

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
P.O.B. 200 • SE 405 30 GOTHENBURG • SWEDEN

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A FEW THINGS ABOUT SOMALI

Morgan Nilsson

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This is work in progress.

Read it critically! Feel free to contact me with your comments.

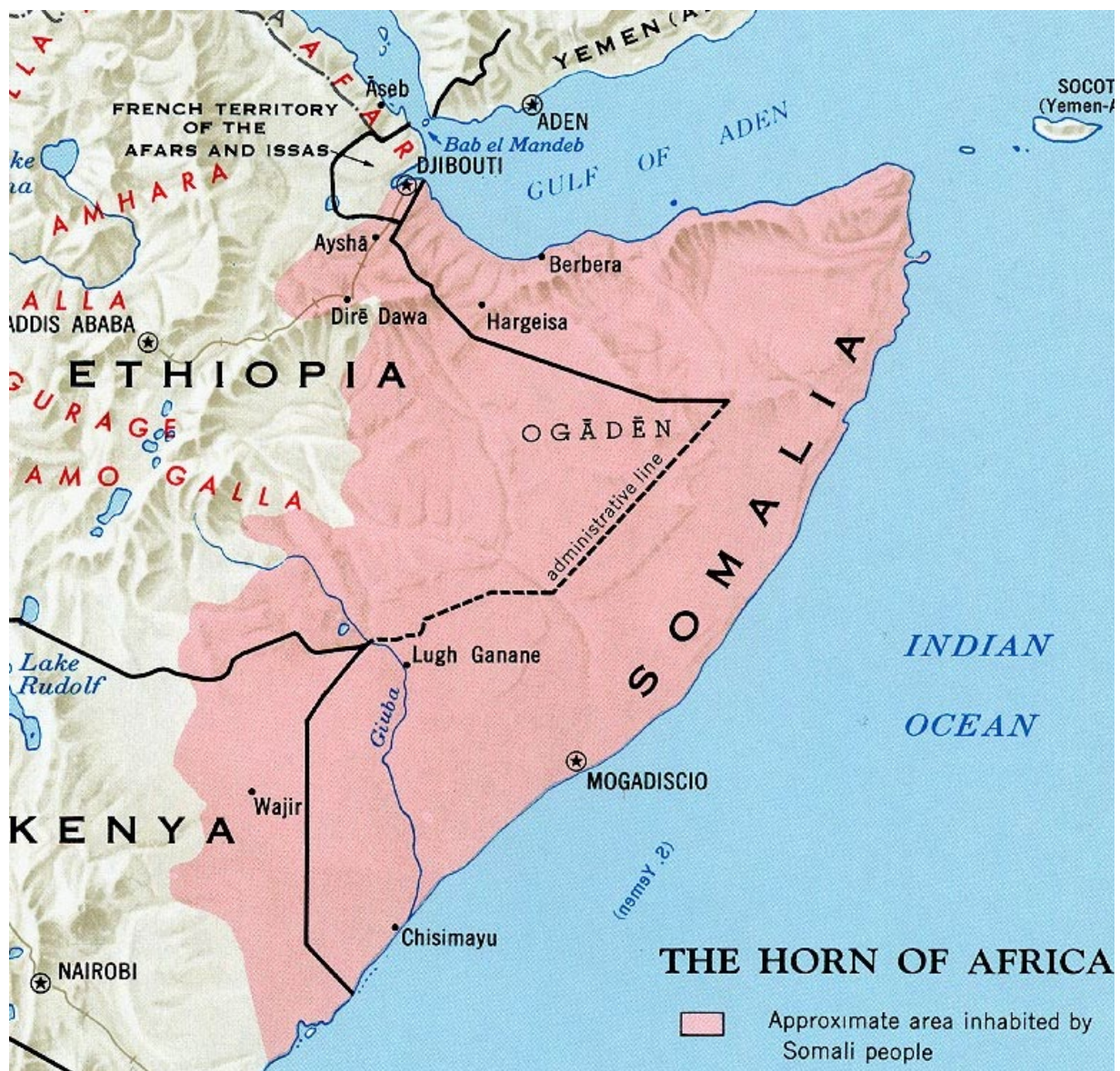
morgan.nilsson@gu.se

Theme 1

Somali
among the languages of the world

The Somali speaking area

Somali is spoken in the **Horn of Africa** within an area encompassing the whole of Somalia with Puntland and Somaliland, the south-eastern part of Djibouti, the eastern part of Ethiopia and the eastern part of Kenya.



Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The whole Somali speaking area is approximately as big as France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland together, about 1.100.000 km². However, the size of the Somali population in that area is only one eighth of the population in those European countries.

In addition to the coherent area in the Horn, Somali is also spoken by a large number of Somalis living outside that area, mainly in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, Kenya's capital Nairobi, in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, South Africa, Yemen, Tanzania, but also in many other countries of the world.

It is difficult to establish exactly how many people speak Somali, but based on statistics from different national agencies in the countries where Somali is spoken, as well as some qualified assumptions, the number is likely to be approximately 26 million. Adding up the most trustworthy figures leads to a total of somewhere between 24–28 million speakers.

The calculation looks as follows:

Somalia ¹	13.5	–	15.5
Djibouti ²	0.5	–	0.6
Ethiopia ³	6.5	–	7
Kenya ⁴	2.5	–	3
<u>Rest of the world</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>–</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	24	–	28.1

With about 26 million speakers, Somali is approximately the 70th largest among the ca. 7,000 languages of the world, meaning that 99% of all

¹ According to <data.un.org> (2019), UN estimates the number of people in Somalia to 15.4 million. The large span 13.5–15.5 million mainly depends on whether Maay is considered a separate language or a dialect of Somali, as well as on the number of Maay speakers. There is reason to assume that different varieties of Maay may be spoken by as many as 2 million people.

² According to CIA (2017), 60% of the population in Djibouti are Somalis. According to <data.un.org> (2019), the total population is 974,000.

³ According to the Ethiopian census of 2007, 6,2% of the Ethiopian population were Somalis. According to <data.un.org> (2019), the total population is 112 million.

⁴ According to the Kenyan census of 2009, 6,2% of the population were Somalis. According to the 2019 census, the total population is 47.5 million.

languages are smaller than Somali. Among the approximately 2,000 languages spoken in Africa, Somali is most probably the 9th largest.

The list of the largest languages in Africa looks as follows.

1. Arabic (over 300 mill.)
2. Swahili (around 100 mill.)
3. Hausa (around 50 mill.)
4. Yoruba (around 40 mill.)
5. Oromo (around 35 mill.)
6. Igbo (around 30 mill.)
6. Fula (around 30 mill.)
6. Amharic (around 30 mill.)
9. Somali (ca. 26 mill.)
9. Malagasy (ca. 26 mill.)

Somali outside the Horn of Africa

In Sweden Somali is spoken by at least 100,000 people. That corresponds to 1% of the Swedish population. The figure is based on the number of persons born in Somalia together with the number of persons having one or two parents who were born in Somalia. Even if some of these do not speak Somali, there must be many other speakers of Somali that were not born in Somalia, but in some other part of the Horn or the world.

Table 1. Persons born abroad + persons born in Sweden with one or both parents born abroad.

NB: the figures don't say anything about the language spoken, just the country of birth.

SCB						
Utrikes födda samt födda i Sverige med en eller två utrikes födda föräldrar efter födelseland/ursprungsland, 31 december 2018, totalt						
Födelseland/ ursprungsland	Utrikes födda	Födda i Sverige med två utrikes födda föräldrar			Födda i Sverige med en utrikes född förälder	
		Föräldrarnas födelseland då de har samma födelseland	Faderns födelseland då föräldrarna har olika födelseland ¹	Moderns födelseland då föräldrarna har olika födelseland ¹	Faderns födelseland då modern är född i Sverige	Moderns födelseland då fadern är född i Sverige
Djibouti	447	19	115	238	6	15
Etiopien	20 695	5 782	4 125	2 826	1 478	1 885
Kenya	4 502	289	438	603	574	841
Somalia	68 678	27 602	1 942	2 509	917	5 183

Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB), spring 2019

According to statistics collected in March 2017 from sister agencies in the other Nordic countries, the corresponding figure for Norway is at least 42,000, for Finland at least 20,000 and for Denmark at least 20,000. That corresponds to 0.8% of the Norwegian population, and 0.4% of the Finnish and Danish population.

In the Swedish primary education system (9 years) at least 21,000 pupils speak Somali, which corresponds to 2% of all school children in Sweden. That makes Somali the third most common mother tongue among Swedish children, after Swedish and Arabic. The Somali speaking children are also the group with the highest degree of participation in mother tongue classes at a rate of 76% of the children.

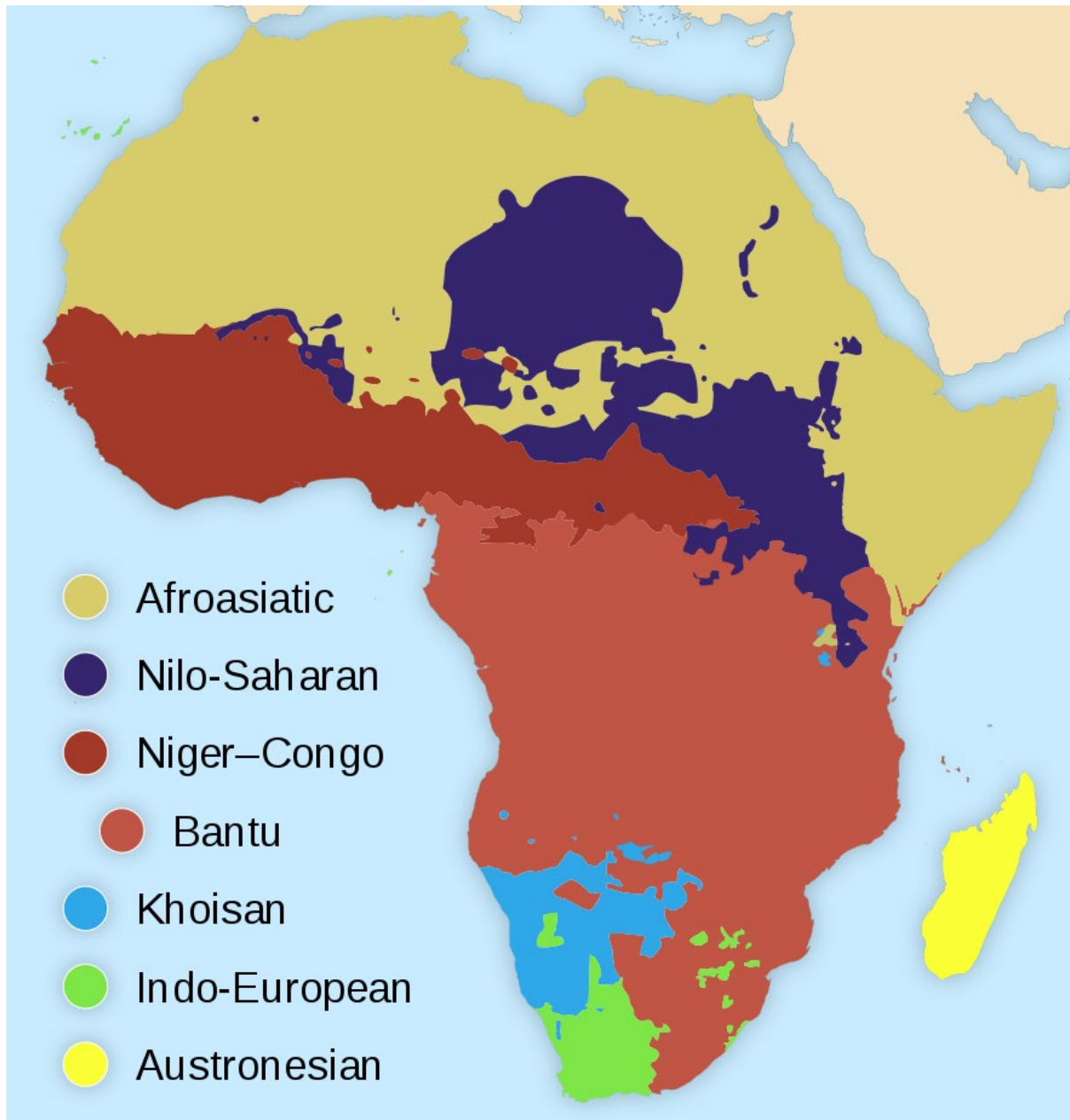
Table 2. Pupils according to mother tongue and participation in classes, school year 2018/19.

Grundskolan – Elever – Riksnivå						
Sveriges officiella statistik						
Tabell 8 B: Elever med undervisning i modersmål						
läsåret 2018/19						
Modersmål		Antal elever	Andel (%)	Deltagare i modersmålsundervisning		
		berättigade	berättigade	Antal	Andel (%) av	Andel (%)
		till moders-	av samtliga		samtliga berätti-	utanför
		målsunder-	elever		gade	garanterad
		visning			elever	undervisningstid
10 största modersmålen						
Arabiska		77 448	7,3	54 578	5,1	54,6
Somaliska		21 115	2	16 070	1,5	54,2
Engelska		17 718	1,7	9 403	0,9	59,3
Bosniska/Kroatiska/Serbiska		17 109	1,6	8 624	0,8	65,3
Kurdiska		15 629	1,5	8 672	0,8	59,1
Persiska		14 713	1,4	8 696	0,8	57,8
Spanska		14 237	1,3	7 319	0,7	61,8
Albanska		9 570	0,9	5 605	0,5	54,7
Polska		9 552	0,9	5 748	0,5	58,1
Finska		9 454	0,9	4 841	0,5	42,6
Övriga språk (154 st.)		97 106	9,1	47 377	4,5	58,7

Source: Statistics Sweden (SCB), spring 2019

Somali and its relationship to other languages

At some distance, Somali is related to languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic, Tigrinya, Hausa and different Berber languages. They all belong to the **Afro-Asiatic** language family with about 300 different languages.



Source: Wikipedia

Many languages that are quite well known by Somalis, are not at all related to Somali, but belong to the **Indo-European** language family, e.g. English, Swedish, German, Italian, French, Spanish, Russian, Persian,

Kurdish, Pashto, Urdu and Hindi. The Indo-European languages are spoken by almost half of the world's population, i.e. some 3 billion people.

Also Turkish and Finnish are unrelated to Somali. Finnish, together with Sami, Estonian and Hungarian belong to the **Uralic** language family, whereas Turkish belongs to the **Turkic** language family together with e.g. Azerbaijani and Turkmen.

African languages

The number of languages on the African continent is estimated to over 2,000. The vast majority of these languages belong to the following four families:

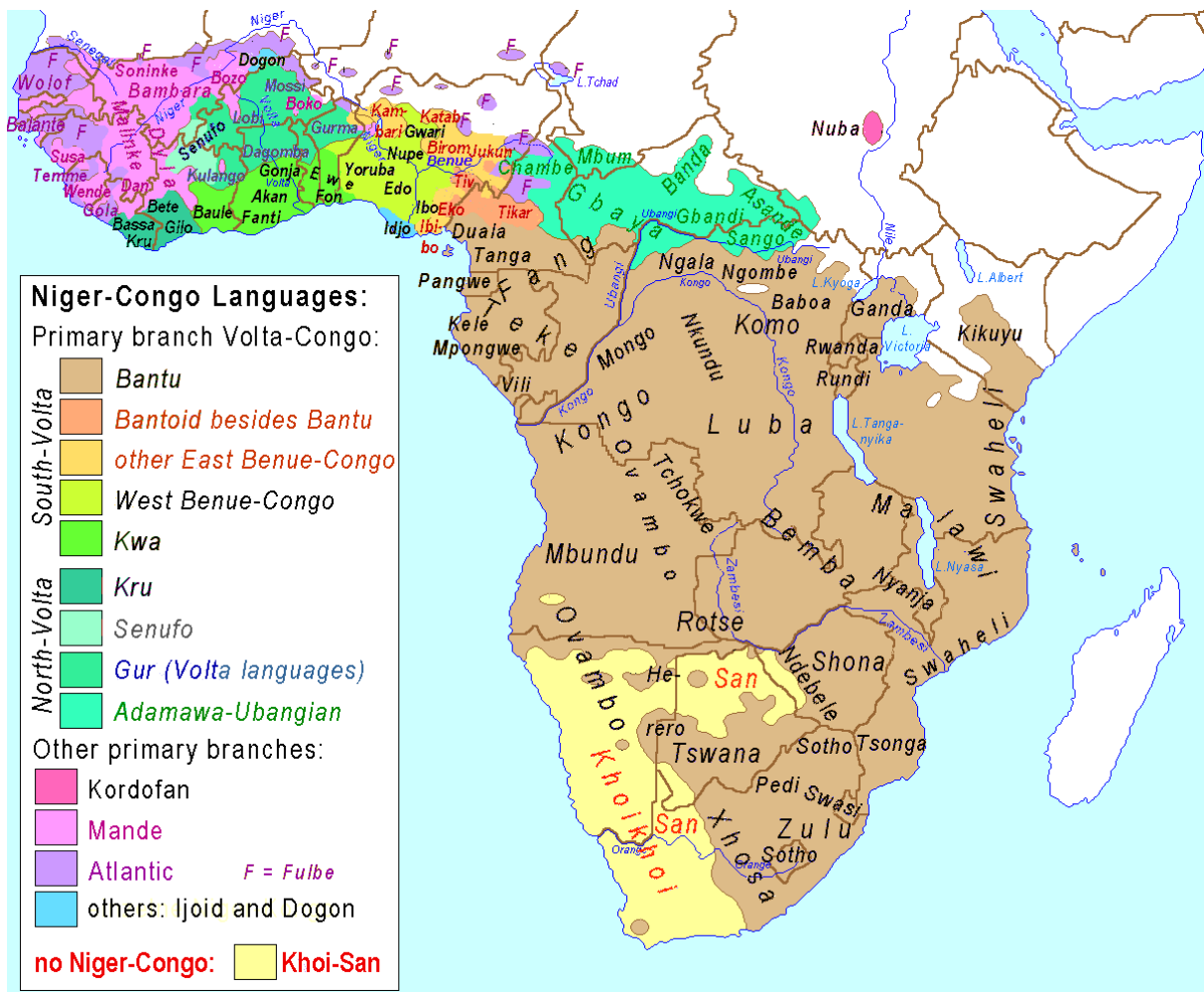
- **Niger-Congo** languages, e.g. Swahili, Zulu, Yoruba, Igbo, Fula, Shona, Sesotho, Akan etc.
- **Afro-Asiatic** languages, e.g. Arabic, Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo, Somali, Hausa, Berber languages etc.
- **Nilo-Saharan** languages, e.g. Luo, Nubian, Dinka, Maasai etc.
- **Khoisan** languages, e.g. Nama.

The two largest of these four language families are the Niger-Congo languages and the Afro-Asiatic languages, each spoken by around half a billion people.

The **Niger-Congo** languages are sub-divided into several subgroups, from the **Atlantic** languages in the west to the **Bantu** languages in the south and east. From a Somali perspective, the most well known Niger-Congo language is one of the Bantu languages, namely **Swahili**, which is one of the directly neighbouring languages with Somali. It is spoken directly to the south of Somali, mainly in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and eastern Congo. Swahili isn't at all genetically related to Somali, and the grammatical structure of Swahili is very different from Somali. Swahili is also a much larger language, used by some 100 million people. It is

however not the mother tongue of more than a smaller part of all the speakers, but it is their language of daily communication, e.g. for work or study.

All the other languages in the direct proximity of the Somali speaking area, except for Swahili, are Afro-Asiatic languages, just like Somali.



Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#).

The **Nilo-Saharan** languages are spoken by some 40 million people around the river of Nile, mainly in Libya, Chad, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. The largest language in this family is **Luo** or **Dholuo**, which is spoken by some 5 million people, mainly in western Kenya. This language is actually the third largest language in Kenya.

The **Khoisan** languages are spoken in the western part of southern Africa, mainly in Namibia and Botswana. The number of languages is around 30

and the total number of speakers just around 200,000. The largest language in this family is **Nama** with some 100.000 speakers in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. Several of the languages in this family are very small and threatened with extinction.

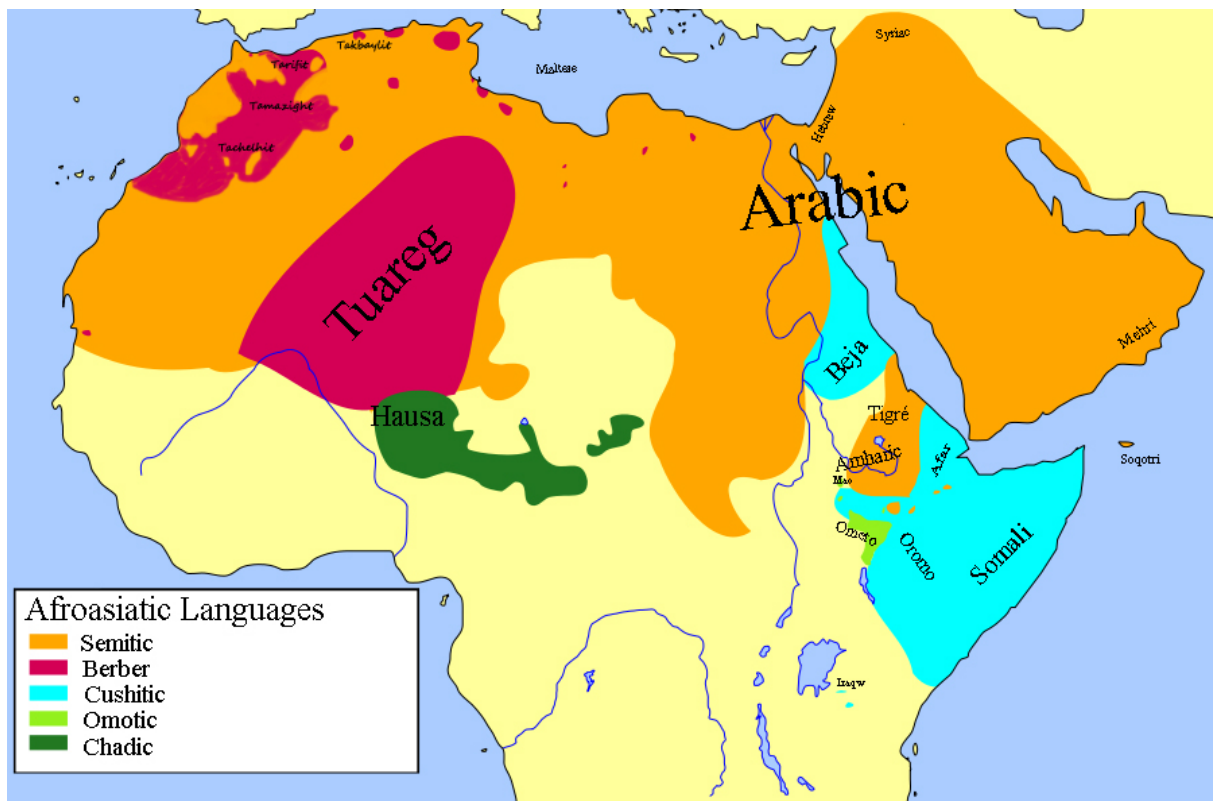
Finally, on the island of Madagascar a language is spoken that does not belong to any of the already mentioned families. The name of the language is **Malagasy**. It is spoken by some 26 million inhabitants of the island, and it belongs to the **Austronesian** language family together with languages such as **Tagalog** (the Philippines), **Javanese**, **Malay**, **Maori** (New Zealand) och **Hawaiian**. It is actually possible to notice surprising similarities between some basic vocabulary, such as the numbers.

Malagasy:	iray,	roa,	telo,	efatra,	dimy,	enina
Malay:	satu,	dua,	tiga,	empat,	lima,	enam
Tagalog:	isa,	dawala,	tatlo,	apat,	lima,	anim
Maori:	tahi,	rua,	toru,	whā,	rima,	ono
Hawaiian:	kahi,	lua,	kolu,	hā,	lima,	ono
	<i>one,</i>	<i>two,</i>	<i>three,</i>	<i>four,</i>	<i>five,</i>	<i>six</i>

Afro-Asiatic languages

Somali belongs to the **Afro-Asiatic** language family that encompasses northern and north-eastern Africa, the Arabic peninsula and parts of the Middle East. There are about 300 Afro-Asiatic languages, and they are spoken by close to 500 million people.

At some distance, Somali is related to languages like Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic, Tigrinya, Hausa and different Berber languages, but these languages belong to different sub-groups within the **Afro-Asiatic** language family.



Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The different sub-groups within the **Afro-Asiatic** language family are:

- **Semitic** languages, which constitute the largest group with languages such as Arabic (over 300 mill.), Amharic (over 30 mill.), Hebrew (some 10 mill.), Tigrinya (some 10 mill.);
- **Cushitic** languages, such as Oromo (over 35 mill.), Somali (ca. 26 mill.), Sidamo (ca. 3 mill.);
- **Omotic** languages, a number of rather small languages spoken mainly in the south-west of Ethiopia. Wolaytta with about 2 mill. speakers in Ethiopia is most probably the largest Omotic language.
- **Berber** languages, which are spoken by over 15 million people, mainly in Morocco, Algeria, Mali and Niger. **Shilha** (in Arabic) or **Tashelhit** (in the language) with possibly up to 8 million speakers, mainly in Morocco, is the largest Berber language.
- **Chadic** languages, where the largest one is **Hausa**, spoken by more than 50 million people, mainly in Niger and Nigeria;
- the **Egyptian** language, extinct since some 400 years ago, is the language that was used in the inscriptions made with hieroglyphs in the Egyptian pyramids. The last spoken form of this language is called **Coptic**. This language is still used to a certain extent as the ceremonial language of the Christian orthodox church in Egypt.

	Somali	Wolaytta	Amharic	Arabic	Hausa	Tamazight
	<i>Cushitic</i>	<i>Omotic</i>	<i>South Semitic</i>	<i>Central Semitic</i>	<i>Chadic</i>	<i>Berber</i>
<i>one</i>	kow	'istá	and	waaxid	ɗaya	yan
<i>two</i>	laba	naa"á	hulätt	iṭnaan	biyu	sin
<i>three</i>	saddex	heezzá	sost	ṭalaata	uku	kṛaḍ
<i>four</i>	afar	'oiddá	aratt	arbaca	hudu	kkuz
<i>five</i>	shan	'iccashá	amməst	khamisa	biyar	smmus
<i>six</i>	lix	'usúppuna	səddəst	sitta	shida	ṣḍiṣ
<i>seven</i>	toddoba	lááppuna	säbatt	sabca	bakwai	sa
<i>eight</i>	siddeed	hóspuna	səmmənt	ṭamaaniya	takwas	tam
<i>nine</i>	sagaal	'uddúpuna	zäṭäṇṇ	tisca	tara	tza
<i>ten</i>	toban	'isíínó	assər	cashra	goma	mraw
<i>head</i>	madax	húúp'				
<i>Ear</i>	dheg	haitt				
<i>mouth</i>	af	doon				

<i>Bone</i>	laf	mek'étt				
<i>leg</i>	lug	ged (tóh)				
<i>foot</i>	cag	tóh (ged)				
<i>blood</i>	dhiig	súútt				
<i>water</i>	biyo	haatt				
<i>Stone</i>	dhagax	ṣúṣṣ				

Wolaytta according to Wakasa (2008),

Cushitic languages

The most closely related languages to Somali are found in the **Cushitic** group, where the four largest languages are **Oromo** (over 35 mill.), **Somali** (ca. 26 mill.), **Sidamo** (ca. 3 mill.) and **Afar** (ca. 2.5 mill.).

The Cushitic languages are further divided into the following sub-groups:

- **North Cushitic**, consisting of only one language, **Beja**, with some 2 million speakers in Sudan, Eritrea och Egypt;
- **Central Cushitic** languages, among others **Awngi**, spoken by almost half a million people south-west of Lake Tana in Ethiopia;
- **East Cushitic** languages, which constitute the largest sub-group, with languages such as **Oromo** and **Somali**;
- **South Cushitic** languages, with languages such as **Iraqw**, spoken by about half a million people in Tanzania.

	Somali	Iraqw	Beja
	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>North</i>
<i>one</i>	kow	wák	gaal
<i>two</i>	laba	tsár	maloob
<i>three</i>	saddex	tám	mhay
<i>four</i>	afar	tsiyáhh	fadhig
<i>five</i>	shan	koo'án	ay
<i>six</i>	lix	lahhóo'	asagwir
<i>seven</i>	toddoba	fáanqw	asaramaab
<i>eight</i>	siddeed	dakáat	asumhay
<i>nine</i>	sagaal	gwaléel	ashshadhig
<i>ten</i>	toban	mibangw	tamin

East Cushitic languages

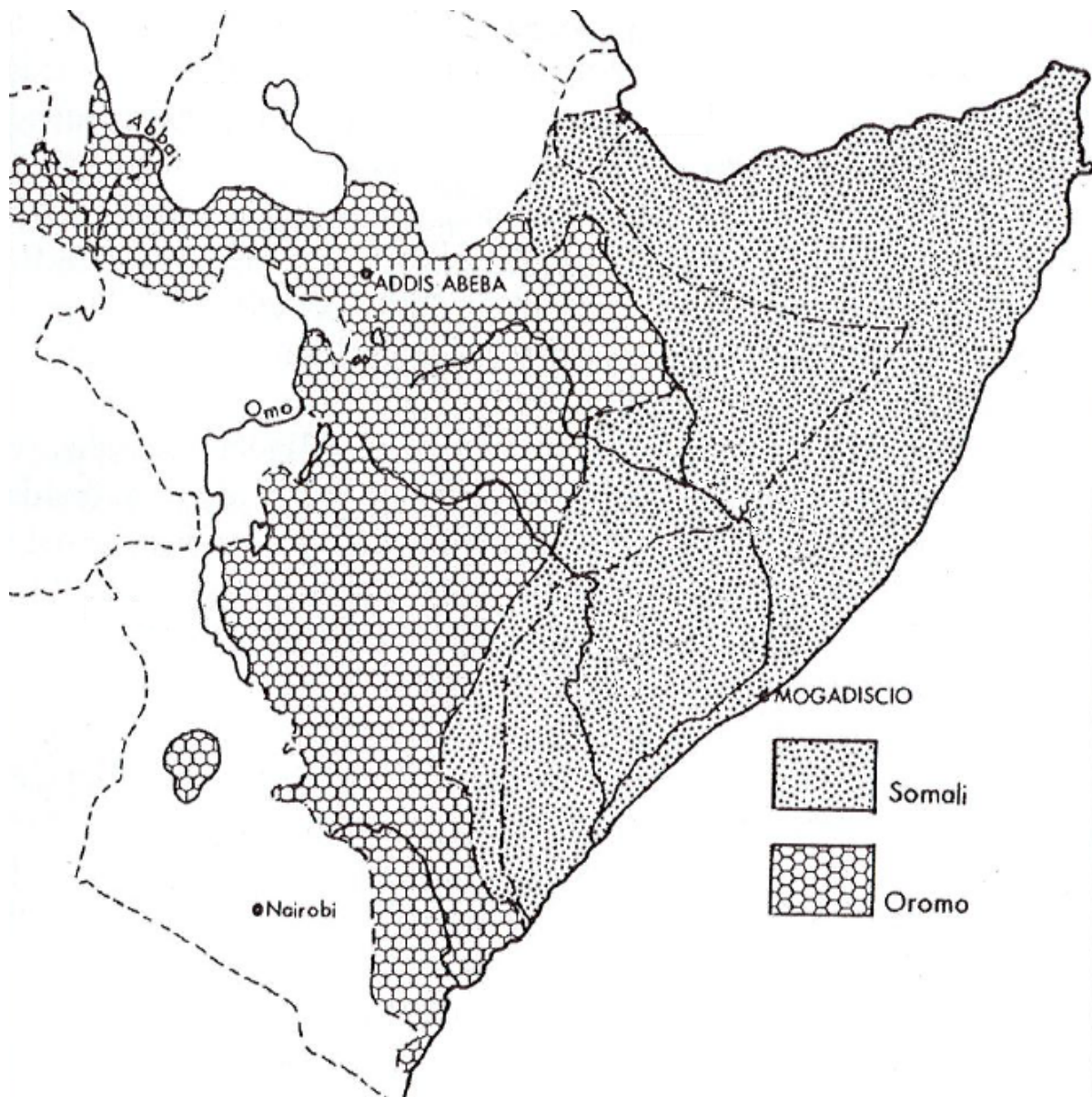
Within the East Cushitic group there is a further division between languages that are spoken in the

- **Highlands**, mainly **Sidamo** with some 3 million speakers, **Hadiyya** with well over 1 million speakers, **Gedeo** with around 1 million speakers and **Kambaata** with some 750.000 speakers. All of them are spoken in fairly small areas a couple of hundred kilometers south of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia;
- **Lowlands**, where most Cushitic languages are found, among others Afar, Arbore, Baiso, Dabarre, Garre, Jiiddu, Konso, Maay, Oromo, Rendille, Saho, Somali, Tunni.

	Somali	Sidamo	Gede'o	Hadiyya
	<i>Lowland</i>	<i>Highland</i>	<i>Highland</i>	<i>Highland</i>
<i>one</i>	kow, mid	mitte	mitte	máto
<i>two</i>	laba	lame	lame	lámo
<i>three</i>	saddex	sase	sase	sáso
<i>four</i>	afar	shoole	shole	soóro
<i>five</i>	shan	onte	onde	'ónto
<i>six</i>	lix	lee	jane	lóho
<i>seven</i>	toddoba	lamala	torbane	lamára
<i>eight</i>	siddeed	sette	saddeeta	sadeénto
<i>nine</i>	sagaal	honse	sallane	hónso
<i>ten</i>	toban	tonne	tomme	tómmo
<i>head</i>	madax	umo	umo	horoóre
<i>leg</i>	lug	lekka		lokko
<i>mouth</i>	af	afo	afo'o	suume
<i>tooth</i>	ilig	hinko	isso	'ínk'e
<i>blood</i>	dhiig	mundee	munde	t'íiga
<i>bone</i>	laf	mikk'a		m'íke
<i>kidney</i>	kelli			múro
<i>knee</i>	jilib	gulubba		gurúbbo
<i>lung</i>	sambab			k'adafara
<i>tongue</i>	carrab	arrawo	arrabo	'allábo

Lowland East Cushitic languages

The two largest Cushitic languages Oromo (över 35 mill.) and Somali (ca. 26 mill.) are rather closely related. They are both **Lowland East Cushitic** languages, but still they are probably more different from each other than English is different from German, Dutch or Scandinavian languages.



Source: Mansuur (2009: 191)

Even if Oromo is larger than Somali in number of speakers, Somali is still a more widely used and more stable language than Oromo. Somali has been quite well described and is relatively well standardised. For Oromo this process started some 30 years later, and has not reach as far as it has for Somali, as the language has not been used in writing and in mass media as much as Somali has. However, comprehensive work has been conducted in the last 20 years in order to develop Oromo, and in today's Ethiopia there are many more books printed in Oromo than in Somali.

Lowland East Cushitic languages may be further subdivided into

- Saho-Afar:
- Oromoid: Oromo
- Omo-Tana: Somali
- Peripheral: Yaaku, Dullay

Comparison of some basic vocabulary in different Lowland East Cushitic languages:

	Somali	Oromo	Afar
	<i>Omo-Tana</i>	<i>Oromoid</i>	<i>Saho-Afar</i>
<i>one</i>	kow	tokko	iníki
<i>two</i>	laba	lama	nammáya
<i>three</i>	saddex	sadii	sidóxu
<i>four</i>	afar	afur	faréyi
<i>five</i>	shan	shan	konóyu
<i>six</i>	lix	jaha	laxéyi
<i>seven</i>	toddoba	torba	malxíini
<i>eight</i>	siddeed	saddeet	baxaará
<i>nine</i>	sagaal	sagal	sagaalá
<i>ten</i>	toban	kudhan	tabaná
<i>head</i>	madax	mataa	<i>amó</i>
<i>leg</i>	lug	luka	
<i>mouth</i>	af	afaan	<i>af</i>
<i>teeth</i>	ilko	ilkaan	<i>boddiná</i>

<i>blood</i>	dhiig	dhiiga	
<i>bone</i>	laf	lafee	
<i>kidney</i>	kelli	kalee	
<i>knee</i>	jilib	jilba	<i>gulub</i>
<i>lung</i>	sambab	somba	
<i>tongue</i>	carrab	arraba	

But the words for most other body parts are quite different in Somali and Oromo.

Omo-Tana languages

Western Omo-Tana languages or Galaboid or Arboroid languages: Dhaasanac, Arbore, Elmolo

Eastern Omo-Tana languages or **Somaloid** languages: Girirra, Rendille, Karre/Boni/Aweer, Tunni/Dabarre, Ashraaf/Marka, Digil, Maay, Benadir, Somali...

Somaloid languages

	Somali	Bayso	Maay
<i>one</i>	kow, mid	ko	
<i>two</i>	laba	lama	lamy
<i>three</i>	saddex	seed	
<i>four</i>	afar	afar, apar	
<i>five</i>	shan	ken	
<i>six</i>	lix	lee	
<i>seven</i>	toddoba	todoba	
<i>eight</i>	siddeed	siddeet	
<i>nine</i>	sagaal	saagaal	
<i>head</i>	madax	mete	mady
<i>leg</i>	lug	luk	
<i>mouth</i>	af	mangaagaa	
<i>teeth</i>	ilko	ilko	
<i>bone</i>	laf	lef	
<i>kidney</i>	kelli	kalaalli	

<i>knee</i>	jilib	gilib	
<i>lung</i>	sambab	somboob	
<i>tongue</i>	carrab		anrab
<i>heart</i>	wadne	wodana	widny

The language situation in the area

A very important difference between the language situation in Somalia and Somaliland, and the situation in almost every other country south of Sahara is that Somalia and Somaliland have very small linguistic minorities. The fact that almost all citizens of Somalia and Somaliland can communicate with each other in their own language is something quite unique in an African perspective. It gives a unique possibility to use Somali as the official language of the country in all domains of political, educational and social life, without the risk of running into any major problems.

Most other non Arabic countries in Africa encompass areas inhabited by speakers of several different larger and smaller languages. In all those countries it is difficult to find a common language for education and administration, since no single local language will function for communication with the whole population.

In several other African countries the choice has therefore been to continue using a European language in order not to favourise any of the local languages at the cost of others, but in some countries one of the larger languages of the country has been chosen.

Languages in Ethiopia

The linguistic situation in Ethiopia is totally different than the situation in Somalia. In Ethiopia alone, over 80 different languages are spoken, but Amharic was the only language with an official status until the end of the

20th century, and it was the only language used in education and administration.

Today's Ethiopia is a federation of nine ethnically defined regional states that coincide with some of the larger linguistic and ethnic groups in the country, and today each region can decide about its own language policy. In higher education and research, English is nowadays playing a quite important role as the common lingua franca.



Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethiopia_administrative_regions_and_zones.png).

Until recently, only Amharic was used in Ethiopia as the country's official language, even though that language actually was only the second largest, after Oromo, but the choice of Amharic is of course linked to the fact that the Amhara people had the major political power in the country. Today the choice of Amharic is questioned, above all by the Oromo speakers, who demand both languages to have an equal status at the national level.

Since the middle of the 1990's, the linguistic situation in Ethiopia has developed into a much larger regional independence regarding the choice language for administration and schooling. In the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia, Somali is today used in schools until the 8th grade, and also to a large extent in the administration of the region. There are now plans to introduce Somali up to grade 12.

The modern linguistic development in Ethiopia towards a larger linguistic diversity has also strengthened the role of English, especially in higher education. Since students have different linguistic background, and many don't know Amharic very well, English has become the predominating "lingua franca".

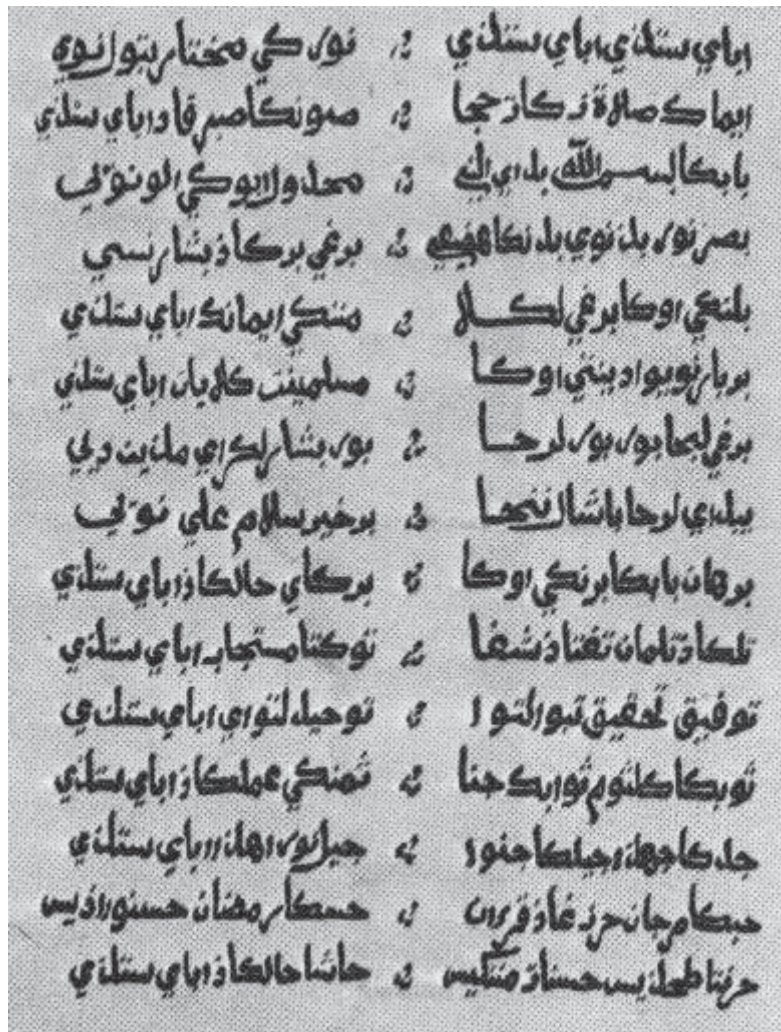
Theme 2

The older history of
Somali

Ever since the middle ages Arabic has been the language primarily used to write texts in the lands where Somali is spoken. As the language of Islam, Arabic early became the natural choice for those who were to learn how to read and write. It was therefore natural to write all kinds of documents in Arabic. For several hundred years Arabic remained rather unchallenged as the written language of the area.

Not until in the 1700's and 1800's an interest for local languages began to emerge in East Africa. The reason was then that there was hope that Islam's message would reach people more effectively through the use of local languages. Early on Swahili began to be written with the Arabic script for this purpose. One can assume that this also inspired the use of Arabic script to write in Somali. One of the first to do so was probably Haji Ali Majerten who in the early 1800's lived in Nugal, but later on moved to the Mogadishu area (Idaajaa n.d., note 2). The best known attempts to write Somali in Arabic script were made towards the end of the 1800's by Sheikh Awees Mahamed from Barawe who wrote a considerable amount of poetry (Banti 1988: 21).

During the late 1800's European missionaries and linguists made various attempts to adapt the Latin script to the Somali language. For a long time these attempts were very little known among the Somalis, and when it finally became more generally known that attempts were conducted to write Somali with Latin script this was met with partially negative reactions, mainly for religious reasons (Idaajaa n.d.: 2).



Abbaay sittidey abbaay sittidey nuurkii Mukhtaar batuula Nabii
Iimaanka salaata sakaat xijaa soonkaa sabarkaada abbaay sittidey
Baabkaa bismillaahi biddaaya anNabii mahadoola abbowkey Allow Nebiyee
Basar nuur badnooy beddenkaa hillacaa berigii barakaada bishaara na sii
Ballankii awkaa berigii la galaa mininkii iimaanka abbaay sittidey
Barbaar Nebiyow diintii awkaa muslimiinta galaayaan abbaay sittidey
Berigii la baxaa buurbuur la rahaa buur bishaara la koraaya Madiinadiyey

Illustration 1. The first page of *Abbaay sittidey* by Sheikh Awees Mahamed
 with corresponding Latin transcription. Source: Banti (1988).

The first real reference grammar of Somali was written in English by Fred Hunter. It consists of 181 pages and was printed in Bombay, India, in 1880. The author is not an trained linguist, but a military officer working in the Horn of Africa.

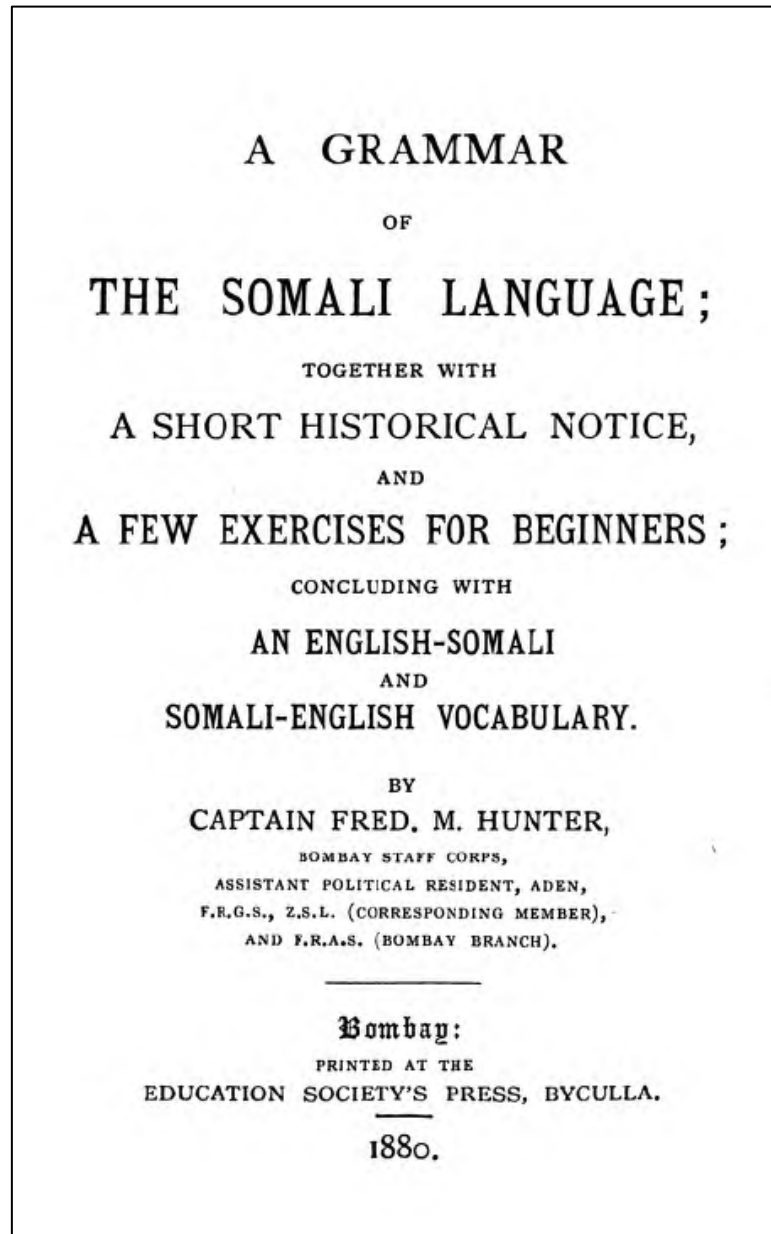


Illustration 2. The first Somali reference grammar.
The whole book (181 pages) can be accessed digitally at Gupea:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/57923>

The next Somali reference grammar was written in French by Gabriel Ferrand. It is considerably smaller, consisting of just 28 pages. It was printed in Alger in 1886.

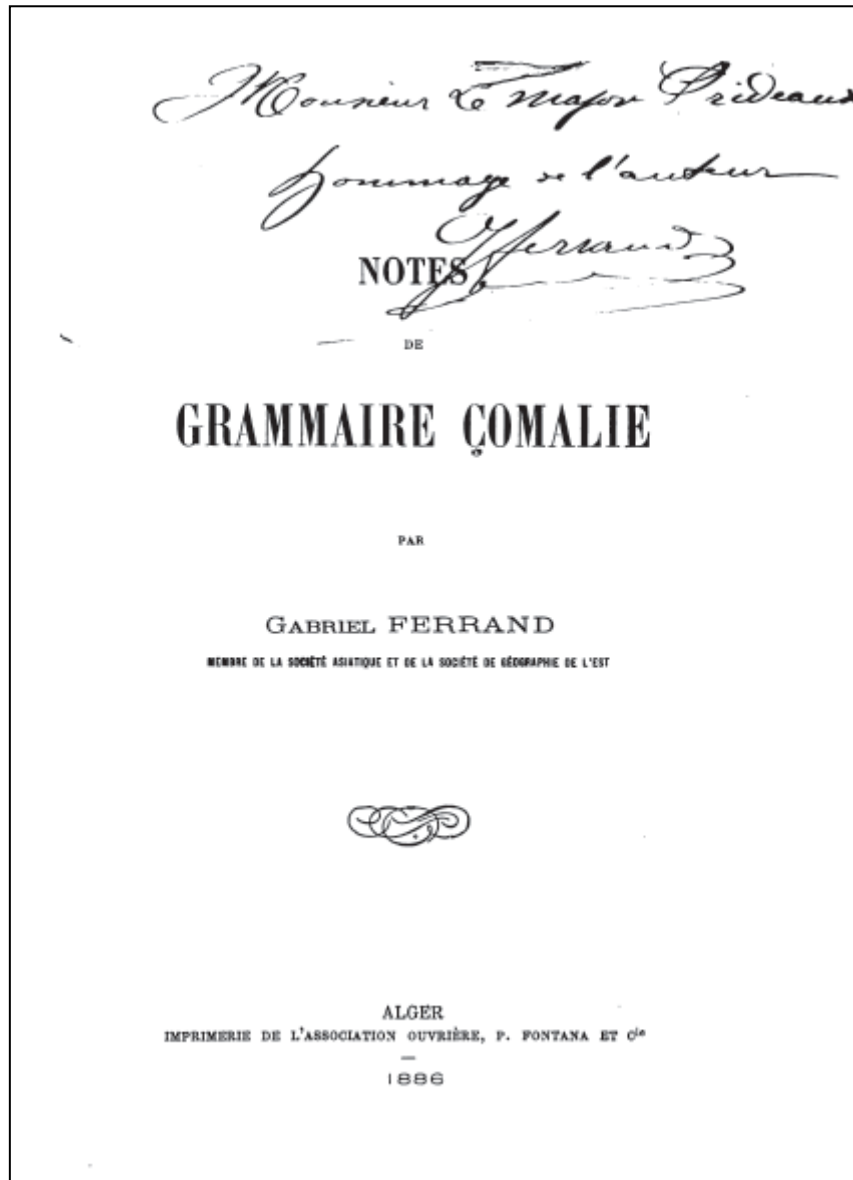
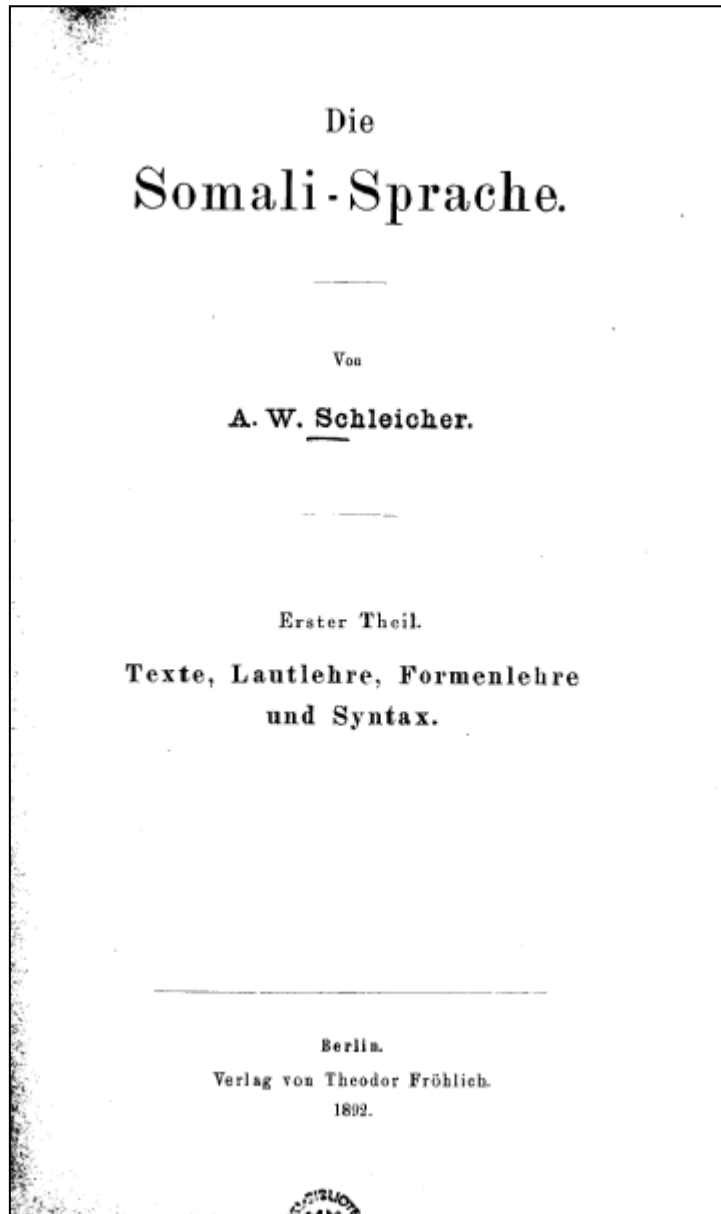


Illustration 3. Somali reference grammar in French from 1886.

The whole book (28 pages) can be accessed digitally at Gupea:

<https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/57977>

Already in 1892 another reference grammar followed, this time in German, written by A. W. Schleicher, who was a PhD student in Berlin and Vienna. It comprises 159 pages and is printed in Berlin.



*Illustration 4. Somali reference grammar in German from 1892.
The whole book (159 pages) can be accessed digitally at Gupea:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/30609>*

In 1897 the first real dictionary of the Somali language was published. It was a Somali-English dictionary (with a shorter English-Somali appendix) written by Evangelist de Larajasse. The book contains 301 pages and was printed in London.

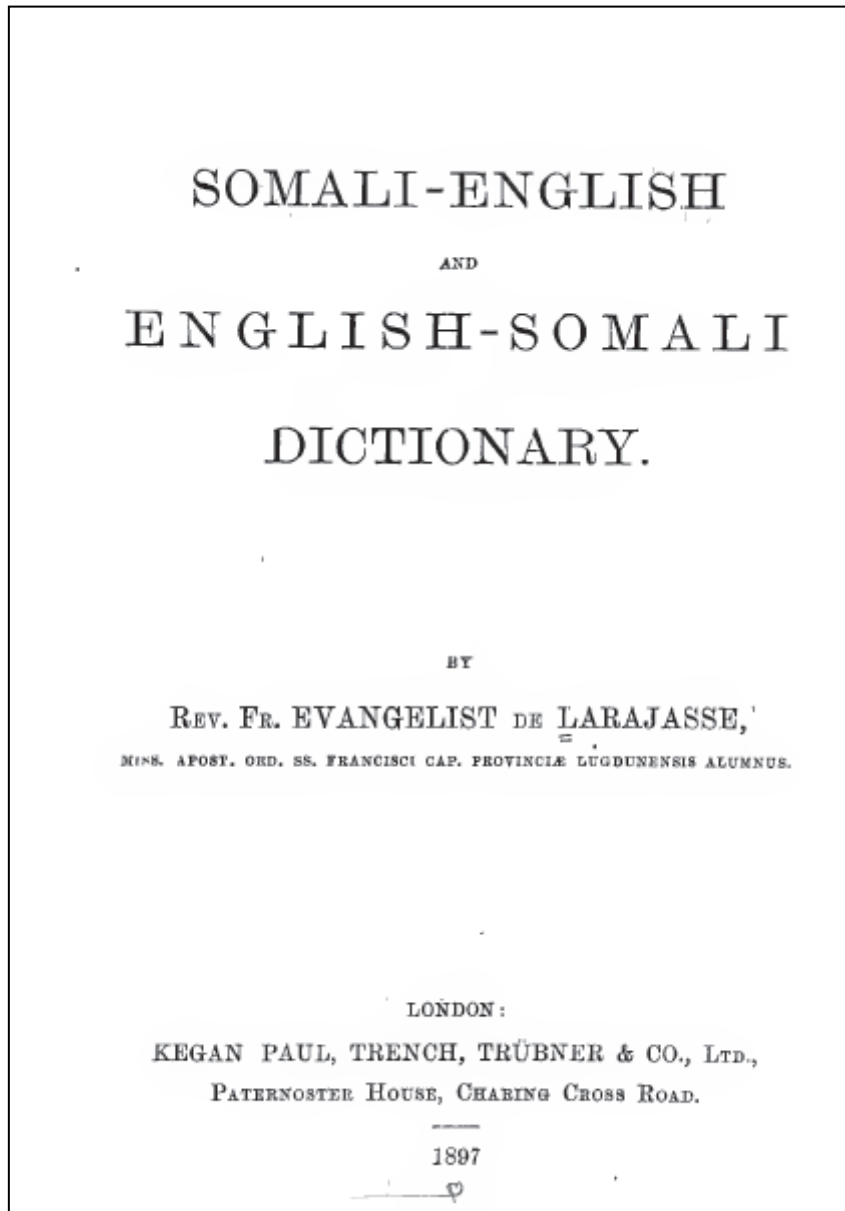
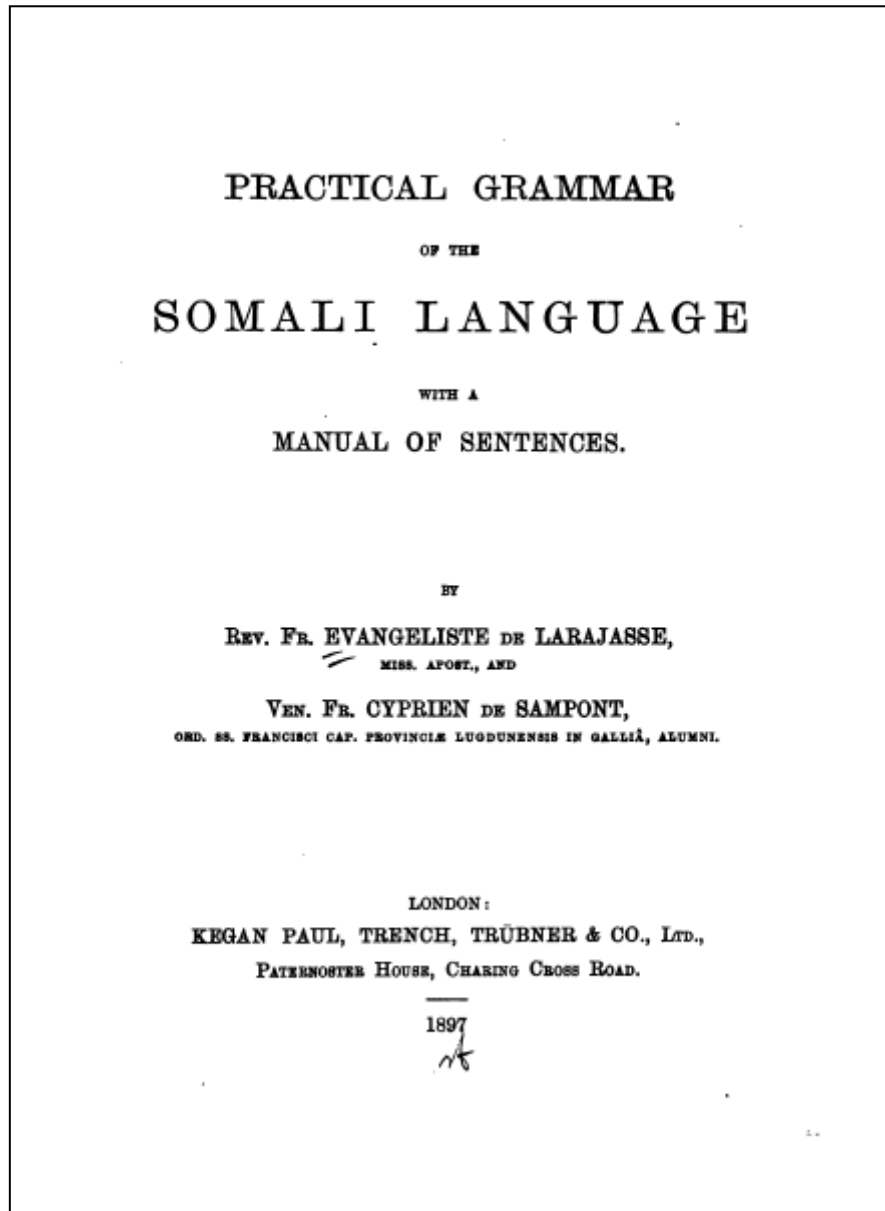


Illustration 5. The first Somali dictionary.

The whole book (301 pages) can be accessed digitally at Arcadia:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2307/5177>

In the same year also a Somali reference grammar written in English was published by the same author in cooperation his colleague Cyprien de Sampont. This book contains 265 pages and was also printed in London.



*Illustration 6. The second Somali reference grammar in English.
The whole book (265 pages) can be accessed digitally at Arcadia:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2307/5366>*

In 1900, a collection of Somali texts was published in Vienna. It contains 287 pages and was edited by Leo Reinisch, 1832–1919, considered the founder of Cushitic studies, professor of Egyptology 1868–1900, and Vice Chancellor of the University of Vienna in the 1890s (Pugach 2006). Reinisch partially builds on his student Schleicher's work, since Schleicher died before he was able to publish the materials that he had collected.

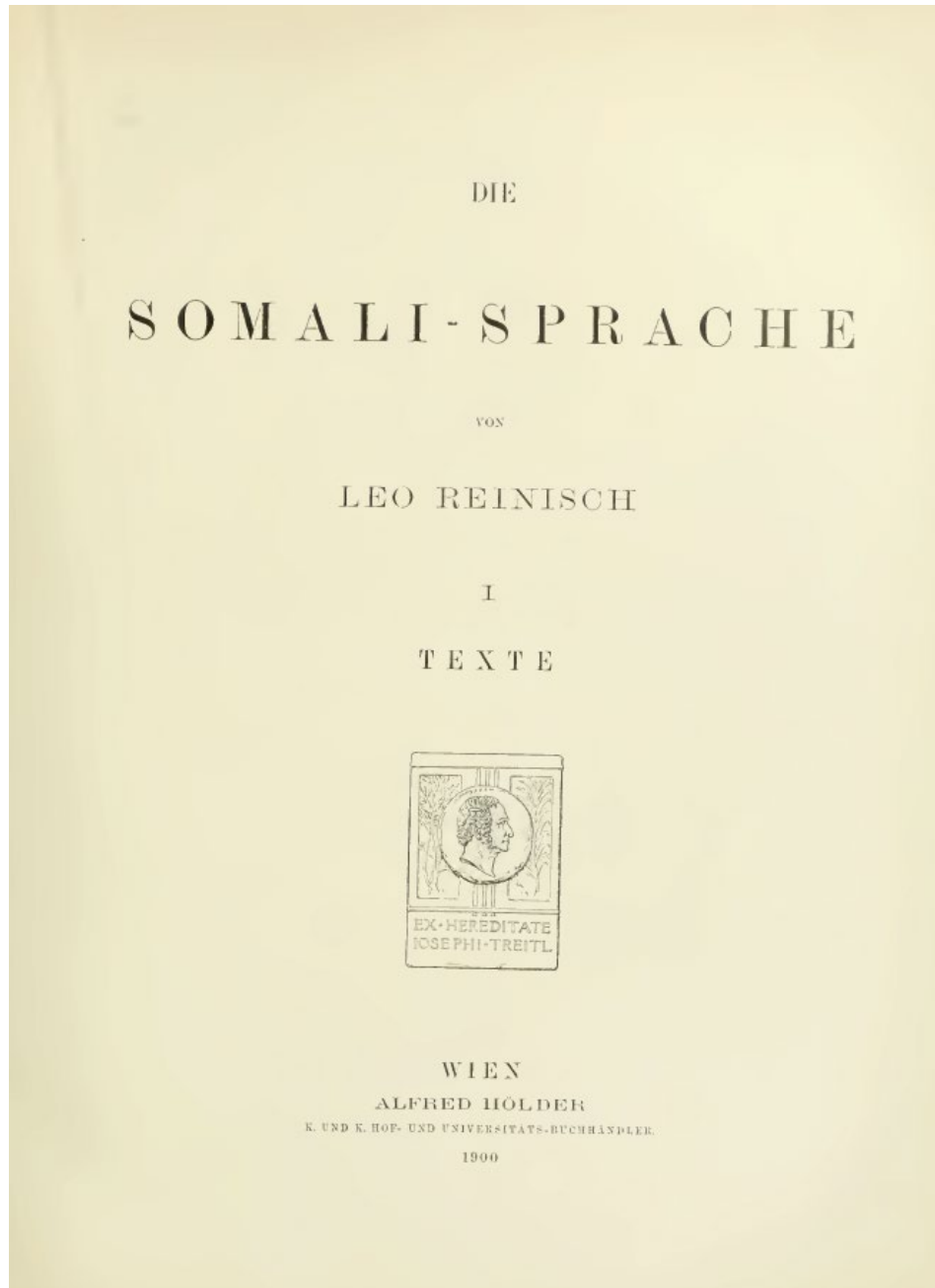


Illustration 7. An anthology of Somali texts from 1900.
The whole book (287 pages) can be accessed digitally at Gupea:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/30613>

73. Vater und son.

*Nín-bā hōlā badan lahā, nínku-se
inan bū lá yahay.*

*Markāsū nínki bukóday ō inan-kísi
ká yidi: »haddán dinto, hōláha ō dan
adā is ká la; hasé-ahāte sāddeh waḥ is
kú ōgó: dīg sokáya ha gálin! haddád dīg
sokáya gášo, hōláha ō dan yā la ga gá
mag qáta: markāsád ūyqōda. Hāta-ná
wíhí haráṛa is ká ōgó! Hāta-ná nāg ti
basári'a há gūrsan! Haddúd gūrsato, sōr
wisíh-la yay kū sísa. ad qáho kú qáta,
ad ū dímata.«*

*Markāsū inanki yidi: »háyje!« Mar-
kāsū inanki bári dúmbe nāg basári'a gūr-
saday.*

*Markāsáy ūša dúmbe sor wisíh-la ū
kéntay, markāsū sōrti wisíhda lahúyd ár-
kay, markāsū gábiyay:*

*»Allah lulálaye, ilayn gájo wā kulúšahay!
Allah lulálaye, Allah sōr wisíh-la yā ī
kéntay!*

*Allah lulálaye, ilayn basári wā hānsir!
Allah lulálaye, abbáhay-bā bári hóre ī gú
yidi: nāgti basári'a há gūrsan!*

*Allah lulálaye, mahān abbáhay ū máqli
wāy! :*

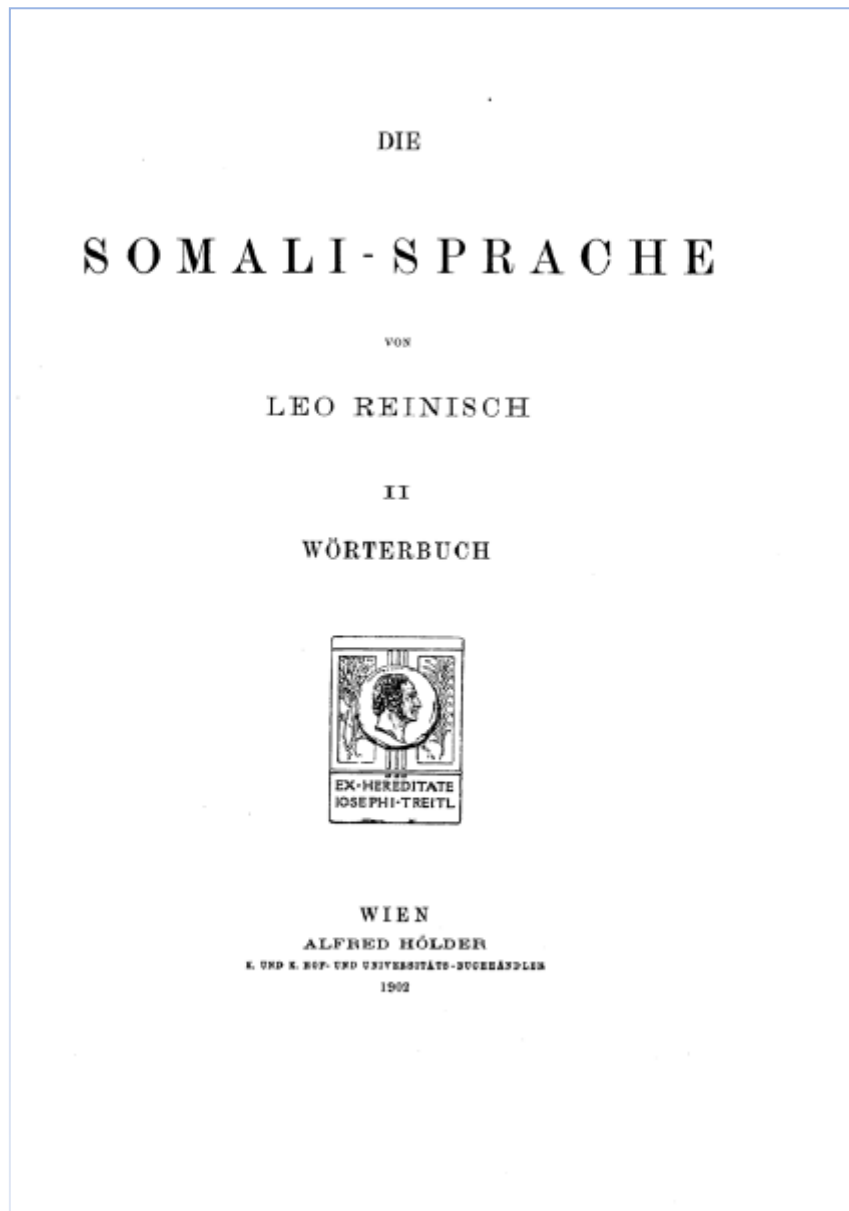
Illustration 8. An example of a text from

Leo Reinisch: *Die Somali-Sprache*. Wien 1900.

The whole book (287 pages) can be accessed digitally at Gupea:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/30613>

In 1902, Prof. Leo Reinisch also published the second comprehensive dictionary of Somali. It was a Somali-German dictionary (with a shorter German-Somali appendix) containing 540 pages.



*Illustration 9. Somali-German dictionary from 1902.
Part of the book can be accessed digitally at Arcadia:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2307/1705>*

The following year Prof. Reinisch also published a reference grammar with 126 pages.

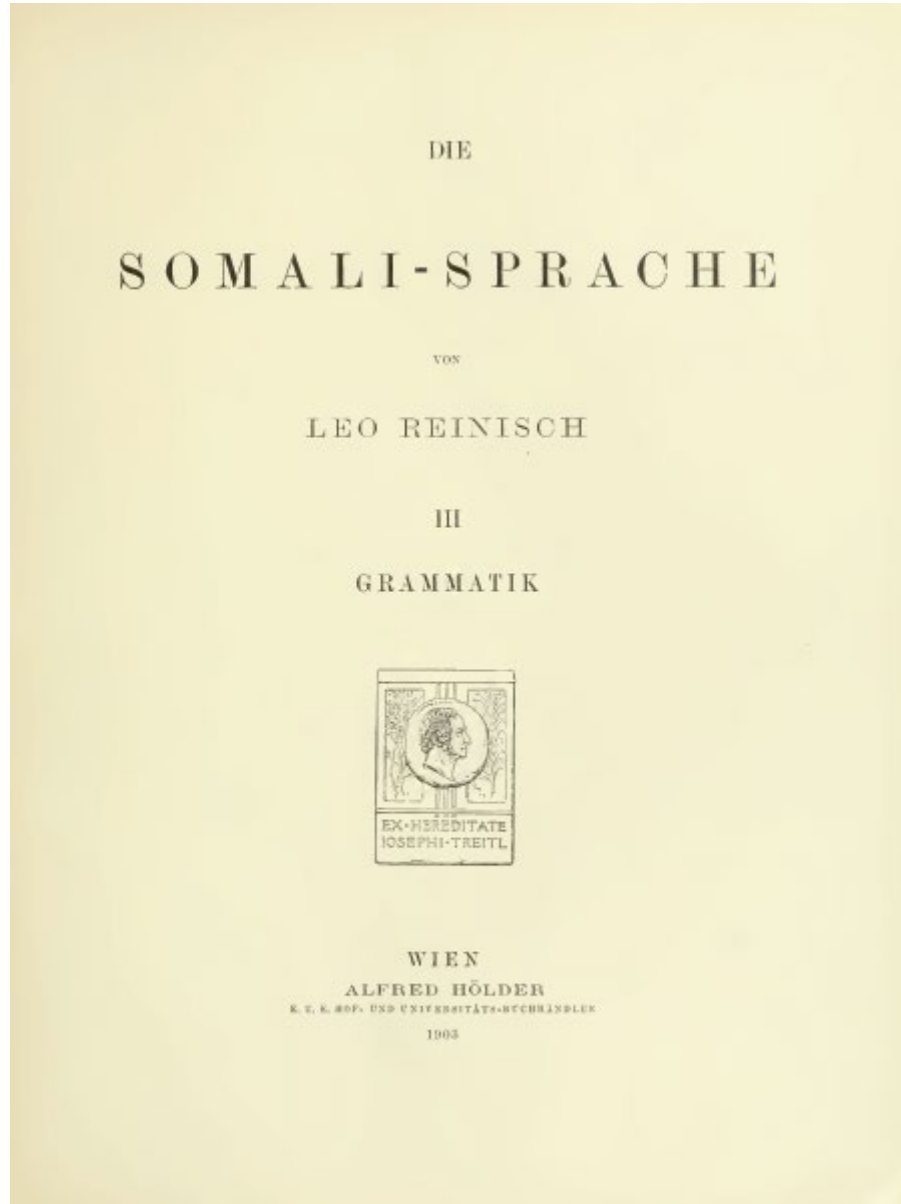
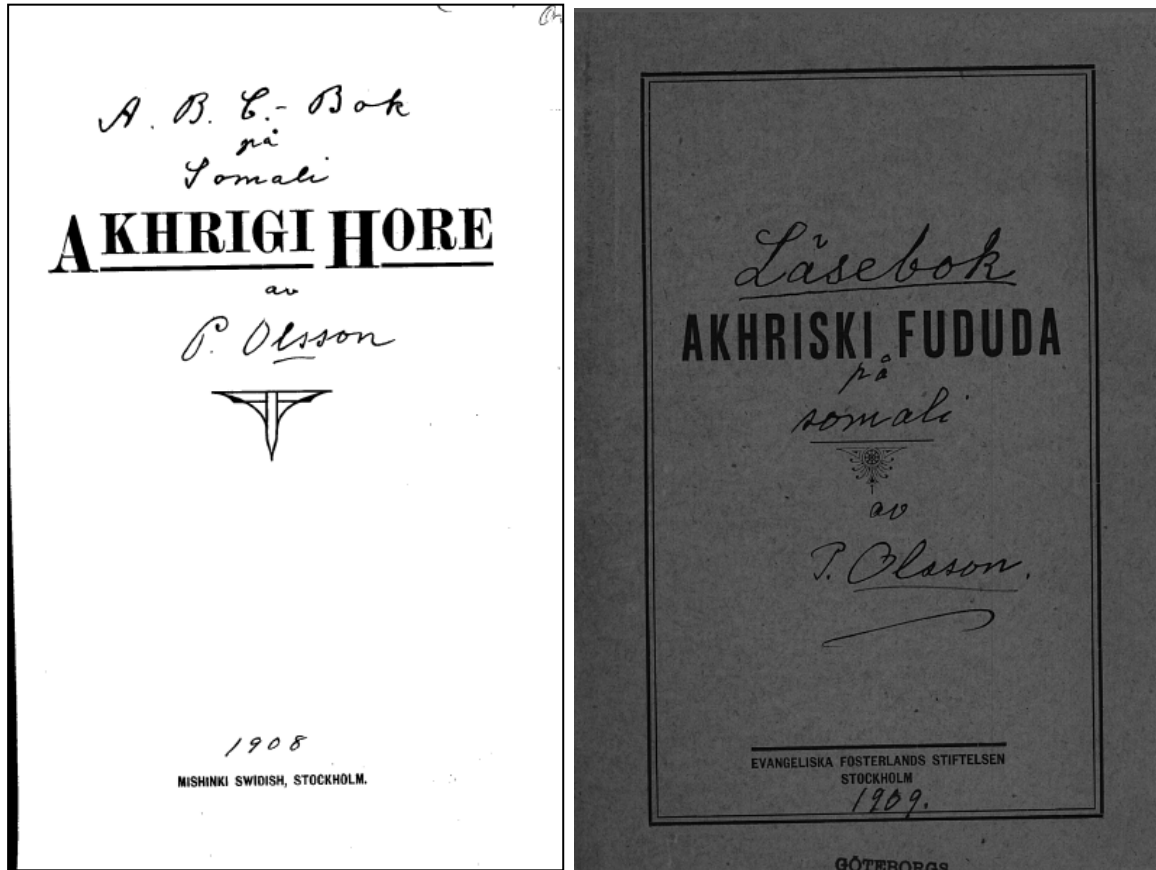


Illustration 10. Somali reference grammar in German from 1903.

The whole book (126 pages) can be accessed digitally at Gupea:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/30610>

In 1908 and 1909 two Somali readers were printed in Sweden by the priest Per Olsson who was running a missionary station in Jubbaland 1899–1926 together with several other Swedes (Tyrberg 2015).



Shekadi gel iyo nin maskine.

Wah̄as aha nin maskine, wah̄as uk̄ae keligis durka. Beri walba inu tago jidka tugsado un, sidas shughul kisa way.

Berigo wahu arke dad odonayin gel kodha okadume. Wah̄ay yiren: Adig abo, gel kayni dume maaragte? Wahu yire: Rati gina bala mia? Wah̄ay yiren: Run way, inted kuaragte? Wahu yire hadana: Rati gan mahokola, lug tisa bidah̄de mahanuni? Wah̄ay yiren: Run way, bes intes joga? Wahu yire: ma iligo bulaya rati gan? Wah̄ay yiren: Run way, run way Abo, nosheg inted kuaragte. Wahu yire hadana: Ferti midikte barid mia, iyo ferti bedah̄de malab mia? Wah̄ay yiren: Mah̄ad kuogate ghalab kis? Ilowse run way hadal kaga, inted kuaragte bes? Wahu yire: Bes

Illustration 11. Two Somali readers printed in Sweden in 1908 and 1909.

Both books can be accessed digitally at Gupea:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/30595> ; <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/30598>

Both the Latin and the Arabic systems developed for writing Somali varied quite a bit between the individual texts and authors. Regardless of the type of script chosen, the same challenges had to be faced: it was necessary to find good symbols to represent all the sounds occurring in Somali. Neither the Arabic, nor the Latin alphabet had ideal letters for all the Somali sounds. At the same time, the inventory of Somali sounds still hadn't been investigated systematically enough, hence there wasn't a good enough scientific basis to build on in order to develop the ideal alphabet and spelling system. All the early efforts were therefore to a certain degree characterised by the authors' personal preferences.

Some of the most typical Somali consonant were written in the following ways in some of the early publications:

Today's graphemes	c	dh	j	kh	q	sh	x	y
Hunter 1880		ḍ	j	k	ḡ	sh	h	y
Ferrand 1886	^c	d/dh	dj		kh	ch	h'	i
Bricchetti-R. 1889		dh	gi		g	sci	h	j
Schleicher 1892	^o	ḍ	j		ɣ	š	h	y
Larajasse 1897	^c	ḍ			ḡ	sh	ḥ	y
Reinisch 1900	^c	ḍ	j		q	š	ḥ	y
Schleicher 1900	^{o/c}	ḍ	j		ḡ	š	ḥ	y
Kirk 1905	^c	ḍ	j		kh	sh	hh	i
Jahn 1906	^c	ḍ	j		q	š	ḥ	y
Olsson 1909	–	dh	j	kh	gh	sh	ḥ	y
Moreno 1955	^c	ḍ	ḡ		q	š	ḥ	y

Long vowels were also written in a variety of ways.

In order to avoid the choice between Arabic and Latin script, but also to strengthen the uniqueness of the Somali language, the idea of creating a unique Somali script was born. Between 1920–1922, the first serious attempt was made to create a special script for Somali. The creator was Osman Yusuf Kenadid, a scholar in Islam and the Arabic language. He descended from the family ruling the Sultanate of Hobyo at the southern coast of Somalia between 1884 and 1925. Han claimed that his script was inspired neither by the Latin nor by the Arabic alphabet. Despite his claims, though, one can quite easily see similarities between the shape of these new letters and letters in different existing alphabets. Also, Osman's new script was written from left to right, like the Latin script. Initially this new script, under the name *Osmania*, enjoyed some interest in the Italian colony.



Illustration 12. The *Osmania* alphabet.

When the first Somali political party, Somali Youth League, was founded in 1943, a decision was taken to use *Osmania* to write in Somali and the party decided to work for the introduction of this script as the official script for Somali. The party also took the initiative to start teaching the

script and to some extent the Osmania script also spread to schools outside the Italian colony, e.g. to Addis Ababa and Yemen. However, after some time, there was considerable disagreement about the Osmania script as it began to be considered too closely related to the family and clan whose name was used for it.

Some years later, the Somali Youth League (SYL) had a new leadership, and the chairman Haji Mohamed Hussein was strongly opposed to the Somali language. Instead, he wanted to introduce Arabic as the official language of Somalia. On the 20 April 1950, a referendum was organised. The result was in favour of Arabic. Already on the 22 April, the presidium of SYL wrote a request to the Italian authorities asking for the introduction of Arabic as the country's official language (Maino 1957: 17), arguing that there is no unified form of Somali that could be taken as the point of departure for standardised Somali. The vocabulary was also claimed to be limited, making it impossible to express oneself well enough in Somali. Arabic, however, as a great language with a rich culture, a language of international communication and a *LINGUA FRANCA*⁵, was already functioning well in Somalia. The majority of the Somali population was claimed to already know Arabic. Haji Mohamed probably tried to gain political power by gaining support from religious leaders and leading businessmen. The answer from the Italian authorities on the 17 May was that Arabic can already in the present situation be studied alongside with Italian in the Somali schools. On the 2 February 1951, the territorial council furthermore approved a resolution confirming that Somali is always to be used in oral communication and that a solution needs to be found as soon as possible in order to be able to write in Somali (Maino 1957: 18).

⁵ A *LINGUA FRANCA* is a foreign language which is used for communication between persons who don't know each other's mother tongue. In today's world English is a very common lingua franca, but in some parts of the world other languages clearly dominate in this function.

At this point, the crucial question wasn't any longer which script to choose for Somali, but which language should be the official language of the new Somali Republic: Somali, Arabic, Italian or English?

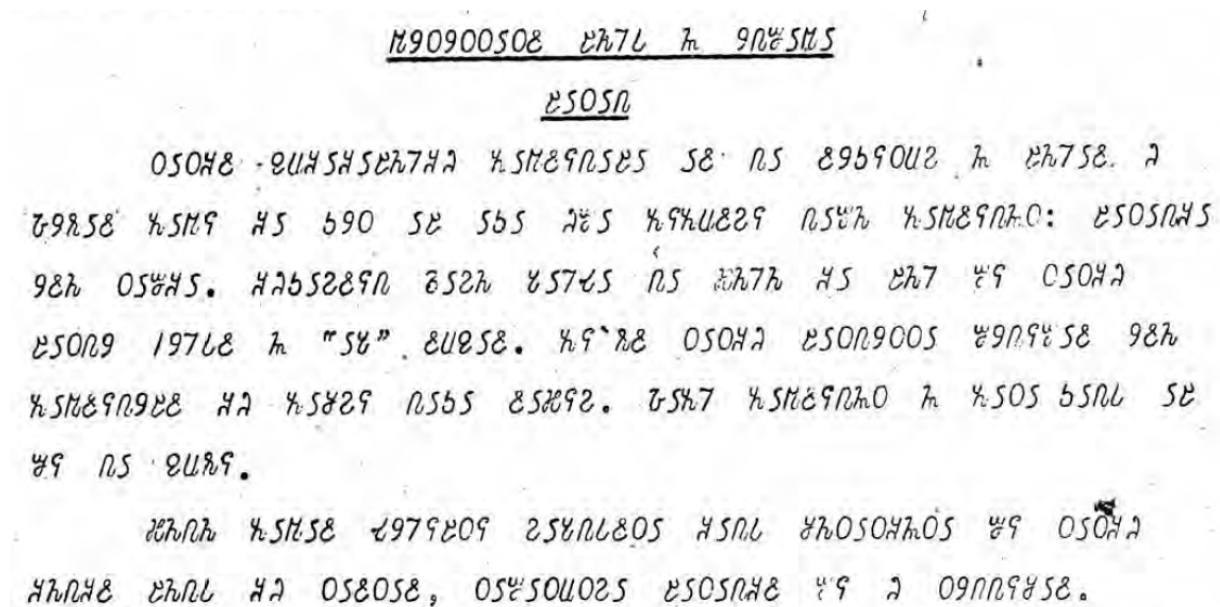
The population was divided by their different opinions. On the one hand, there was serious opposition against Somali among those who wanted to introduce Arabic as the country's official language, on the other hand there was also a strong opposition against the Latin script among those in favour of Somali, wanting to write Somali with the Arabic script, mainly for religious reasons.

In this complicated situation, the authorities of the new republic decided in 1962 to make English the new common language of tuition in the Somali primary and secondary schools (Hared 1992: 33). At university level, however, Italian remained the major language of instruction, and it did so even in the 70's and 80's, when Somali was introduced in primary and secondary schools.

Unique Somali scripts

In addition to the Latin and the Arabic script, a number of unique scripts have also been suggested for Somali during the 1900's. The three most widely known are presented below. In addition to these three there were another eight less known suggestions that were all evaluated by a Somali language commission in 1960-1961.

The oldest and most well known is Osmania, created in the beginning of the 1920's.



Section from: Keenadiid (1966) *Sheekada yaabka le oo dadka*.

The Osmania Alphabet

$\delta = '$	$\mathfrak{b} = \text{m}$	$\mathcal{O} = 0$
$\mathfrak{y} = \text{b}$	$\mathcal{Z} = \text{n}$	$\mathcal{S} = 1$
$\mathfrak{o} = \text{t}$	$\mathfrak{h} = \text{w}$	$\mathcal{E} = 2$
$\mathfrak{l} = \text{j}$	$\mathfrak{z} = \text{h}$	$\mathcal{H} = 3$
$\mathcal{M} = \text{x}$	$\mathfrak{e} = \text{y}$	$\mathfrak{d} = 4$
$\mathfrak{h} = \text{kh}$		$\mathfrak{e} = 5$
$\mathcal{O} = \text{d}$		$\mathfrak{y} = 6$
$\mathfrak{7} = \text{r}$	$\mathcal{S} = \text{a}$	$\mathcal{J} = 7$
$\mathfrak{z} = \text{s}$	$\mathfrak{q} = \text{aa}$	$\mathcal{C} = 8$
$\mathfrak{z} = \text{sh}$	$\mathfrak{l} = \text{e}$	$\mathcal{U} = 9$
$\mathfrak{z} = \text{dh}$	$\mathcal{U} = \text{ee}$	
$\mathfrak{y} = \text{c}$	$\mathfrak{9} = \text{i}$	
$\mathfrak{h} = \text{g}$	$\mathfrak{e} = \text{ii}$	
$\mathfrak{y} = \text{f}$	$\mathfrak{h} = \text{o}$	
$\mathfrak{h} = \text{q}$	$\mathfrak{h} = \text{oo}$	
$\mathfrak{h} = \text{k}$	$\mathfrak{z} = \text{u}$	
$\mathfrak{h} = \text{l}$	$\mathfrak{h} = \text{uu}$	

The Borama or Gadabuursi script (1933):

ƒ	J	P	O	Ɔ	ʎ	ʎ	T	S	3
b	t	j	d	g	h	kh	d	r	s
6	ʎ	ʎ	J	I	Γ	Π	U	Q	ʎ
sh	c	f	q	k	l	m	n	w	y
T	H	I	L	C	CC	Ɔ			
a	e	i	ii	u	uu	oo			

Short specimen:

3HΓTʎ
QʎΓΠIL TU PHʎΓT ʎC3HU.3TΓT-
ΠT. TUTʎC Qʎ UTʎTT. (H) IL QC-
ʎC ʎTΓ OƆʎ. TQʎ IL QHUT Qʎ-
ʎT ʎCUTʎ ΓʎʎTʎ. ΠΓʎ UT QCC
ʎʎʎʎT. TΓTʎʎ Qʎʎ UT 3Ɔ ʎTʎʎ.
UƆ 3Ɔ Tʎʎ 3CʎTʎ. ʎCʎTʎ Qʎʎ
ʎʎʎT. QʎTʎT Iʎ ʎCCΓHT QCʎC
ʎTʎʎ ʎTʎʎH3T.

UCCʎ ʎΓH
ʎʎʎʎT.

Source: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/somali.htm>

The Kaddare script (1952):

Ɑ	Ɱ	Ɐ	Ɒ	ⱱ	Ⱳ	ⱳ	ⱴ	Ⱶ	ⱶ	ⱷ	ⱸ
ⱹ	ⱺ	ⱻ	ⱼ	ⱽ	Ȿ	Ɀ	Ⲁ	ⲁ	Ⲃ	ⲃ	Ⲅ
b	t	dʒ	h	x	d	r	s	f	ɖ	ʃ	
ⲅ	Ⲇ	ⲇ	Ⲉ	ⲉ	Ⲋ	ⲋ	Ⲍ	ⲍ	Ⲏ	ⲏ	Ⲑ
ⲑ	Ⲓ	ⲓ	Ⲕ	ⲕ	Ⲗ	ⲗ	Ⲙ	ⲙ	Ⲛ	ⲛ	Ⲝ
g	f	q	k	l	m	n	w	h	j		
ⲝ	Ⲟ	ⲟ	Ⲡ	ⲡ							
Ⲣ	ⲣ	Ⲥ	ⲥ	Ⲧ							
a	e	i	o	u							

Text specimen in two versions:

Դեռ Խեղճ Երկրի վրա Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ
 Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ
 Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ
 (Երբ Երբ) Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ
 Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ
 Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ Երբ

Source: <http://www.skyknowledge.com/kaddare.htm>

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Theme 3: The Standardisation of Somali

Morgan Nilsson

March 23, 2020

1 What is a standard language?

Simply stated, a standard language is a form of a language that is relatively stable and used in different public settings, such as education, politics and mass media. The purpose is usually to facilitate communication between the inhabitants of a linguistic area or country. A standard language is first of all a written language, but also the spoken language in public settings is often aiming towards that very same standard, even though variation in spoken language is usually considerably larger than it is in the written standard.

To a large extent a standard language evolves on its own over a long period of time, but it is also common that this process is influenced to a smaller or larger degree by different groups of the society. It normally the language of influential persons or groups that constitute the foundation for the standard language. Such influential persons or groups may be of different kinds, e.g., politicians, wealthy traders and businessmen, religious leaders and writers or poets enjoying high esteem by the public. Standard Russian is said to have emerged from the language of Alexander Pushkin, and Italian from the language of Dante Alighieri. For the Somali standard the language of the traditional oral poetry was an early source of inspiration.

Such influential people's language can sometimes function as a foundation for politically governed language planning. The authorities may then take initiatives for language reforms which are carried through in the educational system and the administrative bodies of a whole country. This is something that happened in Somalia in the 1970's and 1980's. How mass media react and to what extent they adopt the imposed standard, and what kind of power the politicians have over the mass media are of course important factors in this development. In Somalia the military dictatorship had total control over all mass media and publishers from 1969 until the end of the 1980's.

Most standard languages are described in different handbooks, mainly dictionaries and reference grammars. The production of such handbooks is referred to as the CODIFICATION of the language. Such handbooks are sometimes produced after a political decision, as was the case with the first monolingual Somali dictionary from 1976 and the first reference grammar from 1971 (2nd edition 1973), but many codificational handbooks are produced by individuals or by private publishing houses, and gain their status based on the good reputation of the author or the publisher. This is typically the situation for English. Somali of today has a quite weak codification, as no author or publisher enjoys exceptional prestige, hence the codification can only be derived from "the sum" of all the major handbooks available.

2 The first steps towards a Somali standard

In 1941 radio transmissions started for the first time from Hargeisa and in 1951 also from Mogadishu (Hassan & Ahmed 2011: 12, 44). Both stations were transmitting in several languages, also in Somali. Already from the very beginning the editorial staff had to make decisions about what “kind” of Somali to use for broadcasting. Of course, the choice fell on a variety of Somali that enjoyed high esteem and was considered prestigious. Soon the language used by the radio became more and more unified and stable, which is exactly what is typical for standardisation.

Above all there was a need to develop new vocabulary in order to be able to speak about different abstract notions. In other words, Somali terminology was needed. Some of the most urgent areas were politics and economy, as these areas are very common subjects in news reports. To develop and enrich a language’s vocabulary and strive towards a situation where all the speakers of a language use the same word for the same notion, so that misunderstandings are avoided, is also a very important part of the standardisation process.

The next important step in the standardisation process was the establishment of a number of theatres in different towns and cities during the 1950’s as they began to perform in Somali. Here the language was used in new settings, and another part of the language and its vocabulary was slowly adjusted to a common standard norm. Within artistic areas, such as theatre, poetry and fiction, there is of course a larger freedom to use the language in more personal ways, but at the same time it is completely natural that the public and the artistic forms of language influence each other mutually so that both forms slowly converge and the standard language over a period of time becomes more and more unified.

But at this time, Somali was practically only used in its oral form. The discussions about the written language were completely focused on which alphabet to adopt. As long as that issue wasn’t resolved, it was difficult to start using written Somali to any larger extent, even if certain individuals of course did write in Somali to some extent as far back as the late 1800’s. The problem was that there were different groups advocating different solutions: Arabic script, Latin script or a unique Somali script. In addition to that there were also groups in favour of discharging Somali as a written language altogether, and make Arabic the official language of Somalia.

3 Yassin and Shire

Two persons played a very important role for the standardisation of Somali, Yassin Osman Kenadid and Shire Jama Ahmed. They were both very knowledgeable about languages.

Shire Jama Ahmed was born in 1936 in Wardheer in the Somali part of Ethiopia. Early in life, he studied Arabic in Mogadishu. Between 1945 and 1951 he attended a British school in the north and then returned to his Arabic studies. In 1955 he received a scholarship to study at the university of Cairo. It seems probable that he devoted the years in Egypt to the study of languages and linguistics. In 1957 he returned, 21 years old, to Somalia and immediately joined the on-going language debate.

There was large resistance against the Latin script. Osmania was considered suitable on nationalistic grounds, whereas the Arabic script was considered suitable on religious grounds. The Latin script was almost completely associated with the exercise of colonial power, and the few persons who openly advocated the Latin script had to endure harsh criticism from the general public.

Yassin, Shire and many, many others were convinced that there was no reason to choose another official language than Somali, since Somalia – as one of very few countries in Africa – had a linguistically almost homogeneous population. They pointed out that other very large muslim countries, like Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, had chosen a local language as the official language, not Arabic. Not to be able to use one's mother tongue as the official language poses large obstacles for the majority of the population, and it would largely hinder the future development of Somalia. They claimed that it was absolutely necessary to choose Somali as the official language if one was serious about working for the introduction of public schools for the whole population and erasing illiteracy.

Even though Yassin and Shire had a common goal in making Somali the official language of the country, there was still serious disagreement between them. Yassin was an advocate of the Osmania script developed by his father, whereas Shire advocated the Latin script, mainly for technical and economical reasons. The existing printing presses and typewriters in Somalia could handle the Latin script since they were used to write the languages of the colonial powers, English and Italian.

Illustration 1: The first page in Somali in a daily newspaper, 2 March 1957



4 The first public text in Somali

The first Somali Prime Minister (1949-1961) Abdullahi Issa Mohamud was an advocate of the Latin script and in the Italophone daily newspaper *Corriere della Somalia* a page in Somali writeten with the Latin script was introduced as early as 2 March 1957 under the title *Wargeys-ka Somalíyed*. (See illustration 1.) However, due to serious protests this page disappeared just as suddently as it had been introduced.

This intermezzo caused Shire to work even more intensely for the introduction of the Latin script. He compared the Latin script to things like electricity, pointing out that both electricity and the Latin script had been introduced in Somalia by the colonial powers, but nobody wanted to get rid of electricity. He also pointed out that other large languages in mulsim countries, for example Turkish, hade introduced the Latin script successfully. By and large, Shire had developed his own proposal for a Latin alphabet for Somali already by 1960, and he had designed it in almost the same way as the alphabet that tiday constitutes the official standard Somali orthography.

5 The first language commission

When the independent republic of Somalia was formed on 1 July 1960, the language issue was not solved. Instead Italian and English, togheter with Arabic, continued to be used as administrative languages. People now came to realise how difficult it is to have a foreign language as the official language of the country. The need to introduce Somali as the official language became more and more evident for large parts of the population. Already

Illustration 2: An article in *Waregys-ka Somaliyed*, 2 March 1957

Wareg-gî dhowâ ê hâkin-ka magâlo-da baydhabod iyo madah-dî ay kulmen

Hâkin-ka magâlo-da Baydhabod ê Ahmed Râge 'Abdi ah bâ malin dhaweyd wuhû ku sô waregey búloyin-ka ka tirsan magâladîsa.

Bûlo-da Gorisane la yirahdo mar-ku tagey hâkin-ku ô û ku waregey iyada iyo war-têda ba bu wahû u yimid duq-î mêl-sha ô isagu na u ga waramey in la gu nebad qâbo bûlo-da ô ay miyiran tahai, la na bihiyo 'anshurta bêraha. Wuhû duqu hâkin-ka ogeysiyey in 'êl-kî bûlo-da lô bâhan yahai in la qodo. Wahâ' ra'iyey dad-ka ka sokow in bêr-tu na ku tôseyso. Hâkin-ku na sabab-tî dahisey 'êl-ka qodnin-kîsa bu uga waramey wahâ na u ka ballan qâdey inû u dadâlo, dabadêd na hâkin-kî wahû sô adey bûlo-da la yirahdo Tigan-Kasa Sheb.

Mêl-shân na wahû ku la kulmay dugow-dî iyo 'ulumodî, hawên-ku na wâ ay u 'ar-rab-dhaben, dhallin yaro-du na wâ ay u 'ayârtay wahâ na la tiriye hêso Dowlad-da amman-têda ah. Hâkin-ku, gêd-kî 'âdo-da ahâ hostisa bu ikhyar-tî ku la hadley, wahâ

na u gar siyey salan-tisa iyo tî hâkin-ka jaha-da. Dawr odey bâ ka hadlay gêd-kî ô ku mahad naqay hâkin-kî wahâ na ay weydisten in lô qodo 'êlal iyo waroh. Mar-kôda wahâ hadley ô la dardarmey hâkin-ka duqa la yirahdo Hussên 'Abdi Nûr iyo rag kale ô ku adkêyey 'od-kôda inû gârsiyo hâkimmo-da sare ô degdeg lô ga kâlmeyo biyo yarîda, wahâ ballanqâdey in la sô diro rag farsamo leh ô firya sidî wah-lô sameyn karo.

Dabadêd-na wahû u sô 'ar-rabay Baydhaboh.

Nin-ka madah ah haffis-ka ka furan Addis-Ababa ô ka tirsan mêlsha la yirahdo UNICEF, la na yirahdo maga'isa H. Ehrenstrale, iyo Fulvio Rizzetto bâ wahey ku hoyden Baydhabo, wahâ dhaweyey hâkin-ka Jahada Hâjî Bashir Isma'il, intî ay jôgen na magâloda u wêyn Alto Juba, wahay âd u dâwaden Isbital-ka iyo dugsi-ga wêyn ê Jahada iyo dugsiyoda kale, wahâ na ay âd u shekeysten nin-ka la madah-a ah sida so'od-kôdu yahai iyo sidu wah tar-kôdu yahai.

on the 8 December 1960 the government of the new republic appointed a commission with nine members, led by Musa Ismail Galaal, to recommend the most suitable script for Somali from a purely technical perspective. The commission however pointed out itself in the report that was delivered on the 15 May 1961 about a suitable orthography for Somali, that the commission had also taken into consideration the economical situation in the country and the development of society in general.

The commission gave the public 15 days to submit proposal for a Somali orthography in order to then evaluate these proposals with respect to 17 criteria that the commission already on beforehand had formulated. Some of the most important criteria were that the script should be phonetic, simple (without accents or other support signs), economically defensible (possible to write and print with the equipment that already existed in the country), possible to use for telegraphing, easy to learn, possible to use for all dialects, as well as being unique for Somali (not directly imported from any other language). Questions regarding religion and culture were not included in the criteria, totally in accordance with the instructions given to the commission.

The whole commission first engaged in studies of orthography from a general linguistic perspective, telegraphy, as well as Somali phonetics and grammar.

18 different proposals for a Somali orthography were submitted, and they were all scrutinised according to the 17 criteria that had been established by the commission. Eleven of the proposals wanted to introduce a completely new and unique alphabet for Somali, four suggested different adaptations of the Arabic script and three were adaptations of the Latin script.

The commission emphasises in its report that there is no connection between an alphabet used for a language and the religious beliefs of its speakers. It is especially emphasised that such was the unanimous opinion of all the members in this muslim commission. The commission also declares that it was following its conscience by choosing the script that best serves the development of the Somali society.

In their report the commission emphasises that all proposals for new and unique Somali scripts were written from left to right, like the Latin script, and this is interpreted as an indication that subconsciously the Somali populations has a positive attitude towards the basic principles of the Latin script. Furthermore, the shape of the letters in the unique Somali alphabets had more in common with the Latin letters than with the Arabic ones, and about one fourth of the signs in the unique Somali proposal heavily resemble individual Latin characters. All the unique Somali proposals are however economically impossible to defend since all typewriters and printing presses would have to be replaced.

Also when it comes to the Arabic proposals, the commission argues that the number of typewriters and amount of printing equipment is small and that the cost for acquiring a sufficient amount of such equipment would be too high. It is also pointed out that the readability and the learning of the Arabic script is impaired by the use of small diacritic signs and that the Arabic vowel system with its three short and three long vowel signs is too restricted for Somali. Some signs are also used for both a vowel and a consonant, and the short vowels are written with signs that are generally not applied in the Arabic orthography. It would however be absolutely vital to write those signs for Somali. It was also emphasised that earlier attempts to write Somali with the Arabic alphabet, conducted among others by Sayid Mohamed Abdillahi Hassan, Mohamed Abdillahi Mayal (Berbera), Osman Yusuf Kenadid, Sheikh Abdulrahman Kadi (Borama) and the Englishman J. S. King had not led to any well functioning result. Mohamed Abdillahi Mayal had produced school-books written with the Arabic script, but they had not been welcomed with enthusiasm by the public. Sayid Mohamed Abdillahi Hassan had abandoned his idea to write down his texts due to the difficulties to handle the Somali vowels with the restricted inventory of Arabic signs. Osman Yusuf Kenadid had in the 1920's finally chosen to create his own alphabet, which meant an important step forward for investigation of the Somali sound system, and led to the creation of a suitable number of vowel symbols.

From the perspective of the commission the Latin script had many more advantages than the uniquely Somali scripts and the Arabic script. However, within the commission Yassin Osman Kenadid was a strong advocate of his father's Osmania script and Ibrahim Hashi Mohamud a dedicated supporter of the Arabic script. Both realised that their viewpoint had very small chances based on the 17 criteria decided upon by the commission, and towards the end of the process Ibrahim Hashi Mohamud and Mohamud Jama Afballad left the commission as a protest, while Yassin Osman submitted a written request for a leave.

Therefore, in the end only six of the commission's members recommended Shire Jama Ahmed's proposal in a slightly adjusted version. Of course, Shire himself was part of the commission and therefore also in these adjustments. According to the commission's final report, Shire had developed his script in 1960 and it consisted at the time when it was submitted of the set of symbols rendered by illustration 3 (Galaal 1961: 57).

The only difference when compared to today's orthography is that Shire suggested to write the long vowels with an accent and that he used "ch" for today's "x", while "x" was used for today's "kh".

When the commission had made its choice, the recommendation was to use Shire's proposed alphabet with slight modifications as shown by illustra-

Illustration 3: Shire Jama Ahmed's proposal for a Somali orthography

Consonants,	b	t	j	ch	x	d	r	s	sh	dh	c	g	f	q	k	l	m
	n	w	h	y	.												
Vowels, (Short)	a	i	u	e	o												
" (Long)	`a	`i	`u	`e	`o												

Illustration 4: The Language Commission's proposal for a Somali orthography

Consonants,	.b.	.t.	.j.	.ch.	.kh.	.d.	.r.	.s.	.sh.	.dh.	.c.						
	.g.	.f.	.q.	.k.	.l.	.m.	.n.	.w.	.h.	.y.	.ny.	.jy.					

Vowels (Short)	.a	.	.i	.	.	.u	.	.	.e	.	.	.o	.	.	.	.	.
" (Long)	aa	.	ii	.	.	uu	.	.	ee	.	.	oo	.	.	.	.	.

tion 4 (Galaal 1961: 70).

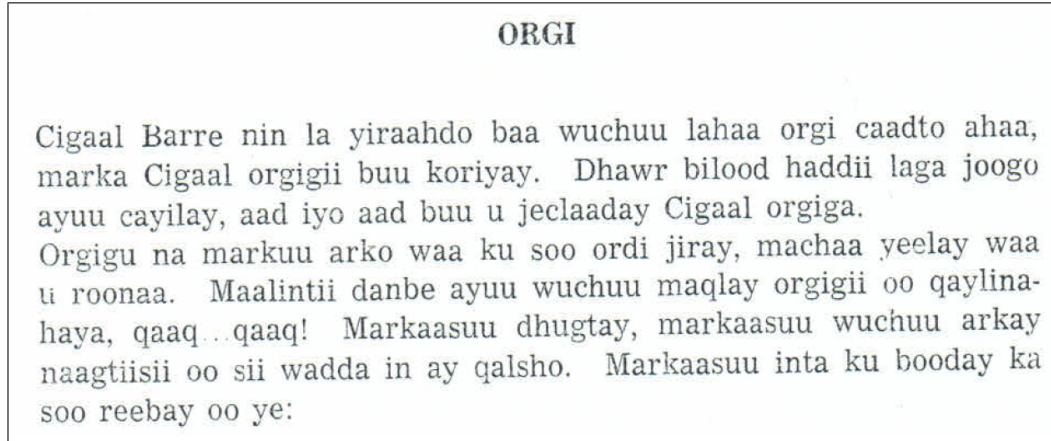
Notice that the only remaining difference compared to today's orthography is that "ch" is still suggested instead of today's "x". The combinations "ny" and "jy" are only added to render specific sounds in certain southern dialects. The accents are added as a means to represent tone or stress if necessary.

6 The politicians hesitate to take action

The recommendations of the commission were left without action by the politicians for a number of years. Instead it was decided that English would be the language of instruction in Somali schools, whereas the university in Mogadishu continued to use Italian.

In 1966 the politicians asked a new commission for a new recommendation, this time through UNESCO. Professor B. W. Andrzejewski at the university of London was appointed together with two other linguists. Seven different proposals for a Somali orthography were submitted this time: three with Latin script, two with Arabic script and two unique Somali scripts. The commission chose not make any direct to recommendation, but instead to discuss different advantages and disadvantages of the different proposed scripts. Among the Latin alphabets proposed, the advantages of Shire Jama Ahmed's proposal was clearly stated, especially for technical and economical

Illustration 5: From Shire's *Gabayo, maahmaah iyo sheekooyin yaryar*, 1965



reasons. Once again the politicians were worried about the public opinion and once again they left this commission's recommendations without action.

Throughout the 1960's Shire devoted a lot of efforts to systematic collection of a large amount of oral poetry and stories that he wrote down with his own Latin orthography. In 1965 he published a book with the title *Gabayo, maahmaah iyo sheekooyin yaryar*. A short passage from the book can be found in illustration 5.

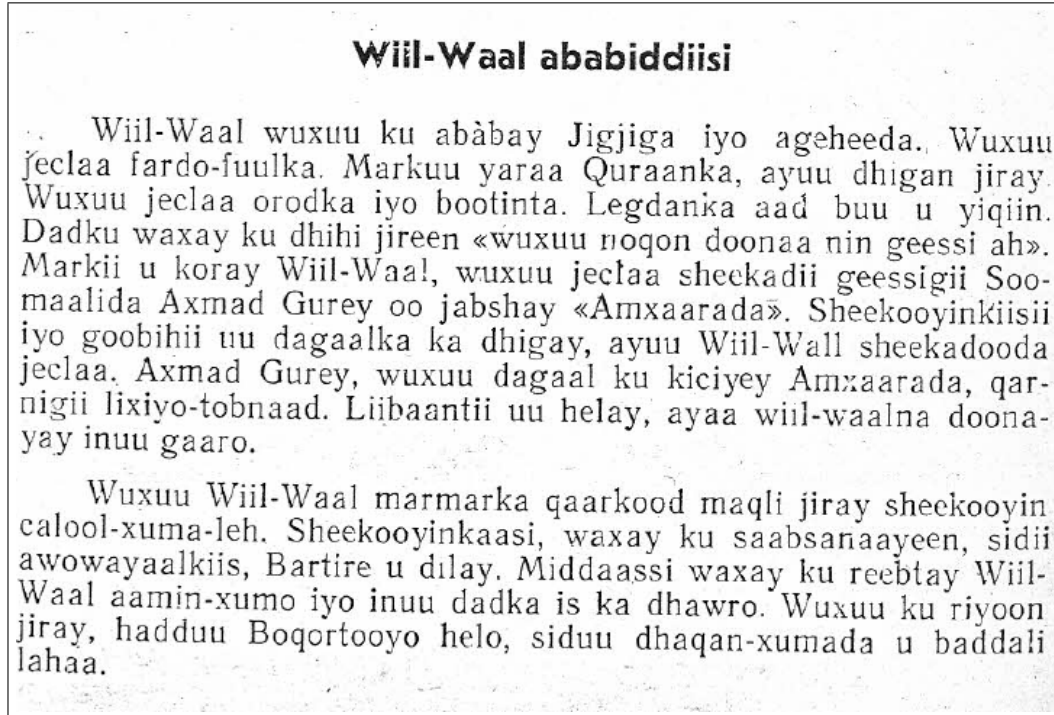
The following year he started to publish his texts in his own journal called *Iftiinka Aqoonta*. It appeared with six issues from November 1966 until July 1967. Thanks to this journal Shire's alphabet slowly gained more supporters. In the journal he had made the last small changes in his orthographic system. He had introduced the letter 'x' and the sign ' for the glottal stop called *hamsa*. In all major respects, the spelling in the journal is the same as today's standard Somali spelling. The most important difference that still remains is that more consonants than today's seven may be doubled, e.g., *affar*, *Xassan*. A short passage from the last issue of the journal is shown in illustration 6.

7 Somali becomes the official language

In 1969 the military seized power in Somalia and declared that Somali would be introduced as the official written language as soon as possible. Therefore, in January 1971 a commission consisting of 11 men was appointed with the task to prepare schoolbooks, a reference grammar and a dictionary, as well as to develop modern technical terminology (Laitin 1977: 115).

The commission was however not supposed to take a stance about which

Illustration 6: From Shire's *Iftiinka Aqoonta* no 6, 1967



script to apply. Hence, the books were prepared without knowing for sure which script would be used and the instructions for the commission stated that each member was free to write in the way he himself preferred, but of course there were only typewriters with Latin script available (Laitin 1977: 117). The orthography would then be corrected afterwards according to coming decisions by the government.

On 21 October 1972 it was decided that Somali was going to be written with the Latin script that had already been used by Shire Jama Ahmed. All state employees were given three months to learn to write in Somali and Somali was introduced as the official language of the republic on 1 January 1973. It was immediately applied throughout the administration, and later that same year it was introduced as the language of instruction in the lower grades of the Somali school system. Within just a few months Somali also replaced the previous languages in the daily press.

Despite the fact that Shire's orthography was introduced with absolutely minimal modifications, this remains a surprisingly unknown fact among the general public. A number of books and journals had already been published with the Latin script during the 15 years that had passed since the first page in *Corriere della Somalia* in March 1957. Besides Shire's *Iftiinka Aqoonta*

Illustration 7: From *Abwan Urursan Af Soomaali iyo Rusha*, 1969

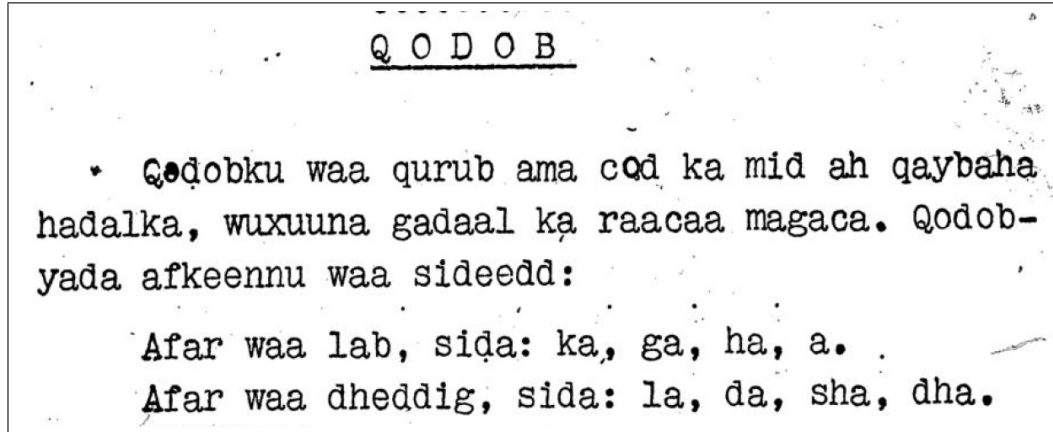
ban-ka <i>м.</i> 1) равнина; 2) площадь (в городе).	barbardhigid: <i>is</i> ~ сравнивать.
bandhig-ga <i>м.</i> 1) ярмарка; 2) выставка; показ; 3) музей.	barbardhigid-da <i>жс.:</i> <i>is</i> ~ сравнение.
bangi-ga <i>м.</i> банк.	bare-ha <i>м.</i> педагог, учитель.
baniadem-ka <i>м.</i> человечество.	barxad-da <i>жс.</i> вестибюль; коридор.
baniademnimo: ~ аһ человеческий.	bari-da <i>жс.</i> курдюк.
bannaan свободный, незапятный.	bari-ga <i>м.</i> восток; Bariga Fog Дальний Восток; Bariga Dhexe Средний Восток; Bariga Dhow Ближний Восток.
bannaan-ka <i>м.</i> 1) свободное (незанятое) место; 2) площадь (в городе).	barid 1) учить (кого-л.); 2) преподавать.

there is also, among a handful of other titles, the first Somali-Russian and Russian-Somali dictionary from 1969 as well as the language commission's first reference grammar in Somali from 1971. Short samples from these books are reproduced in illustration 7 and 8.

Just like most other standard languages today's written Somali has evolved and found its present shape through a dynamic process, even if certain individuals have influenced that development to a quite large extent. Hence, the legislation from 1972 mainly means a legal formalisation of the language norm that already to a large extent had been established on its own. The important effect of the political decision was not that "Somali was given a script", it already had one since a number of years, but that the de facto already functioning written language finally, supported by the new law, was introduced as the country's OFFICIAL LANGUAGE in administration and education, replacing English, Arabic and Italian.

After 1972 the language commission became part of Somalia's Academy of Culture and Shire Jama became its chairman. He was also one of the authors of the first reference grammar of the Somali standard language *Aasaaska Naxwaha Af Soomaaliga* (1st ed. Mogadishu 1971, 46 p.; 2nd ed. Mogadishu 1973, 40 p.). At the same time he also published his own Somali reference grammar called *Naxwaha Af Soomaaliga* (1st impression, Mogadishu 1973, 156 p.; 2nd impression 1976). Later on Shire became the cultural attache at the Somali Embassy in Stockholm. He remained in Stockholm for the rest of his life.

Illustration 8: From *Aasaaska Narwaha Af Soomaaliga*, 1971



8 The Literacy Campaign

BBC: Somalia's Rural Literacy Campaign

YouTube: Somalia Literacy Campaign Ololaha Horumarinta Reer Miyiga 1974

9 Standard Somali

How stable is the Somali standard language? It is of course a difficult question to answer, but if one compares Somali to most other languages in the world, it is quite well standardised. The fact that there are people who oppose to the norms of the present standard is nothing strange. Those things happen in most languages, especially younger ones. An interesting comparison might be the lively debates about standard language in Norway.

Some factors that are often mentioned as typical for a standard language are that the standard form of a language – in contrast to its dialectal forms – is:

- prestige: symbolises status and high prestige;
- functions: used in politics, administration, education, mass media;
- codification: documented in dictionaries and reference grammars, leading to uniformness and stability;
- official status: sanctioned by political decisions as the common language of a specific geographic area.

To a large extent the Somali language of today exhibits many of these characteristics of a standard language. Maybe it did so to an even larger extent in the 1980's, when only Somali was used in education (except university), in political life and administration.

Today, there are political decision about the status of the Somali language in additional states and regions. Somali is also systematicall used in mass media. There is a number of new dictionaries and reference grammars documenting the language and for the most part these works exhibit a very homogenous decription, even though there is also a smaller degree of varaition, which isn't surprising due to the fact that the Somali standard language is relatively young and is used over a very large geographic area encopmassing several different countries.

10 Somali language planning and support

For Somali there are no stable organisations with a long-standing tradition of planning and supporting the development of the standard language like there are in many coutries that have an academy, a prominent publishing house or a university department with certain special responsibilities for the national langauge or languages. Finland has its Institute for the languages of Finland, Sweden has The Swedish Academy and the Langaug Bank etc. There is no such long-standing and stable organisation whose main aim would be to support the development of standard Somali. Hsitorically, however, several organisations have contributed to this development and some of them have had this work as one of their objectives.

- Radio Hargeysa and Radio Mogadishu,
- the first langauge commission 1960-61,
- the third langauge commission "Guddiga Af Soomaaliga" 1971-73,
- The Somali National Academy of Culture,
- universities and institutes where researchers work on Somali, especially Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche de Djibouti and the universities of Mogadishu, Hargeisa, Djibouti, Jigjiga och Dire Dawa,
- the authorities for education in Mogadishu, Garoowe, Hargeisa and Jigjiga that produce textbooks for their respective schooling systems,
- The Somali Langaug Academy, Akadeemiye-Goboleedka AfSoomaaliga (AGA), founded in 2013, today based in Mogadishu.

11 Documentation and codification of Standard Somali

Compared to languages such as Swedish or English, many of the factors characteristic for a standard language are of course not fulfilled to a similar degree, but compared to most other languages of the world, the degree of standardisation is still high and many efforts have been done in order to give the language a unified form. In a global perspective there is a large number of publications describing Somali, but no single handbook hasn't yet gained the status of "codificational codex". However, many respected publications agree to a very high degree on most facts:

- Stepanjenko. 1969. *Abwan urursan af Soomaali iyo Rusha*. PDF
- Schoolbooks written during the 1970's and 1980's. PDF
- Guddiga Afka Soomaalida. 1971. *Aasaaska naxwaha af Soomaaliga*. PDF
- Guddiga Af Soomaaliga. 1973. *Aasaaska naxwaha af Soomaaliga*. PDF
- Shire J. Ahmed. 1973, 1976. *Naxwaha Af Soomaaliga*. PDF
- Yaasiin C. Keenadiid. 1976. *Qaamuuska Af-Soomaaliga*. PDF
- 1985. *Dizionario somalo-italiano*. PDF
- Zorc m.fl. 1993. *Somali-English dictionary*.
- Mansur & Puglielli. 1999, 201x. *Barashada naxwaha af-Soomaaliga*. PDF
- New schoolbooks in Somalia, Somaliland and Ethiopia in the 2000's and 2010's.
- 2008. *Qaamuuska af-Soomaaliga*. Nairobi.
- 2012. *Qaamuuska af-Soomaaliga*. Roma. PDF
- 2013. *Qaamuus Afsoomaali*. Jabbuuti.
- Modern mass media and fiction applying a quite homogenous norm.

This all means that there are many different actors of quite different types that together work for the strengthening, stabilisation and development of the Somali standard language.

As long as individuals and institutions are willing to conduct work based on the existing tradition and the foundation already laid down, then every effort is generally very valuable, without regard to whether the work is backed up by a governmental institution or not. Different kinds of publications that reinforce the prevailing, established norms contribute to further strengthening of that norm and the development of an even stronger and clearer standard.

When previous handbooks do not give any clear answers to certain questions and problems, the safest way for authors of new publications is to try and find out how the majority of the speakers and writers of the language actually use their language. Today that is much easier to do than in the past, with help from computers, corpora and the internet.

It is however more problematic when individuals and in some instances also institutions propose far reaching changes in the existing norms and principles that are already very well established, e.g., to change the spelling of complex pronoun and preposition clusters, and to write **u gu** instead of the very well established **ugu**, or to double other consonants than the well established seven (**b, d, g, l, m, n, r**), e.g., **affaf** instead of the established **afaf**. With such new ideas there is a high risk of causing large confusion. In well established standard languages that kind of “planned” changes are very uncommon. Such proposals are also usually met with considerable opposition from the public. One example could be the introduction in 1996 of three identical consonants in a row in German compound words, e.g., *Schiff* ‘ship’ + *Fahrt* ‘traffic’ > *Schiffahrt* ‘shipping’ instead of the traditional *Schiffahrt*, something that arouse strong feelings and still hasn’t been accepted by many people.

Similar cases of far reaching changes in the Somali orthography can be found in the dictionary *Qaamuus Ereykoobe* that was published in Djibouti in 2004. This dictionary is therefore not very useful for the public, but it is of course interesting for linguists and others who can see through the odd spellings.

For Somali there are actually very many really stable norms and principles for both spelling, grammar and vocabular. These norms and principles have however not always been formulated into “rules” that are generally taught, learnt and followed. But it is evident that many linguistically conscious writers and editors apply the same generally accepted rules since the way of writing differs quite little between different experienced writers.

E.g., there is total agreement on the set of letters and how they should be

used to denote Somali sounds, which letters may be doubled, i.e., **a, o, u, e, i; b, d, g, l, m, n, r** and no other. In the same way there is a very high degree of agreement on the shape of almost all the inflectional forms.

On the other hand there are certain details for which there are no generally accepted rules, e.g., whether one should write **ay** or **ey**, whether to use **dh** or **r** after a vowel in certain words, or whether the focus particle should be written **waxa** or **waxaa**. In these instances there is basically a totally free choice for each and everyone between the two possibilities, and both ways are equally correct, even though they might not be equally common.

Theme 4: The variation within Somali

Morgan Nilsson

May 25, 2020

1 Sociolinguistics

Just like any other language, Somali exhibits some variation between different speakers, different places and different situations.

In different languages this kind of variation may look in many different ways and depend on many different factors. How languages vary is the object of study in the field of **SOCIOLINGUISTICS**, or sometimes also language sociology. The different forms of a language are usually called **VARIETIES** of the language in question.

A language can vary due to many different factors, e.g. geographic areas. Varieties that are spoken within more restricted areas and differ quite a bit from the standard variety are often referred to as **TRADITIONAL DIALECT**, whereas varieties that are spoken over larger areas and generally do not differ as much from the standard variety are often referred to as regional varieties or **REGIONAL DIALECTS**.

2 Regional variation within the standard

When the differences between varieties in different regions are very small, they may be perceived as parallel forms of the standard language. This situation commonly arises when there is more than one strong central administrative city or capital where the same language is spoken. Typical examples of such languages with parallel regional standards is English and Spanish, which are spoken in several different countries around the world, but also Swedish (in Sweden and Finland), German (in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Luxemburg), French (in France, Switzerland, Belgium, Canada and many more countries), Russian (in Russia, Belarus and several other countries), Greek (in Greece and Cyprus), Persian (in Iran and Afghanistan)...

A similar situation can today be observed also for standard Somali in the different regions where it is spoken. There are three strong regions with the administrative central cities Mogadishu, Hargeisa and Jigjiga. These three regional administrations use slightly different varieties that all constitute forms of a common standard Somali language.

Among other things, these differences can easily be traced in administrative documents, such as laws, but also in the different series of schoolbooks produced in each of the three regions.

In all the mentioned languages there is a general consensus that there is **one** common standard language that is being used in slightly different forms in different regions.

Until the beginning of the 1990s, also Serbo-Croatian was generally re-

garded as one language exhibiting slightly differing regional varieties within one standard. Since then the situation has changed dramatically, mainly for political reasons. The prevailing situation of today is that the same varieties are generally regarded as four different standard languages in four different states – Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrinian and Serbian – even though the differences between these four languages are not larger than between the regional varieties of many other standard languages over the world.

3 Regional variation in Swedish and English

The fact that a standard language may exhibit variation within the standard between different regions is very common and very natural. For example, in Swedish there are two phonemes that exhibit a large regional (or even individual) variation: /r/ and /ʃ/. Also the realisation of the tonal accent varies a lot depending on region. And of course there are differences in the vocabulary, for example such a technical term as ‘motorway intersection’ which the authorities call *mot* (related to English ‘meet’) in the south west and *trafikplats* in the rest of the country. There are also grammatical differences, e.g. adjectives have a special masculine form that is mainly used in the south west: *den gamle mannen* ‘the old man’ versus *den gamla kvinnan* ‘the old woman’, whereas in the rest of the country the form *gamla* is gender neutral. There are also noticeable differences between the standard in Sweden and in Finland.

Regional variation in the vocabulary is common in practically all languages. As an illustration some examples of differences between the United States and Britain:

BRITAIN	U.S.
<i>tarmac</i>	<i>blacktop</i>
<i>mobile phone</i>	<i>cell phone</i>
<i>overall</i>	<i>coveralls</i>
<i>nappy</i>	<i>diaper</i>
<i>lift</i>	<i>elevator</i>
<i>rubber</i>	<i>eraser</i>
<i>rubbish</i>	<i>garbage</i>
<i>pneumatic drill</i>	<i>jackhammer</i>
<i>timber</i>	<i>lumber</i>
<i>bedside table</i>	<i>nightstand</i>
<i>pavement</i>	<i>sidewalk</i>
<i>post code</i>	<i>ZIP code</i>
<i>cleg</i>	<i>horse fly</i>
<i>crisps</i>	<i>chips</i>
<i>chips</i>	<i>french fries</i>
<i>electric fire</i>	<i>space heater</i>
<i>gear box</i>	<i>transmission</i>
<i>hoover</i>	<i>vacuum cleaner</i>
<i>landslip</i>	<i>landslide</i>

	FRANCE	BELGIUM
<i>déjeuner</i>	<i>lunch</i>	<i>breakfast</i>

4 Regional variation within Standard Somali

When it comes to Standard Somali the largest regional differences can be found in the vocabulary, also in very basic vocabulary. The differences in pronunciation and grammar are much smaller, but there are certain very typical and frequent differences, such as

- the pronunciation of /j/ as voiced [dʒ] or voiceless [tʃ].
- the use of /dh/ or /r/ in the middle or at the end of words, e.g. **tidhi** or **tiri** *you/she said*
- the use of /kh/ or /q/, e.g. **waqti** or **wakhti** *time*
- the presence or absence of /n/ before a consonant, e.g. **daanyeer** or **daayeer** *monkey*

- the use of /o/ or /a/ at the end of names and a few other words, t.ex. **Sahra** or **Sahro**, **laba** or **labo** *two*,
- the inflectional ending **-saa** or **-daa** after **-i-**, e.g. **akhrisaa** or **akhri-daa** *you/she writes*
- the use of subject pronouns in questions and negated clauses, e.g.
Muu arki karo or **Ma arki karo** *He can't see it.*
Miyuu arki karaa? or **Ma arki karaa?** *Can he see it?*
- Word order with the negation **aan** in subordinate clauses, e.g.
Waxaan rabaa in uusan tegin or **Waxaan rabaa in aanu tegin**
I don't want him to go (aanu < aan + uu; uusan < uu + aan).
- Vocabulary:
kalluun, **mallaay** *fisk* (se illustration 1)
beed, **ukun ägg** (se illustration 2)
kubbad, **banooni** *boll* (se illustration 3)
ayskiriin, **jalaato**, **qaboojiso** *glass*
xaggee, **halkee**, **meeshee**, **meelma** *var?*
sannad, **sano**, **jir** *år*

MOGADISHU

banooni
moos
baaquli
wiil
xaaqin
walaal, aboowe
baabuur, gaari
yaanyuur, mukulaal
dooro
albaab, irrid
ukun
mallaay
bur
dawaco
gabar
awoowe, abkow
ayeeyo, abooto
cagaar
nus, haaf, bar
halkaan, inta, meeshan
meeqa, meeqo
baahi
waraabe, dhurwaa
jirran, xanuunsan
jalmad, kirli
jiko, kushiin
mind, middi
firi
daanyeer
doolli
saxan
mushaari, boorash
guduudan, gaduudan
xarig
cusbo
iskool, iskuul
shaati, shaar
toddoba
abaayo

BOSASO

kubbad
muus, moos
baaquli, madiibad
wiil
xaaqin
walaal, boowe
gaari, baabuur
bisad, dummad
digaag, dooro
albaab
ukun
kalluun, mallaay
bur, daqiiq
dawaco
gabar
awoowe
ayeeyo
cagaar
bar, haaf
halkan
immisa, meeqa
gaajo
dhurwaa
xanuunsan, jirran
kildhi, kirli
jiko
mind, middi
firi, eeg
daanyeer, daayeer
jiir
saxan
boorash, mushaari
guduudan, cas
xarig
cusbo, milix
iskuul, iskool
shaati
toddoba, toddobo
walaal, baayo

HARGEISA

kubbad ‘ball’
muus ‘banana’
madiibad ‘bowl’
inan, will ‘boy’
mafiq ‘broom’
walaal ‘brother’
gaadhi ‘car’
bisad ‘cat’
digaag ‘chicken’
albaab ‘door’
beed ‘eggs’
kalluun ‘fish’
daqiiq ‘flour’
dacawo ‘fox’
inan, gabadh ‘girl’
awoowe, awoow ‘grandpa’
ayeeyo, ayeey ‘granny’
akhtar ‘green’
badh ‘half’
halkan ‘here’
immisa ‘how much’
gaajo ‘hunger’
waraabe ‘hyena’
xanuunsan ‘ill’
kildhi ‘kettle’
madbakh ‘kitchen’
middi, mindi ‘knife’
eeg ‘look’
daanyeer, daayeer ‘monkey’
jiir ‘mouse’
saxan, bileydh ‘plate’
boorash ‘porridge’
cas ‘red’
xadhig ‘rope’
milix ‘salt’
iskuul ‘school’
shaadh ‘shirt’
toddoba ‘seven’
walaal ‘sister’

MOGADISHU	BOSASO	HARGEISA
<i>fariiso, fadhiiso</i>	<i>fariiso, fadhiiso</i>	<i>fadhiiso</i> ‘sit down’
<i>oon</i>	<i>harraad</i>	<i>harraad</i> ‘thirst’
<i>Talaado</i>	<i>Talaado, Salaasa</i>	<i>Salaasa</i> ‘Tuesday’
<i>labaatan iyo shan</i>	<i>shan iyo labaaatan, labaaatan iyo shan</i>	<i>shan iyo labaaatan</i> ‘25’
<i>labo</i>	<i>labo, laba</i>	<i>laba</i> ‘two’
<i>qare</i>	<i>qare</i>	<i>xabxab</i> ‘watermelon’
<i>Arbaco</i>	<i>Arbaco, Arbaca</i>	<i>Arbaca</i> ‘Wednesday’
<i>dariishad</i>	<i>daaqad, dariishad</i>	<i>daaqad</i> ‘window’
<i>naag</i>	<i>naag</i>	<i>gabadh, naag</i> ‘woman’
<i>jaalle</i>	<i>jaalle</i>	<i>huruud</i> ‘yellow’

5 Somali dialects

Talking about dialects in an everyday context, people tend to think about varieties of a language that diverge noticeably from the standard language and are spoken by people who have been living in a certain area for a long time.

Within the Somali speaking area the variation between dialects is surprisingly small taken into account the size of the area. The geographic area where Somali is spoken is almost as big as France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands together. The most likely explanation is that the area is rather flat and that the Somali speakers have been and to a large extent still are nomads who move back and forth over enormous distances. This has had a neutralising impact on the dialectal differentiation.

For Somali there is a dominating group of very similar dialects that are spoken in the major part of the Somali speaking area. In European languages this dialect group is often referred to as NORTHERN SOMALI. This label is unfortunately somewhat misleading as the dialects in the far south also belong to this group.

Actually, it is only in the coastal areas approximately 200 km to the north and 200 km to the south of Mogadishu and the areas around and between the two large rivers Shabeelle and Jubba that exhibit dialects that diverge more severely from the rest, i.e. from Northern Somali. Best known are the two dialect groups called BANAADIR and MAAY. See illustration 4 (from Lamberti 1986: 29) and illustration 5 (Lamberti’s map in an adapted version by Kzl55 (Wikimedia)).

The reason for the label NORTHERN SOMALI, comprising dialects in Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, northern Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland)

Illustration 1: The distribution of the words **kalluun** / **mallaay** *fish* based on crowd-sourcing in Oct. 2019

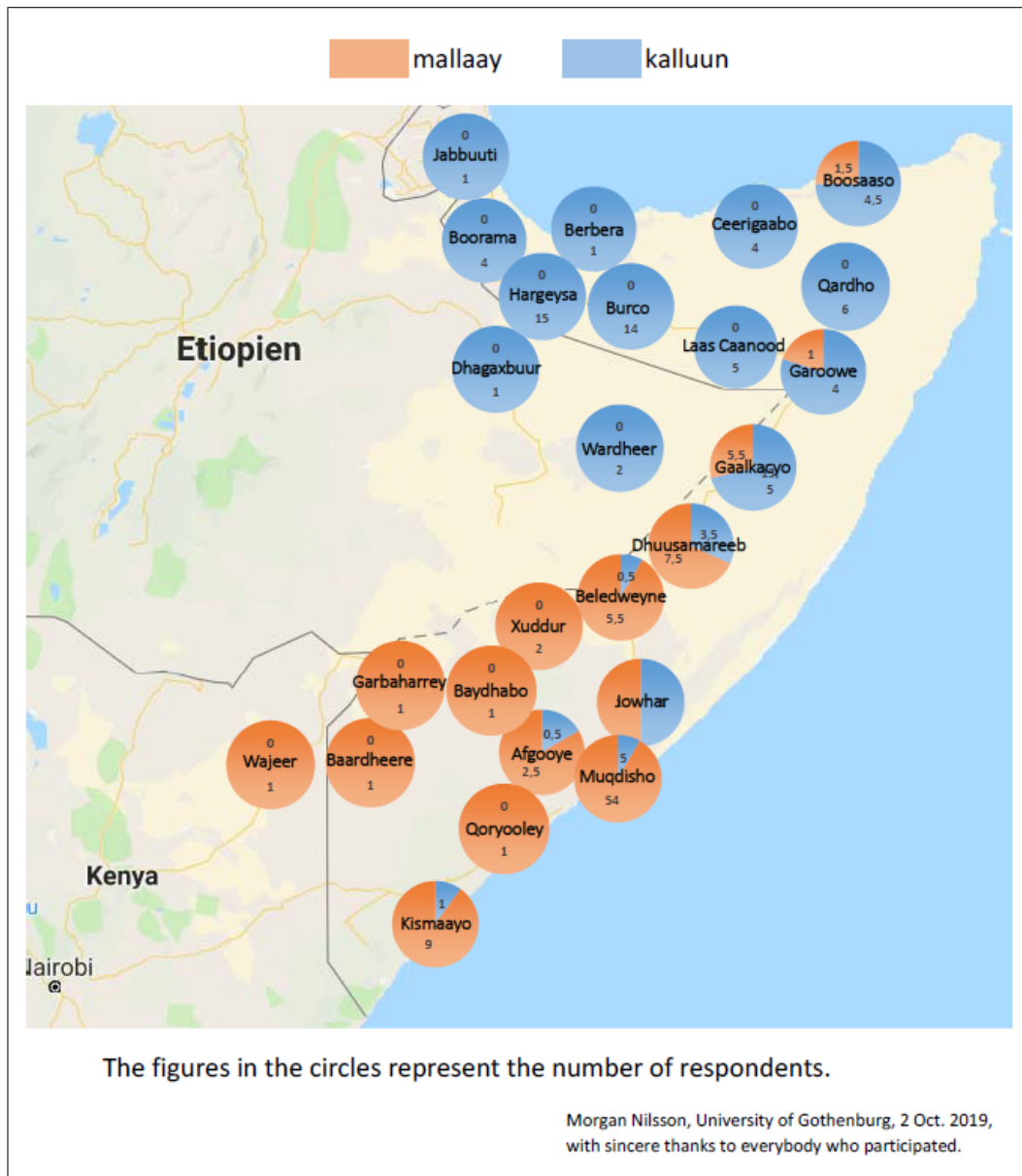


Illustration 2: The distribution of the words **ukun** / **beed** eggs based on crowd-sourcing in Oct. 2019

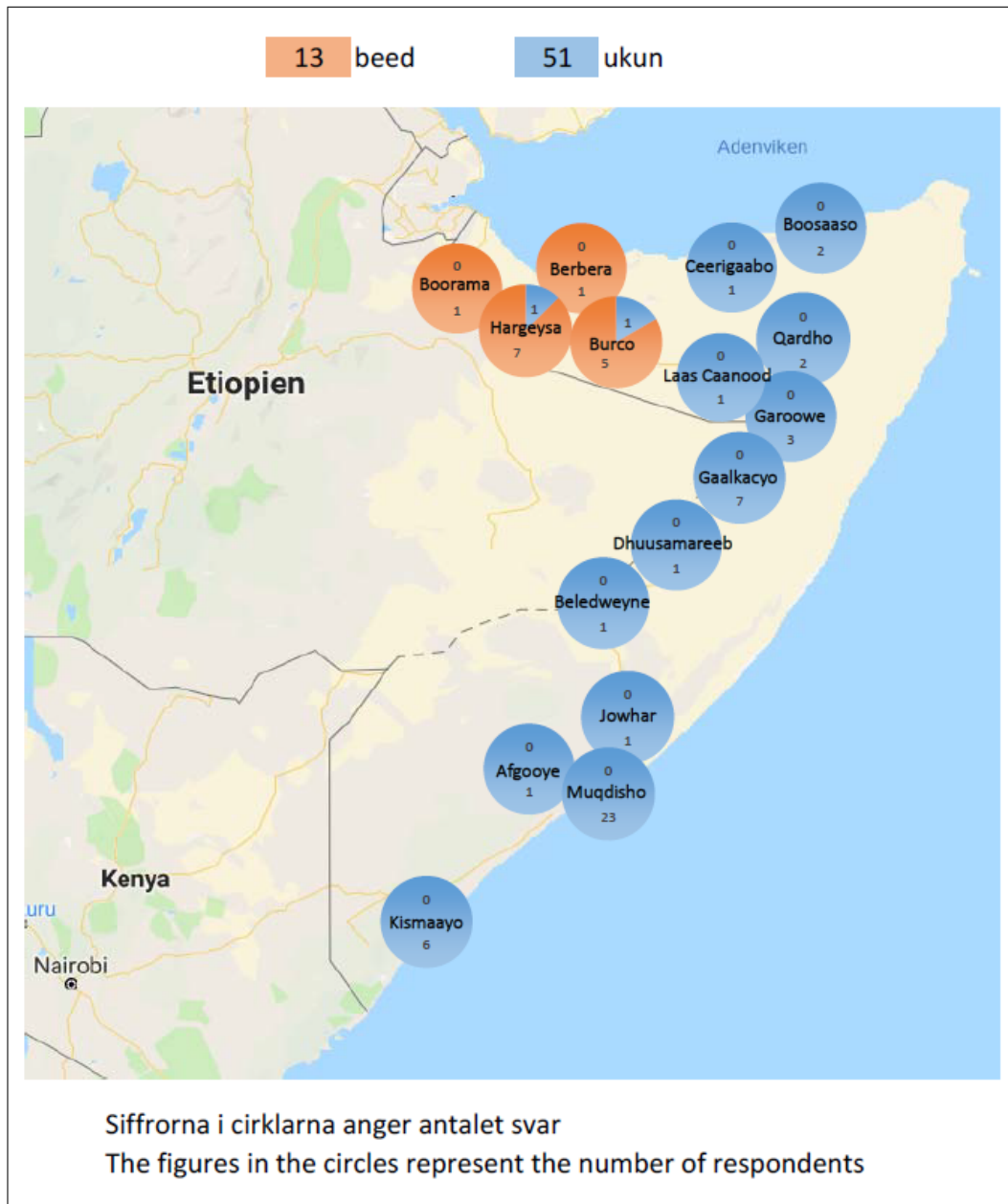


Illustration 3: The distribution of the words **kubbad** / **banooni** *ball* based on crowd-sourcing in Oct. 2019

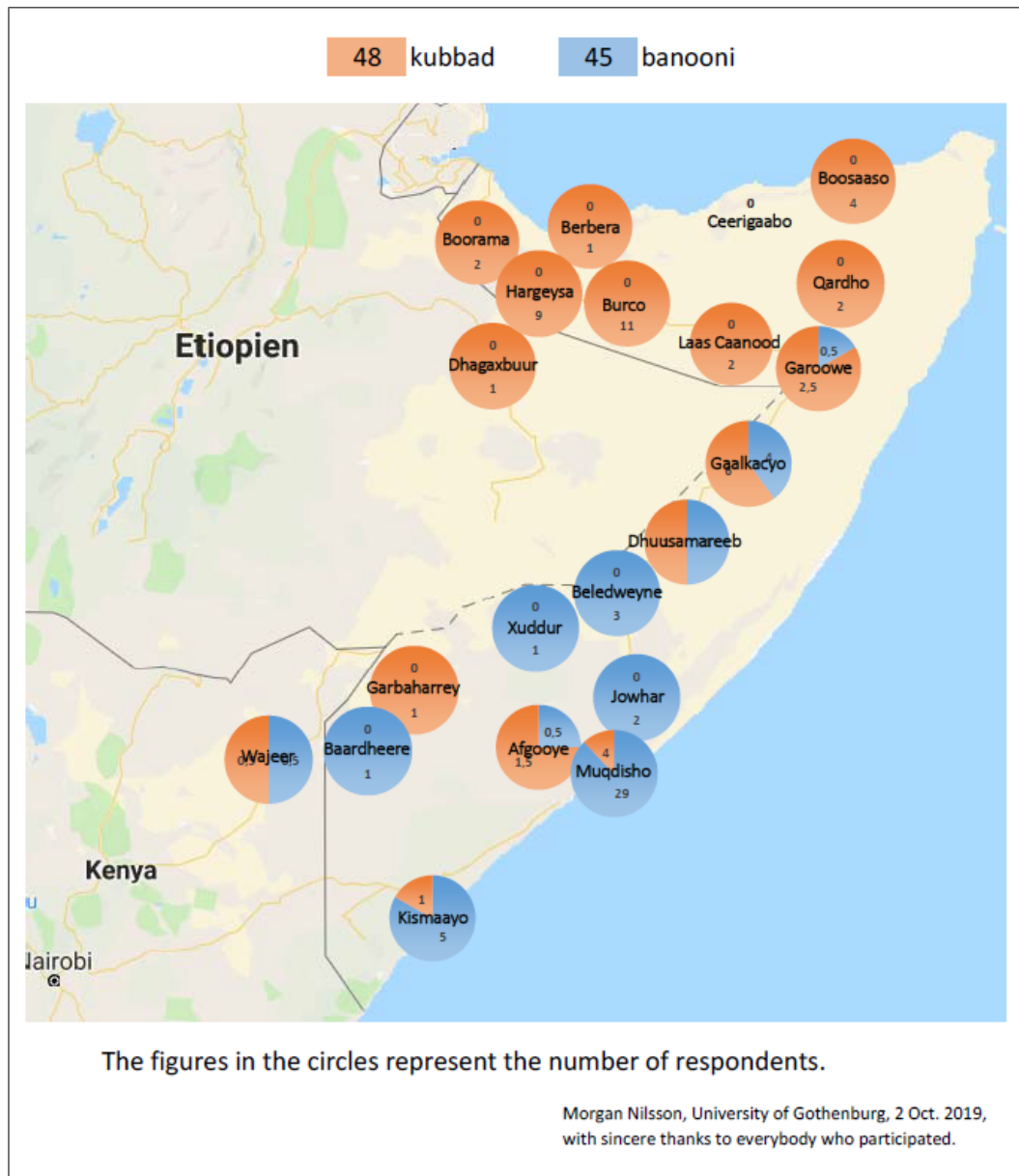


Illustration 4: The Somali dialect groups (Lamberti 1986: 29)

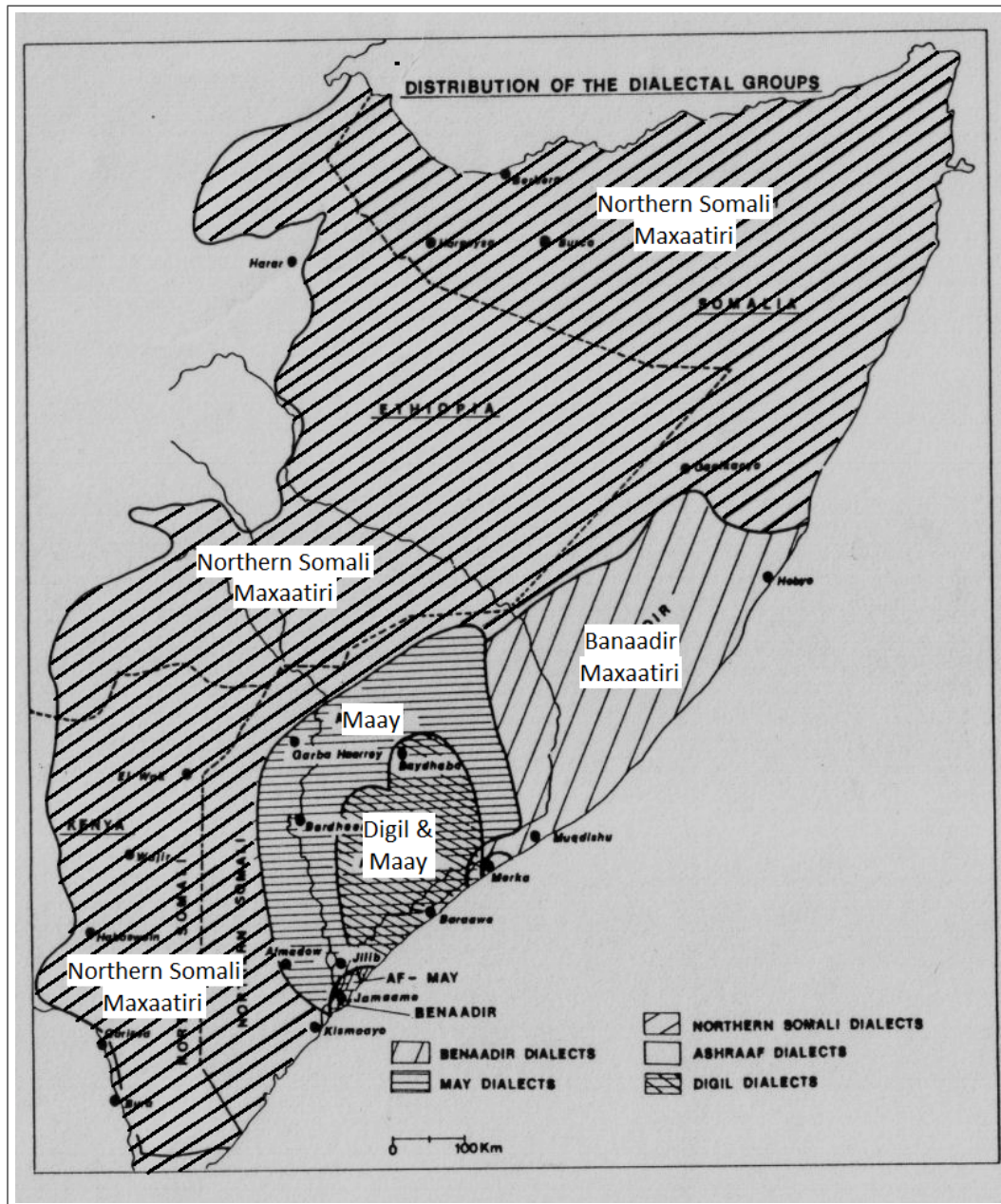
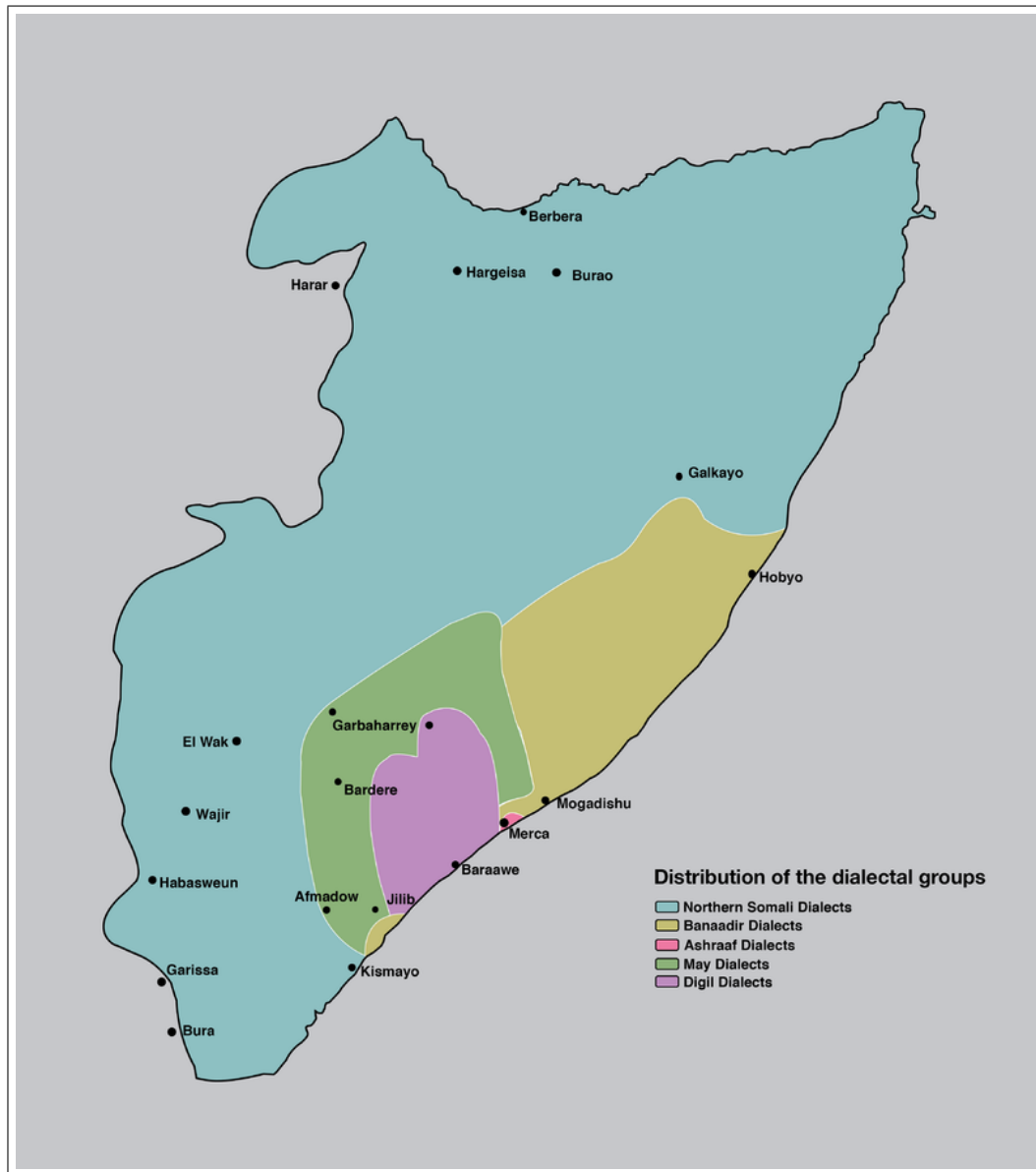


Illustration 5: The Somali dialect groups (Wikipedia, user: Kzl55, adaptated from Lamberti 1986: 29)



the western parts of middle Somalia as well as its southern parts, is due to the assumption that the people speaking these dialects are supposed to have migrated from the north to the south so that the historical origins of this dialect group is to be found in the north. In Somali this large group of dialects is instead generally referred to as MAXAATIRI, with the difference that it is common practice to include in *maxaatiri* also the *Banaadir* dialects. *Maxaatiri* is usually contrasted with *Maay*. In the Constitution (2012: art. 5) of the Federal Republic of Somalia it is stated that its official language “is Somali (Maay and Maxaa-tiri), and Arabic is the second language.”

The group of Northern Somali dialects is usually divided into three subgroups that are characterised by certain smaller differences:

- a dialect group in the NORTHWEST,
- a dialect group in the EAST AND WEST,
- a dialect group in the SOUTH.

This division is shown by illustration 6 (from Lamberti 1986: 33) and illustration 7, (Lamberti’s map adapted by Kzl55 (Wikimedia)).

The Somali dialect situation can be summarised as follows:

- The MAXAATIRI dialects do not differ very much from each other. They are spoken by the majority of the Somali population. They are divided into two main subgroups:
 - NORTHERN SOMALI dialects that are spoken over the major part of the territory, i.e. the northern, central, western and southern parts of the Somali speaking area. The Northern Somali dialects are subdivided into:
 - * a NORTHWESTERN type spoken approximately in Somaliland, Djibouti and the northern parts of the Somali Region of Ethiopia,
 - * an EASTERN AND WESTERN type that is spoken approximately in Puntland, the rest of the Somali Region of Ethiopia and northeastern Kenya,
 - * a SOUTHERN type spoken approximately in Somalia to the west and south of the large rivers and in southeastern Kenya,
 - BANAADIR dialects spoken in an area reaching approximately 200 km to the north and 300 km to the northeast of Mogadishu.

Illustration 6: The Somali dialect groups (Lamberti 1986: 33)

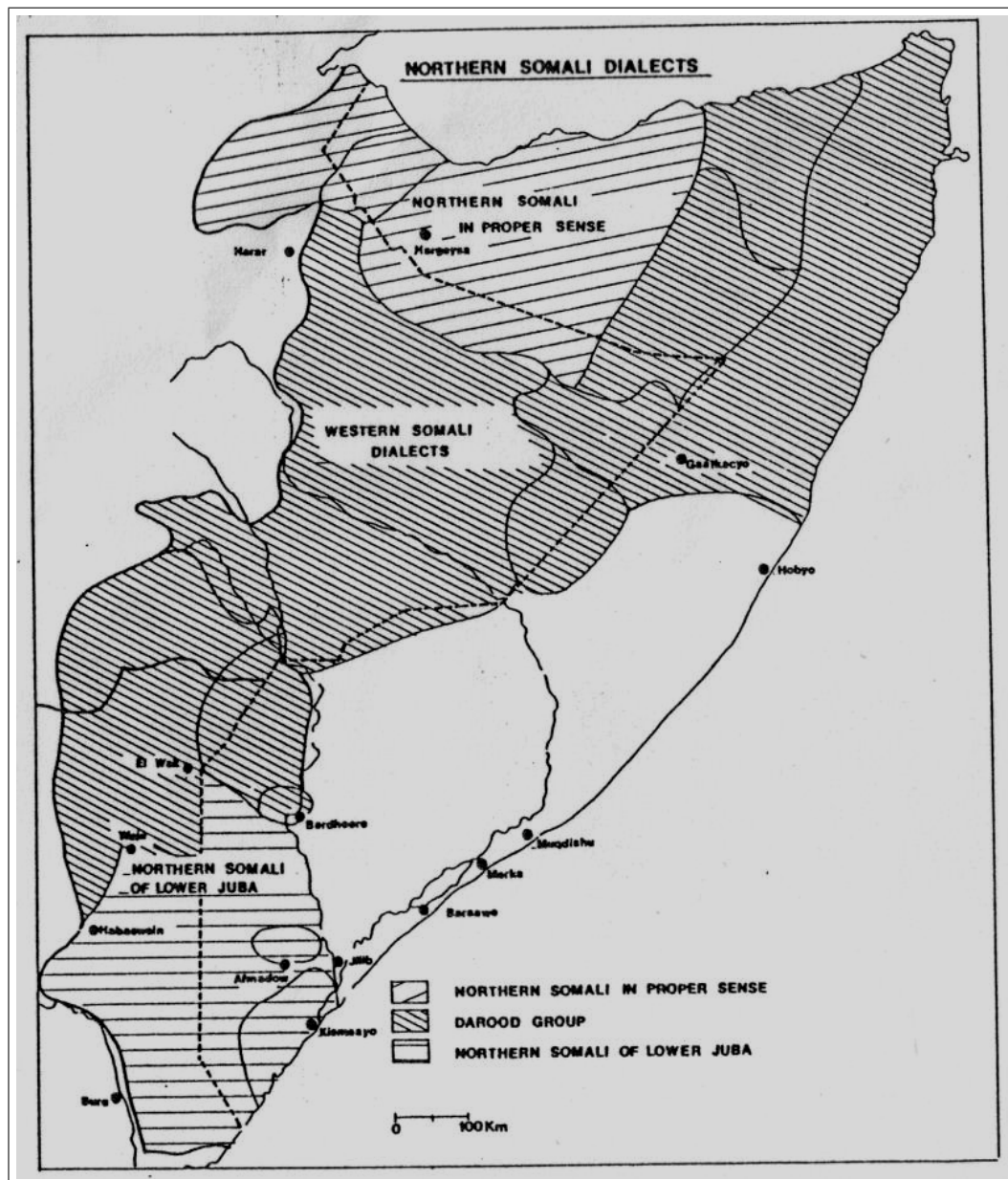
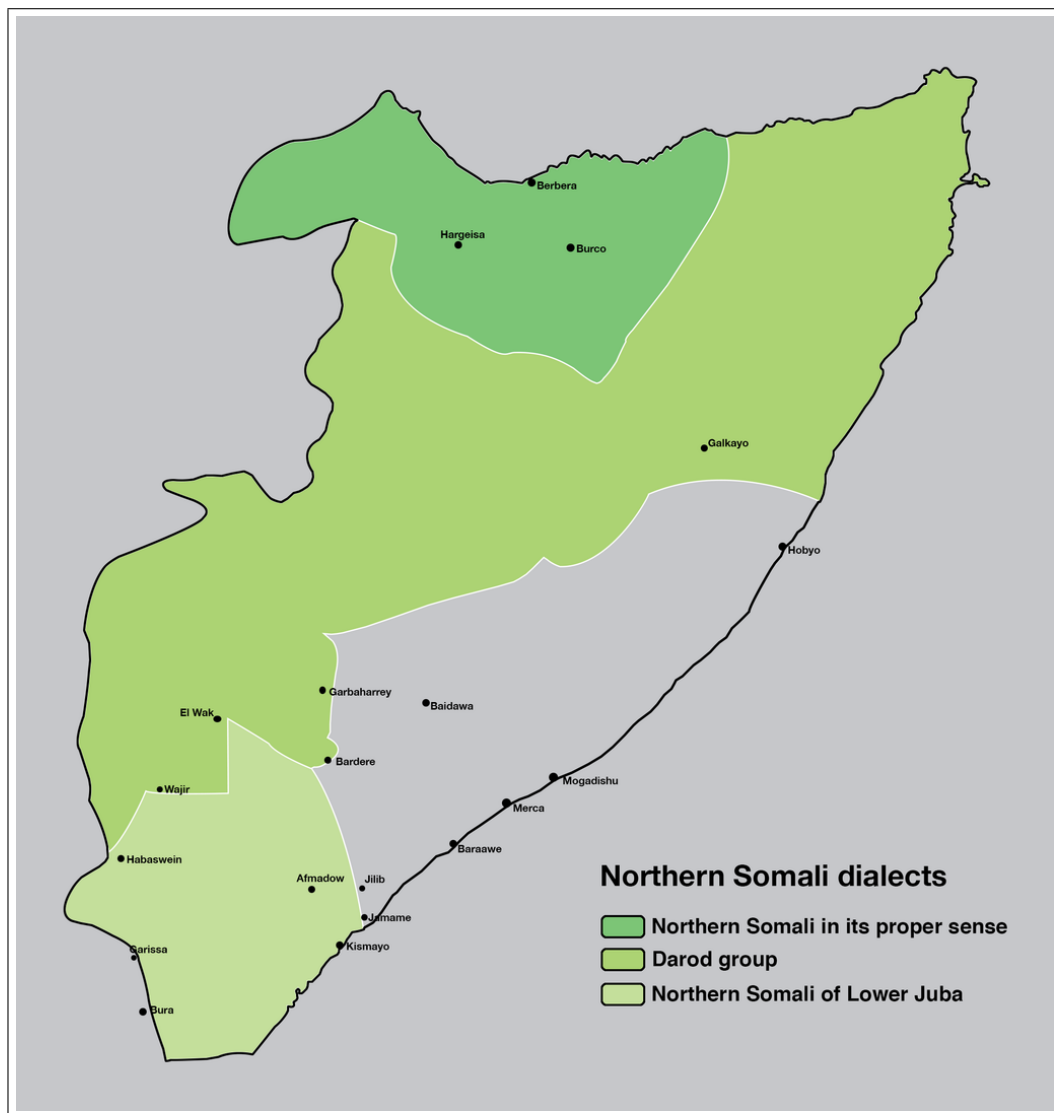


Illustration 7: The Somali dialect groups (Wikimedia: Klz55, adapted from Lamberti 1986: 33)



- MAAY dialects spoken in an area around and between the two large rivers, reaching approximately 200 km to the northwest, west and southwest of Mogadishu.
- the ASHRAAF dialect spoken in parts of Mogadishu and Marka.
- the DIGIL dialects spoken in smaller parts within the Maay area.

6 Typical traits in different dialects

According to Lamberti (1984) a characteristic trait for the *maxaatiri* dialects in the northwest, approximately spoken in Somaliland, Djibouti and the northern parts of the Somali Region of Ethiopia, is that the sound /dh/ can occur in all positions in a word. In the remaining parts of the Somali linguistic area /dh/ may only occur word initially and after a consonant in the middle of a word. After a vowel it has been replaced /r/ with the exception of just a few words where the /dh/ was originally long. Bāda spellings and pronunciations have equal status in today's Standard Somali.

Northwest	yidhi	<i>sa</i>	gabadh	<i>girl</i>
All other	yiri		gabar	

In the dialects in the East and the West it is characteristic to pronounce the phoneme /j/ as a voiceless [tʃ], while other dialects pronounce a voiced [dʒ]. Hence, **Jubba** is pronounced as Choubba in the East and the West, whereas it is elsewhere rather pronounced as Djoubba. A modern trend however seems to be that the voiceless pronunciation is spreading towards the Northwest.

East-West	Jubba	[tʃuba]	voiceless /j/
All other	Jubba	[dʒuba]	voiced /j/

In the north a more systematic difference is made between /q/ and /kh/, whereas these sound occur in free variation further south, especially in the Banaadir dialects.

The Northwestern dialects are also characterised by the consistent distinction between inclusive **innaga** *we* (including the person(s) spoken to) and exclusive **annaga** *we* (excluding the person(s) spoken to). This distinction is rarely maintained in other parts of the Somali speaking area.

When it comes to lexical differences, it is for example worth noticing that **naag** *woman* is used differently in the Northwest compared to the rest of the territory. In the Northwest it is only used by a man about his wife. It is not used referring to other women, and if used it has a negative connotations. Instead **dumar** or **haween** are used. Further south, however, **naag** is a neutral word, just like **dumar** and **haween**.

So far these dialectal differences coincide with traits that are generally perceived as regional variation within the standard language. But of course this regional variation within the standard has its roots in the traditional dialects which in these ways have left some traces in the standard language.

Many other dialectal traits have however developed being perceived as departing from the standard language. Some examples of common non-standard dialectal traits are the following:

A striking difference is that the diphthong /ey/ is monophthongised in many areas of the south, giving e.g. **ween** and **aheed** instead of Standard Somali **weyn** *big* and **ahayd** *you were, she was*.

In most areas of the south the subject of a clause is not marked with the ending **-u**, **-i**, **-aa**.

For the *Banaadir* dialects as well as the dialects of the South, it is typical after negation to use the ending **-i** in the 1st person singular instead of **-o**.

Standard	ma cuno	<i>I don't eat</i>
South/Banaadir	ma cuni	

Also, the *Banaadir* dialects as well as the dialects of the South, it is typical to use the subjunctive instead of the reduced forms of verbs when the subject is focused.

Standard	anigaa keena	<i>det var jag som hade med mig det</i>
South/Banaadir	anigaa keeno	

The Banaadir dialects contract the progressive forms, giving **-aa**, **-ee**. The main difference between the aspects therefore lies in the position of the high tone. Also, subject pronouns are less frequent.

Standard	waan keénayaa	waad keénaysaa
Banaadir	waa keénaa	waa keénee

In Banaadir, therefore, the main difference between the aspects lies in the position of the high tone.

Standard	wáan keena	waan keénayaa
Banaadir	wáa keena	waa keénaa

If the verb stem ends in a vowel the progressive endings are preceded by an **-h-** instead of an **-n-** in the Banaadir dialects.

Standard	jebinayaa	imaanayaa
Banaadir	jebihaa	imaahaa

The Banaadir dialects also exhibit a variety of differing plural endings, such as (**-yaal**, **-oshing**, **-oying**, **-nyo...**).

Standard	san	<i>nose</i>	pl. san
Banaadir	san		pl. sanyaal

The subject pronoun in the masculine 3rd person singular in the Banaadir dialects occurs in forms like **aas**, **aaw**, **oow** *han*.

Standard **biyaha ayaa uu dhamey** *he finished the water*
Banaadir **biyahaas dhamey**

The 2nd person plural object pronoun is **ni** *er* in the Banaadir dialects.

Standard **waan idin arkey** *I saw you*
Banaadir **waa ni arkey**

In Banaadir dialects, verb with a stem ending in a vowel do not add any ending in the infinitive.

Standard **jebin, imaan**
Banaadir **jebi, imaa**

Some typical traits of the Ashraaf dialect are the following:

– /l/+/t/ does not become /sh/

Standard **walaashay** *my sister*
Ashraaf **walaaltay**

– the plural of nouns is form with the ending **-aay**.

Standard **naago** *women*
Ashraaf **naagaay**

– all plural nouns take the definite article **-ta**, irrespective of gender.

Standard **naagaha** *the women*
Ashraaf **naagaayta**

– there are 3rd person objekt pronouns, **su** *him*, **sa** *her*.

Standard **dil**
Ashraaf **sa/su dil** *kill her/him*

– there are no focus particles and hence no reduced verb forms with focused subjekts.

Finally just a few examples of the even larger differences between *Maxaatiri* and *Maay*. The question is whether *Maay* should be regarded a dialect of Somali or a separate language.

MAXAATIRI	MAAY
gaal <i>icke-muslim</i>	gaal <i>kamel</i>
wan <i>bagge</i>	wang <i>mjölk</i>
1 kow	kow
2 laba	lama
3 saddex	siddə
4 afar	afar
5 shan	shang
6 lix	li
7 toddoba	todobə
8 siddeed	siyeed
9 sagaal	sagaal
10 toban	tomu
11 kow iyo toban	tomi iyə kow

For those interested, I'm attaching a short document comparing Maay and Maxaatiri. Unfortunately, I haven't had time to translate it.

Om den språkliga varieteten maay

Bokstäver och ljud

I maay slutar inte ord på **-n** eller **-m**, utan på **-ng**. Man uttalar inte [ŋg], utan bara [ŋ], precis som på svenska!

MAAY	SOMALISKA	SVENSKA
lang / nang	nin	<i>man</i>
shang	shan	<i>fem</i>

Maay saknar de somaliska ljuden /x/ och /c/. I stället för /x/ uttalas oftast /h/. Sist i ord saknas dock ofta /h/.

li	lix	<i>sex</i>
lihdung	lixdan	<i>sextio</i>
wang	caano	<i>mjölk</i>

Maay har ljudet **ny** /ɲ/, ungefär som franskt/italienskt **-gn-** eller svenska **-nj-**. I vissa texter tillämpas stavningen **y'** i stället för **ny**.

nyaawduur (y'aawduur)	<i>vildkatt</i>
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Många somaliska /a/ och /e/ motsvaras av det slappare ljuder /ə/ i maay. Detta vokalljud skrivs i slutet av ord med bokstaven **y**.

	sedy [sedə]	saddex	<i>tre</i>
	my [mə]	ma	<i>inte</i>
	ly [lə]	la	<i>med</i>
men:	le [lə]	la	<i>man</i>

Tillsammans med vokal står bokstaven **y** för samma konsonant som i somaliskan.

iyo	iyaga	<i>de</i>
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I slutet av ord efter /y/ och inuti ord skrivs som regel **e** för [ə].

iye [iyə]	iyada	<i>hon</i>
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Precis på samma sätt som i somaliskan så uttalas **-b-**, **-d-**, **-g-** mellan vokaler på ett svagare eller slappare sätt, men i maay återges detta uttal på ett annorlunda sätt i stavningen.

[d]	V d V	sedy	V dd V	saddex	<i>tre</i>
[b]	V b V		V bb V		
[g]	V g V		V gg V		

[ð]	V th V	bathing	V d V	badan	<i>mycket</i>
[β]	V p V	geper	V b V	gabar	<i>flicka</i>
[ʎ]	V gh V	maghy	V g V	magac	<i>namn</i>

Ljudväxlingar

l + t > ll

ul, ully [ullə]

l + t > sh

ul, usha

pinne, pinnen

-ng sist i ord, men **-n-** före /d/, /t/.

wang, wanty

caano, caanaha

mjölk, mjölken

Grammatik

Subjektspronomen

any [anə]	aniga	jag
athy [aðə]	adiga	du
usy [usə]	isaga	han
iye [iyə]	iyada	hon
le [lə]	la	man
unny [unnə]	innaga/annaga	vi
iseng [isən]	idinka	ni
iyo	iyaga	de

Objektspronomen

i	i	mig
ky [kə]	ku	dig
is [əs]	is	sig
ny [nə]	na / ina	oss
seng [sən]	idin	er

Frågande pronomen

mey	maxay	vad?
eey	ayo, yaa	vem?
eme	goorma	när?
intee	meeshee, xaggee	var?

Verb i enkelt presens

sheen-y	keen-aa	jag/han tar med sig
sheen-ty	keen-taa	du/hon tar med sig

sheen-ny	keen-naa	vi tar med oss
sheen-taang	keen-taan	ni tar med er
sheen-aang	keen-aan	de tar med sig

Verb i enkelt preteritum

sheen-i	keen-ay	jag/han tog med sig
sheen-ti	keen-tay	du/hon tog med sig
sheen-ni	keen-nay	vi tog med oss
sheen-teeng	keen-teen	ni tog med oss
sheen-eeng	keen-een	de tog med oss

Verb i 'immediate future'

sheen-e	keen-ayaa	jag/han tar med sig
sheen-aasy	keen-aysaa	du/hon tar med sig
sheen-aany	keen-aynaa	vi tar med oss
sheen-aasang	keen-aysaan	ni tar med oss
sheen-aayang	keen-ayaan	de tar med oss

Verb i 'distant future'

sheen-y doon-y	keen-i doon-aa	jag/han tar med sig
och så vidare...		

Negation

my [mə]	ma	inte (i huvudsats)
eng [əŋ]	aan	inte (mest i bisats)

Focus

Maay saknar motsvarighet till somaliskans 'waa'. Alltså är inte satspartiklar helt obligatoriska i maay. De används bara vid fokus på en substantivfras:

iyaa / ya / wa / -a	ayaa / baa / -aa
wey / wey ba	waxaa

Frågepartikel: ändelsen -aa

Iyo qosoleen ^{aa} ?	^{Ma} qosleen?	Skrattade de?
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Prepositioner

ku	ka	från
ky [kə]	ku	i, på; med (verktyg)

eng [əŋ]

ly [lə]

u

la

till, för, åt

med

Det oregelbundna verbet 'är'

aha

eye [eyə] / haayi

ety / haayti

enny / haayni

etiing / haayteeng

eyiing / haayeeng

ahay

yahay

tahay

nahay

tihiin

yihiin

jag är

han är

du / hon är

vi är

ni är

de är

Preteritum 'var' är nästan regelbundet på maay:

ahay

ahay-ti

ahay-ni

ahay-teeng

ahay-eeng

ahaa

ahayd

ahayn

ahaydeen

ahaayeen

jag / han var

du / hon var

vi var

ni var

de var

Verbet 'har' i presens:

laha

leye [leyə]

lety

lenny

letiing

leyiing

leeyahay

leeyahay

leedahay

leenahay

leedihiin

leeyihiin

jag har

han har

du / hon har

vi har

ni har

de har

Preteritum 'hade' är helt regelbundet på maay

lahaay-i

lahaay-ti

lahaay-ni

lahaay-teeng

lahaay-eeng

lahaa

lahayd

lahayn

lahaydeen

lahaayeen

jag / han hade

du / hon hade

vi hade

ni hade

de hade

Ordlista

aary'aary

aay

abaay

aboow

caaro

hooyo

ayeeyo

awoowe

spindel

mor

mormor, farmor

morfar, farfar

adow	cadow	fiende
alool	calool	mage
anrab	carrab	tunga
beriid	bariis	ris
besy [besə]	lacag	pengar
bool	baal	fjäder
edaang	caddaan	vit
eel	ceel	källa, brunn
galang	gacan	hand
geper	gabar	flicka
hidig	xiddig	stjärna
ir	cir	himmel, sky
jeel	saaxiib	vän
kahi	kac	stå upp, resa sig
lamy [lamə]	laba / labo	två
lang (nang)	nin	man
libe	libaax	lejon
liib		ödlä
mady [madə]	madax	huvud
malay	kalluun, mallaay	fisk
mayaang	macaan	söt, god
nyaawduur		vildkatt
rooji	jooji	stoppa, stanna
seriir	saliid	olja
sheen	keen	ta med, hämta
so'	hiblib	kött
tuury [tuurə]	mindl	kniv

unug	inan, wiil	pojke, son
usby [usbə]	cusbo	salt
wang	caano	mjöl
widny [wadnə]	wadne	hjärta
wiing	weyn	stor
weby [wəbə]	webi	flod

Gepertoo ii sedy meghel	Gabar iyo saddex ...
Gee iyaa wey jarreey sedy meghel.	Beri baa waxaa jiray saddex ...
Koo suurutha lahaayi, kang lamaad wey haayey lang walgorod eh oo karty bathing, kang sedehaad hooly bathing iyaa lahaayi.	Mid quruxda ayuu lahaa, kan labaad wuxuu ahaa nin waxgarad ah oo karti badan, kan saddexaad xoolo badan ayuu lahaa.
Maduung sediithii lang wey is ly fatheenaa gepertoo eed ing suurud bathing oo le erraayi lishow.	Markaas saddexdii nin waxay isla fadhiyeen gabar aad u qurux badan oo la yiraahdo lishow.
Ishow wey oghaatey inii sedy meghel iyee guur ky fathaayang.	Ishow waxay ogaatay in ay saddex nin iyada guur ku rabaan.
Maduung shuruudii iyee ky shal biyi lahaayti iyaa dejhiithi.	Markaas shuruudihii ay ku kalabixin leheyd ayey dejisay.
Sediithii lang ku kasty mathalaa goony ing ky hirti.	Saddexdii nin mid kasta ballan gooni ah ayey u dhigtay (ku xirtay).
Sediithii lang marby mithaa lishow ing looyey, reed guur ky ly haasowi.	Saddexdii nin...
Madii kowaad, kii suurudy lahaayi iyaa ing kooyi lishow.	
Wey erreey "Arirey surudey dey. Ariycoghey aathiyo naghetoo fathee?	
Hooby athy i guursety wey dhalaasee owlaad hanuung suurud bathing."	
Langkii lamaad iyaa ky higheey, usuuny wey erreey "Alingtii aathey, moorathey arag, nolol aduuyey illy wathaagto fathee?	
Hooby any i guursety athii ariicyooghaa nolol faylle ku noolathaasang."	

Langkii sedehaad oo ing ky dambooyi iyaa kooyey, wey erreey "Oorathey nagheto fathee?	
Any lang suurud bathing ii hooly bathing le my ihi.	Anigu nin qurux badan iyo xoolo badan leh ma ihi.
Laakiing wey aha lang qalqaaly bathing oo walgorod eh.	Laakiin waxa aan ahay nin ... badan oo ... ah.
Lang eed ing karty bathing iyaa aha qalqaalathey ii kartithey dey."	Nin ... karti badan ayaa aan ahay ...