students are reading.*

(b) A declarative clause with focus on one of the noun phrases contains one of the three focus particles **baa**, **ayaa** or **waxa(a)**.

If the focused noun phrase goes before the verb phrase **baa** or **ayáa** is used and the particle occurs immediately after the focused noun phrase.

Rooti iyo caano baa uu rabaa. *He wants bread and milk.*

Cuntadu xoog baa ay inoo yeeshaa. *The food generates energy for us.*

If the focused noun phrase occurs at the end of the clause, the particle **wáxa/waxáa**¹³ is used and the particle phrase occurs before the verb phrase.

Najma waxa ay leedahay buug. *Najma has A BOOK.*
 Najma the.thing she has book

Waxa uu rabaa rooti iyo caano. *He wants BREAD AND MILK.*
 the.thing he wants bread and milk

The focus particle frequently refers to a whole subordinate clause.

Cali wáxa uu rabaa ín uu fuuló baaskíilka. *Ali wants to RIDE THE BIKE.*
 Ali the.thing he wants that he rides the.bike

§ 13.1.1 Subjects

In clauses where the subject is not focused, it has to be grammatically marked as such. It is only the last word in the subject noun phrase that is marked.

If the subject is not focused there is normally also a short subject pronoun in the particle phrase.

The last word of the subject noun phrase is marked by tone and/or the endings **-u, -i, -aa** in the following ways.

(a) In noun suffixes and pronouns a final **-a** is replaced by **-u**.

Wíilku waa macállin. *The boy is a teacher.*

Mágacaygu waa Sahrá. *My name is Sahra.*

Wíilkaygu waa macállin. *My son is a teacher.*

Hooyáda reérku waa Cambará. *The mother of the family is Ambara.*

(b) The high tone is missing on the last (or only) morpheme of the subject.

Axmed wúu hurdaa. *Ahmed sleeps.*

¹³ This particle has developed from the word **wax** *thing*.

(c) Adjectives take the ending **-i**. A high tone on the preceding morpheme is missing before **-i** as in (b) above.

Bisádda yari wáxa ay raadínaysaa hooyádeed.

The little cat is looking for its mother.

(d) Pronouns and corresponding suffixes, not ending in **-a**, take the ending **-i**. A high tone on the morpheme preceding **-i** usually disappears.

Tani waa káb.

This is a shoe.

Kani waa bás.

This is a bus.

Báskani waa wéyn yahay.

This bus is big.

(e) Verb forms not inflected for person and ending in a consonant (**ah** being, **leh** having, and reduced subjunctive forms) take the suffix **-i**.

Sideé bay **dádka tuulo-jóogga ahi** ú nadiifiyaan iláha biyáhooda?

How do people who live in the village keep their water sources clean?

(f) Feminine nouns with an indefinite form that ends in a consonant often take the ending **-i**, especially in a more formal style.

Maalín maalmáha ká mid ah ayáa **bisadi** gúrigeedii ká tagtay.

On one of those days a cat set out from home.

With proper nouns this ending is less frequent than with common nouns.

It may also occur with names ending in a vowel.

Hargeysi, Soomaaliyi, Sahri etc.

(g) Verb forms ending in a short **-a/-o** take the long vowel ending **-aa**.

Wiilka jiifaa wuu bukaa. The boy that is lying down is ill.

Sideé baa ay **dádka sawirrada ká muuqdaa** ú isticmaalaan biyáha?

How do the people showing in the pictures use the water?

Cf. not as the subject:

wiilka jiifa the boy that is lying down

dádka sawirrada ká muuqda the people showing in the pictures

(h) Also in the adjective **kasta** *each, every* the final vowel becomes **-aa**.

Qol kastaa wuxuu leeyahay dariishado waaweyn. (as subject)

Every room has BIG WINDOWS.

cf. **Hawadu waxa ay joogtaa meel kasta.** (as adverbial)

The air is EVERYWHERE.

(i) Short possessive endings take over the high tone from the preceding morpheme, hence these endings are not affected by the rule in (b) above.

Hooyaday waa macallimád. *My mother is a teacher.*

cf. non-subject: **Tani waa hooyaday.** *This is my mother.*

(k) In a colloquial style, the grammatical subject marking is sometimes missing.

§ 13.1.2 Focused subjects

If the subject noun phrase of a clause is focused, it is not grammatically marked as the subject. Furthermore, there is no short subject pronoun in such a clause, and the predicate verb appears in its reduced form. See § 11.9.

Cáli ◇ **baa** ◇ **akhrínaya**.

ALI is reading. It's ALI who is reading.

Cali ◇ **waa uu** ◇ **akhrínayaa**.

Ali is reading.

Saaxiibkiis ◇ **baa** ◇ **kú riixaya** ◇ **baaskiilka**.

HIS FRIEND pushes the bike.

Saaxiibkiis ◇ **wáxa uu** ◇ **kú riixayaa** ◇ **baaskiilka**.

His friend pushes THE BIKE.

Aníga ◇ **ayáa** ◇ **raba**.

I want to.

Anígu ◇ **wáa aan** ◇ **rabaa**.

I want to (do it).

A focused subject may also occur at the end of the clause. It is then focused with the particle **waxa(a)**. Such clauses are often translated in the passive.

Baaskíilka ◊ **waxaa** ◊ **kú riixaya** ◊ **saaxíibkiis**.

The bike is pushed by HIS FRIEND.

Daaqadáha ◊ **waxa** ◊ **kú jira** ◊ **muraayadó**.

In the windows there are PANES.

§ 13.1.3 Agreement with the subject

The short subject pronoun and the predicate verb agree in most clauses with the subject noun in grammatical number and, in the singular, also in gender. In some cases, however, there is a discrepancy between the subject's grammatical form and its meaning. The most common case are collective nouns which grammatically are singular, but have a "plural" meaning. The verb and the short subject pronoun, which always agree with each other, may then be in the singular or in the plural.

Carruúrtu **waxa ay aádayaan** **gúriga adeérkood**.

The children are going to THEIR UNCLE'S HOUSE.

Carruúrtaydu **áad baa ay ú fiicán tahay**.

My children are VERY good.

There are also cases where a word's grammatical gender and biological sex do not coincide, e.g. **xaas** (m.) *wife*, **sac** (m.) *cow*. If the noun denotes a human being, the biological sex generally determines the form of the short subject pronoun and the verb, whereas if the noun denotes an animal, the word's grammatical gender generally takes precedence.

Xáaskiisu **wáxa ay karínaysay** **cuntó**.

His wife was cooking FOOD.

Sácu **waxa uu ká mid yahay** **xayawáanka naásleyda ah**.

The cow belongs to THE MAMMALS.

§ 13.1.4 Objects

In Somali there is no formal difference between object noun phrases and adverbial noun phrases. If one still wishes to make this distinction, it has to be based on either the meaning of the phrases or the presence of an associated preposition in the verb phrase. Noun phrases that are associated with a preposition may then be regarded as adverbial phrases, whereas noun phrases that are directly associated with the verb, without a preposition, are considered object noun phrases.

§ 13.1.4a Two objects

A few Somali verbs take two objects without any preposition. Such objects are traditionally often referred to as direct and indirect objects.

Hooyádu dériská ayaa ay síinaysaa hílib.

Mother is giving THE NEIGHBOURS meat.

Hoóyo wax má ku weydiisay?

Did mother ask you something?

Maxamed carruúrta waxa uu síinayaa lacág.

Mahamed is giving the children MONEY.

Other such verbs are **tusaa** *shows something to somebody*, and **baraa** *teaches something to somebody, introduces somebody to somebody*.

§ 13.1.5 Adverbials

Noun phrases that are associated with a preposition are referred to as adverbial complements. The preposition is always found in the verb phrase, and from there it refers to one of the noun phrases in the clause. Which noun phrase it points to can only be inferred from the context.

Wáxa aan ◆ biyáha ◆ ká helnaa ◆ meeló badan.

We get water from MANY PLACES. / We find water in MANY PLACES.


Wáxa aynu ◆ guryáha ◆ kú cunnaa ◆ cuntó kala duwan.

In the homes we eat DIFFERENT KINDS OF FOOD.

§ 13.1.5a Adverbials without a preposition

Many Somali phrases expressing time are used without any preposition.

Waxa uu ◆ tágayaa ◆ masaájidka ◆ **maalínta Jimcáha.**

*He is leaving for the mosque **on Friday.***

Also some Somali motion verbs, such as **aadaa** goes, **tagaa** leaves, **yimaaddaa** comes, take an adverbial of place without any preposition.

Carruurtu ◆ waxa ay ◆ **aadayaan** ◆ **guriga** adeerkood.

*The children **are going to** their uncle's house.*

Diinkii ◆ waxa uu ◆ **yimid** ◆ **gurigiisa.**

*The turtle **came to** its house. = The turtle came home.*

Diinka iyo xaaskiisu ◆ waxay ◆ **tageen** ◆ **guriga** Maroodiga.

*The turtle and his wife **went to** Elephant's house.*

Kaalay ◆ **bannaanka.**

Come to the open space. = Come outside.

Daanyeerkii iyo bisaddii

◆ waxa ay ◆ **yimaadeen** ◆ **biyihii dushooda.**

*The monkey and the cat **came to** the surface of the water.*

= The monkey and the cat arrived at the water's edge.

Some other verbs with an object, such as **saaraa** puts, also take an adverbial of place without any preposition.

Cumar ◆ cawska ◆ ayuu ◆ **saarayaa** ◆ **saqafka.**

*Omar **puts** grass **on** the roof.*

§ 13.1.5b Adverbials of time

Noun phrases that express time and refer to the past most often take the demonstrative ending **-kii/-tii**.

Afartii galabnimo ayaa uu ka soo baxay aqalkii.

At four in the afternoon he came out from the house.

Toddobáadkii hore aábbe wuxuu tagay magaaló kale.

Last week mother and father went to another city.

When reference is made to the future or to something that is repeated as a habit, only the ordinary definite article is used.

Maalin kasta Faadumo waxa ay kacdaa shanta aroornimo.

Every day Faduma gets up AT FIVE IN THE MORNING.

§ 13.2 Declarative clauses with the verb *to be*

Declarative clauses that contain the verb **yahay is** differ in some respects from ordinary declarative clauses.

(a) If the predicative complement does not contain a noun, but just an adjective, the adjective goes in the verb phrase, immediately before the verb **yahay is**. The short subject pronoun is often omitted.

Dukáanku ♦ waa (uu) ♦ wéyn yahay.

The shop is big.

Gabádhu ♦ waa (ay) ♦ wéyn tahay.

The girl is big.

(b) In Somali, as in languages such as Arabic and Russian, no present tense form of the verb *to be* is necessary if the predicative complement is a noun or a noun phrase. Also, the short subject pronoun is omitted.

Sahro ♦ waa ♦ macallimad.

Sahra is a teacher.

Cumar ♦ waa ♦ arday wanaagsan.

Omar is a good pupil.

This type of clause lacks a verb phrase. Instead the particle phrase relates to and has a fixed position relative to the predicative complement NP.

§ 13.2.1 The verb *to be* with focused subjects

(a) If the subject is focused and the predicative complement is a noun phrase, the reduced verb form must be used, just as with any other verb.

Shimbiraha qaar ◆ baa ◆ ah ◆ xayawaan waxtar leh.

A PART OF THE BIRDS are useful animals.

(b) If the subject is focused and the predicative complement is an adjective, the reduced form **ah** *being* is omitted in the present tense.

Dád badani ◆ waxa ay ◆ kú nool yihiin ◆ magaaloóyinka.

Many people live in (the) CITIES.

Dád badan ◆ baa ◆ kú nool ✕ ◆ magaaloóyinka.

MANY PEOPLE live in (the) cities.

§ 13.2.2 Comparison

When two items are compared, the words *like* or *as* are often used in English. In Somali the noun **sida** *the way, the manner* is most often used as the head of a noun phrase. This noun phrase often becomes a predicative complement.

Midabkeedu ◆ waa ◆ sida qiiqa.

its.colour.SUBJ DECL the.way the.smoke

Its colour is like smoke.

§ 13.2.3 Telling the time

Numbers used to tell the time in the present/past most often take the demonstrative endings **-kii/-tii**.

Waa immisadii? – Waa shantii.

What time is it? – It's five o'clock.

Waa kowdii iyo badhkii.

It's half past one.

When referring to future or repeated events, the definite article **-ka/-ta** is used.

Example

§ 13.3 Negative declarative clauses

In negative declarative clauses the sentence type particle **má** *not* is used. It always has a high tone. The verb is in the subjunctive. See § 11.10. The short subject pronouns are not obligatory, but frequently used by some.

Má (aan) rabo. *I don't want it. / I don't want to (do it).*

cf. **Wáa aan rabaa.** *I want it. / I want to (do it).*

§ 13.4 Wh-questions

Wh-words are usually focused by a focus particle.

Qóysku xaggeé baa uu aaday ugu horréyntii?

WHERE did the family go first of all?

Two of the wh-words are obligatorily contracte with the following focus particle into one word.

maxáy *what?* + **baa / ayaa** > **maxáa** *WHAT?*

ayó *who?* + **baa / ayaa** > **yáa** *WHO?*

Yaa ay siisay hooyo hilibkii? *WHO did mother give the meat to?*

Maxaa ay u samaysay sidaas? *WHY did she do it that way?*

Maxaa uu ahaa dharka cusub ee Faadumo loo iibiyay?

WHAT were the new clothes that one had bought for Faduma?

As always, the short subject pronoun can of course be contracted with the focus particle in a more colloquial style. Notice especially the irregular form **muxúu** *WHAT ... he?* < **maxáy** + **baa** / **ayaa** + **uu**.

Faadumo iyo Xasan adeerkood muxuu siiyay?

Faduma and Hassan's uncle, WHAT did he give to them?

If the focused wh-word phrase at the same time is the subject of the clause, there will of course not be any short subject pronoun and the verb will be in its reduced form. The form **ah** *being* is omitted after an adjective.

Ímmisa wiil ayáa fásalka kú jira?

HOW MANY BOYS are there in the class?

Maxáa dhíci doona?

WHAT will happen?

Yáa rabá in uu falo haruurka?

WHO wants to sow the sorghum?

Maxáa ká duwán * ?

WHAT is different (than ...)?

After the pronoun **kee/tee?** *which?* and nouns with this ending, the focus particle **baa** or **ayaa** is often omitted, but the question word is still focused. One could say that this interrogative pronoun and ending has inherent focus, and in clauses where such question words are the subject, there is therefore no short subject pronoun and the verb is used in its reduced form. The form **ah** *being* is omitted after adjectives.

Kee dhээр * ? *Which one is (the) long(est)?*

Kee gaabán * ? *Which one is (the) short(ast)?*

§ 13.4.1 Wh-questions without focus

More seldom wh-questions without focus do occur. Then the clause contains the sentence type particle **waa**, otherwise typically used in declarative clauses.

Dhárka Xasan waa midabkeé? *What colour are Hassan's clothes?*

§ 13.5 Yes/no-questions

In a question that requires *yes* or *no* as an answer, the sentence type particle **ma**¹⁴ is used together with the ordinary forms of the verb. The short subject pronoun is optional.

The question particle **ma** has a high tone if the following phrase doesn't have a high tone. This is above all so for the simple aspect of verbs and the object pronouns.

Má ◆ **i aragtaa?**

Do you see me?

Adígu ◆ **má** ◆ **tahay** ◆ **hooyáday?**

Are you my mother?

The question particle **ma** does not have a high tone if the following phrase has a high tone. This is above all so for the progressive and habitual aspect of verbs as well as prepositions and nouns.

Adígu ◆ **ma** ◆ **kú nóoshahay** ◆ **gúri magaalo?**

Do you live in an urban house?

Ma ◆ **nabád** ◆ **baa?**

Are you doing okey? How are you doing?

Many yes/no-questions, alongside the question particle **ma**, also contain a focus particle. This is especially frequent with the verb *to be*.

If the predicative complement is a focused noun, the present tense forms of **yahay** are omitted in yes/no-questions, just like in the corresponding declarative clauses.

Kani ma Áxmed baa? *Is this Ahmed?*

Tani ma Sáhraa¹⁵? *Is this Sahra?*

¹⁴ A similar particle exists in many other languages, such as Finnish (*-ko/-kö*), Polish (*czy*), French (*est-ce que*), Persian (*āyā*), Russian (*li*) And Arabic (*hal*), but in most languages it is not obligatory, like in Somali.

¹⁵ **Sáhraa** is an obligatory contraction of **Sahro+baa**.

If instead **ayáa** is used, **ma** goes after the focused noun or noun phrase and **ma + ayáa** are contracted into **miyáa**.

Maxamed **ma macállin baa?**

= Maxamed macállin **miyáa?**

Is Mohamed a teacher?

Without focus the verb **yahay** is functions just like any other verb.

Gurigiinnu ♦ ma ♦ yahay ♦ sida Rooble gurigooda?

your.house.SUBJ QUEST is the.way Roble their.house

Is your hose the way Roble's house (is)? = ...like Roble's house?

§ 13.6 Commands

Commands are mainly expressed by the verb's imperative form.

Clauses in the imperative have no particle phrase.

Sheeg magacyada laba ciidood.

Tell the names of two holidays.

Qor laba waxtar oo kale oo uu dabku leeyahay.

Write two other usages that fire has.

§ 13.6.1 Warnings and prohibitions

These are often presented as negative impratives, but in Somali, they are expressed through a special construction which may be referred to as the PROHIBITIVE. The construction consists of the sentence particle **ha** folowed by the reduced simple present subjunctive. The tone is on the second to last vowel position.

Ha tégin hádda, waáyo waa máadow.

Don't go now, since it's dark.

When addressing several person, a final –a is added, just like in the imperative. The tone is on the second to last vowel position.

Ha tegína hádda, waáyo waa mádow.

Don't go now, since it's dark.

§ 14. Coordination

(a) There are three words in Somali that correspond to English *and*.

Between nouns and noun phrases **iyo** *and* is used.

Safiya iyo Cali *Safiya and Ali*

lix iyo toban *sixteen*

Rooti iyo caano baa uu rabaa. *He wants bread and milk.*

Between verbs **oo** *and* is used.

Akhri oo sawir! *Read and draw!*

Aniga ayaa shaqeeyay oo cunaya.

I'm the one who has done the work and will eat.

Between adjectives **oo** *and* is used.

Waa isbitaal weyn oo wanaagsan. *It is a big and good hospital.*

Qor qoraal gaaban oo ku saabsan qoyskaaga.

write text short and to relating your.family

Write a short text about your family.

It may also be used to introduce follow-up questions.

Waxaan ku nool ahay meel fog. – Oo waa xaggee?

I live in (a place) far away. – And where is that?

Between main clauses **-na** *and* is used. It is attached to the first phrase of the second clause.

Maroodigani waa weyn yahay, maroodiganina waa yar yahay.

This elephant is small and this elephant is big.

Fasalku waa weyn yahay, ardayduna waa badan yihiin.

The classroom is big and the pupils are many.

It may also be used to introduce follow-up questions.

Magacaygu waa Xasan. Adigana magacaa?

My name is Hassan. And you, what is your name?

(b) Somali has two conjunctions corresponding to English *or*.

In declarative clauses **ama** *or* is used.

Cali waxaa uu jiraa guriga ama dugsiga.

Ali is at home or at school.

Shaqadaydu ma aha in aan dilo ama dhaawaco.

My job is not to kill or injure.

A repetition of **ama** before both the alternatives corresponds to English *either ... or*.

Ama isaga ama wasiiraddiisa, khasab ma aha inuu isagu yimaaddo.

Either he or his minister, it is not necessary that he comes himself.

In questions where one is expected to choose one of the alternatives **mise** *or* is used.

Ma magaalo baa aad ku dhalatay mise miyi?

Are you born in the city or in the countryside?

If **mise** is used between clauses, the first clause contains the question particle **ma** whereas the second clause is a declarative clause with the particle **waa**.

Ma oggolaatay, mise waa aad diidday?

Did you approve or did you say no?

If you are not expected to make a choice, **ama** is used also in questions.

Ma maqashay sheeko kale oo ku saabsan diiq ama dawaco?

Have you heard any other story about a cock or a fox?

§ 14.1 The conjunction *ee*

The conjunction **ee** is used between two main clauses to express that there is a logical relation between the clauses, often some kind of cause and effect. The corresponding English word is often *so*, *then* or *and*.

Digaagad ayaa biyaha ku dhex jirta ee waa in aad noo soo gurmataa.

There is a hen down in the water, so you must come and help us.

Ee is often used to contrast two clauses. Then one clause is usually negative, and the other one positive. After a negative clause, **ee** corresponds fairly well to English *but*. Before a negative clause, though, English usually doesn't have any conjunction at all.

Maya, ma aha Safiya, ee waa Khadra.

No, it is not Safia, (but) it is Khadra.

Anigu dhakhtar baan ahay, ee askari ma ihi!

I'm a doctor, (and) I'm not a soldier!

§ 14.2 The conjunctions *laakiin* and *-se*

The conjunction **laakiin** *but* connects two contrasting main clauses. There is always a sentence particle in both clauses.

Soomaáli baan ahay, laakiin waxaan kú dhashay Itóobiya.

I am SOMALI, but I was born in ETHIOPIA.

Also the conjunction **-se** *but*, which is added to the first phrase of the second clause, connects two contrasting main clauses, but it puts less emphasis on the contrast. Again, there is always a sentence particle in both clauses.

§ 14.3 The conjunction *waáyo*

The conjunction **waáyo** *because, since* connects two main clauses and introduces an explanation. There is always a sentence particle in both clauses.

Waxa uu xidhán yahay dhár fudud waáyo waa xílli kulul.

He is dressed in LIGHT CLOTHES since it is a warm season.

§ 15. Subordinate clauses

A Somali subordinate clause can straight-forwardly be identified by its lack of a sentence particle. Only main clauses contain a sentence particle.

Waa maxay shaqada Aamina samaynaysaa?

PART what the.work Amina is.doing

What's the work (that) Aamina is doing?

Notice that in this chapter all subordinate clauses will be underlined.

§ 15.1 The form of the verb in subclauses

Most importantly, subclauses are divided into those that contain a noun or a pronoun representing the subject of the subclause and those that do not contain any such subject word.

(a) If the subclause contains a word denoting the subject, then the verb will be in the present or future subjunctive, describing an imagined event, or in the ordinary past tense, describing a real event.

Sheeg waxyaabaha aad sawirka ku aragtid.

tell the.things you the.picture in see

Tell the things you see in the picture. / Tell what things you see ...

Fiiri sida ay u samaynayso.

look the.way she in is.doing

Look at the way she is doing it in. / Look how she is doing it.

U sheeg fasalka waxa aad biyaha u isticmaasho gurigiinna.

to tell the.class the.thing you the.water for use your.house

Tell the class what you use water for in your home.

Sawirradani waxa ay ina tusayaan meelaha aynu biyaha ka helno.

these.pictures FOC they us show the.places we the.water from find

These pictures show us the places we get water from.

The two irregular verbs **yahay** *is* and **leeyahay** *has* are however used in the ordinary present tense.

Marka ay xilli kulul tahay waxa aynu xidhannaa dhar fudud.

the.moment it season warm is PART we put on clothes light

When it is a warm season we put on LIGHT CLOTHES.

Qor laba waxtar oo kale oo uu dabku leeyahay.

write two benefit and other and it the.fire has

Write two other uses that fire has. / ...that there is for fire.

(b) If the subclause does not contain any subject word, the verb is in the reduced form. Then, the subject of the subclause is the head noun that the subclause modifies. The head noun is part of the main clause.

Waxa aan ahay arday dhigta fasalka 2aad.

I'm a pupil who studies in the 2nd grade.

I'm a pupil studying in the 2nd grade.

or even: *I'm a pupil in the 2nd grade.*¹⁶

In this type of clauses, many languages of the world use a participle or a gerund.

(c) A negative subclause is always in the reduced subjunctive, lacking the distinction between present and past tense. This form is used since there is a two-fold reason for the subjunctive, both subclause and negation.

Example

§ 15.1.1 The time relation between verbs

The time relation between the situation in the main clause and the situation in the subclause is called TAXIS. Different languages express such relations in different ways. In English it is common to apply the same time in both clauses if the situations are simultaneous, but in Somali the present tense is used in the subclause to express simultaneity. It doesn't matter if

¹⁶ Often, a verb in a relative clause like this may be omitted in English if it does not really contribute anything to the meaning that is not evident from the context. The reason for this syntactic difference between the two languages is that a preposition may connect two nouns in English, whereas in Somali prepositions always connect a verb (or adjective) and a noun.

the main clause is in the past, simultaneity still makes the subclause occur in the present tense.

Waxa ay tagtay meel ay biyo ku jiraan.

the.thin she went place it water in exists

*She **went** to a place where there **was** water.*

In a temporal subclause, PROGRESSIVE present tense means that the actions in both clauses are simultaneous.

Markii uu casar tukanayo carruurtu waxa ay akhrinayaan Qur'aanka.

*When he **prays** the afternoon prayer the children **read** the Quran.*

In a temporal subclause, SIMPLE present tense means that the action in the subclause has come to an end before the action in the main clause starts.

Markii uu casar tukado carruurtu waxa ay akhrinayaan Qur'aanka.

the.moment he afternoon prays the.children FOC they are.reading the.Quran

*When he **has prayed** the afternoon prayer the children **read** the Quran.*

Sometimes both present and past may be used in English if the time relation is clear from the context.

Carruurtu marka ay masaajidka ka soo noqdaan waxa ay cunayaan buskud iyo xalwo.

When the children (have) come back from the mosque they eat cookies and halva.

Markii Qur'aanka akhriskiisu uu dhammaado carruurtu waxa ay aadayaan guriga adeerkood.

When the Quran reading ends / has ended, the children go to their uncle's house.

§ 15.2 *In*-clauses

The only frequent subordinating conjunction in Somali is **ín** *that*.

A subject word is obligatory in **ín**-clause, and therefore the verb is always in the present or future subjunctive, or in the ordinary past tense.

§ 15.2.1 Object clauses with *ín*

Subclauses beginning with **ín** mostly occur as objects of the main clause verb.

Ma jeceshahay ín aad soo booqato ayeeyadaa?

QUEST you.like that you towards visit your.grandmother

Do you like to visit your grandmother?

Ma u malaynaysaa ín haramcadkii la hadlay Maxamed?

QUEST in you.believe that the.leopard with talked Mahamed

Do you think that the leopard talked with Mahamed?

Some verbs that are followed by an infinitive phrase in English correspond to Somali verbs that must be followed by an **ín**-clause.

Cali wáxa uu rabaa ín uu fuuló baaskiilka.

Ali FOC he wants that he rides the.bike

*Ali wants **TO RIDE** THE BIKE.*

§ 15.2.2 Subject clauses with *ín*

Sometimes the *in*-clause functions as the subject of the main clause verb.

Example

§ 15.2.3 Predicative complement clauses with *ín*

Shaqadayduna waa in aan daweeyo, ma aha in aan dilo ama dhaawaco!

And my job is to heal, it is not to kill or injure (lit. ...that I heal, it is not that I kill or injure).

§ 15.2.4 The construction *waa ín...*

The phrase **waa ín** corresponds to English *should, has to, must, need to*. In this construction **ín** *that* may be followed by either the present subjunctive or the ordinary present tense.

Waa in aynu ilaalinnaa nadaafadda ilaha biyaheenna.

Waa ín aynu ilaalunno nadaafadda ilaha biyaheenna.

We must protect the hygiene of our water sources.

One possible explanation for this variation could be that this construction is not straight-forwardly felt to be a subclause, since there isn't much of a main clause preceding it.

§ 15.3 Relative clauses

English relative clauses generally begin with one of the relative pronouns *which* or *that*.

The letter that I received had been opened.

Did you watch the film that I recommended?

But quite often we may also omit the relative pronoun.

The letter I received had been opened.

Did you watch the film I recommended?

In Somali relative clauses are always expressed in this latter manner. Somali doesn't have any relative pronoun. Instead, the relative clause often begins with the short subject pronoun, expressing the subject of the relative subclause.

Waa maxay shaqada ay Aamina samaynaysaa?

PART what the.work she Amina is doing

What'ss the work (that) Amina is doing?

The short subject pronoun may also go before the verb or be omitted.

Waa maxay shaqada Aamina ay samaynaysaa?

Waa maxay shaqada Aamina samaynaysaa?

And, of course, a relative clause does not contain any sentence particle. That is one of the most important characteristics of subclauses in general.

§ 15.3.1 Relative clauses with a preposition

Many relative clauses contain a preposition that points back to the noun in the main clause that the relative clause is modifying. In such cases the preposition may often be replaced in English by another suitable relative word. If the head noun denotes a place *where* is commonly used.

Sawirkani waxa uu ina tusayaa meelaha aynu biyaha ka helno.

This picture shows us the places (that) we get water from.

= This picture shows us the places where we find water.

§ 15.3.2 Relative clauses with ee

A relative clause that is not the very first modifier of its head noun must be preceded by a conjunction. The conjunction **ee** indicates that the relative clause is intimately connected with the head noun and that it is crucial in order to identify the object that the head noun is referring to.

Maxáa uu ahaa dhárka cusub ee Faadumó loó iibiyay?

What are the new clothes that one bought for Faduma?

Booqo ilaha biyaha ee ku dhow dugsigaaga.

Visit the water sources that are close to your school.

Magacow cuntada kala duwan ee sawirka ka muuqata.

Give the names of the different kinds of food shown in the picture.

The sentences are not about any *clothes, surces* or *kinds of food*, but precisely those *one bought for Faduma*, those *that are close to your school*, and those *shown in the picture*. In order to know that, the relative clause is absolutely necessary.

§ 15.3.3 Relative clauses with oo

The conjunction **oo** indicates that the relative clause is only loosely connected to the head noun. It doesn't contain information that is crucial to identify the object denoted by the head noun. Rather, it just adds a bit of "extra" information, which might be very interesting and even important, but not necessary in order to identify the person or object.

(a) The conjunction **oo** is common after indefinite nouns.

Magacow saddex cunto oo kale oo aad ku cunto guriga.

Give the name of three other kinds of food that you eat at home.

Sheeg magacyada laba ciidood oo Islaamku leeyahay.

Tell the names of two holidays that Islam has.

Qor laba waxtar oo kale oo uu dabku leeyahay.

Write two other uses that fire has.

(b) After proper nouns **oo** must always be used before a relative clause.

Jaamac waxa uu maqlay Xasan oo ku hadlaya telefoonka.

Jama heard Hassan who was talking on the phone.

= Jama heard Hassan talk(ing) on the phone.

§ 15.3.4 Relative clauses in subject noun phrases

According to the rules of standard Somali, a final **-a/-o** in a verb in a relative clause should be changed to the long vowel **-aa** if the verb in the relative clause is the final word in a subject noun phrase.

The subject noun phrase has been put in a box in the following examples.

Waa maxay shaqada ay Aamina samaynaysaa?

PART what the.work she Amina is.doing

What's the work (that) Amina is doing?

Waa maxay dharka aad dugsiga u xidhataa?

What are the clothes (that) you put on for school?

The use of this subject marker is not very widespread in colloquial Somali, and it is therefore frequently lacking also in writing.

§ 15.3.5 Relative clauses in headings

Somali headings and descriptions of illustrations generally have the structure of a noun phrase containing a head noun and a relative clause with a verb in its reduced form.

Xayawaanka biyaha ku jira

The animal that is in the water = The animal in the water

Also English headings and descriptions of illustrations may contain a relative clause with a verb, but often they just contain a noun phrase followed by a preposition phrase. That kind of structure is impossible in Somali, since prepositions can only be used if followed by a verb. That is why relative clauses are more frequent in Somali than in English.

§ 15.4 Adverbial clauses

Compare the subordinate clauses in the following two sentences.

Sue immediately noticed Mary when she entered the room.

Sue noticed Mary the moment she entered the room.

The noun *the moment* does the same job as the subordinating conjunction *when*. To use nouns as connecting words between clauses in this manner is extremely common in Somali. Actually, subordinating conjunctions are quite scarce, with the exception of the very frequent subordinating conjunction *in that* and a few others borrowed from Arabic.

§ 15.4.1 Temporal clauses

The most common connecting word in temporal subclauses is the noun **marka**, **markii** *the moment*. It corresponds to English *when*.

Ku bilow xaraf weyn marka aad qorayso magac gaar ah.

Start with a big letter when you write a proper noun.

Qof waliba markii uu hoos u eegay biyihii waxa uu arkay hummaaggiisa.

Each person, when he looked down into the water, saw his mirror image.

The form **marka** is mainly used for general reference and with reference to the present and the future, whereas the form **markii** is mainly used with reference to a specific occasion in the past.

Other common connecting words are **ka dib markii** *after (having)* and the subordinating conjunction **ilaa** *until* which is borrowed from Arabic.

Dad badan ayaa waqti badan noolaa ka dib markii ay qaadeen cudurkan.

Many people have lived a long time after they got this disease.

Sidii ayaa warkii ku faafay magaaladii ilaa uu boqorkiina maqlay.

That way the news spread in the city until even the king heard it.

§ 15.4.2 Conditional clauses

The most common connecting word in conditional subclauses is the noun **haddii** *the occasion*. It corresponds to English *if*.

Haddii aad erayó iskú darto waxa aad héli doontaa weér.

If you put words together you will get a clause.

§ 15.4.3 Final clauses

(a) Final subclauses are introduced by the noun **si** *manner, way*, accompanied by the preposition **u** *in* in the verb phrase of the subclause. This construction corresponds to the English conjunctive phrases *in order to* or *so that*.

Isticmaal erayadan si aad ugu buuxiso meelaha bannaan.

use these words **way** you **in.with** fill the places empty.

Use these words **so that** you fill the empty spaces **with them**.

= Use these words **in order to** fill the empty spaces.

As shown by the last translation, this kind of subclause may in English be condensed into an infinitive phrase if the subject of both clauses is identical, a construction that does not exist in Somali.

(b) Final subclauses may also be introduced by the conjunction **in** *that*, which requires the use of the preposition **u** *for* in the main clause.

Example

§ 15.4.4 Concessive clauses

Concessive subclauses are introduced by the connecting phrase **in kasta oo** corresponding to English *even though*. The contracted form **in kastoo** or **inkastoo** is also very frequent.

Axmed waa yimid in kasta oo uu soo daahay.

Ahmed came, even though he was late.

§ 15.4.5 Causal clauses

Causes are usually not expressed as subordinate clauses in Somali. Instead, the phrase **sababta oo ah / sababtoo ah** *the reason being*, corresponding to English *since, because*, or the coordinating conjunction **waáyo** *since, because* is used. In both cases a complete main clause containing a sentence particle follows.

Maryan ayeyyadeed **waa** ay farxi doontaa sababta oo ah waxa ay jeceshahay moos.

Maryan's grandmother will be happy since she likes bananas.

Waxa uu xidhan yahay dhar fudud waayo waa xilli kulul.

He is dressed in light clothes since it's a warm season.

§ 15.4.6 Circumstantial clauses

A special type of relative clauses are used to express different kinds of circumstances. A long personal pronoun, or sometimes a noun, is followed by the conjunction **oo** and a relative clause introduced. This type of construction may express time, manner, reason etc. and the interpretation depends only on the context.

MANNER:

Waxa aan hubinayaa qiyaastaydii aniga oo adeegsanaya miisaan.

I check my estimation, me using a scale.

= I check my estimation (by) using a scale.

Waxa ay noolaan kartaa muddo dheer iyada oo aan biyo cabbin.

It can live for a long period of time, it not drinking water.

= It can live for a long period of time without drinking water.

§ 15.5 English indirect questions

English indirect questions are generally introduced by the same question word as the corresponding direct question, e.g., *when, where, how, what*.

Where do you live?

I asked him *where* he lives.

In Somali question words are generally formed through the addition of the interrogative suffix **-ee** to various nouns. In "indirect questions" the same noun is used, but in the plain definite form, without the interrogative suffix **-ee**.

xaggee?

xagga

Waxa *the thing* isn't always a focus particle. Sometimes it is a definite noun used to introduce an object subclause in the same way as English *what*.

U sheeg fasalka waxa aad biyaha u isticmaasho gurigiinna.

to tell the.class the.thing you the.water for use your.house

Tell the class what you use water for at your home.

§ 15.5.1 Indirect yes/no-questions

English indirect yes/no-questions are usually expressed as subclauses beginning with *if* or *whether*. In Somali they usually begin with **in** *that*.

Waxay weydiisay bisaddii iyo ridii in ay burka ka sameeyaan canjeero ama rooti.

She asked the cat and the goat whether they should make flat bread or French bread with the flour.

§ 15.6 Direct speech as object clause

Direct speech may occur as the object of a verb in a main clause. Both clauses are then main clauses and will contain a sentence particle. It is very common that the main clause contains a focus particle pointing to the object clause.

Jiirkii waxa uu yiri "Anigu ma rabo."

The mouse said: – I DON'T WANT TO.

"Waa qaamuus," ayaa uu yiri.

– IT'S A DICTIONARY, he said.

§ 16. Colloquial Somali

§ 16.1.1 Distant vowel assimilation

Besides forms like **ilkúhu** *the teeth* and **ilkíhii** *those teeth*, with assimilation of /u/ and /i/ across /h/, the spoken language also shows assimilation with a following /e/ or /o/, but those sound changes are usually not reflected by the orthography. The most frequent spelling is, e.g., **ilká-hooda** *their teeth*, **ilká-heeda** *her teeth*, but people often pronounce *ilkóhooda* and *ilkéheeda*. To render this kind of assimilation in writing is somewhat more common in certain words, e.g.

	<i>more literary</i>	<i>more everyday</i>
aabbáha <i>the father</i>	aabbá-heed	aabbé-heed <i>her father</i>
	aabbá-hood	aabbó-hood <i>their father</i>

Distant vowel assimilation with /i/ is also frequently applied in a more relaxed style in the stem of some masculine nouns that end in /x/ or /c/.

mágac <i>name</i>	mágac-a	<i>the name</i>	mágac-iisa
			(mágic-iisa) <i>his name</i>

§ 16.1.2 Focus by subject pronoun

The focus particle **baa** / **ayaa** may disappear between a preceding noun phrase and a following short subject pronoun. A subject pronoun that is contracted with a preceding noun phrase is a very frequent way of expressing focus in colloquial Somali.

EX