Does tone mark case in Somali?

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Aim

To re-examine **tonally marked case forms** in Somali based on project data.

To point out some **weaknesses in the prevailing view** on such forms.

To suggest **alternative analyses.**

Outline

- **Background** information on Somali cases.

- **Typological** principles.

- Discussion of the **Genitive** case and our project data

- Discussion of the **Nominative** case and our project data

- Conclusions

'Somali and Prosodic Typology'

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Annotated database (as of June 2017)

- Speakers: 4   (Mogadishu: 3, Kismayo: 1)
- Utterances (Types):   2.987
- Utterances (Tokens): 10.002

Somali cases

The prevailing interpretation of the case system in Somali, following, e.g., Hyman (1981), Banti (1988), Frascarelli (1999), Saeed (1999).

ABSOLUTIVE (Frascarelli: Accusative)
unmarked: used as citation form,
used for objects, adverbials and **focused** subjects.

NOMINATIVE (Hyman: Subject case)

used for **non-focused** subjects.

GENITIVE used for a noun determining another noun.

VOCATIVE used for addressing persons or objects.

Somali case marking

"the marking of case on nouns is largely accentual, with some use of suffixes".

Saeed (1999: 63):

Somali case marking

The traditional view, slightly simplified.

ABSOLUTIVE unmarked

NOMINATIVE Only marked NP-finally
by suffixes: **-u, -i, -aa**
and/or low tone, mainly finally

GENITIVE marked at word level
by suffixes: **-aad, -eed, -ood**
and/or final high tone

VOCATIVE Only marked NP-finally
by suffixes -yahow, -ow (m.), -yahay, -ay, -y (f.)
OR by initial high tone – then no suffix

Somali case marking: Tonal accent

BARE / INDEFINITE MASCULINE NOUNS

ABSOLUTIVE	Maxámed	L.H.L	'Mahamed'
NOMINATIVE	Maxamed	L.L.L	
GENITIVE	Maxaméd	L.L.H	
VOCATIVE	Máxamed	H.L.L	
or	Maxámedów	L.H.L.HL	

Somali case marking: Suffixes

INDEFINITE FEMININE

ABS.SG	naág		'woman'
NOM.SG	(naag)	naag-i	
GEN.SG	naág	or naag-eéd	
VOC.SG	(náag)	naág-éy	
ABS.PL	naag-ó		
NOM.PL	naag-o		
GEN.PL	naag-ó	or naag-oód	
VOC.PL	(náag-o)	naag-á-yahow	

Somali case marking: Definite forms

	DEFINITE FEMININE		DEFINITE MASCULINE	
ABS.SG	naág-ta	'the woman'	áqal-ka	'the house'
NOM.SG	naág-tu		áqal-ku	
GEN.SG	naág-ta		áqal-ka	
ABS.PL	naag-á-ha		aqall-á-da	
NOM.PL	naag-ú-hu		aqall-á-du	
GEN.PL	naag-á-ha		aqall-á-da	

Absolutive and genitive are always syncretic in definite nouns.

Principles for canonical features and their values

- Canonical features [case, number, gender…] and their values [nom, gen…] are clearly distinguished by formal means.

- The use of canonical morphosyntactic features and their values is determined by simple syntactic rules.

- Canonical morphosyntactic features and their values are expressed by canonical inflectional morphology.

(Corbett 2012: 155-199)

Overview of genitive markers

Genitive is only marked explicitly on morphologically indefinite nouns.
Genitive and Absolutive are always syncretic in definite nouns.

Feminine common nouns

singular	-eed (-aad)	(1) dhar naag-eéd	'woman's clothes'
		dhar naág	'a woman's clothes'
		(2) caano riy-aád	'goat milk'
plural	-ood	(3) shan naag-oód	'five women'

Masculine nouns

singular	LH	(4) guriga Calí	'Ali's house'
		(absolutive: Cáli)	

The use of the genitive

No genitive due to government by verbs or prepositions.

No agreement in case in the genitive.

The genitive only occurs as the second of two nouns constituting a NP.

Lack of expected genitive final high tone

In our project data, final high tone is lacking in 68% of NP final genitives, e.g.

    hál litir   'one liter'   (for the expected: hál litír)

                                    (Downing & Nilsson, forthcoming)

This only takes into account NP's which do not function as a non-focused subject. In non-focused subject NP's the final high tone is overridden by a nominative phrase final low tone.

Genitive & the canonical principles

All nouns in a given class should be inflected in the same way.
> Not so. Lexical restrictions apply for **–eed, –aad**.

Cases should be clearly distinguished.
> Not so. Definite nouns do not distinguish the genitive.

Their use should be determined by simple rules.
> Not so. Nominative overrides the genitive.
> NP final genitive in non-foc. subject NP is marked as nominative.

For any specific lexeme, a certain case should always be expressed by the same morpheme. All morphemes expressing the same case should be used according to the same syntactic rules.
> Not so. Some lexemes exhibit different genitive forms depending on the (semantic) type of construction.

> There is a special form used only after numerals.

> Also, the expected tone marking is often reduced / not realised.

Doing without a Genitive

Lexical and semantic restrictions on the use of **–aad** and **–eed**.
Rather these forms should be described as derived adjectives.

Syntactic restriction on the use of **–ood**; only feminine nouns after numeral
These forms are better described as a 'numerative' form (case?)

Shift to final high tone only in indefinite masculine nouns.
Can be interpreted as NP final high tone,
occurring also in other parts of speech.

What can be observed today are rather traces of a genitive case that is not productive any more.

Nilsson (to appear)

The Nominative Case

The absolutive is unmarked, and the nominative is limited to non-focused subject NP's, and to the very last constituent within such an NP.

The case distinction is expressed by specific nominative morphemes in some contexts, and by tonal accent distinctions in others.

Andrzejewski (1956: 24ff.) does not primarily use the notion of case. Instead he talks about "Subsidiary agreement signs" that are added to the NP: "**the suffixes -i, -u, distinctive tone patterns, and in some cases the length and quality of the final vowel**" [of the noun phrase].

Overview of nominative markers

Traditional view, slightly simplified.

Only marked on the last word of an NP by	BASE form	SUBJECT form	
-- suffix –u after definite article	bisádda	bisáddu	'the cat'
-- falling tone on (short) possessive suffixes	hooyáday	hooyadáy	'my mother'
-- penult tone on bare (indefinite) nouns ending in –o/–e	Sahró / Sáhro	Sáhro	'Shara'
-- low tone on (most) other bare (indefinite) nouns	Xásan	Xasan	'Hassan'
-- low tone on the remote definite article –ii	wíilkií	wíilkii	'that boy'
-- low tone on the past tense relative verb endings (past participles)	arkaý	arkay	'who saw'
-- low toned suffix –aa on the present tense relative verb forms (present participles)	arká	arkaa	'who sees'
-- suffix –i preceded by low tone on adjectives and demonstrative suffixes	tán	tani	'this'

Our data on the Nominative

- Full clauses (Types): 1.150

- Full clauses (Tokens): 3.529

- With a subject NP (Tokens): 2.031

- Which is not focused (Tokens): 1.521

- With a possible tonal difference (Tokens): 1.236

Our data on non-focused subject NP's

Tonal marking	Nom.	Abs.	Other
Bare nouns –o/-e	147	15	5: two high tones
Feminine penult	14	30	1: mid tone
Other bare nouns	142	28	4: 'genitive' final high tone
Adjective	25	0	
Adjective –e	11	20	
Relative clause	18	18	24: low with suffix -a
Demonstrative suffix	39	8	21: low without -i, 7 high with -i
Possessive suffix	118	25	3: no high tone; 4 two high tones
Remote definite suffix	82	30	5: mid tone
Demonstrative pronoun	381	10	

Our data on non-focused subject NP's

Morphological marking		Nom.	Abs.
Definite article in	-u	181	
Definite article in	-a		29

Yaa   waaye   [qofka   garaacaya albaabk**a**]$_{NP}$?
Who.FOC is   the.person   knocking   the.door
'Who is the person knocking at the door?'

Tonal variation in both directions

The expected final high tone is often missing in the Absolutive case.
This leads to forms that are identical to or tonally similar to the Nominative.

Proportions of missing high tones in our data:

Final high tone is lacking in 58% of the demonstrative suffixes, e.g.
    wiílkan   'this boy' (N: wiilkani)   (for the expected A: wiílkán)

Final high tone is lacking in 36% of the remote definite suffixes, e.g.
    nínkii   N 'that man, you know' (for the expected A: nínkií)

Final high tone is lacking in 68% of NP final genitives, e.g.
    hál litir   N 'one liter'   (for the expected A: hál litír)

Final high tone is lacking in 50% of NP final adjectives, e.g.
    subáxdií hore N 'the early morning' (for the expected A: subáxdií horé)

                                (Downing & Nilsson, forthcoming)

Desinences vary only in one direction

Nominative desinences are not encountered instead of Absolutive
-- with one exception:

The ending –i has a tendency to occur in adverbials – possibly when they can be understood as the familiar topic (Frascarelli & Puglielli 2009).

> Sidaasi   ayaana loo   wadaa muddo dheer.
> that.way.**NOM**   FOC.and one.in go.on while long
> 'And you go on like that for quite a while.'

> Maxaa aad filanaysaan in   aad meeshani   ka   heshaan?
> What   you hope.PRS   that you place.this.NOM from find.SBJ
> 'What are you hoping to find here?'

What influences substitution of Nominative Low with Absolutive High tone?

	Nom. L	Abs. H
Pronouns lowest frequency of substitution.		
Demonstrative pronouns	381	10
Nouns mid frequency.		
Noun + Demonstative suffix	60	15
Relative clauses highest frequency.		
	42	18

Familiar topic?

What influences substitution with Absolutive H?

Position of VP relative to the VP

      Miyúu   Max**a**med   baabúurkíí arkay?

      Q   Mahamed.NOM   that.car.ABS saw

      Max**á**med   baabúurkíí miyúu   arkay?

      Mahamed.ABS   that.car.ABS Q   saw

      Miyúu   arkay   baabúurkii Max**á**med?

      Q   saw   that.car.ABS Mahamed.ABS

      'Did Mahamed see that car?'

Nominative & canonical principles

All nouns in a given class should be inflected in the same way.
>   True for the nominative.

Cases should be clearly distinguished.
>   Some syncretism with the Absolutive.
>   Some substitution of the Nominative with the Absolutive.

Their use should be determined by simple rules.
>   True for the nominative.

For any specific lexeme, a certain case should always be expressed by the same morpheme. All morphemes expressing the same case should be used according to the same syntactic rules.
>   A certain difference between different morphemes can be noticed with
>   regard to the frequency of substitution with the absolutive.

Conclusions

The genitive seems to be mere remnants of a historical case, not productive any longer in modern Somali,

It has been morphologically reinterpreted, partly as derivational suffixes, partly as the new category of the numerative.

Final high tone seems to function as an (optional) final boundary marker of an NP.

Also the Nominative seems to be somewhat instable. It is however used much more systematically than the Genitive, especially close to the VP and possibly also when the subject is the familiar topic of the clause.

As the distance to the VP becomes larger the Absolutive sometimes also seems to be possible in non-focused subject NP's.

Morphological desinences are used more systematically than tone.

Substitution of tone goes both ways, but in the desinences the Nominative is hardly ever used instead of an expected Absolutive.

Needs for further research

More data is needed with non-focused subject NP's in other positions than directly before the VP.

The larger situational context needs to be taken into account more carefully in order to systematically investigate the relation between grammatical tone, intonation and topicality.

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