

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

We offer [net-based courses](#) in Somali  
free of charge for citizens of the EU and EEA

# BEGINNER'S SOMALI GRAMMAR

*Morgan Nilsson*

Gothenburg

25 August 2023

Preliminary version

Final version expected later this autumn/winter.

*This is work in progress. Read it critically!*

*Feel free to contact me with comments.*

[morgan.nilsson@gu.se](mailto:morgan.nilsson@gu.se)

# Table of contents

## Table of contents 1

### § 1. The Somali speaking areas 6

- § 1.1 *Regional variation within standard Somali* 6
  - § 1.1.1 Variation in the pronunciation 6
  - § 1.1.2 Variation in word forms 7
  - § 1.1.3 Variation in the vocabulary 8

### § 2. The script 10

- § 2.1 *The alphabet* 10
- § 2.2 *Orthography* 11
- § 2.3 *Capital letters* 11
- § 2.4 *Double letters* 11
  - § 2.4.1 <gg> and <dd> in nouns with a suffix 12
  - § 2.4.2 <nn> in the 1st and 2nd person plural 12

### § 3. The sound system 13

- § 3.1 *Vowels* 13
  - § 3.1.1 Heavy vowels 13
  - § 3.1.2 Short and long vowels 14
  - § 3.1.3 Diphthongs 14
- § 3.2 *Consonants* 15
  - § 3.2.1 Intense consonants 18
- § 3.3 *Stress or high tone* 18
  - § 3.3.1 Nouns without a context 19
  - § 3.3.2 Subject tone 19
  - § 3.3.3 Continuation high tone 20
  - § 3.3.4 Nouns phrases 20
- § 3.4 *Phonotactics* 21
  - § 3.4.1 Limitations on syllable structure 21
  - § 3.4.2 Restrictions on /m/, /t/ and /k/ 21

### § 4. Morpho-phonology 23

- § 4.1 *Alternations of /k/ and /t/* 23
  - § 4.1.1 Adjectives like *jecel* and *nool* 23
- § 4.2 *Distant vowel assimilation* 24
  - § 4.2.1 Distant assimilation across /h/ 24
  - § 4.2.2 Distant assimilation in the infinitive 25
- § 4.3 *Vowel insertion* 25

### § 5. Contractions 26

- § 5.1 *Optional contractions* 26
  - § 5.1.1 Sentence particle + subject pronoun 26
- § 5.2 *Obligatory contractions* 27
  - § 5.2.1 Contracted prepositions 27
  - § 5.2.2 Contractions with *la* 28
  - § 5.2.3 Contractions with object pronouns 29
  - § 5.2.4 Contractions with the negator *má* 30
  - § 5.2.5 Longer contractions 30
  - § 5.2.6 The negator *aan* + short subject pronouns 31
  - § 5.2.7 Contractions with the particle *baa* or *ayaa* 31

### § 6. Nouns 32

- § 6.1 *The gender of nouns* 32
  - § 6.1.1 Stress in nouns 33
  - § 6.1.2 Nouns ending in *-e/-o/-a* 34
  - § 6.1.3 Exceptions 34
- § 6.2 *The indefinite form* 35
- § 6.3 *The definite singular form* 35
  - § 6.3.1 Generic definite form 36
- § 6.4 *The plural of feminine nouns* 38
- § 6.5 *The plural of masculine nouns* 39
- § 6.6 *Less straight-forward plural forms* 41
  - § 6.6.1 Sound changes 41
  - § 6.6.2 *-ó, -áha* instead of *-yó, -yáda* 42
  - § 6.6.3 *-ó, -áha* instead of reduplication 42
  - § 6.6.4 *-yó, -yáda* instead of consonant strengthening 42
  - § 6.6.5 Unexpected definite article 43
  - § 6.6.6 Gender alternations 43
  - § 6.6.7 Irregular plural forms 43
  - § 6.6.8 Two plural forms 44
- § 6.7 *Arabic plural forms* 45
- § 6.8 *The counting form of nouns* 46
- § 6.9 *Countability* 47
  - § 6.9.1 General use of the singular 47
  - § 6.9.2 Collective nouns 47
  - § 6.9.3 Singular, plural and collective form 48
  - § 6.9.4 Only singular and collective form 49
  - § 6.9.5 Group nouns 49

- § 6.9.6 Plural only nouns 50
- § 7. Formation of nouns 51**
- § 7.1 *Persons 51*
- § 7.1.1 Female persons 51
- § 7.1.2 Collectives 52
- § 7.2 *Things and abstract notions 52*
- § 7.3 *Verbal nouns 53*
- § 7.4 *Compounds 54*
- § 8. Numerals 56**
- § 9. Pronouns 58**
- § 9.1 *Personal pronouns 58*
- § 9.1.1 No 3rd person object pronouns 58
- § 9.1.2 Long forms of personal pronouns 59
- § 9.1.3 First person plural: *we, us, our* 59
- § 9.1.4 The indefinite subject pronoun *la* 60
- § 9.1.5 Obligatory short object pronouns 60
- § 9.1.6 The reflexive object pronoun *is* 61
- § 9.2 *Demonstrative pronouns 61*
- § 9.2.1 Demonstrative forms with *-aan, -aa* 63
- § 9.2.2 Demonstrative forms with *-ii* 63
- § 9.2.2a Adjectives after *-ii* 65
- § 9.2.3 Placeholder pronouns 65
- § 9.3 *Possessive pronouns 66*
- § 9.3.1 Short possessive endings 67
- § 9.3.2 Implied possessive relations 69
- § 9.3.3 Partitive use of possessive suffixes 69
- § 9.3.4 Possessive + demonstrative suffix 69
- § 9.4 *Interrogative pronouns 70*
- § 9.4.1 Interrogative use of possessive forms 70
- § 9.5 *Nouns with pronominal functions 71*
- § 9.5.1 *qóf person; cid people* 71
- § 9.5.2 *wáx thing* 71
- § 9.5.3 *sí manner* 71
- § 9.5.4 *meél, háł place; xág side, direction* 72
- § 9.5.5 *már, goór, kól moment; wákhti/wáqti time* 72
- § 9.5.6 *dhammaán all* 72
- § 9.5.7 *láf bone; náf soul, spirit; qúr/qúdh life* 72
- § 9.6 *Adjectives with pronominal functions 73*
- § 9.6.1 *dhán all, total* 73
- § 9.6.2 *kalé other* 73
- § 10. Adjectives 74**
- § 10.1 *Formation of adjectives 74*
- § 10.1.1 Adjectives derived from nouns 74
- § 10.1.2 Ordinal numbers 74
- § 10.1.3 Adjectives derived from verbs 75
- § 10.1.4 “Phrasal adjectives” 75
- § 10.2 *The inflection of adjectives 76*
- § 10.2.1 The distributive form 76
- § 10.2.2 Sound alternations in the stem 77
- § 10.3 *The comparative degree 78*
- § 10.4 *The superlative degree 78*
- § 11. Verbs 79**
- § 11.1 *The present tense 79*
- § 11.2 *The past tense 80*
- § 11.3 *The three conjugations 81*
- § 11.4 *The infinitive 82*
- § 11.5 *Progressive verb forms 83*
- § 11.5.1 Present progressive expressing near future 84
- § 11.5.2 Verbs without progressive forms 84
- § 11.6 *The habitual past tense 86*
- § 11.7 *The future tense 87*
- § 11.8 *Survey of tenses and aspects 88*
- § 11.9 *Reduced verb forms 89*
- § 11.10 *The subjunctive mood 91*
- § 11.10.1 Negative forms of the present progressive 93
- § 11.10.2 Reduced subjunctive forms 94
- § 11.10.3 The optative construction 95
- § 11.10.3a The negative optative 96
- § 11.10.4 The conditional construction 97
- § 11.10.4a The negative conditional 98
- § 11.11 *The imperative mood 100*
- § 11.11.1 The prohibitive construction 101
- § 11.12 *Sound changes 102*
- § 11.12.1 Conjugation 1 102
- § 11.12.2 Conjugation 2 111
- § 11.12.3 Conjugation 3 114
- § 11.13 *Irregular verbs 123*

- § 11.13.1 **yahay is** 123
  - § 11.13.2 Adjectives with copular verb suffixes 124
    - § 11.13.2a The use of *yahay* 'is' 126
    - § 11.13.2b Different equivalents of English 'is' 126
  - § 11.13.3 **leeyahay has** 128
    - § 11.13.3a Equivalents of English *has* 129
  - § 11.13.4 **yaallaa lies, is** 130
  - § 11.13.5 **yaqaannaa knows** 131
  - § 11.13.6 **yimaaddaa comes** 132
  - § 11.13.7 **yiraahdaa says** 133
- § 11.14 *Formation of verbs* 134
- § 11.14.1 Inchoative verbs in *-oobaa / -oodaa* 134
  - § 11.14.2 Inchoative verbs in *-aadaa* 134
  - § 11.14.3 Causative verbs in *-eeyaa* 134
  - § 11.14.4 Causative verbs in *-iyaa* 135
  - § 11.14.5 Causative verbs in *-siiyaa* 137
  - § 11.14.6 Anticausative verbs in *-maa* 137
  - § 11.14.7 Autobenefactive verbs in *-(s)taa / -(sa)daa* 138
- § 12. Phrases and word order 140**
- § 12.1 *The noun phrase* 140
- § 12.1.1 Nouns as modifiers 141
  - § 12.1.2 Adjectives as modifiers 142
  - § 12.1.3 Noun + adjective as a modifier phrase 142
  - § 12.1.4 Adjectives with headwords in *-kii/-tii* 142
  - § 12.1.5 Relative clauses as modifiers 143
  - § 12.1.6 Noun + **ah being** as a modifier phrase 143
  - § 12.1.7 Noun + **leh having; with** as a modifier phrase 144
  - § 12.1.8 Agreement in definiteness 144
  - § 12.1.9 Noun phrases expressing quantity 145
  - § 12.1.10 Counting uncountable nouns 145
  - § 12.1.11 More than one modifier 146
  - § 12.1.12 More than two nouns in a phrase 149
  - § 12.1.13 The phrase **ká mid ah of** 149
  - § 12.1.14 Prepositions before verbal nouns 150
  - § 12.1.15 Prepositions before other nouns 150
  - § 12.1.16 The particle *-ba* 150
- § 12.2 *The verb phrase* 152
- § 12.2.1 Prepositions 153
  - § 12.2.2 Object pronoun + preposition 154
  - § 12.2.3 The negator *má* 154
  - § 12.2.4 Viewpoint particles 154
  - § 12.2.5 Distribution particles 155
  - § 12.2.6 Position particles 155
- § 12.3 *The particle phrase* 156
- § 12.3.1 Sentence particles 156
  - § 12.3.2 Short subject pronouns 158
  - § 12.3.3 Obligatory subject pronouns 158
  - § 12.3.4 Omission of the short subject pronoun 158
- § 13. Simple clauses 160**
- § 13.1 *Sentence constituents* 160
- § 13.1.1 Subjects 160
  - § 13.1.2 Predicate agreement 162
  - § 13.1.3 Focused subjects 164
  - § 13.1.4 Objects 164
    - § 13.1.4a Two objects 165
  - § 13.1.5 Adverbials 166
    - § 13.1.5a The preposition *u* 167
    - § 13.1.5b The preposition *ku* 169
    - § 13.1.5c The preposition *ka* 172
    - § 13.1.5d The preposition *la* 173
    - § 13.1.5e Variation in the use of prepositions 174
    - § 13.1.5f Preposition with position particle 174
    - § 13.1.5g Complex "prepositional phrases" 175
    - § 13.1.5h Recipient or indirect object 176
    - § 13.1.5i Place adverbials 176
    - § 13.1.5j Time adverbials 177
    - § 13.1.5k **Manner adverbials** 177
    - § 13.1.5l **Nouns with possessive endings** 177
  - § 13.1.6 Vocatives 178
- § 13.2 *Declarative clauses* 179
- § 13.2.1 Clauses with the verb *to be* 179
  - § 13.2.2 *To be* with focused subjects 180
  - § 13.2.3 Comparison 181
  - § 13.2.4 Telling the time 181
- § 13.3 *Questions* 182
- § 13.3.1 Wh-questions with focus 182
  - § 13.3.2 Wh-questions without focus 183
  - § 13.3.3 Yes/no questions 183
  - § 13.3.4 Multiple choice questions 185

- § 13.4 *Commands* 186
  - § 13.4.1 Warnings and prohibitions 186
- § 13.5 *Negative clauses* 187
  - § 13.5.1 Negative questions 187
- § 14. Coordination 188**
  - § 14.1 *The conjunctions ama and mise* 189
  - § 14.2 *The conjunction ee* 190
  - § 14.3 *The conjunctions laakiin, -se and balse* 191
  - § 14.4 *The conjunction waáyo* 191
  - § 14.5 *The conjunctive phrase sababta oo ah* 192
- § 15. Subordinate clauses 193**
  - § 15.1 *The form of the verb in subclauses* 193
    - § 15.1.1 The time relation between clauses 195
    - § 15.1.2 Future from the perspective of the past 196
  - § 15.2 *Ín clauses* 197
    - § 15.2.1 Object clauses with *ín* 197
    - § 15.2.2 Subject clauses with *ín* 197
    - § 15.2.3 Predicative complement clauses with *ín* 197
    - § 15.2.4 The construction *waa ín...* 198
  - § 15.3 *Relative clauses* 199
    - § 15.3.1 Relative clauses connected by a conjunction 199
    - § 15.3.2 Relative clauses in subject noun phrases 201
    - § 15.3.3 Relative clauses in headings 201
    - § 15.3.4 Relative clauses with a preposition 202
- § 15.4 *Adverbial clauses* 202
  - § 15.4.1 Temporal clauses 202
  - § 15.4.2 Conditional clauses 204
  - § 15.4.3 Final subclauses 205
  - § 15.4.4 Concessive clauses 205
  - § 15.4.5 Causal clauses 206
  - § 15.4.6 Circumstantial clauses 206
  - § 15.4.7 Comparative clauses 207
- § 15.5 *English indirect questions* 208
  - § 15.5.1 Indirect yes/no questions 208
- § 15.6 *Direct speech as object clause* 209
- § 15.7 *Negative subordinate clauses* 209
- § 16. Colloquial Somali 210**
  - § 16.1 *The sounds* 210
    - § 16.1.1 Contractions 210
    - § 16.1.2 Assimilation of /n/ 210
    - § 16.1.3 Distant vowel assimilation 211
  - § 16.2 *Inflection* 211
    - § 16.2.1 Gender of nouns 211
    - § 16.2.2 Nouns with gender variation 212
    - § 16.2.3 Determiner endings 212
    - § 16.2.4 Verb inflection 212
      - § 16.2.4a Present tense, 2nd person plural 212
      - § 16.2.4b 1 p. sing. negative present subjunctive 213
      - § 16.2.4c *Forms of the verb yahay* 213
    - § 16.2.5 Vowel length in the progressive morpheme 213
  - § 16.3 *Syntax* 213
    - § 16.3.1 No subject case 213
    - § 16.3.2 Focus by subject pronoun 214
    - § 16.3.3 Subjunctive instead of reduced verb forms 214

## Abbreviations and signs

[ ]	indicates the pronunciation of words
/ /	indicates the sound structure of words
< >	indicates the spelling of words
<sup>c</sup>	colloquial (common in colloquial Somali)
CMPL	completive aspect (expresses a completed action)
FIN.FOC	final focus (focus on the last noun phrase)
FOC	focus (focus on the preceding noun phrase)
<sup>N</sup>	north (more common in the north)
PR.FOC	predicate focus (focus on the predicate verb, adjective or noun)
Q	question particle
<sup>s</sup>	south (more common in the south)
sb.	somebody
sth.	something

# § 1. The Somali speaking areas

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

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

## § 1.1 Regional variation within standard Somali

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

### § 1.1.1 Variation in the pronunciation

The largest difference in the pronunciation concerns the voiced post-alveolar retroflex stop /dh/<sup>2</sup> (see § 3.2). This phoneme is not used to the same extent in all Somali speaking areas. In the north-west (approximately Somaliland, Djibouti and the northern part of the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia), /dh/ may occur in any position in a word. In the remaining areas

---

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

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

/dh/ doesn't normally occur after a vowel, and /r/ is used instead. Both manners of pronunciation and spelling are considered equally correct in standard Somali.

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

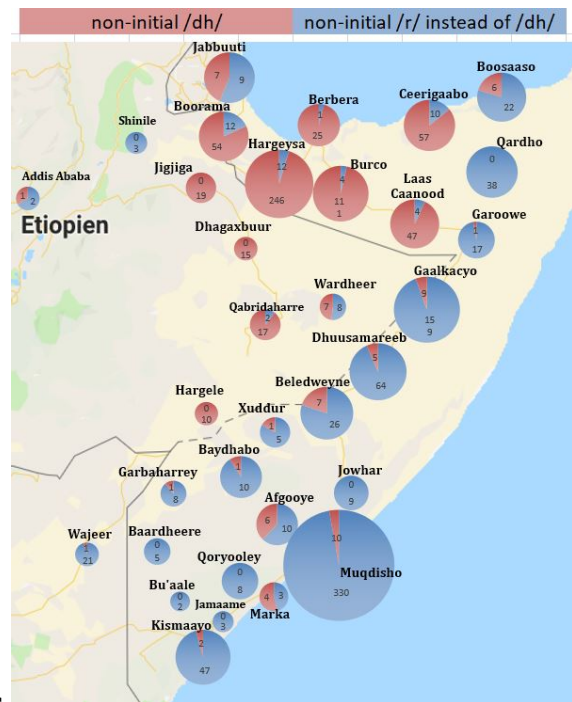
**gabádh<sup>N</sup>** or **gabár<sup>S</sup>** *girl*  
**ádhi<sup>N</sup>** or **ári<sup>S</sup>** *goats and sheep*

At the beginning of words /dh/ is used in all areas:

**dhálo** *bottle, glass (as material)*

Also after a consonant /dh/ is used in all areas:

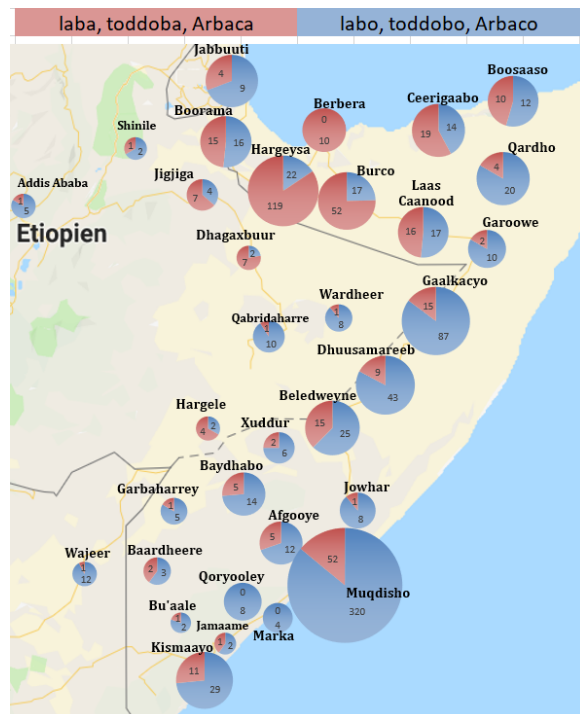
**gabdhó** *girls*



## § 1.1.2 Variation in word forms

A few nouns may end in either /a/ or /o/. The form ending in /o/ is somewhat more common in the middle and southern parts of the Somali speaking area, whereas the form ending in /a/ is more common in the northern parts. This happens, e.g., in the numbers **lábo** / **lába** *two* and **toddóbo** / **toddóba** *seven*; this variation is especially frequent word finally in women's names:

**Sáhra<sup>N</sup>** / **Sáhro<sup>S</sup>**, **Faadúma<sup>N</sup>** /  
**Faadúmo<sup>S</sup>**, **Caásha<sup>N</sup>** / **Caásho<sup>S</sup>**



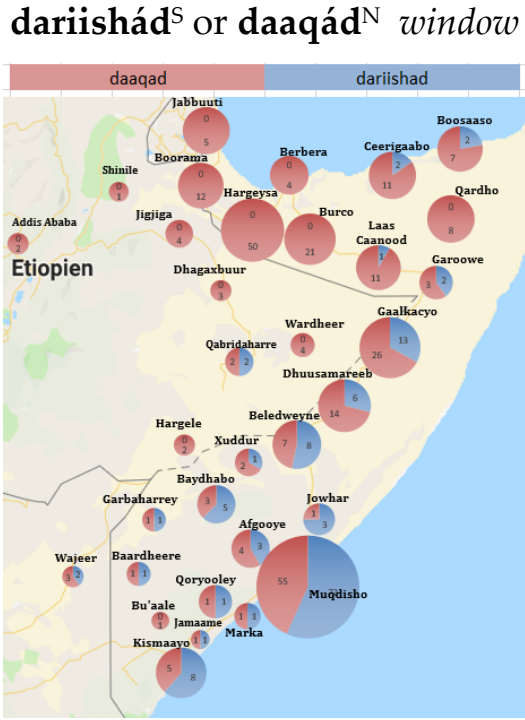
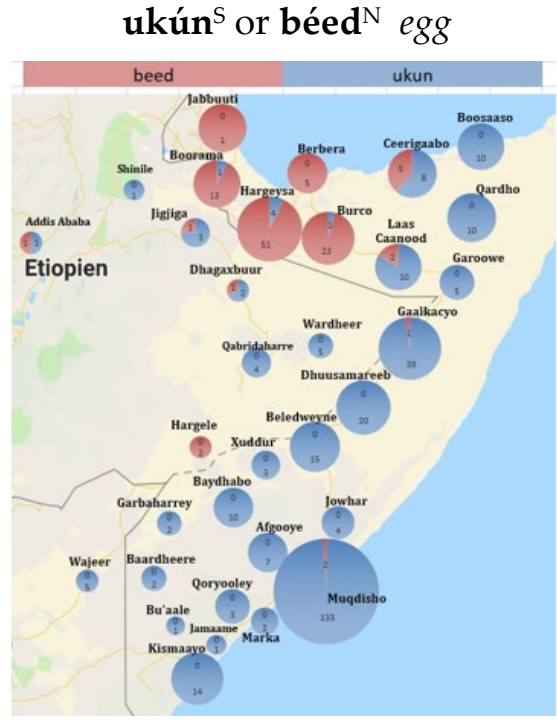
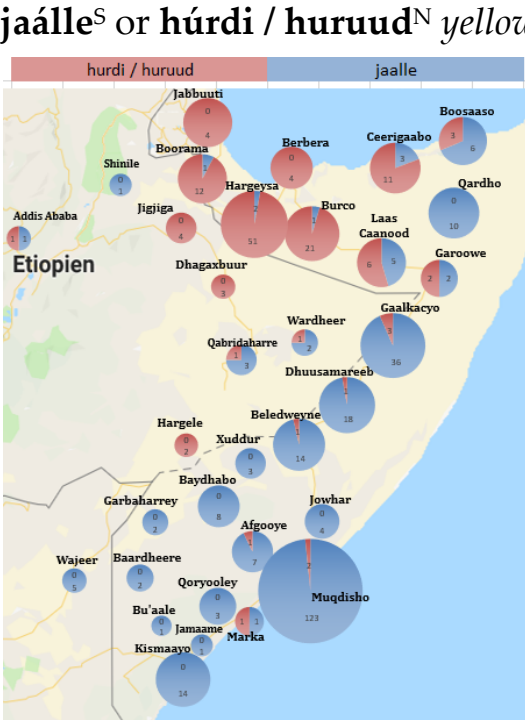
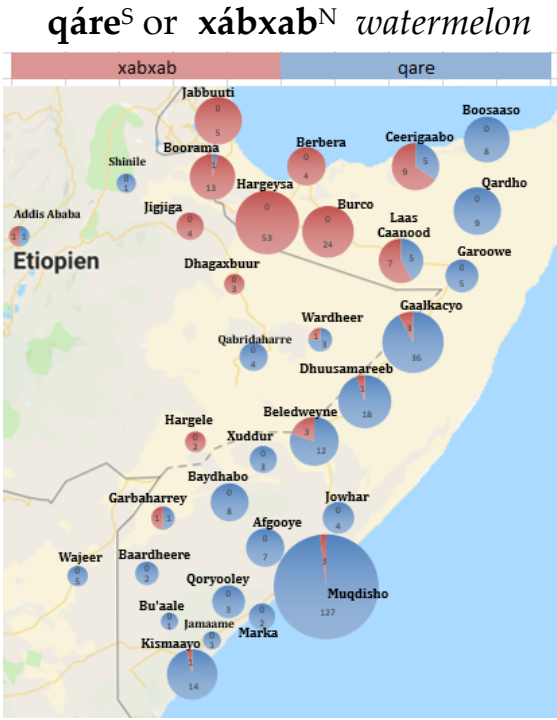
Personal preferences, in combination with geographic factors, influence the choice of form. The forms which end in /o/ may be perceived by some speakers as more typically Somali, maybe because the forms ending in /a/



resemble the European and Arabic forms of these names; however, both forms have an equal status in the standard language.

### § 1.1.3 Variation in the vocabulary

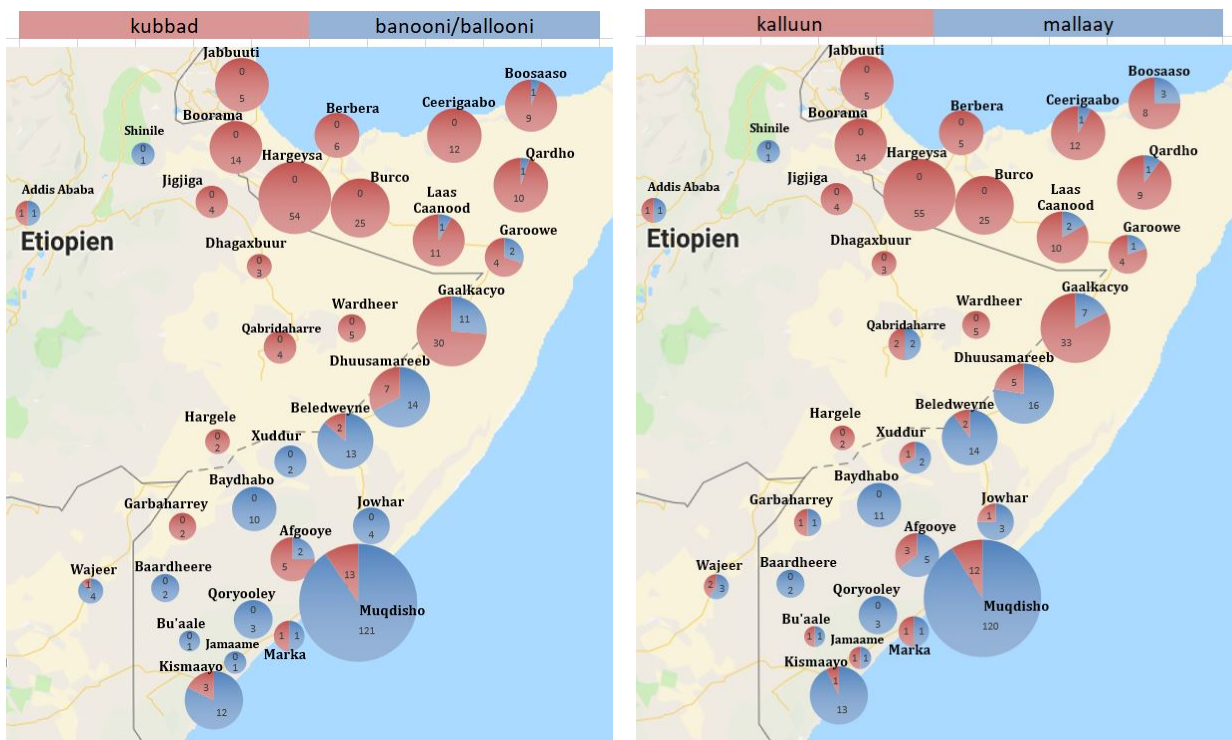
The differences between regions are easiest to notice in the vocabulary.



In some instances, one of the words in the pair has developed into the more neutral one in written standard Somali, e.g.

**banoóni<sup>S</sup> or kubbád ball**

**mallaáy<sup>S</sup> or kallúun fish**



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

**usbúuc** (from Ar. *'usbuu<sup>c</sup>*), **wiig<sup>N</sup>** (from Eng. *week*), **sitimáan<sup>S</sup>** (from It. *settimana*) or **toddobáad** (purely Somali), all meaning *week*

**shukumáan<sup>S</sup>** (from It. *asciugamano*) or

**tuwáal<sup>N</sup>** (from En. *towel*) both meaning *towel*

## § 2. The script

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

### § 2.1 The alphabet

The traditional order of the letters in the Somali alphabet is

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

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

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

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

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

## § 2.2 Orthography

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

## § 2.3 Capital letters

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

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

## § 2.4 Double letters

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

The following rules are particularly important.

### § 2.4.1 <gg> and <dd> in nouns with a suffix

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

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

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

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

### § 2.4.2 <nn> in the 1st and 2nd person plural

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

**Waa in aynu ilaalinnaa nadaafadda ilaha biyaheenna.**

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

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

## § 3. The sound system

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

### § 3.1 Vowels

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

#### § 3.1.1 Heavy vowels

However, the Somali vowel system is more complex than the spelling reveals, as each vowel letter may be pronounced in two different ways. There is a second, less frequent way of pronouncing each letter. Those sounds are produced with greater tension in the throat, and are traditionally referred to as heavy vowels. They only occur in certain words.

In order to represent heavy vowels in dictionaries and grammar books, different systems have been proposed: a comma, a cedilla or a “tail” under the letter, i.e. **ḷ**, **ḡ**, **ḳ**, **oḷ**, **uḷ**, or two dots above the letter, i.e. **ï**, **ë**, **ä**, **ö**, **ü**. If needed, ordinary vowels may be underlined, i.e. **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**.

#### Ordinary vowels

/i/	approx. like Eng.	<i>sit</i>
/e/		<i>less</i>
/a/		<i>arm</i>
/o/		<i>hot</i>
/u/		<i>soup</i>

#### Somali words with ordinary vowels

Somali examples

#### Heavy pronunciation

i	approx. like Eng.	<i>police</i>
---	-------------------	---------------

#### Somali words with heavy vowels

Somali examples

e		<i>convey</i>
a		<i>apple</i>
o	approx. like French	<i>sæur</i>
u	approx. like French	<i>sur</i>

It is important to stress, however, that the comparisons made with English and French are only approximations. The European “heavy” vowels are simply pronounced by putting the tongue closer to the front of the mouth, whereas the Somali heavy vowels are also accompanied by a tension in the throat.

Unfortunately, the research into Somali heavy vowels is very limited. It is therefore not possible to present any exact principles for their use. The vowel quality is also not noted systematically in any existing dictionary. It is however very seldom the case that this subtle difference in vowel quality is the only difference between two different words. Consequently, the best advice is simply to listen carefully to Somali speakers and imitate their pronunciation as closely as possible.

### § 3.1.2 Short and long vowels

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

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

### § 3.1.3 Diphthongs

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

## § 3.2 Consonants

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

Somali has three **digraphs**, i.e. combinations of two letters representing one sound: <dh>, <kh> and <sh>.

The sound /dh/ is very similar to the Swedish and Norwegian sound written <rd>. It is similar to a /d/, but pronounced with the tip of the tongue touching a point higher up, above the alveolar ridge. YouTube<sup>3</sup> and Wikipedia<sup>4</sup> offer further helpful details.

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

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

**Hibo**<sup>♀</sup>, **Liibaan**<sup>♂</sup>, **Hodan**<sup>♀</sup>, **Idil**<sup>♀</sup>, **Ladan**<sup>♀</sup>, **Faadumo**<sup>♀</sup>, **Magan**<sup>♂</sup>, ...

Double <**bb, dd, gg**> are however pronounced more distinctly and with more slightly more energy and longer duration.

---

<sup>3</sup> <dh> [https://youtu.be/nU7H\\_aiG-kc](https://youtu.be/nU7H_aiG-kc)

<sup>4</sup> <dh> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiced\\_retroflex\\_plosive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiced_retroflex_plosive)



The Somali /r/ differs from how it is usually pronounced in English. It is quite similar to the trilled or rolled /r/ sound in Italian or Spanish, but sometimes becomes voiceless at the beginning or end of a word.

Double <ll, mm, nn, rr> are also pronounced with some extra energy and duration.

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

The <c> is rather similar to a very voiced /h/. Pronouncing /h/, the air flow is given a free passage through the throat, but when pronouncing /c/ the tongue root is pushed back towards the back of the throat in order to constrict the air flow into a narrow channel, thereby causing turbulence. This sound is often perceived by Europeans as a "creaky" /a/. For Somalis, however, there is no doubt that this sound is a consonant. YouTube<sup>5</sup> offers a helpful explanation and sound illustration.

**Cali<sup>♂</sup>, Cumar<sup>♂</sup>, Cabdi<sup>♂</sup>, Jaamac<sup>♂</sup>, Sacdiya<sup>♀</sup>, Nimco<sup>♀</sup>**

The <kh> is similar to <ch> in German *Bach* or Scottish *Loch Ness*. YouTube<sup>6</sup> offers a helpful explanation and sound illustration.

**Khadra<sup>♀</sup>, Sheekh<sup>♂</sup>, Khaalid<sup>♂</sup>, Kheyre<sup>♂</sup>, Khadiijo<sup>♀</sup>**

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

The <q> is rather similar to /k/ or /g/, but the tongue is pushed back towards the uvula instead of up towards the hard palate. The voiced pronunciation (similar to /g/) is more common between vowels, whereas the voiceless pronunciation (similar to /k/) is more common at the

---

<sup>5</sup> <c> <https://youtu.be/3057MbWmH1k>

<sup>6</sup> <kh> <https://youtu.be/y5AizU69VOA>

beginning and end of words. YouTube<sup>7</sup> offers a helpful explanation and sound illustration.

**Muqdisho, Qarshi<sup>♀</sup>, Ruqiya<sup>♀</sup>, Cabdiqani<sup>♂</sup>, Qaali<sup>♀</sup>**

The <x> is rather similar to a voiceless /h/, but in order to pronounce /x/ the tongue root needs to be pushed backwards against the back of the throat (the pharynx), in order to constrict the air flow into a narrow channel, causing friction or turbulence. This sound is often perceived by European as a “breathy” version of /h/. YouTube<sup>8</sup> offers a helpful explanation and sound illustration.

**Farxiyo<sup>♀</sup>, Xasan<sup>♂</sup>, Maxamed<sup>♂</sup>, Maxamuud<sup>♂</sup>, Xamdi<sup>♀</sup>, Xaddiyo<sup>♀</sup>, Axmed<sup>♂</sup>**

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

**Israa'iil, Sa'iir; Daa'uud<sup>♂</sup>, Faa'iso<sup>♀</sup>**

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

---

<sup>7</sup> <q> voiced (mainly between vowels) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOrmm4oLR3Q>

<q> voiceless <https://youtu.be/N98UVs85qII>

<sup>8</sup> <x> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Al1JaAfr88&t=680s>

### § 3.2.1 Intense consonants

Some Somali consonants exhibit a more "intense" version alongside the simple consonant. These more intense consonants are pronounced more distinctly, with slightly more energy and with a slightly longer duration. There may be some variation between regions as well as speakers. Listen carefully to native speakers.

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

### § 3.3 Stress or high tone

Lägg till detaljerade regler för betoningens placering.

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

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

**ínan** *boy*

**áfartan** *these four*

**héés** *sing!*

**mádow** *darkness*

**bád wéyn** *a big sea*

**inán** *girl*

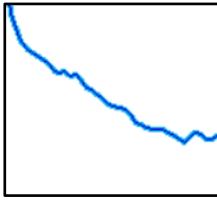
**afártan** *forty*

**heés** *song*

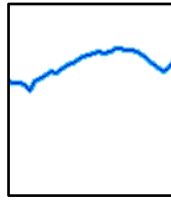
**madów** *dark (adj.)*

**badwéyn** *ocean*

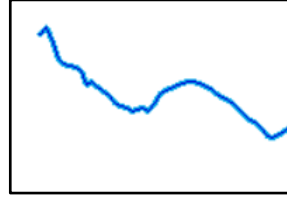
The pitch tracks below show the pitch level in some of these words. (The pitch is measured by the speed of the vibrations creating the sound.)



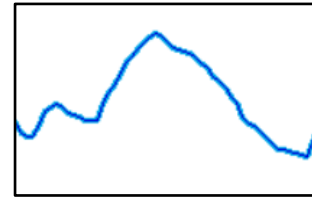
**ínan**  
*boy*



**inán**  
*girl*



**bád wéyn**  
*a big sea*



**badwéyn**  
*ocean*

### § 3.3.1 Nouns without a context

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

<b>magaálo</b>	<i>a city</i>
<b>magaaló wéyn</b>	<i>a big city</i>
<b>báre</b>	<i>a teacher</i>
<b>baré wanaagsan</b>	<i>a good teacher</i>

### § 3.3.2 Subject tone

Most bare nouns and adjectives lose their high tone

Nouns ending in **-e/-o/-a** have their high tone on the second to last vowel position.

When a short possessive suffix occurs as the final morpheme of a subject marked noun phrase, the suffixes take over the high tone from the stem of the noun. The stem remains toneless.

**Saaxíibkiis baa kú riixaya baaskíilka.** (not subject marked)

*HIS FRIEND pushes the bike.*

**Saaxiibkiís wáxa uu kú riixayaa baaskíilka.** (subject marked)

*His friend pushes THE BIKE.*

### § 3.3.3 Continuation high tone

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

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

### § 3.3.4 Nouns phrases

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

<b>dúgsiga Sahrá</b>	or <b>dúgsiga Sahra</b>	<i>Sahra's school</i>
----------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------

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

<b>Áxmed</b>		<i>Ahmed</i>
<b>gúriga Axmé</b>	or <b>gúriga Axmed</b>	<i>Ahmed's house</i>

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

<b>dukáanka Máryan</b>	<i>Maryan's shop</i>
------------------------	----------------------

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

<b>baabúurka macállinka ~ baabúurka macállinká</b>	<i>the teacher's car</i>
--	--------------------------

## § 3.4 Phonotactics

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

### § 3.4.1 Limitations on syllable structure

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

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

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

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

### § 3.4.2 Restrictions on /m/, /t/ and /k/

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

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

This may lead to sound changes between different grammatical forms.

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

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

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

**cámbe (cánbe)** *mango*

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

## § 4. Morpho-phonology

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

### § 4.1 Alternations of /k/ and /t/

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

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

After	/k/ becomes	/t/ becomes
/g/	g	
/d/		d
/a/, /u/, /w/	g	d
/i/, /y/	g	d / s <sup>i</sup>
/e/, /o/	h	d
/c/, /h/, /x/, /kh/, /q/, /ʻ/	∅ <sup>ii</sup>	d
/dh/		∅ <sup>ii</sup>
/l/ <sup>iii</sup>		sh

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

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

#### § 4.1.1 Adjectives like *jecel* and *nool*

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

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

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

< jecél + tahay



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

## § 4.2 Distant vowel assimilation

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

### § 4.2.1 Distant assimilation across /h/

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

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

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

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

Sometimes people also apply this type of assimilation to masculine nouns with a stem ending with /ax/ or /ac/.



## § 5. Contractions

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

Some contractions are **obligatory** while others are **optional**.

### § 5.1 Optional contractions

#### § 5.1.1 Sentence particle + subject pronoun

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

wáa aan → wáan

wáa aad → wáad

wáa uu → wúu

wáa ay → wáy

baa aan → baan

baa aad → baad

baa uu → buu

baa ay → bay

maxáa aan → maxáan

maxáa aad → maxáad

maxáa uu → muxúu

maxáa ay → maxáy

wáxa aan → wáxaan

wáxa aad → wáxaad

wáxa uu → wúxuu

wáxa ay → wáxay

ayáa aan → ayáan

ayáa aad → ayáad

ayáa uu → ayúu

ayáa ay → ayáy

## § 5.2 Obligatory contractions

Especially in verb phrases, many contractions are obligatory. The indefinite subject pronoun **la** *one*, the object pronouns **i** *me*, **ku** *you* SG, **is** *oneself*, **na** *us* EXCL, **ina** *us* INCL, **idin** *you* PL, the prepositions **ú** *to/for*, **kú** *in/on/with*, **ká** *from/of/about/than*, **lá** *with*, and the negator **má** *not* all belong to the type of words that merge with each other. These contractions are written and pronounced as one word. Only the very last part of these contractions stressed and pronounced with a high tone, if the last part is a preposition or the negator.

### § 5.2.1 Contracted prepositions

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

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

Note that the form **ugú** has three different meanings:

**ugú** < **ú + kú**

**Maxaa ay dadku Hecoo ugu qosli jireen?**

*Why did people use to laugh at Hecoo?*

**maxáa + ú** *for what?, why?*

**Hecoo + kú** *at Hecoo*

**ugú** < **ú + ú**

**Maxáa aynu dábka ugú baahán nahay?**

What do we need fire for?

**maxáa? + ú** for what?, why?

**dábka + ú baahán** needy of the fire

**ugú** (superlative marker)

**Xámar waa magaaláda ugú dád iyo baabuúr badan.**

*Mogadishu is the city with the most people and cars.*

**ugú + badan** the most

Also note that all three possible combinations of the two prepositions **ku** and **ka** result in one and the same contraction: **kagá**.

**Wáxaan búugga kagá qoray qálin.**

FIN.FOC.I the.book in.with wrote pen

*I wrote in the book with a PEN.*

**kú + búugga** in the book

**kú + qálin** with a pen

**Gaari-daméerkiisa waxa uu kagá shaqeeyaa magaaláda.**

his.donkey-cart FIN.FOC he with.from works the.town

*With his donkey cart he works in the CITY.*

**kú + gaari-daméerkiisa** with his donkey cart

**ká + magaaláda** in the city (literally: from the city)

There is, however, also a contraction **kugú**, but this form consists of the object pronoun **ku** *you* and the preposition **kú** *in/on*. See § 5.2.3.

## § 5.2.2 Contractions with *la*

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

**la + ú** → **loó** one ... to /a/ + /u/ > /oo/

**la + kú** → **lagú** one ... in/on

**la + ká** → **lagá** one ... from

**la + lá** → **lalá** one ... with

**ú + lá** → **ulá** to ... with

**kú + lá** → **kulá** *in/on ... with*

**ká + lá** → **kalá** *from ... with*

**Meeláhan waxa loó yaqaan iláha biyáha.**

these.places FIN.FOC one.as knows the.springs the.water.

*These places are known as (~are called) water springs.*

### § 5.2.3 Contractions with object pronouns

**la one + i me** → **lay** or uncontracted **la i**

**i me + ú to** → **íí**

**i me + kú in/on** → **igú**

**i me + ká from** → **igá**

**i me + lá with** → **ilá**

**la one + ku you** → **lagú**

**ku you + ú to** → **kuú**

**ku you + kú in/on** → **kugú**

**ku you + ká from** → **kaá**

**ku you + lá with** → **kulá**

**la one + is oneself** → **lays** or uncontracted **la is**

**is oneself + ú to** → **isú**

**is oneself + kú in/on** → **iskú**

**is oneself + ká from** → **iská**

**is oneself + lá with** → **islá**

**la one + na us** → **nala** (more seldom **lana**)

**na us + ú to/for** → **noó** /a/ + /u/ > /oo/

**na us + kú in/on** → **nagú**

**na us + ká from** → **nagá**

**na us + lá with** → **nalá**

**la one + ina us** → **layna** or uncontracted **la ina**

**ina us + ú to/for** → **inoó** /a/ + /u/ > /oo/

**ina us + kú in/on** → **inagú**

**ina** *us* + **ká** *from* → **inagá**

**ina** *us* + **lá** *with* → **inalá**

**Cuntádu** *xóog* **baa** *ay* **inoó** *yeeshaa*.

the.food strength FOC it us.for makes

*Food gives us STRENGTH.*

**la** *one* + **idin** *you* → **laydin** or uncontracted **la idin**

**idin** *you* + **ú** *to/for* → **idiín** /i/ + /u/ > /ii/

**idin** *you* + **kú** *in/on* → **idinkú**

**idin** *you* + **ká** *from* → **idinká**

**idin** *you* + **lá** *with* → **idinlá**

## § 5.2.4 Contractions with the negator *má*

The negator **má** *not* merges with a preceding preposition, object pronoun and the indefinite subject pronoun **la** *one*. The negator always occurs at the very end of such contractions and it doesn't cause any additional sound changes.

**Biyáha** **kamá** *maaranno*.

We *don't* manage *without* water.

## § 5.2.5 Longer contractions

Contractions consisting of more than two constituent parts occur quite often. Any sound changes that occur in the more simple contractions will also occur in the longer ones.

**iigá** < **i** *me* + **ú** *in* + **ká** *from* cf. **i** + **u** > **ii** and **u** + **ka** > **uga**

**Sideé** **baad** **hurdáda** **iigá** **kícin** **kartaa?**

*How can you wake me up from sleep?*

**sideé?** + **ú** *in what manner?, how?*

**hurdáda** + **ká** *from sleep*

## § 5.2.6 The negator *aan* + short subject pronouns

The negator **aan** *not* is found in all subordinate clauses, all main clauses with focus and in some past tense clauses. It always merges with the short subject pronouns. It may precede or follow the pronoun, and the long vowel of the second constituent part always becomes short.

<b>aan + aan</b>	→	<b>aanan</b>	<i>I not</i>
<b>aan + aad</b>	→	<b>aanad<sup>N</sup> / aadan<sup>S</sup></b>	<i>you not</i>
<b>aan + uu</b>	→	<b>aanu<sup>N</sup> / uusan<sup>S</sup></b>	<i>he not</i>
<b>aan + ay</b>	→	<b>aanay<sup>N</sup> / aysan<sup>S</sup></b>	<i>she not</i>

Haddii carruurtu **aysan<sup>S</sup>/aanay<sup>N</sup>** haysan biyo, maxaa dhici lahaa?  
*If the children didn't have water, what would happen?*

## § 5.2.7 Contractions with the particle *baa* or *ayaa*

The focus particles **baa** and **ayaa** obligatorily merge with the two basic interrogative pronouns.

<b>maxáy</b> <i>what</i> + <b>baa / ayaa</b>	→	<b>maxáa</b>
<b>ayó</b> <i>who</i> + <b>baa / ayaa</b>	→	<b>yáa</b>

The particle **baa** also merges with nouns ending in **-e/-o/-a**.

<b>Aamíno / Aamína</b> + <b>baa</b>	→	<b>Aamínaa</b>
-------------------------------------	---	----------------



## § 6. Nouns

Somali nouns are divided into two groups or grammatical genders: MASCULINE nouns and FEMININE nouns. This is similar to the situation in, e.g., French or Arabic. The gender of a noun is an important key to its grammatical behaviour, since Somali nouns can take on many different endings that have differing forms depending on the noun's gender.

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

### § 6.1 The gender of nouns

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

In most cases, however:

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

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

## § 6.1.1 Stress in nouns

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

The vast majority of masculine nouns have the high tone on the second last vowel position, while the vast majority of feminine nouns have their high tone on the last vowel position. The main exceptions are nouns ending in **-e/-o/-a** in the singular (see § 6.1.2).

In the case of nouns with a short final vowel, feminine words therefore have their high tone on the last syllable, whereas masculine nouns have their high tone on the second last syllable.

MASC.		FEM.	
<b>ínan</b>	<i>boy</i>	<b>inán</b>	<i>girl</i>
<b>kúrsi</b>	<i>chair</i>	<b>bisád</b>	<i>cat</i>
<b>áqal</b>	<i>house</i>	<b>gabádh</b>	<i>girl</i>

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

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

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

MASC.		FEM.	
<b>géed</b>	<i>tree, plant</i>	<b>beér</b>	<i>garden, field, farm</i>
<b>dukáan</b>	<i>shop</i>	<b>khudaár</b>	<i>vegetables and fruit</i>
<b>míis</b>	<i>table</i>	<b>liín</b>	<i>citric fruit(s)</i>

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

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

### § 6.1.2 Nouns ending in *-e/-o/-a*

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

<b>magaálo</b>	<i>town, city</i>	<b>magaaló yar</b>	<i>a small town</i>
----------------	-------------------	--------------------	---------------------

### § 6.1.3 Exceptions

There are a few exceptions to the principles for the placement of tone described above: numbers 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 100.

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

**dilaá** *murderer*, **qoraá** *writer*, and other agent nouns ending in **-aá**,  
**abtí** *maternal uncle*, **maroodí** *elephant*, **rati** *pack camel*, **webí** *river*,  
**adeér** *paternal uncle*, **dhakhtár** *doctor, clinic*, **reér** *family*,  
**afhayeen** *spokesperson*, **haweén** *women*,  
**albaáb** *door*, **xafiís** *office*

Among feminine nouns, women's names that do not end in **-o** or **-a** usually have their high tone on the second last vowel position.

#### **Lúul, Máryan**

The names of many cities have their high tone on the fourth vowel position counting from the end.

**Áfgooye** a city close to Mogadishu, **Gároowe** the capital of Puntland

The same is true for countries ending in **–(i)ya**.

**Itóobiya** *Ethiopia*, **Kéenya/Kíinya** *Kenya*, **Soomáaliya** *Somalia*,  
**Tansáaniya** *Tanzania*

## § 6.2 The indefinite form

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

## § 6.3 The definite singular form

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

–**ka** for masculine nouns: **más** (*a*) *snake*      **máska** *the snake*

–**ta** for feminine nouns: **káb** (*a*) *shoe*      **kábta** *the shoe*

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

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

**gúri** (*a*) *house*      **gúriga** *the house*

After /e, o/ the masculine article becomes **–ha**. At the same time /e/ is replaced by /a/. The high tone is always on this /a/.

**aábbe** (*a*) *father*      **aabbáha** *the father*

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

**libáax** (*a*) *lion*      **libáaxa** *the lion*

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

**mindí** (*a*) *knife*      **mindída** *the knife*

The feminine article also becomes **–da** after /o/. At the same time /o/ changes to /a/. The high tone is always on this /a/.

**magaálo** (a) city      **magaaláda** the city

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

**gabádh** (a) girl      **gabádha** the girl

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

**bíl** (a) month/crescent      **bísha** the month/crescent

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

**macállin** (a) teacher      **macállinka** the teacher

**macallimád** (a) teacher      **macallimádda** the teacher

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

**fúre** (a) key      **furáha** the key

**sheéko** (a) story      **sheekáda** the story

In a handful of nouns, a stem final glottal stop disappears before the definite article.

**gu'** (a) key      **gúga** the key

**ri'** (a) goat      **rída** the goat

but

**go'** (a) piece of cloth      **gó'a** the piece of cloth, sheet

### § 6.3.1 Generic definite form

The generic use of a noun means that the noun is used in a generalising way with reference to the whole category of such objects, not with reference to any specific, existing object(s). In English the definite singular form is sometimes used in this way, e.g. *Why does the spider have eight legs?*

It is as if we treated one spider as a prototype for all the spiders in the world. This is very common in Somali.

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

For countable nouns in English, the generic use of the definite singular is synonymous with a generic use of the indefinite plural. You can also say *Why do spiders have eight legs?* In Somali, however, the **definite** form is preferred in this sense, both in the singular and in the plural.

**Shimbirúhu** ukún ayéy dhalaan. *Birds lay eggs.*

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

**Wáxa uu jecél yahay liínta.** *He is fond of citrus fruit.*

**Waxyaabáha lagá helo gúriga reer-guuraága.**

*The things that one finds in a nomadic house.*

## § 6.4 The plural of feminine nouns

The regular plural forms of feminine nouns fall into two types.

(a) Feminine nouns with a singular form ending in **-o** have a plural form that ends in **-oóyin** and the definite article is always **-ka**.

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

(b) All other feminine nouns have a plural form that ends in **-ó**. The definite form ends in **-áha**.

<b>sariír</b>	<b>sariírta</b>	<b>sariiró</b>	<b>sariiráha</b>	<i>the beds</i>
<b>káb</b>	<b>kábta</b>	<b>kabó</b>	<b>kabáha</b>	<i>the shoes</i>
<b>bisád</b>	<b>bisádda</b>	<b>bisadó</b>	<b>bisadáha</b>	<i>the cats</i>
<b>meél</b>	<b>meésha</b>	<b>meeló</b>	<b>meeláha</b>	<i>the places</i>
<b>úl</b>	<b>úsha</b>	<b>uló</b>	<b>uláha</b>	<i>the sticks</i>

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

<b>mindí</b>	<b>mindída</b>	<b>mindiyó</b>	<b>mindiyáha</b>	<i>the knives</i>
--------------	----------------	----------------	------------------	-------------------

## § 6.5 The plural of masculine nouns

The regular plural forms of masculine nouns fall into three types.

(a) Masculine nouns with a singular form ending in **-e** have a plural form that ends in **-ayaál**. The definite plural form ends in **-ayaásha**.

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

(b) Masculine nouns with only one syllable in the singular usually form their plural by reduplication. First the vowel **-á-** is added and then the final consonant of the singular form is repeated. Such nouns have the same definite article both in the singular and in the plural.

<b>qóys -ka</b>	<i>family</i>	pl. <b>qoysás</b>	<b>qoysáska</b>
<b>áf -ka</b>	<i>mouth, language</i>	pl. <b>afáf</b>	<b>afáfka</b>
<b>sán -ka</b>	<i>nose</i>	pl. <b>sanán</b>	<b>sanánka</b>
<b>bás -ka</b>	<i>bus</i>	pl. <b>basás</b>	<b>basáska</b>

(c) Most other masculine nouns – the majority – have a plural form that ends in **-yó**. The definite form ends in **-yáda**.

<b>dálag -ga</b>	<i>crop</i>	pl. <b>dalagyó</b>	<b>dalagyáda</b>
<b>mágac -a</b>	<i>name</i>	pl. <b>magacyó</b>	<b>magacyáda</b>
<b>libáax -a</b>	<i>lion</i>	pl. <b>libaaxyó</b>	<b>libaaxyáda</b>
<b>webí -ga</b>	<i>river</i>	pl. <b>webiyó</b>	<b>webiyáda</b>

If the stem already ends in /y/, one of the /y/'s disappears.

<b>éray -ga</b>	<i>word</i>	pl. <b>erayó</b>	<b>erayáda</b>
-----------------	-------------	------------------	----------------

After most stems ending in /b/, /d/, /r/, /l/, /n/, and /m/, the /y/ of the ending is usually replaced by a strengthening of the stem final consonant, represented in writing by a double consonant.

<b>saaxíib -ka</b>	<i>friend</i>	pl. <b>saaxiibbó</b>	<b>saaxiibbáda</b>
<b>baabúur -ka</b>	<i>car</i>	pl. <b>baabuurró</b>	<b>baabuurráda</b>



xayawáan –ka	<i>animal</i>	pl. xayawaannó	xayawaannáda
tártan –ka	<i>competition</i>	pl. tartammó	tartammáda

## § 6.6 Less straight-forward plural forms

### § 6.6.1 Sound changes

A number of nouns exhibit regular plural endings, but the forms are less straight-forward due to quite regular sound alternations.

(a) If the stem of a noun ends in two consonants, a vowel must be inserted between these consonants in the singular form. The inserted vowel is usually a copy of the vowel already present in the stem. That a vowel has been inserted is of course not evident from the singular form. It only becomes evident when comparing the singular and the plural form.

/gal\_b/ **galáb** -ta *afternoon* pl. **galbó** **galbáha**

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

/weydiim/ **weydiín** -ta *question* pl. **weydiimó** **weydiimáha**

/tim/ **tín** -ta *a strand of hair* pl. **timó** *hair* **timáha**

/nim/ **nín** -ka *man* pl. **nimán** < /nimam/ **nimánka**

example with /k/ - /g/

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

/gac\_m/ **gacán** -ta *arm, hand* pl. **gacmó** **gacmáha**

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

/maal\_m/ **maalín** -ta *day* pl. **maalmó** **maalmáha**

/xub\_n/ **xubín** -ta *member* pl. **xubnó** **xubnáha**

### § 6.6.2 -ó, -áha instead of -yó, -yáda

(a) Masculine nouns with vowel insertion in the singular form (due to a stem ending in two consonants) take the plural endings **-ó, -áha**.

/il_k/	<b>ílig -ga</b>	<i>tooth</i>	pl. <b>ilkó</b>	<b>ilkáha</b>
/jil_b/	<b>jílib -ka</b>	<i>knee</i>	pl. <b>jilbó</b>	<b>jilbáha</b>
/xar_f/	<b>xáraf -ka</b>	<i>letter (of the alphabet)</i>	pl. <b>xarfó</b>	<b>xarfáha</b>

(b) A few masculine nouns with a stem ending in a consonant followed by /y/ have singular forms ending in the vowel /i/ and plural forms ending in **-ó, -áha**.

/gur_y/	<b>gúri -ga</b>	<i>house</i>	pl. <b>guryó</b>	<b>guryáha</b>
---------	-----------------	--------------	------------------	----------------

### § 6.6.3 -ó, -áha instead of reduplication

(b) A small number of masculine nouns with only contain one **long vowel** in the singular form do not form their plural through reduplication, but with the endings **-ó, -áha**.

<b>géed -ka</b>	<i>tree, plant</i>	pl. <b>geedó</b>	<b>geedáha</b>
<b>reér -ka</b>	<i>family</i>	pl. <b>reeró</b>	<b>reeráha</b>

### § 6.6.4 -yó, -yáda instead of consonant strengthening

The ending **-yo** is kept after /b/, /d/, /r/, /l/, /n/, and /m/, in most foreign borrowings as well as in a few words of Somali origin.

<b>insaym</b>	<i>enzyme</i>	pl. <b>insaymyó</b>
<b>qurub -ka</b>	<i>particle</i>	pl. <b>qurubyó qurubyáda</b>

The ending **-yo** is also kept with compounds that end in /d/.

<b>falkaab-meeléed</b>	<i>adverbial of place</i>	pl. <b>falkaab-meeleedyó</b>
------------------------	---------------------------	------------------------------

## § 6.6.5 Unexpected definite article

(a) All masculine nouns that form their plural through reduplication of the consonant /l/ and whose stems contain a **long vowel** have a definite plural form ending in **-ásha**.

wiil -ka      *boy*      pl. wiilál      wiilásha

## § 6.6.6 Gender alternations

(a) A few nouns do not form the plural according to the general rules for their gender. Instead, the plural form is based on the rules for the opposite gender.

walaál -ka      *brother*

walaál, walaásha      *sister*      pl. walaaló      *siblings*      walaaláha

sánnad -ka      *year*

(sannád -da)      pl. sannadó      sannadáha

Alongside **sánnad** *year*, there is also an alternative form **sáno**, **sanáda**, pl. **sanoóyin -ka**, which is perfectly regular.

(súbax -a)      *morning*      pl. subaxyó      subaxyáda

subáx -da      (subxó)      (subxáha)

## § 6.6.7 Irregular plural forms

(c) Two words take the uncommon plural endings **-yaabó** or **-yaaló**.

sí -da      *manner*      pl. siyaabó      siyaabáha

or siyaaló      siyaaláha

wáx -a      *thing*      pl. waxyaabó      waxyaabáha

or waxyaaló      waxyaaláha

## § 6.6.8 Two plural forms

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

<b>abtí –ga</b> <i>maternal uncle</i>	pl. <b>abtiyó, abtiyáda</b> <b>abtiyáal, abtiyaásha</b>
<b>fáras –ka</b> <i>horse</i>	pl. <b>fardó, fardáha</b> (rarely <b>farsó, farsáha</b> )

(b) In a few instances there is a difference in meaning.

<b>íl, ísha</b> <i>eye; spring, source</i>	pl. <b>indhó, indháha</b> <i>eyes</i> <b>iló, iláha</b> <i>springs, sources</i>
--	--

## § 6.7 Arabic plural forms

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

**saaxíib -ka** *friend*      Ar. pl. **asxaáb, asxaábta**  
reg. pl. **saaxiibbó, saaxiibbáda**

**kúrsi -ga** *chair*      Ar. pl. **kuraás, kuraásta**  
reg. pl. **kursiyó, kursiyáda**

This Arabic pattern has sometimes spread to other borrowings.

**búug -ga** *book*      Ar. pl. **buugaág, buugaágta**  
reg. pl. **buugág, buugágga** (rarely used)

Also the Arabic plural ending **-iín** is rather commonly used with Arabic borrowings in Somali. The definite form ends in **-iínta**.

**macállin -ka** *teacher*      Ar. pl. **macallimiín, macallimiínta**  
(no regular plural)

## § 6.8 The counting form of nouns

After numbers larger than **hál** *one*, Somali nouns are not used in their plural form, but in a special **counting form**. Only feminine nouns with the plural ending **-ó** have a separate counting form that ends in **-ood**. For all other nouns the counting form is the same as the singular form.

MASCULINE		FEMININE	
<b>búug</b>	<i>book</i>	<b>bisád</b>	<i>cat</i>
<b>buugaág</b>	<i>books</i>	<b>bisadó</b>	<i>cats</i>
<b>hál buug</b>	<i>one book</i>	<b>hál bisad</b>	<i>one cat</i>
<b>labá buug</b>	<i>two books</i>	<b>labá bisadood</b>	<i>two cats</i>
<b>baabúur</b>	<i>car</i>	<b>hoóyo</b>	<i>mother</i>
<b>baabuurró</b>	<i>cars</i>	<b>hooyoóyin</b>	<i>mothers</i>
<b>hál baabuur</b>	<i>one car</i>	<b>hál hooyo</b>	<i>one mother</i>
<b>labá baabuur</b>	<i>two cars</i>	<b>labá hooyo</b>	<i>two mothers</i>

The counting form is also used after certain other words that express quantity, e.g. **ímmisa** *how many*, **dhówr** *a few*.

<b>ímmisa qof</b> <i>how many persons</i>	<b>ímmisa bilood</b> <i>how many months</i>
<b>dhówr jeer</b> <i>a few times</i>	<b>dhówr maalmood</b> <i>a few days</i>

The numeral and the following noun constitute a noun phrase, and the end of a noun phrase is often marked by a non-obligatory high tone.

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

No other endings can be added after **-ood** in the counting form. Other endings must be added to the numeral, which is the head noun of the phrase.

<b>labádayda</b> <b>bisadood</b>	<i>my two cats</i>
<b>labádaas</b> <b>bisadood</b>	<i>those two cats</i>

For more details about noun phrases with numerals, see § 12.1.8 and § 12.1.9.

## § 6.9 Countability

Nouns can be divided into countables and uncountables depending on whether they have a singular as well as a plural form or not.

Many English nouns, mainly proper nouns (i.e. names), mass nouns and many abstract nouns, are never or very rarely used in the plural, e.g. *Julietta, London; milk, dust; childhood, love*. The same also applies to these kinds of words in Somali.

### § 6.9.1 General use of the singular

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

### § 6.9.2 Collective nouns

For collective nouns it is characteristic that a grammatically singular word form, i.e. a word form without any plural ending, refers to several persons or objects. Examples of English collective nouns are *police, staff* and *public*. There is often variation between the singular and plural forms of verbs used with such nouns, e.g. *The staff is/are very efficient*.

Somali has a much larger number of collective nouns than does English.

<b>carruúr –ta</b>	<i>children</i>	<b>dúmar –ka</b>	<i>women</i>
<b>rág –ga</b>	<i>men</i>	<b>lo' –da</b>	<i>dairy cattle</i>
<b>ádhi<sup>N</sup> / ári<sup>S</sup> –ga</b>	<i>goats and sheep</i>	<b>digáag –ga</b>	<i>chicken</i>

Collective nouns cannot be used when referring to only one single person, animal or object.



### § 6.9.3 Singular, plural and collective form

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

M.SING.	<b>baabúur -ka</b> <i>car</i>	M.PLUR.	<b>baabuurró -da</b> <i>cars</i>
F.COLL.	<b>baabuúr -ta</b> <i>cars</i>		
MASC.	<b>búug -ga</b> <i>book</i>	M.PLUR.	<b>(buugág -ga)</b> <i>books</i>
F.COLL.	<b>buúg -ta</b> <i>books</i>	AR.PLUR.	<b>buugaág -ta</b> <i>books</i>

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

M.COLL.	<b>digáag -ga</b> <i>chicken, hens</i>		
F.SING.	<b>digaagád -da</b> <i>hen</i>	F.PLUR.	<b>digaagadó -ha</b> <i>hens</i>

There are also other, more complex patterns. For the noun **dhágax** *stone* the singular has both a singulative and a mass reading, and the collective form ends in **-aán**.

M.MASS/SING.	<b>dhágax -a</b> <i>stone</i>	M.PLUR.	<b>dhagaxyó -da</b> <i>stones</i>
F.COLL.	<b>dhagxaán -ta</b> <i>stones</i>		

## § 6.9.4 Only singular and collective form

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

M.SING.	<b>Soomaáli –ga</b> <i>Somali</i>	NO PLURAL FORM
F.COLL.	<b>Soomaali –da</b> <i>Somalis</i>	
M.SING.	<b>árday –ga</b> <i>pupil</i>	NO PLURAL FORM
F.COLL.	<b>ardáy –da</b> (or <b>ardó –da</b> ) <i>pupils</i>	
M.SING.	<b>askári –ga</b> <i>soldier</i>	NO PLURAL FORM
F.COLL.	<b>askár –ta</b> <i>soldiers</i>	

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

M.COLL.	<b>haweén –ka</b> <i>women</i>	
F.SING.	<b>haweéney –da</b> <i>woman</i>	NO PLURAL FORM

## § 6.9.5 Group nouns

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

SG.COLL.	<b>qóys –ka</b> <i>family</i>
PL.COLL.	<b>qoysás –ka</b> <i>families</i>
SG.COLL.	<b>géel, géela</b> <i>herd of camels</i>
PL.COLL.	<b>geelál, geelásha</b> <i>herds of camels</i>

## § 6.9.6 Plural only nouns

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

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

These nouns are plural (not feminine singular) since

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

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

## § 7. Formation of nouns

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

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

### § 7.1 Persons

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

**baraa** *teaches*                      **báre** (m.) *teacher*  
**beér** *field*, **falaa** *cultivates*      **beerfále** (m.) *farmer*

Other, less common endings with the same meaning are **-aá** and **-aal**.

**qoraa** *writes*                              **qóre / qoraá** (m.) *writer, author*  
**reér** *family*, **guuraa** *moves*          **reer-guuraá** (m. coll.) *nomads*  
**tumaa** *beats, pounds*                  **tumáal** (m.) *blacksmith*

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

**dukáan** *shop*                              **dukaánle** (m.) *shopkeeper, shop assistant*  
**tágsi** *taxi*                                  **tagsiile** (m.) *taxi driver*

The same ending sometimes denotes a person with some kind of problem.

**indhó** *eyes*                                  **indhoóle** *a blind person*

#### § 7.1.1 Female persons

The ending **-ád** is commonly used to form feminine nouns denoting a person.

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

The feminine **-ley** corresponds to the masculine **-le**.

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

Sometimes **-to** corresponds to the masculine **-e**, whereas **-so** corresponds to **-ye**.

MASCULINE	FEMININE
<b>adeége</b>	<b>adeégto</b> <i>servant</i> < <b>adéeg</b> <i>service</i>
<b>kalkaalíye</b>	<b>kalkaalíso</b> <i>nurse</i>
<b>kariye</b>	<b>karíso</b> <i>cook</i> < <b>kariyaa</b> <i>cooks</i>

## § 7.1.2 Collectives

The two feminine endings **-ley** and **-to/-so** are also used to form collective nouns.

MASC. SG.	FEM. COLL.
<b>beeraále</b> <i>farmer</i>	<b>beeraléy</b> <i>farmers</i>
<b>kalluumáyste</b> <i>fisherman</i>	<b>kalluumaysáto</b> <i>fishermen</i>

## § 7.2 Things and abstract notions

The suffix **-e** is used to form certain words denoting tools.

**furaa** *opens*                      **fúre -ha** *key*

The suffix **-o** is used to form various kinds of nouns.

**sheegaa** *says, tells*                      **sheéko -da** *story*

The suffix **-aal** is used to form nouns denoting the result of an action.

**qoraa** *writes*                      **qoráal -ka** *text, writing*

The suffix **-i** is sometimes used to form abstract nouns.

**baahán** *needing*

**baahí -da** *need*

**kalsoón** *trusting*

**kalsooní -da** *trust, confidence*

Reduplication occurs in a few common nouns.

**dhээр** *long, tall, high*

**dhээрer -ka** *length*

**nóol** *living, alive*

**nolól -sha** *life*

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

**bээр!** *plant!, cultivate!*    **beэр** *a field, a plantation*

**beer-aa** *plants, cultivates*    **beэр-ta** *the field, the plantation*

## § 7.3 Verbal nouns

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some other, less frequent endings are, e.g.

**-itaan**

**furaa** *opens*, **furitáan -ka** *opening (ceremony)*

besides **furíd -da** *opening* (in general)

**baaraa** *investigates*, **baaritáan -ka**, **baarís -ta**, **baaríd -da** *investigation*

Somali verbal nouns are often used like English *to* + infinitive.

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

Some verbal nouns have developed special meanings and usages.

**horreeyaa** *is up front, comes first*

**ugú horreyntii** *first of all*

**weydiyaa** *asks*

**weydiin -ta** *question*

## § 7.4 Compounds

There are several different types of compound nouns. The common trait is that a compound noun only has one high tone (one stress) and only one definite article at the end of the whole compound.

**bád wéyn** *a big sea*

**badwéyn** *an ocean*

**bádda wéyn** *the big sea*

**badwéynta** *the ocean*

Many are formed just by joining two roots, as in the example above. Others are formed with the addition of a suffix, often **-éed** or **-e**.

**éray** *word*, **su'aál** *question*

**eraysu'aaléed** *question word*

**mádax** *head, chief*, **wéyn** *big*

**madaxweýne** *president*

Some are formed in more complex ways.

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

Notice that verbal nouns are often compounds consisting of e.g. a verb and its object, and that such compounds only have one high tone (stress).

**sigáar** *cigarette* + **cabbíd** *drinking*    **sigaaarcabbíd** *smoking*

If prepositions or other preverbal particles precede a verbal noun, they become prefixes (i.e. part of the noun), and lose the high tone (stress) that they have before a verb form.

In today's written Somali, compounds exhibit a lot of spelling variation. Traditionally, writing them as a single word has been recommended, but today writing the constituent parts separately has become very common. Sometimes a hyphen is also used.

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

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



## § 8. Numerals

(a) In Somali, numerals are not a separate word class. They are simply nouns, just like *pair*, *trio* or *dozen* are nouns in English. When an ending is added to a phrase beginning with a numeral, the ending is added to the numeral, not to the following noun (see also § 12.1.8). The noun after the numeral is in the counting form (see § 6.8). The counting form does not permit the addition of any further endings.

labá wiil      *two boys*      **sáddex bilood**      *three months*  
 labá**da** wiil    *the two boys*    **sáddexdaas bilood**    *those three months*

(b) The Somali numbers 2–8 are feminine nouns, whereas all higher numbers are masculine. **Ków** (1) is feminine, whereas **hál** (1) and **éber** (0) are masculine. The feminine numbers **sáddex** (3), **áfar** (4), **siddéed** (8) and the masculine **sagaál** (9), **tobán** (10) and **boqól** (100) have a high tone that is atypical for their gender.

0	<b>éber</b> (m.)		
1	<b>ków</b> (f.) / <b>hál</b> (m.)	10	<b>tobán</b> (m.)
2	<b>lábo</b> / <b>lába</b> (f.)	20	<b>labaátan</b> (m.)      (–tan < toban)
3	<b>sáddex</b> (f.)	30	<b>sóddon</b> (m.)
4	<b>áfar</b> (f.)	40	<b>afártan</b> (m.)
5	<b>shán</b> (f.)	50	<b>kónton</b> (m.)
6	<b>lín</b> (f.)	60	<b>lín<b>dan</b></b> (m.)
7	<b>toddóbo</b> / <b>toddóba</b> (f.)	70	<b>toddobaátan</b> (m.)
8	<b>siddéed</b> (f.)	80	<b>siddeétan</b> (m.)
9	<b>sagaál</b> (m.)	90	<b>sagaáshan</b> (m.)      /l+t/ > /sh/
		100	<b>boqól</b> (m.)
		200	<b>labá boqol</b>
		300	<b>sáddex boqol ...</b>
		1000	<b>kún</b>
		4000	<b>áfar kun</b>
		1000000	<b>milyan</b> (or <b>malyuun</b> )

(c) In complex numbers, **ków** is always used. It is also used when simply counting *one, two, three, four...*

**kow iyo toban** *eleven*

**toban iyo kow buug** *eleven books*

**ków, lábo, sáddex, áfar...** *one, two, three, four...*

**Hál** is used when reading a sequence of figures, such as a phone number, and also preceding a noun in order to say that there is one item of some kind. It can also be used independently, not mentioning the intended object.

**sáddex, hál, áfar, siddéed** *three, one, four, eight* (e.g. a PIN code)

**hál buug** *one book*

**hál i síi** *give me one*

## § 9. Pronouns

Somali has fewer genuine pronouns than English. Nouns dominate in Somali and they are also used as the equivalents of many English pronouns or pronominal adverbs, e.g., **qóf** *person, somebody*, **wáx** *thing, something*, **meél** *place, somewhere* etc.

### § 9.1 Personal pronouns

	SHORT SUBJECT FORMS		SHORT OBJECT FORMS	
1 sg.	<b>aan</b>	<i>I</i>	<b>i</b>	<i>me</i>
2 sg.	<b>aad</b>	<i>you</i>	<b>ku</b>	<i>you</i>
3 sg. m.	<b>uu</b>	<i>he, it</i>	–	<i>him, it</i>
3 sg. f.	<b>ay</b>	<i>she, it</i>	–	<i>her, it</i>
1 pl. excl.	<b>aan / aannu</b>	<i>we</i>	<b>na</b>	<i>us</i>
1 pl. incl.	<b>aynu / aan</b>	<i>we</i>	<b>ina</b>	<i>us</i>
2 pl.	<b>aad / aydin</b>	<i>you</i>	<b>idin</b>	<i>you</i>
3 pl.	<b>ay</b>	<i>they</i>	–	<i>them</i>
	LONG FORMS			
1 sg.	<b>aníga</b>	<i>I, me</i>		
2 sg.	<b>adíga</b>	<i>you</i>		
3 sg. m.	<b>isága</b>	<i>he, him (it)</i>		
3 sg. f.	<b>iyáda</b>	<i>she, her (it)</i>		
1 pl. excl.	<b>annága</b>	<i>we, us (excluding you)</i>		
1 pl. incl.	<b>innága</b>	<i>we, us (including you)</i>		
2 pl.	<b>idínka</b>	<i>you</i>		
3 pl.	<b>iyága</b>	<i>they, them</i>		

#### § 9.1.1 No 3rd person object pronouns

In Somali there are no object pronouns in the 3rd person corresponding to *him, her, it, them*. If a verb normally takes an object and there isn't any word

in the clause expressing such an object, then the object has to be inferred from the preceding context and an object pronoun has to be added when translating into English.

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

**Aabbihiis wúxuu siiyey shán shilin.** *His father gave him five shillings.*

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

**Waxay ku tiri,** “Ma kartid.”

*She said to him, “You can’t do it.”*

**Immisa shilin baa u soo hartay?**

*How many shillings remained for her/him/them?*

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

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

## § 9.1.2 Long forms of personal pronouns

Alongside the short personal pronouns there are also longer forms which function as nouns. They contain the definite article and they are used for additional clarity or emphasis. Since these forms behave like any other noun they also take the subject ending **-u** when they denote the subject of the clause.

### Example

The long personal pronouns are mostly used to refer to people. The third person long pronouns may also be used to refer to animals, but quite seldom to inanimate objects or abstract nouns. In those instances demonstrative pronouns are preferred instead of personal pronouns.

### Example

## § 9.1.3 First person plural: *we, us, our*

In Somali it is possible to make a distinction between two different meanings of the pronouns *we, us, our*. Especially in a higher stylistic

register, standard Somali has inclusive and exclusive forms of these pronouns, depending on whether one wants to include or exclude the person(s) spoken to.

In colloquial Somali, however, most speakers don't make this distinction, and one form has been generalised in both functions.

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

	INCLUDING	EXCLUDING
Long personal pronoun	<b>innága</b>	<b>annága</b>
Short subject pronoun	<b>aynu</b>	<b>aannu</b>
Short object pronoun	<b>ina</b>	<b>na</b>
Short object pronoun + <b>ú</b>	<b>inoó</b>	<b>noó</b>
Possessive pronoun	<b>kéenna, téenna</b>	<b>kaayága, taayáda</b>

#### § 9.1.4 The indefinite subject pronoun *la*

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

**Albaábka waxa lagú sameeyay lóox.**

*They have made the door with wood.*

*The door has been made of wood. or The door is made of wood.*

#### § 9.1.5 Obligatory short object pronouns

The short object pronouns in the 1st and 2nd person must always be used, even if a long pronoun is also used for clarity or emphasis.

### Adíga yáa ku ilaaliya?

you who.FOC you.OBJ watches.out

WHO takes care of *you*? (contrastive emphasis on *you*)

## § 9.1.6 The reflexive object pronoun *is*

The pronoun *is* corresponds to both *oneself* and *each other*, i.e. it has both a reflexive and a reciprocal meaning.

Xáaskii Díinku wáy *is* qarisay.

*The Turtle's wife hid herself.*

Sahró iyo Áxmed wáa ay *is* eegeen.

*Sahra and Ahmed looked at each other.*

Way *is*lá hádlayaan.

*They are talking to each other.*

It is used in the 1st and 2nd person as well as in the 3rd person.

Wáa aan *is* qariyay. *I hid myself.*

Wáa aad *is* qarisay. *You hid yourself.*

Wáa uu *is* qariyay. *He hid himself.*

Wáa ay *is* qarisay. *She hid herself.*

Wáa aan *is* qarinnay. *We hid ourselves.*

Wáa aad *is* qariseen. *You hid yourselves.*

Wáa ay *is* qariyeen. *They hid themselves.*

## § 9.2 Demonstrative pronouns

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

	MASC.SING.	FEM.SING	PLURAL	
<i>this</i>	<b>kán</b>	<b>tán</b>	<b>kúwan</b>	<i>these</i>
<i>that</i>	<b>kaás</b>	<b>taás</b>	<b>kúwaas</b>	<i>those</i>
<i>that one, you know</i>	<b>kií</b>	<b>tií</b>	<b>kúwii</b>	<i>those, you know</i>

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

<b>káb</b>	<b>mindí</b>	<i>(a) shoe, knife</i>
<b>kábta</b>	<b>mindída</b>	<i>the shoe, knife</i>
<b>kábtan</b>	<b>mindídan</b>	<i>this shoe, knife</i>
<b>kábtaas</b>	<b>mindídaas</b>	<i>that shoe, knife</i>
<b>kábtii</b>	<b>mindídi</b>	<i>that shoe, knife, you know</i>
<b>kabó</b>	<b>mindiyó</b>	<i>shoes, knives</i>
<b>kabáha</b>	<b>mindiyáha</b>	<i>the shoes, knives</i>
<b>kabáhan</b>	<b>mindiyáhan</b>	<i>these shoes, knives</i>
<b>kabáhaas</b>	<b>mindiyáhaas</b>	<i>those shoes, knives</i>
<b>kabíhii</b> <sup>12</sup>	<b>mindiyíhii</b>	<i>those shoes, knives, you know</i>
<b>bás</b>	<b>gúri</b>	<i>(a) bus, house</i>
<b>báska</b>	<b>gúriga</b>	<i>the bus, house</i>
<b>báskan</b>	<b>gúrihan</b>	<i>this bus, house</i>
<b>báskaas</b>	<b>gúrigaas</b>	<i>that bus, house</i>
<b>báskii</b>	<b>gúrigii</b>	<i>that bus, house, you know</i>
<b>basás</b>	<b>guryó</b>	<i>buses, houses</i>
<b>basáska</b>	<b>guryáha</b>	<i>the buses, houses</i>
<b>basáskan</b>	<b>guryáhan</b>	<i>these buses, houses</i>
<b>basáskaas</b>	<b>guryáhaas</b>	<i>those buses, houses</i>
<b>basáskii</b>	<b>guryíhii</b>	<i>those buses, houses, you know</i>

---

<sup>12</sup> /i/ in the suffix spreads across /h/ so that a preceding /a/ becomes assimilated. See § 4.2.1.

## § 9.2.1 Demonstrative forms with *-aan, -aa*

When referring to objects close by, there is variation between the more neutral forms ending in *-an* and the marked southern forms ending in *-aan*.

<b>kábtan</b> / <b>kábtaan</b> <sup>S</sup>	<b>mindídan</b> / <b>mindídaan</b> <sup>S</sup>	<i>this shoe, knife</i>
<b>kabáhan</b> / <b>kabáhaan</b> <sup>S</sup>	<b>mindiyáhan</b> / <b>mindiyáhaan</b> <sup>S</sup>	<i>these shoes, knives</i>
<b>básan</b> / <b>báskaan</b> <sup>S</sup>	<b>gúrihan</b> / <b>gúrihaan</b> <sup>S</sup>	<i>this bus, house</i>
<b>basáskan</b> / <b>basáskaan</b> <sup>S</sup>	<b>guryáhan</b> / <b>guryáhaan</b> <sup>S</sup>	<i>these buses, houses</i>

When referring to objects further away, there is variation between more neutral forms with *-aas* and more casual, everyday forms with *-aa*.

<b>kábtaas</b> ( <b>kábtaa</b> )	<b>mindídaas</b> ( <b>mindídaa</b> )	<i>that shoe, knife</i>
<b>kabáhaas</b> ( <b>kabáhaa</b> )	<b>mindiyáhaas</b> ( <b>mindiyáhaa</b> )	<i>those shoes, knives</i>
<b>báskaas</b> ( <b>báskaa</b> )	<b>gúrigaas</b> ( <b>gúrigaa</b> )	<i>that bus, house</i>
<b>basáskaas</b> ( <b>basáskaa</b> )	<b>guryáhaas</b> ( <b>guryáhaa</b> )	<i>those buses, houses</i>

## § 9.2.2 Demonstrative forms with *-ii*

The demonstrative suffix *-ii* has a referential function. It is used in several different contexts.

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

**Cábdí wáxa uu ahaa dúq beeraléy ah. Maalín ayaa wáxa uu beeray geedó moxóg ah oo waawéyn. Maalín waliba waa uu waraabín jirey moxóggii. Dhírtii wáa kortay.**

*Abdi was an OLD FARMER MAN. ONE DAY he planted SOME BIG CASSAVA PLANTS. Every day he USED TO WATER the cassava. The plants GREW.*

(b) Sometimes the speaker or writer only pretends that the object is known to the listener, or implies that it ought to be known to most people. This is



often the case with main characters in stories or prominent characters in real life.

In the story that this passage originates from, the son has not been previously mentioned.

**Cabdi géedkii waa uu soó jiidey dhówr jeer, laakiin dhúlka ayaa uu ká soo bixín waayey. Cabdi waxa uu ú yeeray wíilkiisii weynaa.**  
*Abdi PULLED the plant a couple of times, but he was unable to get it out of THE GROUND. Abdi called upon HIS BIG SON.*

This usage is also very common in headings and title, implying that the text is about somebody or something prominent, that the reader might be expected to have heard about before.

**Sheekoóyinkii Cigaal Shidaad** *The stories about Igal Shidad*  
**Cali Baaba iyo afártankii tuug** *Ali Baba and the forty thieves*

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

**toddobaadkii hore** *last week, the preceding week*  
**toddobaadka dambe** *(the) next week (referring to the future)*  
**toddobaadkii dambe** *the next week (referring to the past)*

(d) It is also frequently used when telling the present time.

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

(e) It is used in expressions of time with general reference, i.e. not referring to any actual point in time, but to a potential situation.

**Maalintii ilayska waxa aynu ka helnaa qorraxda.**  
*During the day we get light from the SUN.*

(f) Furthermore, it is used in expressions of repetition and frequency. In this function the demonstrative suffix is usually followed by the particle – **ba**.

**Golahani wuxuu shiraa caadi ahaan sannadkiiba laba jeer.**

*This assembly normally convenes TWO TIMES each year.*

**Maxaa lagu qabtaa midkiiba dhismayaasha beesha degaanka?**

*WHAT do they do in each one of the buildings of the local community?*

One important use of this suffix is with expressions of percentage.

**boqolkiiba afartan** *fyratio procent, fyratio av (varje) hundra*

(g) It is also used in certain fixed expressions.

**ugu horraýntii** *first of all*

**ugu dambaýntii** *last of all*

### § 9.2.2a Adjectives after -ii

Adjectives following this form need to be followed by the past tense ending of the verb **yahay** *is*. See § 12.1.13.

**wiilkiisii wey naa** *his big son, that boy of his you know that was big*

**digaagaddii yarayd ee casayd** *the little red hen*

### § 9.2.3 Placeholder pronouns

	MASC.SING.	FEM.SING	PLURAL
<i>the</i>	<b>ka</b>	<b>ta</b>	<b>kúwa</b>
<i>a</i>	<b>ku</b>	<b>tu</b>	<b>kúwo</b>

These pronouns are used as placeholders or as the dummy head of a noun phrase when a modifier word is used “on its own”.

<b>ku kale</b>	<i>another</i>	<b>kuwo kale</b>	<i>others, other ones</i>
<b>ka kale</b>	<i>the other (one)</i>	<b>kuwa kale</b>	<i>the other ones</i>
<b>ka cusub</b>	<i>the new one</i>	<b>ka labaad</b>	<i>the second one</i>

## § 9.3 Possessive pronouns

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

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

When functioning as the subject of a clause, these possessive pronouns take the subject ending **-u**. See § 13.1.1.

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

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

<b>báska</b>	<i>the bus</i>	<b>gúriga</b>	<i>the house</i>
<b>báskayga</b>	<i>my bus</i>	<b>gúrigayga</b>	<i>my house</i>
<b>báskaaga</b>	<i>your bus</i>	<b>gúrigaaga</b>	<i>your house</i>
<b>báskiisa</b>	<i>his bus</i>	<b>gúrigiisa</b>	<i>his house</i>
<b>báskooda</b>	<i>their bus</i>	<b>gúrigooda</b>	<i>their house</i>
<b>basáska</b>	<i>the buses</i>	<b>guryáha</b>	<i>the houses</i>
<b>basáskayga</b>	<i>my buses</i>	<b>guryáhayga</b>	<i>my houses</i>
<b>basáskaaga</b>	<i>your buses</i>	<b>guryáhaaga</b>	<i>your houses</i>
<b>basáskiisa</b>	<i>his buses</i>	<b>guryíhiisa</b> <sup>13</sup>	<i>his houses</i>
<b>basáskooda</b>	<i>their buses</i>	<b>guryáhooda</b>	<i>their houses</i>

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

### § 9.3.1 Short possessive endings

After a small number of nouns denoting family members and friends, special shorter forms of the possessive endings are used. These endings lack the final definite article.

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

<sup>13</sup> /i/ in the suffix spreads across /h/ so that a preceding /a/ becomes assimilated. See § 4.2.1.

Words that are used with the short possessive endings are, above all, **hooyo** *mother*, **aábbe** *father*, **waálid** *parents*, **walaál** *sibling*, **habaryár** *maternal aunt*, **abtí** *maternal uncle*, **eéddo** *paternal aunt*, **adeér** *paternal uncle*, **ayeéyo** *grandmother*, **awoówe** *grandfather*, **saaxíib** *friend* and **saaxiibád** *female friend*.<sup>14</sup>

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

The full possessive endings are used, however, with nouns that do not exclusively denote a relationship between two persons, such as **nín** *man, husband*, **wíil** *boy, son*, **gabádh/gabár** *girl, daughter*, as well as with the collective noun **carruúr** *children*.

Also, if a modifier is added, e.g. an adjective, the full possessive endings are used.

<b>saaxiibáday</b>	<i>my (girl)friend</i>
<b>saaxiibádayda cusub</b>	<i>my new (girl)friend</i>
<b>walaálkay</b>	<i>my brother</i>
<b>walaálkayga weyn</b>	<i>my older brother</i>

As the final morpheme of a subject marked noun phrase, the short possessive suffixes take over the high tone from the stem of the noun.

**Saaxiibkiis baa kú riixaya baaskíilka.** (not subject marked)

*HIS FRIEND pushes the bike.*

**Saaxiibkiís wáxa uu kú riixayaa baaskíilka.** (subject marked)

*His friend pushes THE BIKE.*

---

<sup>14</sup> There is also a similar distinction in Italian between, e.g., *la mia casa* ‘my house’, with the article, and *mia sorella* ‘my sister’, without it.

## § 9.3.2 Implied possessive relations

In possessive constructions where a person is associated with something whose sole “possessor” this person is not, it is common to use a plural possessive ending.

### **Aaminá aabbáhood**

*Amina's father* (lit. *Amina their father*, i.e. her and her siblings' father)

### **Rooblé fásalkooda**

*Roble's class* (lit. *Roble their class*, i.e. his and his classmates' class)

### **adíga dérisiinna**

*your neighbours* (lit. *you (SG) your (PL) neighbours*, i.e. your and your family's neighbours)

## § 9.3.3 Partitive use of possessive suffixes

The possessive endings are commonly used in so called partitive constructions, i.e. after words that express some kind of measure.

With numbers the full possessive suffixes are used.

### **labadooda**

*both of them, the two of them*

With certain other nouns the short possessive suffixes are preferred.

### **qaarkood**

*part of them, some of them*

### **badankood**

*many of them*

### **dhammaántood**

*all of them*

### **kúlligeen, kulligood**

*all of us, all of them*

## § 9.3.4 Possessive + demonstrative suffix

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

### **Cumar wuxuu dhammeeyay mundulkiiisii.**

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

**guri**gaygan

*this* house of *mine*

## § 9.4 Interrogative pronouns

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### § 9.4.1 Interrogative use of possessive forms

When asking for someone's name, **short** possessive endings are used with an interrogative effect. In order to signal this interrogative function, the

high tone is lost on the noun itself and only realised on the ending, in a similar manner to the interrogative ending –**éé**.

**Magacáa?** (*What's your name?*)

**Magacéed?** (*What's her name?*)

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

## § 9.5 Nouns with pronominal functions

Somali nouns function as the equivalents of many English pronouns or pronominal adverbs. They are then often used with the demonstrative endings –**kan** / –**tan** *this*, –**kaa(s)** / –**taa(s)** *that*, the interrogative endings –**keé** / –**teé?** / –**má?** *which?*, and the negative particles –**ná** / –**bá**.

### § 9.5.1 **qóf** *person*; **cíd** *people*

**qóf** *somebody, someone*, **cíd** *somebody, some people*

**qofná** *nobody*, **cidná** *nobody*

**qofkeé?** *who?*

### § 9.5.2 **wáx** *thing*

**wáx** *something*

**wáx XX ah** *any XX (in negative clauses)*

**Má (uu) haysan wax lacág ah.**

*He didn't have any money.*

**waxná, waxbá** *nothing*

### § 9.5.3 **sí** *manner*

**sídan** *like this, (in) this way, (in) this manner*

**sídaa(s)** *like that, (in) that way, (in) that manner*

**sideé?** *how?, (in) what way, (in) what manner*



§ 9.5.4 meél, hál *place*; xág *side, direction*

**meél** *somewhere*

**meelná** *nowhere*

**háلكan, meéshan** *here, (in, to) this place*

**háلكaa(s), meéshaa(s)** *there, (in, to) that place*

**halkeé?, meesheé?, xaggeé?** *where?, (in, to) which place?*

§ 9.5.5 már, goór, kól *moment*; wákhti/wáqti *time*

**márkaa(s), kólkaa(s)** *then, (in) that moment*

**goormá?, wakhtigeé?/ waqtigeé?** *when?, (at) what time?*

§ 9.5.6 dhammaán *all*

**dhammaán** *all* + noun

Goobó géli **dhammaán erayáda** kú bilaabma J.

*Put a circle around all the words that begin with J.*

noun + **dhammaántood** *all of them*

**Dadka dhammaantood** waa ay u siman yihiin sharciga.

*All people are equal before the law.*

§ 9.5.7 láf *bone*; náف *soul, spirit*; qúr/qúdh *life*

**láftayda** *(I) myself*, **láftaada** *(you) yourself* etc.

Waxa uu u sheegay in **isaga laftiisu** uusan haysan wax lacag ah.

*He told him/her/them that he himself didn't have any money.*

Imminka **aniga laftayda** ayaa ku heesa gabayadayda.

*Now I myself sing my poems.*

**naftayda** *(I) myself* etc.

**Aniga ayaa nafteyda** u samaystay. *I have made it for myself.*

**qurtayda / qudhayda** *(I) myself* etc.

Cuntada ay iniintu u baahan tahay waxa ku kaydsan tahay **iniinta qudheeda**. *The nutrition that the seed needs is stored in the seed itself.*  
**Adiga qudhaada** ayaan **ku** leeyahay. *I have only you.*

## § 9.6 Adjectives with pronominal functions

### § 9.6.1 dhán *all, total*

**Ma dhán nahay?** *Are we all (here)?*

After a definite noun, this adjective is preceded by the conjunction **oo**.

**Saaxiibbáday oo dhan** waa ay tágayaan.

*All my friends are going.*

Other modifiers often occur between the noun and the adjective **dhan**.

**Ka samee liis cudurrada la sheegay oo dhan.**

*Make a list of all the diseases that were mentioned.*

In certain expressions with an indefinite noun, this adjective is used without the conjunction **oo**.

**Geela sidkoodu waa muddo dhan 390 maalmood.**

*The gestation of camels equals a total period of 390 days.*

### § 9.6.2 kalé *other*

**baabúur kale** *another car*

**oo kale** *such, similar, like (this, that)*

**baabúurkaas oo kale** *a car like that*

## § 10. Adjectives

Somali has fewer basic, non-derived adjectives than English. Some of the most frequent basic adjectives are:

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

### § 10.1 Formation of adjectives

#### § 10.1.1 Adjectives derived from nouns

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

<b>wanáag</b> <b>-ga</b> <i>sth. good</i>	<b>wanaagsán</b> <i>good</i>
<b>fárax</b> <b>-a</b> <i>happiness</i>	<b>faraxsán</b> <i>happy</i>
<b>gáab</b> <b>-ka</b> <i>shortness, sth. short</i>	<b>gaabán</b> <i>short</i>
<b>qurúx</b> <b>-da</b> <i>beauty</i>	<b>qurxoón</b> <i>beautiful</i>

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

<b>Soomaáli</b> <b>-ga</b> <i>a Somali</i>	<b>Soomaaliyeéd</b> <i>Somali</i>
--	-----------------------------------

A few are derived through the use of **-oód** or **-aád**.

<b>kiimíko</b> <b>-da</b> <i>chemicals</i>	<b>kiimikaád</b> <i>chemical</i>
--	----------------------------------

#### § 10.1.2 Ordinal numbers

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

<b>1 = ków</b>	<i>one</i>	<b>1aad = koowaád / kowaád</b>	<i>first</i>
<b>2 = lába / lábo</b>	<i>two</i>	<b>2aad = labaád</b>	<i>second</i>

3 = <b>sáddex</b>	<i>three</i>	<b>3aad = saddexaád</b>	<i>third</i>
4 = <b>áfar</b>	<i>four</i>	<b>4aad = afraád / afaraád</b>	<i>fourth</i>
5 = <b>shán</b>	<i>five</i>	<b>5aad = shanaád</b>	<i>fifth</i>

### § 10.1.3 Adjectives derived from verbs

Adjectives derived from verbs may be referred to as *participles* or *deverbal adjectives*. They are formed through the addition of the ending **-án** or **-sán**.

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

### § 10.1.4 “Phrasal adjectives”

Often phrases consisting of a noun + an adjective correspond to English adjectives. They most often contain one of the adjectives **badan** *much*, **weyn** *big*, or **yar** *small*, e.g. **qurúx badan** (beauty much) *beautiful*, **da’ weyn** (age big) *old*. The main high tone is on the noun, and the adjective usually has a less prominent high tone or no tone at all.

**Waxa ay kú nóol yihiin meeláha dhágaxa badan.**

*They live in **stony** places.*

Notice that the modifier noun – **dhágaxa** in the example above – has to be in the definite form when the head noun – **meeláha** above – is in the definite form, or if it has a demonstrative or possessive ending.

**nin da’ weyn** *an old man*

**ninka da’da weyn** *the old man*

**baaskiil qurux badan** *a beautiful bike*

**baaskiilka quruxda badan** *the beautiful bike*

Also notice that as a predicate, these “phrasal adjectives” behave like adjectives. They are accompanied by the copular verb. An ordinary noun

+ an adjective, on the other hand, do not need the copular verb in the present tense.

**Baaskiilku waa uu qurux badan yahay.**

*The bike is beautiful.*

**Maryan waa macallimad wanaagsan.**

*Maryan is a good teacher.*

## § 10.2 The inflection of adjectives

Somali adjectives fall into two groups, inflected and uninflected.

Most derived adjectives ending in **-d** or **-e** belong to the uninflected ones, e.g. **Soomaaliyeéd** *Somali*, **dhexé** *middle*, and all ordinal numbers. These adjectives cannot take any prefixes or suffixes.

Most basic adjectives (adjectival roots) as well as derived adjectives ending in **-n** belong to the inflected ones, e.g. **wéyn** *big*, **qurxoón** *beautiful*, and all deverbal adjectives (participles).

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

**gabár yar** *a small girl*

**wíil yar** *a small boy*

**gabárta yar** *the small girl*

**wíilka yar** *the small boy*

### § 10.2.1 The distributive form

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

BASE FORM

DISTRIBUTIVE FORM

**yár** *little*

**yaryár**

**wanaagsán** *good*

**wanwanaagsán**

**gaabán** *short*

**gaagaabán**

<b>dhéer</b>	<i>long</i>	<b>dhaadhéer</b>
<b>wéyn</b>	<i>big</i>	<b>waawéyn</b>

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

The distributive expresses a repetition or spread (distribution) of the quality, either to different objects or to different parts of an object. Therefore this form doesn't automatically occur together with nouns in the plural, and it may also occur together with nouns in the singular, especially collective nouns, as well as mass nouns composed of several small parts.

**dád waawéyn** *grown-up people, adults*

**carruúr yaryar** *small children*

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

## § 10.2.2 Sound alternations in the stem

Some adjectives exhibit sound alternations in the stem, so that the base form of the adjective differs from other forms with an ending.

BASE FORM	STEM	INFLECTED FORM
<b>cad</b> <i>white, light</i>	/cadd/	<b>caddaa</b> <i>was white, light</i>
<b>culus</b> <i>heavy</i>	/cul_s/, /cus_l/	<b>cuslaa</b> <i>was heavy</i>
<b>eg</b> <i>similar</i>	/ek/	<b>ekaa</b> <i>was similar</i>
<b>dhan</b> <i>all</i>	/dhamm/	<b>dhammi</b> (subject form)

### § 10.3 The comparative degree

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

**Shan waa ay ká yar tahay siddéed.**

five PR.FOC it from little is eight

*Five is less than eight.*

### § 10.4 The superlative degree

The equivalent of the English superlative degree is expressed by the particle **ugú** *(the) most, the very -st*.

**ugú culus** *(the) (very) heaviest, (the) most heavy*

## § 11. Verbs

Almost all Somali verbs are inflected in a completely regular and predictable way. There are only six irregular verbs (see § 11.13).

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

### § 11.1 The present tense

The morpheme /aa/ expresses the present tense.

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

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

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

The /t/ of the endings will adjust to the final sound in the stem of the verb in very much the same way as the definite article.

Only if the stem ends in /i/ or /y/, the initial /t/ of the endings change to /s/ instead of /d/ in most verbs, e.g. /sii-/taa/ → **siisaa** *you / she give(s)*.

If the stem ends in a vowel and the ending begins with a vowel, the sound /y/ is inserted in order to avoid a sequence of two vowels, e.g. /akhri-/aa/ → **akhriyaa** *I / he read(s)*.

Sound changes in the verb inflection are discussed in detail in § 11.12.



## § 11.2 The past tense

There is only one past tense in Somali, corresponding to three tenses in English: past tense (*sang*), present perfect (*has sung*) and past perfect (*had sung*), but Somali also has aspects, just like English; see § 11.5 and § 11.6.

The past tense is expressed by the morpheme /ay/ word finally, and by /ee/ non-finally. The suffixes expressing person and number have exactly the same structure as in the present tense.

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

The exact same sound changes occur in the past tense as in the present tense. See § 11.12.

## § 11.3 The three conjugations

It is convenient to divide the regular verbs into three groups or *conjugations*, since small inflectional differences exist between the three groups.

For most verbs the last sound of the stem reveals to which conjugation the verb belongs.

The majority of the verbs in the 1st conjugation have a stem that ends in a consonant, e.g. **hees-aa**, **hees-taa** *he/she sings*.

The majority of the verbs in the 2nd conjugation have a stem that ends in /i/ or /ee/, e.g. **fiiri-yaa**, **fiiri-saa** *he/she looks*.

The verbs in the 3rd conjugation have two stems, one that ends in /t/ or /d/, and one that ends in /a/, e.g., **booqd-aa**, **booqa-taa** *he/she visits*.

Furthermore, in all three conjugations a number of regular sound alternations occur, depending on the last sound of the stem and the first sound in the ending.

More details about sound changes and the inflection of verbs in the individual conjugations are presented in § 11.12.

## § 11.4 The infinitive

The infinitive has two different endings depending on the conjugation, more precisely whether the stem ends in a consonant or in a vowel.

Verbs in conjugation 1 take the ending **-i**, used after a consonant.

Verbs in conjugations 2 and 3 take the ending **-n**, used after a vowel.

In the infinitive, there is always a high tone on the last vowel position of the stem, before the ending.

		PRESENT (F.)	INFINITIV	
CONJUGATION 1	<b>-i</b>	<b>qor-taa</b>	<b>qór-i</b>	<i>write</i>
CONJUGATION 2	<b>-n</b>	<b>fiiri-saa</b>	<b>fiirí-n</b>	<i>look</i>
		<b>samay-saa</b>	<b>samaý-n</b>	<i>do, make</i>
CONJUGATION 3	<b>-n</b>	<b>haysa-taa</b>	<b>haysá-n</b>	<i>have, hold</i>
		<b>soco-taa</b>	<b>socó-n</b>	<i>walk</i>

The Somali infinitive form is far less frequently used than the English infinitive. It only occurs together with a few auxiliary verbs, mainly **doonaa, doontaa** *will*, **jiray, jirtay** *used to*, **karaa, kartaa** *can*, **lahaa, lahayd** *would (have)*, **rabaa, rabtaa** *intends to*, **waayaa, waydaa** *is unable to*.

The auxiliary verb always follows after the infinitive.

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

**Sáhra wáxa ay samaýn kartaa waxyaabó badan.**

*Sahra can do many things.*

Corresponding to most other usages of the English infinitive, Somali applies the verbal noun (see § 7.3) or a full subclause (see § 15.2.1).

**Wáxa ay jecél yihiin ákhriska.**

FIN.FOC they fond are the.reading

*They like to read.*

**Wáxa aan rabaa ín aan tago.**

FIN.FOC I want that I leave

*I want to leave.*

## § 11.5 Progressive verb forms

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

The morpheme /t/ always changes to /s/ after the progressive suffix **-ay-**.

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

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

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

2.	<b>siiyaa, siisaa</b>	<i>gives</i>	<b>sií-n-ay-aa</b>	<i>he is giving</i>
	<b>sameeyaa, samaysaa</b>	<i>does</i>	<b>samaý-n-ay-aa</b>	<i>he is doing</i>
	<b>akhriyaa, akhrisaa</b>	<i>reads</i>	<b>akhrí-n-ay-aa</b>	<i>he is reading</i>
or 1.	<b>akhriyaa, akhridaa</b>	<i>reads</i>	<b>akhrí-y-ay-aa</b>	<i>he is reading</i>

In conjugation 3, the vowel stem is used before the /n/ of the progressive form.

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

### § 11.5.1 Present progressive expressing near future

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

**Béri waxaan ká dul boódayaa Maroodí.**

*Tomorrow I'm jumping over the Elephant.*

### § 11.5.2 Verbs without progressive forms

Some verbs are very rarely used in the progressive form. Above all, verbs denoting states (not actions) belong to that group. Some common verb of this type are:

**haystaa, haysataa** *holds, has*

**léeyahay, léedahay** *has, owns*

**rabaa, rabtaa** *wishes, wants*

**waayaa, waydaa** *cannot*

**yaallaa, taallaa** *is, lies, is situated*

**yaqaannaa, taqaannaa** *knows*

Some speakers avoid the use of progressive forms of certain verbs, e.g.

**hurdaa, huruddaa** *sleeps*

**karaa, kartaa** *can*

**socdaa, socotaa** *walks*

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

Waxaan **noqón doonaa** dhakhtár.

*I will become a doctor.*

Waxaan **doónayaa ín aan noqdo** dhakhtár.

*I want to become a doctor.*

## § 11.6 The habitual past tense

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

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

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

**Maalín waliba waa uu waraabín jiray moxóggii.**

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

As shown in the example, the auxiliary *used to* is not obligatory in English. In Somali, however, the habitual past is systematically used when describing actions that were repeated in the past. The simple past basically denotes actions that only occurred once.

## § 11.7 The future tense

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

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

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

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

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

**Anigu hadda ayaan tagayaa.** *I'm leaving now.*



## § 11.8 Survey of tenses and aspects

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

## § 11.9 Reduced verb forms

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

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

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

The reduced verb paradigm only has the suffix **-t-** in the feminine 3rd person singular (*she*) and the suffix **-n-** in the 1st person plural (*we*). Furthermore, the reduced present tense forms have a short **-a** instead of the long **-aa** that is found in the full forms.

There are reduced forms for all the tenses and aspects.

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

The reduced forms are used in two contexts:

– in positive main clauses, if the subject of the clause is focused,

**Imminka aniga laftayda ayaa ku heesa gabayadayda.**

*Now I myself sing my poems.*

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

**Waxa aad ka mid tahay hablaha heesa ee Soomaaliyeed.**

*You are one of the Somali girls that sing.*

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

**bisád húrdaya**    *a cat that is sleeping = a sleeping cat*

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

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

f. sg.        **soó socio-ta**

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

## § 11.10 The subjunctive mood

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

- in negative main clauses,
- in positive subordinate clauses appearing in the present or future tense and containing a subject word, and
- in wishes and indirect commands (optative constructions).

The present subjunctive ends in **-o** instead of **-aa**, whereas the forms with **-aan** are written in the same way in both the subjunctive and the ordinary present tense.

However, the subjunctive forms ending in **-áan** have a high tone on the second to last vowel position, pronounced as a falling tone over the duration of the long /aa/.

In the 2nd person singular present subjunctive, there are two alternative endings: **-to** and **-tid**. The latter has a somewhat higher stylistic value.

The present subjunctive endings are also used with the future tense auxiliary.

In the past subjunctive there are no different forms for the different persons and numbers, only one common form that generally ends in **-(i)n**.

	SIMPLE	PROGRESSIVE
CONJUGATION 1	<b>-in</b>	<b>-aynin / -ayn</b>
CONJUGATIONS 2 & 3	<b>-nin / -n</b>	<b>-naynin / -nayn</b>

**SUBJUNCTIVE****ASPECT:****TENSE:**

SIMPLE

PROGRESSIVE

HABITUAL

## PAST SUBJ.

**heesin****heésayn(in)****heési jirin**

## PRESENT SUBJ.

1 sg.

**heeso****heésayo**

2 sg.

**heesto****heésayso**/ **heestid**/ **heésaysid**

3 sg.m.

**heeso****heésayo**

3 sg.f.

**heesto****heésayso**

1 pl.

**heesno****heésayno**

2 pl.

**heestáan****heésaysáan**

3 pl.

**heesáan****heésayáan**

## FUTURE SUBJ.

1 sg.

**heési doono**

2 sg.

**heési doonto**/ **heési doontid**

3 sg.m.

**heési doono**

3 sg.f.

**heési doonto**

1 pl.

**heési doonno**

2 pl.

**heési doontáan**

3 pl.

**heési doonáan**

## § 11.10.1 Negative forms of the present progressive

The present progressive can be negated in two different ways.

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

The negative auxiliary **maayo** is the result of a contraction of the negation particle **má** and the historical progressive auxiliary **hayo**, **hayso** *holds*, which was originally used also in the positive form, but became contracted with the main verb, giving rise to the modern standard Somali progressive forms.

**cúnayaa** < (old) cuna hayaa

**má cúnayo** < (old) ma cuna hayo

**cúni maayo** < (old) cuni ma hayo

## § 11.10.2 Reduced subjunctive forms

When negation occurs together with subordination or together with focus, special reduced forms of the verb are used instead of the full subjunctive forms presented above. The endings of the reduced subjunctive are equal to the endings of the past subjunctive in the full paradigm presented in § 11.10.

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

The negation particle is always **aan** *not* together with these verb forms.

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

The reduced subjunctive forms are used in all negative subclauses.

**Markii ay aragtay in aanay cidi agteeda joogin ayaa ay ku booday oo ay cuntay.**

*When she saw that nobody was nearby, she jumped onto it and ate it.*

**Runtu waxa weeye in aanay qorraxdu dhulka ku wareegaysan.**

*The truth is that the sun is not revolving around the earth.*

The reduced subjunctive forms are also used in negative main clauses that contain a focus particle alongside the negative particle **aan** *not*.

**Maxaa aysan u lahayn carruurta qaar saaxiibbo?**

*Why do some of the children not have friends?*

### § 11.10.3 The optative construction

The optative construction consists of the subjunctive form of the verb preceded by the short subject pronoun in the 1st and 2nd person, and by the sentence particle **há** in the 3rd person. In the 1st and 2nd person, there is a high tone on the last vowel position in the stem of the verb. In the 3rd person, however, there is no high tone on the verb, only on the particle **há**.

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

In the 3rd person, the particle **há** can be followed by the indefinite subject pronoun **la** *one*, but it is never followed by the short subject pronouns **uu** *he* and **ay** *she, they*.

**Há la íi keeno seéf.** *Have someone bring me a sword.*

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



### § 11.10.3a The negative optative

These forms express a wish that something would not happen.

1 sg.	<b>yaanan heesín</b>	<i>don't make/let me sing</i>
2 sg.	<b>yaanad heesín</b>	<i>you shouldn't sing</i>
3 sg.m.	<b>yaanu heesín</b>	<i>don't let him sing</i>
3 sg.f.	<b>yaanay heesín</b>	<i>don't let her sing</i>
3 sg.ind.	<b>yaan la heesín</b>	<i>don't let anybody sing</i>
1 pl. excl.	<b>yaanan heesín</b>	<i>let's not sing</i>
1 pl. incl.	<b>yaynu heesín</b>	<i>let's not sing</i>
2 pl.	<b>yaanad heesín</b>	<i>you shouldn't sing</i>
3 pl.	<b>yaanay heesín</b>	<i>don't let them sing</i>

Maalin dambe **yaanan** meeshan kugu **arkin**.

*Don't let me see you here the next day.*

*I hope I won't see you here the next day.*

## § 11.10.4 The conditional construction

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

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

The most basic use of the conditional construction is in sentences with a conditional subclause. The conditional is then often used in both the main and the subordinate clause. For further details see § 15.4.2.

**Haddii digaagaddan aan siin lahaa cunto iyo biyo badan waxa ay ii dhali lahayd ukun fara badan.** *If I would give this hen a lot of food and water it would lay a lot of eggs for me.*

The conditional may also be used in a simple main clause when the situation is hypothetical.

**Maxaa aad soo beddelan lahaydeen?** *What would you have changed?*

The conditional construction is also used in subclauses to express a future, planned action from the perspective of the past. For further details see § 15.1.2.

**Bakaylihii waxa uu ku fekeray sidii uu waraabaha u khiyaameyn lahaa.** *The hare thought about how he would fool the hyena.*

## § 11.10.4a The negative conditional

The negative conditional can be formed in two ways, either with the auxiliary in the past/reduce subjunctive form **lahayn** or with special endings. The negation particle is **má** in main clauses and **aan** in subclauses.

### MAIN CLAUSE NEGATIVE CONDITIONAL FORMS WITH AUXILIARY

1 sg.	<b>ma aan</b>		<i>I would not have sung</i>
2 sg.	<b>ma aad</b>		<i>you would not have sung</i>
3 sg.m.	<b>ma uu</b>		<i>he would not have sung</i>
3 sg.f.	<b>ma ay</b>		<i>she would not have sung</i>
3 sg.ind.	<b>lama</b>	<b>heési lahayn</b>	<i>one would not have sung</i>
1 pl.	<b>ma aan</b>		<i>we would not have sung</i>
2 pl.	<b>ma aad</b>		<i>you would not have sung</i>
3 pl.	<b>ma ay</b>		<i>they would not have sung</i>

### SUBCLAUSE NEGATIVE CONDITIONAL FORMS WITH AUXILIARY

1 sg.	<b>aanan</b>		<i>I would not have sung</i>
2 sg.	<b>aanad / aadan</b>		<i>you would not have sung</i>
3 sg.m.	<b>aanu / uusan</b>		<i>he would not have sung</i>
3 sg.f.	<b>aanay / aysan</b>		<i>she would not have sung</i>
3 sg.ind.	<b>aan la</b>	<b>heési lahayn</b>	<i>one would not have sung</i>
1 pl.	<b>aanan</b>		<i>we would not have sung</i>
2 pl.	<b>aanad / aadan</b>		<i>you would not have sung</i>
3 pl.	<b>aanay / aysan</b>		<i>they would not have sung</i>

## INFLECTED NEGATIVE CONDITIONAL FORMS

The tense/mood vowel is /ee/ throughout the paradigm and all forms end in /n/.

1 sg.		<b>heeseen</b>	<i>would not have sung</i>
2 sg.		<b>heesteen</b>	
3 sg.m.		<b>heeseen</b>	
3 sg.f.	<b>ma / aan</b>	<b>heesteen</b>	
1 pl.		<b>heesneen</b>	
2 pl.		<b>heesteen</b>	
3 pl.		<b>heeseen</b>	

**Waxa hubaal ah haddii ay ahaan lahaayeen kalluumeysato in aanay dhibaatadaasi gaadheen.** *It's for sure that if they had been fishermen they wouldn't have run into those difficulties.*

## § 11.11 The imperative mood

The imperative singular form has no ending. It is therefore equivalent to the stem of the verb.

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

In most imperative forms, the high tone is on the second to last vowel position.

### Conjugation 1

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

Conjugation 2. The buffer consonant /y/ is inserted between the vowel of the stem and the vowel of the plural ending.

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

Conjugation 3. The vowel stem is used in the singular and the consonant stem in the plural. The final /a/ of the vowel stem changes to /o/ in the imperative, since it becomes word final.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to the general rule, the high tone in the singular form is on the final vowel position.

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

<sup>15</sup> The same type of alternation is found in feminine nouns like **hoóyo** *mother*, **hooyáda** *the mother*, with /o/ in word final position, but /a/ when a suffix is added.

Conjugation 1 verbs ending in **-aab-aa** (m.), **-ow-daa** (f.), as well as conjugation 3 verbs ending in **-aad-aa** (m.), **-aa-taa** (f.), have a singular imperative form ending in **-ów**.

<b>bilaab-aa</b>	<b>bilow-daa</b>	<i>begins</i>	<b>bilów</b>	<b>bilaáb-a</b>	<i>begin!</i>
<b>ogaad-aa</b>	<b>ogaa-taa</b>	<i>finds out</i>	<b>ogów</b>	<b>ogaád-a</b>	<i>find out!</i>

### § 11.11.1 The prohibitive construction

In Somali, negative imperative forms are not formed through the addition of a negation particle to the positive imperative forms. Instead there is a special prohibitive particle **ha** *don't*, which in the singular is followed by the reduced subjunctive form ending in **-in** after a consonant and **-n(in)** after a vowel.

In the plural, the suffix **-a** is added, just like in the imperative. This suffix is always added to the longer singular form.

Also like in the imperative, the high tone goes on the second to last vowel position of the full forms. The high tone remains in the same vowel position in the alternative, shorter forms.

#### CONJUGATION 1

<b>ha sheégin</b>	<i>don't say</i>	(addressing one person)
<b>ha sheeɡína</b>	<i>don't say</i>	(addressing several persons)

#### CONJUGATION 2

<b>ha fiirín(in)</b>	<i>don't look</i>	(addressing one person)
<b>ha fiirinína</b>	<i>don't look</i>	(addressing several persons)
<b>ha sameýn(in)</b>	<i>don't make</i>	(addressing one person)
<b>ha sameynína</b>	<i>don't make</i>	(addressing several persons)

#### CONJUGATION 3

<b>ha qaadán(in)</b>	<i>don't take</i>	(addressing one person)
<b>ha qaadanína</b>	<i>don't take</i>	(addressing several persons)

## § 11.12 Sound changes

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

### § 11.12.1 Conjugation 1

This group mainly contains verbs with stems that end in a consonant. The infinitive ends in **-i**. Verbal nouns ends in **-íd (-da)**. Many verbs in the 1st conjugation also have verbal nouns ending with **-ís (-ta)**.

**(a)** In the majority of verbs ending with /b, f, g, n, r, s/ preceded by a vowel, no sound changes occur.

1 sg.	<b>hees-aa</b>	<i>sings</i>	<b>sheeg-aa</b>	<i>tells</i>
2 sg.	<b>hees-taa</b>		<b>sheeg-taa</b>	
3 sg.m.	<b>hees-aa</b>		<b>sheeg-aa</b>	
3 sg.f.	<b>hees-taa</b>		<b>sheeg-taa</b>	
1 pl.	<b>hees-naa</b>		<b>sheeg-naa</b>	
2 pl.	<b>hees-taan</b>		<b>sheeg-taan</b>	
3 pl.	<b>hees-aan</b>		<b>sheeg-aan</b>	
progr.	<b>heés-ayaa</b>		<b>sheég-ayaa</b>	
fut.	<b>heés-i doonaa</b>		<b>sheég-i doonaa</b>	
imp. sg.	<b>héés</b>		<b>shéeg</b>	
imp. pl.	<b>heés-a</b>		<b>sheég-a</b>	
v. noun.	<b>hees-íd -da</b>		<b>sheeg-íd -da</b>	

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

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

progr.	<b>boód-ayaa</b>
fut.	<b>boód-i doonaa</b>

imp. sg.	<b>bóod</b>
imp. pl.	<b>boód-a</b>

v. noun. **bood-íd -da**

Other verbs of this type:

**aadaa** *goes, leaves, sets off*

**aaddaa, aádayaa, aádi, áad!, aáda!, aadíd -da**

**baqaa** *is frightened, fears*

**baqdaa, báqayaa, báqi, báq!, báqa!, baqíd -da**

**duwaa** *divert, turn aside*

**duwdaa, dúwayaa, dúwi, dúw!, dúwa!, duwíd -da**

**go'aa** *breaks (off, into two pieces)*

**go'daa, gó'ayaa, gó'i, gó'!, gó'a!, go'íd -da**

**qaadaa** *takes*

**qaaddaa, qaádayaa, qaádi, qáad!, qaáda!, qaadíd -da**

**raacaa** *accompanies*

**raacdaa, raácayaa, raáci, ráac!, raáca!, raacíd -da**



(c) In addition to the /t/ > /d/ change, when the stem ends in /c, h, x, ' / only preceded by a short /a/ and an initial consonant, the /a/ changes to /i/ before another /i/, i.e., before the endings in the infinitive and the verbal noun.

1 sg.	<b>bax-aa</b> <i>comes out, leaves</i>	<b>dhac-aa</b> <i>falls; happens</i>
2 sg.	<b>bax-daa</b>	<b>dhac-daa</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>bax-aa</b>	<b>dhac-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>bax-daa</b>	<b>dhac-daa</b>
1 pl.	<b>bax-naa</b>	<b>dhac-naa</b>
2 pl.	<b>bax-daan</b>	<b>dhac-daan</b>
3 pl.	<b>bax-aan</b>	<b>dhac-aan</b>
progr.	<b>báx-ayaa</b>	<b>dhác-ayaa</b>
fut.	<b>bíx-i doonaa</b>	<b>dhíc-i doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>báx</b>	<b>dhác</b>
imp. pl.	<b>báx-a</b>	<b>dhác-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>bix-íd -da</b>	<b>dhic-íd -da</b>

Other verbs of this type:

**ba'aa** *is destroyed,*

**ba'daa, bá'ayaa, bí'i, bá'!, bá'a!, bi'íd -da**

**kacaa** *gets up, rises*

**kacdaa, kácayaa, kíci, kác!, káca!, kicíd -da**

**naxaa** *becomes afraid*

**naxdaa, náxayaa, níxi, náx!, náxa!, nixíd -da**

(d) The /t/ of the suffixes merges with a preceding /l/ in the stem. The result is /sh/. Certain verbs with an /a/ in a monosyllabic stem changes /a/ → /e/ before an /i/.

1 sg.	<b>hel-aa</b> <i>finds, gets</i>	<b>gal-aa</b> <i>enters</i>
2 sg.	<b>heshaa</b>	<b>gashaa</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>hel-aa</b>	<b>gal-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>heshaa</b>	<b>gashaa</b>
1 pl.	<b>hel-naa</b>	<b>gal-naa</b>
2 pl.	<b>heshaan</b>	<b>gashaan</b>
3 pl.	<b>hel-aan</b>	<b>gal-aan</b>
progr.	<b>hél-ayaa</b>	<b>gál-ayaa</b>
fut.	<b>hél-i doonaa</b>	<b>gél-i doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>hél</b>	<b>gál</b>
imp. pl.	<b>hél-a</b>	<b>gál-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>hel-íd -da</b>	<b>gel-íd -da</b>

Other verbs of this type:

**yeelaa** *makes*

**yeeshaa, yeelayaa, yeeli, yéel!, yeéla!, yeelíd -da**

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

Such forms with non-initial /dh/ occur mainly in the north-west. In the north-east, the centre and the south, /dh/ has usually been replaced by /r/, which does not lead to any sound alternations.

1 sg.	<b>hadh-aa<sup>N</sup></b> <i>remains</i>	<b>har-aa<sup>S</sup></b> <i>remains</i>
2 sg.	<b>hadhaa</b> [hadhdhaa]	<b>har-taa</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>hadh-aa</b>	<b>har-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>hadhaa</b> [hadhdhaa]	<b>har-taa</b>
1 pl.	<b>hadh-naa</b>	<b>har-naa</b>
2 pl.	<b>hadhaan</b> [hadhdhaan]	<b>har-taan</b>
3 pl.	<b>hadh-aan</b>	<b>har-aan</b>
progr.	<b>hádth-ayaa</b>	<b>hár-ayaa</b>
fut.	<b>hádth-i doonaa</b>	<b>hár-i doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>hádth</b>	<b>hár</b>
imp. pl.	<b>hádth-a</b>	<b>hár-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>hadh-íd -da</b>	<b>har-íd -da</b>

Other verbs of this type:

**xidhaa / xiraa** *ties, closes, links, connects*

**xidhaa, xídhayaa, xídhi doonaa, xídh!, xídha!, xidhíd -da**

**/ xirtaa, xírayaa, xíri doonaa, xír!, xíra!, xiríd -da**

**gaadhaa / gaaraa** *reaches*

**gaadhaa, gaádhayaa, gaádhi doonaa, gaádh!, gaádha!, gaadhíd -da**

**/ gaartaa, gaárayaa, gaári doonaa, gaár!, gaára!, gaaríd -da**

(f) If the stem ends in /k/ or /m/, this consonant alternates with /g/ and /n/ if it is not followed by a vowel. With the exception of a few borrowed words, the phonemes /k/ and /m/ always need to be followed by a vowel.

1 sg.	<b>buk-aa</b> <i>is ill</i>	<b>tartam-aa</b> <i>competes</i>
2 sg.	<b>bug-taa</b>	<b>tartan-taa</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>buk-aa</b>	<b>tartam-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>bug-taa</b>	<b>tartan-taa</b>
1 pl.	<b>bug-naa</b>	<b>tartan-naa</b>
2 pl.	<b>bug-taan</b>	<b>tartan-taan</b>
3 pl.	<b>buk-aan</b>	<b>tartam-aan</b>
progr.	————	<b>tartám-ayaa</b>
fut.	<b>búk-i doonaa</b>	<b>tartám-i doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>búg</b>	<b>tártan</b>
imp. pl.	<b>búk-a</b>	<b>tartám-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>buk-íd -da</b>	<b>tartam-íd -da</b>

Other verbs of this type:

**salaamaa** *greet*s

**salaantaa, salaamayaa, salaami, saláan!, salaáma!, salaamíd -da**

**warramaa** *tells (news), reports*

**warrantaa, warramayaa, warrami, wárran!, warráma!, warramíd -da**

(g) If the stem ends in two consonants, they must be separated by an inserted vowel when they are not immediately followed by a vowel in the ending. Usually, it is the vowel already present in the stem that is copied.

1 sg.	<b>gudb-aa</b> <i>passes</i>	<b>dalb-aa</b> <i>requests</i>	<b>ord-aa</b> <i>runs</i>
2 sg.	<b>gudub-taa</b>	<b>dalab-taa</b>	<b>orod-daa</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>gudb-aa</b>	<b>dalb-aa</b>	<b>ord-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>gudub-taa</b>	<b>dalab-taa</b>	<b>orod-daa</b>
1 pl.	<b>gudub-naa</b>	<b>dalab-naa</b>	<b>orod-naa</b>
2 pl.	<b>gudub-taan</b>	<b>dalab-taan</b>	<b>orod-daan</b>
3 pl.	<b>gudb-aan</b>	<b>dalb-aan</b>	<b>ord-aan</b>
progr.	<b>gúdb-ayaa</b>	<b>dálb-ayaa</b>	<b>órd-ayaa</b>
fut.	<b>gúdb-i doonaa</b>	<b>dálb-i doonaa</b>	<b>órd-i doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>gúdub</b>	<b>dálab</b>	<b>órod</b>
imp. pl.	<b>gúdb-a</b>	<b>dálb-a</b>	<b>órd-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>gudb-íd -da</b>	<b>dalb-íd -da</b>	<b>ord-íd -da</b>

The reasons for these alternations are that a sequence of two consonants cannot occur word finally, only inside words between vowels, and a sequence of three consonants is never possible.

Other verbs of this type:

**turqaa** *pricks, pierces*

**turuqdaa, turqayaa, turqi, turuq!, turqa!, turqid -da**

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

1 sg.	<b>ark-aa</b> <i>sees</i>	<b>hadl-aa</b> <i>talks</i>	<b>kulm-aa</b> <i>meets</i>
2 sg.	<b>arag-taa</b>	<b>hadashaa</b>	<b>kulan-taa</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>ark-aa</b>	<b>hadl-aa</b>	<b>kulm-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>arag-taa</b>	<b>hadashaa</b>	<b>kulan-taa</b>
1 pl.	<b>arag-naa</b>	<b>hadal-naa</b>	<b>kulan-naa</b>
2 pl.	<b>arag-taan</b>	<b>hadashaan</b>	<b>kulan-taan</b>
3 pl.	<b>ark-aan</b>	<b>hadl-aan</b>	<b>kulm-aan</b>
progr.	<b>árk-ayaa</b>	<b>hádl-ayaa</b>	<b>kúlm-ayaa</b>
fut.	<b>árk-i doonaa</b>	<b>hádl-i doonaa</b>	<b>kúlm-i doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>árag</b>	<b>hádal</b>	<b>kúlan</b>
imp. pl.	<b>árk-a</b>	<b>hádl-a</b>	<b>kúlm-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>ark-íd -da</b>	<b>hadl-íd -da</b>	<b>kulm-íd -da</b>

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

Other verbs of this type:

**fahmaa** *understands*

**fahantaa, fáhmayaa, fáhmi, fáhan!, fáhma!, fahmíd -da**

**goglaa** *spreads out (a mat), makes the bed*

**gogoshaa, góglayaa, gógli, gógol!, gógla!, goglíd -da**

**maqlaa** *hears*

**maqashaa, máqlayaa, máqli, máqal!, máqla!, maqlíd -da**

This type of sound changes also occur in all anticausative verbs derived with the suffix /m/. See § 11.14.8.

**dhaawacaa** *hurts, injures, dhaawacdaa, dhaawacayaa...*

**dhaawacmaa** *gets hurt, is injured (without anyone causing it)*

**dhaawacantaa, dhaawácmayaa, dhaawácmi, no imp., dhaawacmíd -da**

(i) If the stem ends in /aab/, an alternation with /ow/ occurs before endings beginning with a consonant.

1 sg.	<b>bilaab-aa</b> <i>begins</i>	<b>magacaab-aa</b> <i>tells the name of</i>
2 sg.	<b>bilow-<u>daa</u></b>	<b>magacow-<u>daa</u></b>
3 sg.m.	<b>bilaab-aa</b>	<b>magacaab-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>bilow-<u>daa</u></b>	<b>magacow-<u>daa</u></b>
1 pl.	<b>bilow-<u>naa</u></b>	<b>magacow-<u>naa</u></b>
2 pl.	<b>bilow-<u>daan</u></b>	<b>magacow-<u>daan</u></b>
3 pl.	<b>bilaab-<u>aan</u></b>	<b>magacaab-<u>aan</u></b>
progr.	<b>bilaáb-ayaa</b>	<b>magacaáb-ayaa</b>
fut.	<b>bilaáb-i doonaa</b>	<b>magacaáb-i doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>bilów</b>	<b>magaców</b>
imp. pl.	<b>bilaáb-a</b>	<b>magacaáb-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>bilaab-íd –da</b>	<b>magacaab-íd –da</b>

One verb exhibits a lot of variation in the stem:

**illaabaa / illaawaa / illoobaa** *forgets*

**illowdaa, illaábayaa, illaábi doonaa, illów!, illaába!, illaabíd –da**

**illowdaa, illaáwaayaa, illaáwi doonaa, illów!, illaáwa!, illaawíd –da**

**illowdaa, illoóbayaa, illoóbi doonaa, illów!, illoóba!, illoobíd –da**

The diphthong <ow> may also – but less often – be spelled <aw>.

**bilawdaa, bilaw!, magacawdaa, magacaw!, illawdaa, illaw!**

Many other verbs that end in /aab/ have a less complex inflectional forms according to the pattern in (a) above, e.g. **jawaabaa, jawaabtaa** *answers*.

## § 11.12.2 Conjugation 2

This conjugation contains mainly verbs with a stem ending in /i/ or /ee/. When the ending begins with a vowel, the consonant /y/ is inserted as a buffer between the vowel of the stem and that in the suffix.

(a) A /t/ in the ending changes to /s/ after the vowel /i/. Between vowels the /n/ in the 1st person plural ending becomes /nn/.

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

progr.	<b>sií-nayaa</b>	<b>fiirí-nayaa</b>
fut.	<b>sií-n doonaa</b>	<b>fiirí-n doonaa</b>

imp. sg.	<b>síi</b>	<b>fiiri</b>
imp. pl.	<b>siíya</b>	<b>fiiríya</b>

v. noun.	<b>sií-n -ta</b>	<b>fiirí-n -ta</b>
----------	------------------	--------------------

Other verbs of this type:

**kariyaa** *cooks*

**karisaa, karínayaa, karín doonaa, kári!, kariya!, karín -ta**



(b) A final long /ee/ in the stem changes to the diphthong /ey/ when the ending begins with a consonant. The spelling with <ay> is more common. A /t/ in the ending changes to /s/ after /y/.

1 sg.	sameeyaa	<i>does, makes</i>	
2 sg.	samey-saa		or samay-saa
3 sg.m.	sameeyaa		
3 sg.f.	samey-saa		or samay-saa
1 pl.	samey-naa		or samay-naa
2 pl.	samey-saan		or samay-saan
3 pl.	sameeyaan		
progr.	samey-nayaa		or samay-nayaa
fut.	samey-n doonaa		or samay-n doonaa
imp. sg.	samée		
imp. pl.	sameéya		
v. noun.	samey-n -ta		or samay-n -ta

Other verbs of this type:

**geeyaa** *brings, transports*

**geysaa, geýnayaa, geýn doonaa, géé!, geéya!, geýn -ta**

(c) A handful of verbs with stems ending in a vowel exhibit a variation between conjugation 1 and 2.

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

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

	2 <sup>nd</sup> conjugation	1 <sup>st</sup> conjugation
1 sg.	akhriyaa	reads
2 sg.	akhri-saa	or akhri-daa
3 sg.m.	akhriyaa	
3 sg.f.	akhri-saa	or akhri-daa
1 pl.	akhrinnaa	or akhri-naa
2 pl.	akhri-saan	or akhri-daan
3 pl.	akhriyaan	
progr.	akhrí-nayaa	or akhriyayaa
fut.	akhrí-n doonaa	or akhriyi doonaa
imp. sg.	ákhri	
imp. pl.	akhríya	
v. noun.	akhrí-n -ta	or akhriyíd -da

Other verbs of this type:

xxxxxxxx

### § 11.12.3 Conjugation 3

This group contains mainly verbs with stems ending in /t/. As a beginner it is easy to mistake such masculine 3rd person singular forms for feminine forms. This /t/ is used to derive new verbs, especially autobenefactive<sup>16</sup> verbs, from other verbs or nouns.

Verbs in conjugation 3 have two different inflectional stems, one when the ending begins with a vowel and another when the ending begins with a consonant.

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

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

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

---

<sup>16</sup> Autobenefactive verbs express actions that have some positive effect for the person carrying out the action.

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

1 sg.	<b>hayst-aa</b> <i>holds, has</i>	<b>dhigt-aa</b> <i>studies</i>
2 sg.	<b>haysa-taa</b>	<b>dhiga-taa</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>hayst-aa</b>	<b>dhigt-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>haysa-taa</b>	<b>dhiga-taa</b>
1 pl.	<b>haysa-nnaa</b>	<b>dhiga-nnaa</b>
2 pl.	<b>haysa-taan</b>	<b>dhiga-taan</b>
3 pl.	<b>hayst-aan</b>	<b>dhigt-aan</b>
progr.	<b>haysá-nayaa</b>	<b>dhigá-nayaa</b>
fut.	<b>haysá-n doonaa</b>	<b>dhigá-n doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>haysó</b>	<b>dhigó</b>
imp. pl.	<b>hayst-a</b>	<b>dhigt-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>haysá-sho -da</b>	<b>dhigá-sho -da</b>

Other verbs of this type:

**bartaa** *learns*

**barataa, baránayaa, barán, baró!, bárta!, barásho -da**

**doortaa** *chooses, elects*

**doorataa, dooránayaa, doorán, dooró, doórta, doorásho -da**

**nastaa** *rests, relaxes*

**nasataa, nasánayaa, nasán, nasó!, násta!, nasásho -da**

**taabtaa** *touches*

**taabataa, taabánayaa, taabán, taabó!, taábta!, taabásho -da**

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

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

progr.	<b>booqá-nayaa</b>
fut.	<b>booqá-n doonaa</b>

imp. sg.	<b>booqó</b>
imp. pl.	<b>boóqd-a</b>

v. noun.	<b>booqá-sho -da</b>
----------	----------------------

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

1 sg. **gashad-aa** *puts on (clothes)*

2 sg. **gasha -taa**

3 sg.m. **gashad-aa**

3 sg.f. **gasha -taa**

1 pl. **gasha -nnaa**

2 pl. **gasha -taan**

3 pl. **gashad-aan**

progr. **gahsá-nayaa**

fut. **gashá-n doonaa**

imp. sg. **gashó**

imp. pl. **gashád-a**

v. noun. **gashá-sho -da**

Other verbs of this type:

**bogsadaa** *recovers*

**bogsataa, bogsánayaa, bogsán, bogsó!, bogsáda!, bogsásho -da**

**daawadaa** *watches*

**daawataa, daawánayaa, daawán, daawó!, daawáda, daawásho -da**

**dhaansadaa** *fetches water*

**dhaansataa, dhaansánayaa, dhaansán, dhaansó!, dhaansáda,**

**dhaansásho -da**

**eryadaa** *chases*

**eryataa, eryánayaa, eryán, eryó!, eryáda!, eryásho -da**

**karsadaa** *cooks for oneself*

**karsataa, karsánayaa, karsán, karsó!, karsáda, karsásho -da**

**kaydsadaa** *keeps, stores*

**kaydsataa, kaydsánayaa, kaydsán, kaydsó!, kaydsáda, kaydsásho -da**

**tabcadaa** *earns money for a certain purpose*

**tabcataa, tabcánayaa, tabcán, tabcól!, tabcáda!, tabcásho –da**

**tukadaa** *prays*

**tukataa, tukánayaa, tukán, tukól!, tukáda, tukásho –da**

(d) A few verbs in conjugation 3 have a consonant stem ending in /sh/ (from /l/+/t/) and a vowel stem ending in /la/.

1 sg. **dhash-aa** *am born*

2 sg. **dhala-taa**

3 sg.m. **dhash-aa**

3 sg.f. **dhala-taa**

1 pl. **dhala-nnaa**

2 pl. **dhala-taan**

3 pl. **dhash-aan**

progr. **dhalá-nayaa**

fut. **dhalá-n doonaa**

imp. sg. **dhaló**

imp. pl. **dhásh-a**

v. noun. **dhalá-sho -da**

Other verbs of this type:

**dabaashaa** *swims*

**dhabaalataa, dhabaalánayaa, dhabaalán doonaa, dabaalól!, dabaásha!, dabaalásho –da**

**yeeshaa** *earns, acquires, obtains*

**yeelataa, yeelánayaa, yeelán doonaa, yeelól!, yeésha!, yeelásho –da**

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

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

progr.	<b>qaadá-nayaa</b>
fut.	<b>qaadá-n doonaa</b>

imp. sg.	<b>qaadó</b>
imp. pl.	<b>qaat-a</b>

v. noun.	<b>qaadá-sho -da</b>
----------	----------------------

Other verbs of this type:

**quutaa** *eats, lives on sth.*

**quudataa, quudánayaa, quudán d., quudó, quúta, quudásho -da**

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

**wadataa, wadánayaa, wadán doonaa, wadó, wáta, wadá-sho -da**

**sitaa** *carries, wears*

**sidataa, sidánayaa, sidán doonaa, sidó, sita, sidásho -da**



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

1 sg.	<b>xidh</b> -aa <sup>N</sup>	[xidh <b>dh</b> -aa]	<b>xirt</b> -aa <sup>S</sup> <i>puts on (clothes)</i>
2 sg.	<b>xidha</b> -taa	[xidh <b>a</b> -taa]	<b>xira</b> -taa
3 sg.m.	<b>xidh</b> -aa	[xidh <b>dh</b> -aa]	<b>xirt</b> -aa
3 sg.f.	<b>xidha</b> -taa	[xidh <b>a</b> -taa]	<b>xira</b> -taa
1 pl.	<b>xidha</b> -nnaa	[xidh <b>a</b> -nnaa]	<b>xira</b> -nnaa
2 pl.	<b>xidha</b> -taan	[xidh <b>a</b> -taan]	<b>xira</b> -taan
3 pl.	<b>xidh</b> -aan	[xidh <b>dh</b> -aa]	<b>xirt</b> -aan
progr.	<b>xidhá</b> -nayaa		<b>xirá</b> -nayaa
fut.	<b>xidhá</b> -n doonaa		<b>xirá</b> -n doonaa
imp. sg.	<b>xidhó</b>		<b>xiró</b>
imp. pl.	<b>xídha</b>	[xidhdh-a]	<b>xírt</b> -a
v. noun.	<b>xidhá</b> -sho -da		<b>xirá</b> -sho -da

(g) Two verbs have a vowel stem ending with /o/ instead of /a/.

1 sg.	<b>socd-aa</b> <i>walks</i>	<b>noqd-aa</b> <i>becomes</i>
2 sg.	<b>soco-taa</b>	<b>noqo-taa</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>socd-aa</b>	<b>noqd-aa</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>soco-taa</b>	<b>noqo-taa</b>
1 pl.	<b>soco-nnaa</b>	<b>noqo-nnaa</b>
2 pl.	<b>soco-taan</b>	<b>noqo-taan</b>
3 pl.	<b>socd-aan</b>	<b>noqd-aan</b>
progr.	<b>socó-nayaa</b>	<b>noqó-nayaa</b>
fut.	<b>socó-n doonaa</b>	<b>noqó-n doonaa</b>
imp. sg.	<b>socó</b>	<b>noqó</b>
imp. pl.	<b>sócd-a</b>	<b>nóqd-a</b>
v. noun.	<b>socó-sho -da</b>	<b>noqó-sho -da</b>

**(h)** Several verbs in conjugation 3 have a consonant stem ending in /aad/, whereas the vowel stem just ends in /aa/. This mainly happens in verbs that are derived from adjectives. The stem in the imperative singular ends in /ow/. These verbs have two verbal nouns. One ends in **-nsho** is masculine, the other ends in **-n** (like in the 2nd conjugation) and is feminine.

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

progr.	<b>dhammaá-nayaa</b>
fut.	<b>dhammaá-n doonaa</b>

imp. sg.	<b>dhammów</b>
imp. pl.	<b>dhammaád-a</b>

v. noun. **dhammaá-n -ta** or **dhammaá-n-sho -ha**

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

Other verbs of this type:

<b>og</b>	<i>aware</i>
<b>ogaadaa</b>	<i>becomes aware, finds out</i>
<b>ogaataa, ogaánayaa, ogaán, ogów!, ogaáda!, ogaán -ta/ogaánsho -ha</b>	

## § 11.13 Irregular verbs

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

### § 11.13.1 **yahay** *is*

The verb **yahay** does not have progressive forms. It also does not have present subjunctive forms in the way other verbs do. Instead, there are three different forms for different functions.

PRESENT	<i>is</i>			REDUCED PRESENT
1 sg.	<b>ahay</b>	1 pl.	<b>nahay</b>	<b>ah</b>
2 sg.	<b>tahay</b>	2 pl.	<b>tihiin</b>	<i>(all persons)</i>
3 sg. m.	<b>yahay</b>	3 pl.	<b>yihiin</b>	<b>ahi (ihi)</b>
3 sg. f.	<b>tahay</b>			<i>(subject marked)</i>

PAST	<i>was</i>			REDUCED PAST
1 sg.	<b>ahaa</b>	1 pl.	<b>ahayn</b>	default <b>ahaa</b>
2 sg.	<b>ahayd</b>	2 pl.	<b>ahaydeen</b>	3 sg. f. <b>ahayd</b>
3 sg. m.	<b>ahaa</b>	3 pl.	<b>ahaayeen</b>	1 pl. <b>ahayn</b>
3 sg. f.	<b>ahayd</b>			

INFINITIVE	<i>be</i>	VERBAL NOUN	<i>being, to be</i>
	<b>ahaán</b>		<b>ahaán -ta / ahaánsho -ha</b>

IMPERATIVE	<i>be!</i>		
2 sg.	<b>ahów</b>	2 pl.	<b>ahaáda</b>

#### NEGATIVE PRESENT “SUBJUNCTIVE” IN MAIN CLAUSES

1 sg.	<b>má ihi (ahi)</b>	1 pl.	<b>má nihin</b>
2 sg.	<b>má tihid</b>	2 pl.	<b>má tihin</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>má aha</b>	3 pl.	<b>má aha</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>má aha</b>		

## PRESENT “SUBJUNCTIVE” IN SUBCLAUSES WITH A SUBJECT WORD

1 sg.	<b>ahay</b>	1 pl.	<b>nahay</b>
2 sg.	<b>tahay</b>	2 pl.	<b>tihiiin</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>yahay</b>	3 pl.	<b>yihiiin</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>tahay</b>		

These forms are identical to the ordinary present tense forms used in main clauses.

## PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE IN THE OPTATIVE CONSTRUCTION

1 sg.	<b>aan ahaádo</b>	1 pl.	<b>aan ahaánno</b>
2 sg.	<b>aad ahaáto</b>	2 pl.	<b>aad ahaáteen (ahaátaan)</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>há ahaado</b>	3 pl.	<b>há ahaadeen (ahaadaan)</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>há ahaato</b>		

The same forms (except those ending in **-een**) are also commonly used after **waa in** *must, ought to*.

## PAST & REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE

(*all persons*) **ahayn**

### § 11.13.2 Adjectives with copular verb suffixes

It is disputed among linguists whether Somali has adjectives or not. Some consider these “quality words” to be verbs due to the inflectional forms that they exhibit. Others consider these forms to be contractions of an adjective and a form of the copular verb **yahay**.

If we consider the forms below to be contractions, all forms of the copular verb **yahay** that have no prefix and therefore begin with the root **ah-**, as well as all negative forms, even some with a prefix, are contracted with a preceding adjective. Since the root **ah-** disappears, the reduced present tense form **ah** leaves no trace whatsoever of the verb, and the adjective is used in its basic form as a modifier of a noun.

PRESENT	<i>am/are/is small</i>		REDUCED PRESENT
1 sg.	<b>yar ahay</b>	1 pl. <b>yaryar nahay</b>	<b>yar</b>
2 sg.	<b>yar tahay</b>	2 pl. <b>yaryar tihiiin</b>	<i>(all persons)</i>
3 sg. m.	<b>yar yahay</b>	3 pl. <b>yaryar yihiin</b>	<b>yari</b>
3 sg. f.	<b>yar tahay</b>		<i>(subject marked)</i>
PAST	<i>was/were small</i>		REDUCED PAST
1 sg.	<b>yaraa</b>	1 pl. <b>yaryarayn</b>	default <b>yaraa</b>
2 sg.	<b>yarayd</b>	2 pl. <b>yaryaraydeen</b>	3 sg. f. <b>yarayd</b>
3 sg. m.	<b>yaraa</b>	3 pl. <b>yaryaraayeen</b>	1 pl. <b>yaryarayn</b>
3 sg. f.	<b>yarayd</b>		
INFINITIVE	<i>to be small</i>	VERBAL NOUN	<i>being small, to be small</i>
	<b>yaraán</b>		<b>yaraánsho –ha</b>
IMPERATIVE	<i>be small!</i>		
2 sg.	<b>yarów</b>	2 pl. <b>yaraáda</b>	
NEGATIVE PRESENT “SUBJUNCTIVE”			
1 sg.	<b>má yari</b>	1 pl. <b>má yaryarin</b>	
2 sg.	<b>má yarid</b>	2 pl. <b>má yaryaridin</b>	
3 sg. m./f.	<b>má yara</b>	3 pl. <b>má yaryara</b>	
PRESENT “SUBJUNCTIVE” IN SUBCLAUSES WITH A SUBJECT WORD			
1 sg.	<b>yar ahay</b>	1 pl. <b>yaryar nahay</b>	
2 sg.	<b>yar tahay</b>	2 pl. <b>yaryar tihiiin</b>	
3 sg. m.	<b>yar yahay</b>	3 pl. <b>yaryar yihiin</b>	
3 sg. f.	<b>yar tahay</b>		
PAST & REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE			
	all persons	<b>yarayn</b>	

All the forms in the tables above that are written as two separate words may equally well be written jointly, as a single word. Both ways of writing are almost equally common. Although, for some special cases involving sound changes see § 4.1.1.

### § 11.13.2a The use of *yahay* 'is'

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

**Aamina waa macallimad.** *Amina is a TEACHER.*

Amina PR.FOC teacher(F)

**Gacantu waa wasakh.** *The hand is DIRTY.*

the.hand PR.FOC dirty.thing

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

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

the.hand PR.FOC small is

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

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

thing FOC from missing (is)

**Eraygeé baa kú habboon × sáwirka?**

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

*WHICH WORD is suitable for the picture?*

### § 11.13.2b Different equivalents of English 'is'

**yahay** *is* (mainly describing some kind of quality)

**Gabartaasi waa aqli badan tahay.** *That girl is INTELLIGENT.*

**Duqsigu wuxuu ka mid yahay cayayaanka yaryar oo duula.**

the.fly.SBJ FIN.FOC.he of one is the.insects small and flying

*The fly belongs to the SMALL FLYING INSECTS.*

**jiraa** *exists, dwells, is present.* This verb is mainly used to express the existence of something, as opposed to its non-existence. A place is often expressed in clauses with this verb. The place is usually expressed without any preposition before the verb.

**Itoobiya waxa jira hal milyan oo carruur ah oo cudurka HIV uu agoon ka dhigay.** *In Ethiopia there are one million children that the HIV disease has made into orphans.*

The preposition **ku** is often used, however, if the place is some kind of “container” or delimited space.

**Nibirigu badweynta buu ku jiraa, xeebtana uma soo dhawaado.**

*The whale dwells (lives) in the ocean, and it doesn't come close to the coast.*

**Doolligu ma ku dhex jiraa baaldiga?** *Is the mouse inside the bucket?*

**joogaa** *stands, stays, is located, is present.* This verb is mainly used when stating the place where a living being can be found. It is mostly used without any preposition referring to the place, but **la** *with* is used when referring to company.

**Libaaxii wuxuu dawacadii weyddiiyey xaggee buu joogaa.**

*The lion asked the jackal where he is.*

**Macallinku ma hor joogaa sabuuradda?**

*Is the teacher standing in front of the blackboard?*

**Waxa uu la joogaa ari.** *He is (staying) with the goats and sheep.*

**yaallaa** *is positioned, lies, is situated.* This verb is mainly used when stating the place where an object is located. It is mostly used with the preposition **ku** to refer to a position inside a room or space, but without a preposition when referring to a position on a surface.

**Baaskiilku wuxuu yaallaa dhulka.**

*The bike is lying on the ground.*

**Dugsigani waxa uu ku dhex yaallaa kaynta.**

*This school is situated in the middle of the forest.*

**Farmasi ma ku yaallaa tuuladiinna?**

*Is there a pharmacy in your village?*



### § 11.13.3 **leeyahay** *has*

This verb has developed from a combination of the adjectival root **leh** *owning, having* and the verb **yahay** *is*. It doesn't have progressive forms, nor does it have present subjunctive forms in the way other verbs do. Instead, there are three different forms for different functions.

PRESENT	<i>has</i>			REDUCED PRESENT
1 sg.	<b>leeyahay</b>	1 pl.	<b>leenahay</b>	<b>leh</b>
2 sg.	<b>leedahay</b>	2 pl.	<b>leedihiin</b>	<i>(all persons)</i>
3 sg. m.	<b>leeyahay</b>	3 pl.	<b>leeyihiin</b>	<b>lihi</b>
3 sg. f.	<b>leedahay</b>			<i>(subject marked)</i>

PAST	<i>had</i>			REDUCED PAST
1 sg.	<b>lahaa</b>	1 pl.	<b>lahayn</b>	default <b>lahaa</b>
2 sg.	<b>lahayd</b>	2 pl.	<b>lahaydeen</b>	3 sg. f. <b>lahayd</b>
3 sg. m.	<b>lahaa</b>	3 pl.	<b>lahaayeen</b>	1 pl. <b>lahayn</b>
3 sg. f.	<b>lahayd</b>			

INFINITIVE	<i>have</i>	VERBAL NOUN	<i>having, to have</i>
	<b>lahaán</b>		<b>lahaánsho -ha</b>

IMPERATIVE	<i>be!</i>		
2 sg.	<b>lahów</b>	2 pl.	<b>lahaáda</b>

#### NEGATIVE PRESENT "SUBJUNCTIVE" IN MAIN CLAUSES

1 sg.	<b>má lihi</b>	1 pl.	<b>má lihin</b>
2 sg.	<b>má lihid</b>	2 pl.	<b>má lihidin</b>
3 sg. m.	<b>má laha</b>	3 pl.	<b>má laha</b>
3 sg. f.	<b>má laha</b>		

## PRESENT “SUBJUNCTIVE” IN SUBCLAUSES WITH A SUBJECT WORD

1 sg.	<b>leeyahay</b>	1 pl.	<b>leenahay</b>
2 sg.	<b>leedahay</b>	2 pl.	<b>leedihiin</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>leeyahay</b>	3 pl.	<b>leeyihiin</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>leedahay</b>		

These forms are identical to the ordinary present tense forms used in main clauses.

## PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE IN THE OPTATIVE CONSTRUCTION

1 sg.	<b>aan lahaádo</b>	1 pl.	<b>aan lahaánno</b>
2 sg.	<b>aad lahaáto</b>	2 pl.	<b>aad lahaáteen (lahaátaan)</b>
3 sg.m.	<b>há lahaado</b>	3 pl.	<b>há lahaadeen (lahaadaan)</b>
3 sg.f.	<b>há lahaato</b>		

The same forms (except those ending in **-een**) are also commonly used after **waa in** *must, ought to*.

## PAST & REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE

(*all persons*) **lahayn**

### § 11.13.3a Equivalents of English *has*

**leeyahay, leedahay** – is used to express that you own something or have a relationship with something or somebody, but you don’t need to have it with you.

**haystaa, haysataa** – is used to express that you have something with you; you have it, you are holding it or you are using it, but you are not necessarily the owner of it.

## § 11.13.4 **yaallaa** *lies, is*

This verb has no progressive forms.

PRESENT	1 SG.	<b>aallaa</b>	/ aal
	2 SG.	<b>taallaa</b>	/ taal
	3 SG.M.	<b>yaallaa</b>	/ yaal
	3 SG.F.	<b>taallaa</b>	/ taal
	1 PL.	<b>naalnaa / naallaa</b>	/ naal
	2 PL.	<b>taallaan</b>	(coll. <b>taalliin</b> )
	3 PL.	<b>yaallaan</b>	(coll. <b>yaalliin</b> )
PAST	1 SG.	<b>aallay</b>	/ iil / iillay
	2 SG.	<b>taallay</b>	/ tiil / tiillay
	3 SG.M.	<b>yaallay</b>	/ yiil / yiillay
	3 SG.F.	<b>taallay</b>	/ tiil / tiillay
	1 PL.	<b>naalnay / naallay</b>	/ niil / niilnay / niillay
	2 PL.	<b>taalleen</b>	/ tiilleen
	3 PL.	<b>yaalleen</b>	/ yiilleen
INFINITIVE		<b>oolli</b>	
IMPERATIVE		<i>not used</i>	
PRES. SUBJUNCTIVE	1 SG.	<b>aallo</b>	/ aal
	2 SG.	<b>taallo</b>	/ taal
	3 SG.M.	<b>yaallo</b>	/ yaal
	3 SG.F.	<b>taallo</b>	/ taal
	1 PL.	<b>naalno / naallo</b>	/ naal
	2 PL.	<b>taalláan</b>	
	3 PL.	<b>yaalláan</b>	
PAST & RED. SUBJUNCTIVE		<b>oollin</b>	

### § 11.13.5 **yaqaannaa** *knows*

This verb has no progressive forms.

PRESENT	1 SG.	<b>aqaannaa</b> / <b>aqaan</b>
	2 SG.	<b>taqaannaa</b> / <b>taqaan</b>
	3 SG.M.	<b>yaqaannaa</b> / <b>yaqaan</b>
	3 SG.F.	<b>taqaannaa</b> / <b>taqaan</b>
	1 PL.	<b>naqaannaa</b> / <b>naqaan</b>
	2 PL.	<b>taqaannaan</b> (coll. <b>taqaanniin</b> )
	3 PL.	<b>yaqaannaan</b> (coll. <b>yaqaanniin</b> )
PAST	1 SG.	<b>aqaannay</b> / <b>iqiin</b> / <b>iqiinnay</b>
	2 SG.	<b>taqaannay</b> / <b>tiqiin</b> / <b>tiqiinnay</b>
	3 SG.M.	<b>yaqaannay</b> / <b>yiqiin</b> / <b>yiqiinnay</b>
	3 SG.F.	<b>taqaannay</b> / <b>tiqiin</b> / <b>tiqiinnay</b>
	1 PL.	<b>naqaannay</b> / <b>niqiin</b> / <b>niqiinnay</b>
	2 PL.	<b>taqaanneen</b> / <b>tiqinneen</b>
	3 PL.	<b>yaqaanneen</b> / <b>yiqinneen</b>
INFINITIVE		<b>aqoon</b>
IMPERATIVE		<i>not used, replaced by <b>ogow, ogaáda</b></i>
PRES. SUBJUNCTIVE	1 SG.	<b>aqaanno</b> / <b>aqaan</b>
	2 SG.	<b>taqaanno</b> / <b>taqaan</b>
	3 SG.M.	<b>yaqaanno</b> / <b>yaqaan</b>
	3 SG.F.	<b>taqaanno</b> / <b>taqaan</b>
	1 PL.	<b>naqaanno</b> / <b>naqaan</b>
	2 PL.	<b>taqaannáan</b>
	3 PL.	<b>yaqaannáan</b>
PAST & RED. SUBJUNCTIVE	<b>aqoon(in)</b>	

### § 11.13.6 yimaaddaa comes

PRESENT	1 SG.	imaaddaa
	2 SG.	timaaddaa
	3 SG.M.	yimaaddaa
	3 SG.F.	timaaddaa
	1 PL.	nimaadnaa
	2 PL.	timaaddaan
	3 PL.	yimaaddaan
PAST	1 SG.	imid / imi (imaadday)
	2 SG.	timid / timi (timaadday)
	3 SG.M.	yimid / yimi (yimaadday)
	3 SG.F.	timid / timi (timaadday)
	1 PL.	nimid / nimi (nimaadnay)
	2 PL.	timaaddeen
	3 PL.	yimaaddeen
IMPERATIVE		kaálay, kaaláya <sup>N</sup> / imów, imaáda <sup>S</sup>
INFINITIVE		imán <sup>N</sup> / imaán <sup>S</sup>
PROGRESSIVE		imánayaa <sup>N</sup> / imaánayaa <sup>S</sup>
PRES. SUBJUNCTIVE	1 SG.	imaaddo
	2 SG.	timaaddo
	3 SG.M.	yimaaddo
	3 SG.F.	timaaddo
	1 PL.	nimaadno
	2 PL.	timaaddáan
	3 PL.	yimaaddáan
PAST & RED. SUBJUNCTIVE		iman(in) <sup>N</sup> / imaan(in) <sup>S</sup>

## § 11.13.7 **yiraahdaa** *says*

This irregular verb has developed parallel regular forms, thus giving rise to the completely regular verb **dhahaa** *says*.

PRESENT	1 SG.	<b>iraahdaa</b> <sup>S</sup>	/	<b>idhaahdaa</b> <sup>N</sup>	/	<b>dhahaa</b> <sup>S</sup>
	2 SG.	<b>tiraahdaa</b>	/	<b>tidhaahdaa</b>	/	<b>dhahdaa</b>
	3 SG.M.	<b>yiraahdaa</b>	/	<b>yidhaahdaa</b>	/	<b>dhahaa</b>
	3 SG.F.	<b>tiraahdaa</b>	/	<b>tidhaahdaa</b>	/	<b>dhahdaa</b>
	1 PL.	<b>niraahnaa</b>	/	<b>nidhaahnaa</b>	/	<b>dhahnaa</b>
	2 PL.	<b>tiraahdaan</b>	/	<b>tidhaahdaan</b>	/	<b>dhahdaan</b>
	3 PL.	<b>yiraahdaan</b>	/	<b>yidhaahdaan</b>	/	<b>dhahaan</b>
PAST	1 SG.	<b>iri</b>	/	<b>idhi</b>	/	<b>dhahay</b>
	2 SG.	<b>tiri</b>	/	<b>tidhi</b>	/	<b>dhahday</b>
	3 SG.M.	<b>yiri</b>	/	<b>yidhi</b>	/	<b>dhahay</b>
	3 SG.F.	<b>tiri</b>	/	<b>tidhi</b>	/	<b>dhahday</b>
	1 PL.	<b>niri</b>	/	<b>nidhi</b>	/	<b>dhahnay</b>
	2 PL.	<b>tiraahdeen</b>	/	<b>tidhaahdeen</b>	/	<b>dhahdeen</b>
	3 PL.	<b>yiraahdeen</b>	/	<b>yidhaadheen</b>	/	<b>dhaheen</b>
IMPERATIVE		<b>dhéh, dháha</b>				
INFINITIVE		<b>orán</b>	/	<b>odhán</b>	/	<b>dhíhi</b>
PROGRESSIVE		<b>oránayaa</b>	/	<b>odhánayaa</b>	/	<b>dháhayaa</b>
PRES. SUBJUNCTIVE	1 SG.	<b>iraahdo</b>	/	<b>idhaahdo</b>	/	<b>dhaho</b>
	2 SG.	<b>tiraahdo</b>	/	<b>tidhaahdo</b>	/	<b>dhahdo</b>
	3 SG.M.	<b>yiraahdo</b>	/	<b>yidhaahdo</b>	/	<b>dhaho</b>
	3 SG.F.	<b>tiraahdo</b>	/	<b>tidhaahdo</b>	/	<b>dhahdo</b>
	1 PL.	<b>niraahno</b>	/	<b>nidhaahno</b>	/	<b>dhahno</b>
	2 PL.	<b>tiraahdáan</b>	/	<b>tidhaahdáan</b>	/	<b>dhahdáan</b>
	3 PL.	<b>yiraahdáan</b>	/	<b>yidhaahdáan</b>	/	<b>dhaháan</b>
PAST & RED. SUBJUNCTIVE		<b>oran(in)</b>	/	<b>odhan(in)</b>	/	<b>dhihin</b>

## § 11.14 Formation of verbs

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

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

### § 11.14.1 Inchoative verbs in *-oobaa / -oodaa*

These suffixes are added to nouns. They produce verbs that describe the result of a change of state of the subject of the verb.

<b>biyó -ha</b> <i>water</i>	<b>biyoobaa, biyowdaa</b> <i>becomes water, melts</i>
<b>wasákh -da</b> <i>dirt, filth</i>	<b>wasakhoobaa, wasakhowdaa</b> <i>becomes dirty</i>
<b>cáro<sup>S</sup> -da</b>	<b>caroodaa, carootaa<sup>S</sup></b>
<i>/ cádho<sup>N</sup> -da</i> <i>anger</i>	<i>/ cadhoodaa, cadhoota<sup>N</sup></i> <i>becomes angry</i>
<b>geerí -da</b> <i>death, passing away</i>	<b>geeriyoodaa, geeriyootaa</b> <i>passes away</i>

### § 11.14.2 Inchoative verbs in *-adaa*

This suffix can be added any adjective. It corresponds to English *become*, expressing that the subject of the clause acquires the quality expressed by the adjective.

<b>kulúl</b> <i>warm</i>	<b>kululaadaa, kululaataa</b> <i>becomes warm</i>
--------------------------	---

### § 11.14.3 Causative verbs in *-eeyaa*

These verbs are transitive and require an object noun. They are mostly derived from adjectives, but also from certain nouns denoting qualities.

They denote an action that causes the object of the verb to gain the quality in question.

<b>wasákh –da</b> <i>filth</i>	<b>wasakheeyaa, wasakhaysaa</b> <i>sb. makes sth. dirty, pollutes</i>
<b>fudúd</b> <i>easy</i>	<b>fududeeyaa, fududaysaa</b> <i>sb. makes sth. easy, simplifies</i>
<b>kulúl</b> <i>hot</i>	<b>kululeeyaa, kululaysaa</b> <i>sb. heats sth.</i>
<b>yár</b> <i>small</i>	<b>yareeyaa, yaraysaa</b> <i>sb. makes sth. small, reduces</i>

#### § 11.14.4 Causative verbs in *-iyaa*

These verbs are transitive and require an object noun. They are mostly derived from other verbs, but also from certain nouns. Typically, they express that a person acts in order for something to happen or in order to make somebody else carry out an intended action.

**aadaa, aaddaa**

*sb. goes, sb. sets off*

**aaddiyaa, aaddisaa**

*sb. makes sb./sth. go/move somewhere*

*= sb. leads/takes sb./sth. somewhere*

**buuxaa, buuxdaa**

*sth. is full*

**buuxiyaa, buuxisaa**

*sb. makes sth. become full*

*= sb. fills sth.*

**guuraa, guurtaa**

*sth. moves*

**guuriyaa, guurisaa**

*sb. makes sth. move*

*= sb. copies sth.*

**karaa, kartaa**

*sth. boils*

**kariyaa, karisaa**

*sb. makes sth. boil*

*= sb. boils/cooks sth.*

**qalloocaa, qalloocdaa**

*sth. is bent, curved*

**qalloociyaa, qalloocisaa**

*sb. makes sth. bent*

*= sb. bends sth.*

**uraa, urtaa**

*sth. smells*

**uriyaa, urisaa**

*sb. makes sth. smell*

*= sb. feels the smell of sth. = sb. smells sth.*



Notice that in some verbs the /i/ of the suffix affects sounds in the root.

If a root with only one syllable ends in /x/, /c/ or /'/, a preceding /a/ tends to change to /i/.

**baxaa, baxdaa**

*sb./sth. comes out*

**bixiyaa, bixisaa**

*sb. makes sth. come out*

*= sb. takes out sth.*

In a few other verb roots with only one syllable, /a/ changes to /e/.

**gala, gashaa**

*sb. enters*

**geliyaa, gelisaa**

*sb. makes sb./sth. enter, go in*

*= sb. inserts sth.*

/g/ and /q/ change into /j/ before the causative suffix /i/.

**daaqaa, daaqdaa**

*sth. eats grass, grazes*

**daajiyaa, daajisaa**

*sb. makes sth. eat grass, graze*

*sb. pastures sth.*

**joogaa, joogtaa**

*sb./sth. stands, stops*

**joojiyaa, joojisaa**

*sb. makes sb./sth. stand, stop*

*= sb. stops sb./sth.*

**muuqdaa, muuqataa**

*sth. appears,*

*sth. can be seen*

**muujiyaa, muujisaa**

*sb. makes sth. appear, be seen*

*= sb. shows sth.*

In a few verbs /l/ also changes into /j/ before the causative -i.

**qallalaa, qallashaa**

*sth. dries,*

*sth. becomes dry*

**qallajiyaa, qallajisaa**

*sb. makes sth. become dry*

*= sb. dries sth.*

When this suffix is added to a noun, the verb describes the state into which the object noun changes as a result of the action that is carried out by the subject of the verb.

<b>kuláyl -ka</b> <i>heat</i>	<b>kulayliyaa, kulaylisaa</b> <i>heats something</i>
<b>nadíif -ka</b> <i>cleanliness</i>	<b>nadiifiyaa, nadiifisaa</b> <i>cleans something</i>
<b>qábow -ga</b> <i>coldness</i>	<b>qaboojiyaa, qaboojisaa</b> <i>cools something</i>
<b>qaýb -ta</b> <i>part</i>	<b>qaybiyaa, qaybisaa</b> <i>divides something</i>

### § 11.14.5 Causative verbs in –siiyaa

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

<b>faham –ka</b> <i>understanding</i>	<b>fahamsiiyaa, fahamsiisaa</b> <i>sb. makes sb. understand sth., sb. explains sth. to sb.</i>
<b>dareen –ka</b> <i>feeling</i>	<b>dareensiiyaa, dareensiisaa</b> <i>sb. makes sb. else feel sth.</i>
<b>socod –ka</b> <i>motion</i>	<b>socodsiiyaa, socodsiisaa</b> <i>sb. puts sth. in motion</i>

### § 11.14.6 Anticausative verbs in –maa

These verbs are derived from other verbs. They express events that occur without anyone explicitly causing them.

**bilaabaa, bilowdaa** *sb. starts sth., begins with sth., begins to do sth.*  
**bilaabmaa, bilaabantaa** *sth. starts, begins*

**Waqtigee ayey carruurta bilaabaan hadalkooda?**  
*When do children begin to talk?*

**Jannaayo waa bisha uu sannadku ku bilaabmo.**  
*January is the month that the year begins with.*

**Weertu waxay ka bilaabantaa xaraf weyn.**  
*The clause begins with a capital letter.*

**dhaawacaa** *sb. hurts sb. else*

**dhaawacmaa** *sb. is hurt*

**Lúg baa uu ká dhaawacmay.**

*He was hurt in a leg.*

### § 11.14.7 Autobenefactive verbs in *-(s)taa / -(sa)daa*

These verbs are derived from other verbs through the addition of /t/. They usually express an action that is somehow beneficial to the person who is carrying it out and they are therefore referred to as autobenefactive verbs. They belong to the 3rd conjugation.

**beeraa, beertaa** *grows, cultivates*

**beertaa, beerataa** *grows, cultivates for oneself*

**dhisaa, dhistaa** *builds*

**dhistaa, dhisataa** *builds for oneself*

**baraa, bartaa** *teaches*

**bartaa, barataa** *teaches oneself, i.e. learns, studies*

Notice that the feminine form of the basic verb and the masculine form of the autobenefactive verb are often identical.

Some verbs also contain an /s/ before the autobenefactive /t/. This gives verbs ending in **-staa** after a vowel, and **-sadaa** after a consonant.

**kariyaa, karisaa** *boils, cooks (food)*

**karsadaa, karsataa** *cooks for oneself*

**joogaa, joogtaa** *is situated, stands*

**joogsadaa, joogsataa** *stops*

**fiiriyaa, fiirisaa** *looks at X*

**ú fiirsadaa, fiirsataa** *observes X*

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

**kaaliyaa, kaalisaa** *supports, helps*

/kaal/+/s+/t+/aa/ > /kaal/+/sadaa/ >

**kaashadaa, kaashataa** *gets support, gets help*

## § 12. Phrases and word order

A typical Somali clause consists of three kinds of phrases:

- NOUN PHRASES (NP),
- A PARTICLE PHRASE (PP),
- A VERB PHRASE (VP).

The order of these phrases is quite free. It depends mostly on the order in which the speaker wishes to present the information. There is only one strict rule for the order of phrases:

The particle phrase must occur somewhere before the verb phrase.

Noun phrases may however occur anywhere in a clause. That gives us the following phrase order template:

(NP NP) **PP** (NP NP) **VP** (NP NP)

There is no requirement for the subject of a clause to occur in any specific position, even though it more often occurs before the verb phrase than after it. The object may equally well occur before as after the verb phrase.

The word order within phrases is however extremely fixed.

Phrases are to a large extent kept together through the pronunciation of the high tones, so that there is often only one distinct high tone per phrase, namely the first one, and the following potential high tones are pronounced less distinctly. Additionally, all phrase except the last one in a sentence may potentially end with a high tone in order to indicate that the speaker is intending to continue. Such phrase final continuation tones are sometimes even higher than the main high tone of the phrase.

### § 12.1 The noun phrase

The position of the head noun is at the beginning of the noun phrase.

Determiners are endings that are added directly to the head noun.

<b>qoys, qoyska</b>	(a) family, <i>the</i> family
<b>qoyskayga, qoyskaaga</b>	<i>my</i> family, <i>your</i> family
<b>qoyskan, qoyskaas</b>	<i>this</i> family, <i>that</i> family
<b>qoyskee</b>	<i>which</i> family
<b>qoyskaygaas</b>	<i>that</i> family of <i>mine</i>
<b>qoyskaagee</b>	<i>which</i> family of <i>yours</i>

Nouns, adjectives and relative subordinate clauses may occur as modifiers of a noun. All such modifiers follow after the head noun with its determiner endings.

### § 12.1.1 Nouns as modifiers

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

<b>dúgsiga Sahra</b>	<i>Sahra's school</i>
<b>gúriga Axmed</b>	<i>Ahmed's house</i>
<b>dukáanka Máryan</b>	<i>Maryan's shop</i>
<b>baabúurka macállinka</b>	<i>the teacher's car</i>

(b) Other types of phrases where one noun functions as a modifier of another noun also have the same structure and word order. In the vast majority of such phrases both nouns occur in their definite form.

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

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

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

(d) When the construction describes a close family relation or friend, only the construction with the possessive ending is used.

**Sahrá hooyádeed**                      *Sahra's mother*

## § 12.1.2 Adjectives as modifiers

Adjectives as modifiers follow after the noun that they modify.

**bisádda yar**                      *the little cat*  
**subáx wanaagsan!**              *good morning!*  
**sheekó gaaban**                  *a short story*

## § 12.1.3 Noun + adjective as a modifier phrase

Yet another common way of constructing a qualitative modifier phrase is to use an adjective such as **badán** *much*, **weyn** *big* or **yar** *small* as a connector.

**baaskíil qurúx badan** <sup>17</sup> *a beautiful bike (a bicycle of great beauty)*  
bicycle      beauty      much

**daanyéerka xóogga weyn** *the strong monkey*  
the.monkey      the.strength big

**gabdhó dá' yar** *young girls*  
girls      age little

## § 12.1.4 Adjectives with headwords in *-kii/-tii*

When adjectives modify nouns with the demonstrative endings **-kii/-tii** (expressing that something is expected to be previously known), such adjectives must be followed by the reduced past tense form **ahaa** (m.sg. & pl.) or **ahayd** (f.sg.) *that was*, depending on the gender and number of the head noun. The modifier adjective is thus turned into a small relative

---

<sup>17</sup> There is an interesting structural similarity between English *beauty-full* and **qurúx badan**.

subclause. However, the verb forms are obligatorily contracted with the preceding adjective and they just appear as the suffixes **-aa/-ayd**. The root **ah-** systematically disappears after adjectives.

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

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

### § 12.1.5 Relative clauses as modifiers

Different types of relative subordinate clauses may serve as modifiers of nouns, ranging from very long and complex to extremely short subclauses. The shortest ones only consist of a reduced verb form or a subject pronoun together with a full verb form.

**Bannaannadu waa dhul siman oo hooseeya.**

*The plains are flat land that is elevated.*

**Ma jeceshahay jabaqda ay sameeyaan?**

*Do you like the sound (that) they make?*

Relative clauses are discussed in more detail in § 15.3. The verb forms used in subordinate clauses are discussed in § 15.1.

Two types of relative subclauses are exceptionally common and they are therefore pointed out in the following two sections.

### § 12.1.6 Noun + **ah being** as a modifier phrase

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



**nín Soomaáli ah**      *a Somali man, a Somali*

man Somali      being

**gabár dhallinyaró ah**      *a teenage girl, a teenager*

girl      youth      being

**shaáti bulúug ah**      *a blue shirt*

shirt      blue.thing being

## § 12.1.7      Noun + **leh** *having; with* as a modifier phrase

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

**surwáal mídabka dambáska leh**      *grey trousers*

trousers      the.colour      the.ash      having

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

lunch      meat      much      having

## § 12.1.8      Agreement in definiteness

When a noun is used as a modifier of another noun, including when connected by verb forms such as **ah** *being, that is*, **leh** *having, that has, with*, or adjective such as, e.g., **badán** *much*, **wéyn** *big*, or **yár** *small*, both nouns in the phrase must be either indefinite or definite. In other words, the two nouns must agree in definiteness.

**maalínta Jimcáha ah**

the.day      the.Friday      being

*(on) Friday*

**nín Soomaáli ah**

man Somali      being

*a Somali man*

**nínka Soomaáliiga ah**

the.man the.Somali      being

*the Somali man*

**baaskíil qurúx badan**

bike      beauty      much

*a beautiful bicycle*

**baaskíilka qurúxda badan**

the.bike      the.beauty      much

*the beautiful bicycle*

Also when the head noun has a demonstrative or possessive determiner suffix, the modifier noun has to be definite.

**baaskíilkiisa qurúxda badan**

his.bike                      the.beauty much

*his beautiful bicycle*

In simple noun + noun constructions, both nouns are usually definite, but other combinations do occur less frequently.

**gúriga macállinka**

the.house the.teacher

*the teacher's house*

**gúri macállin**

house teacher

*a house of a teacher*

## § 12.1.9 Noun phrases expressing quantity

Since the Somali cardinal numbers are nouns they constitute the head nouns of phrases expressing quantities. Therefore, any suffixes are added to the numeral, not to the following "counted" noun. The "counted" noun is in the counting form (see § 6.8)

**labádaas reer**

*those two families*

**sáddexdayda buug**

*my three books*

## § 12.1.10 Counting uncountable nouns

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

**toddobá nácnac ah** (seven.items candy being) *seven pieces of candy*

**sáddex carruúr ah** (three.items children being) *three children*

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

**ímmisa múus ah?** (how.many.items banana(s) being) *how many bananas?*

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

**sáddex xabbo oo múus ah** *three bananas*

three.items **units** and banana(s) being

**áfar kiiloo oo hílib ah** *four kilos of meat*

four.items **kilo** and meat being

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

(c) When some kind of measure precedes a noun denoting a substance, the substance is again followed by the reduced verb form **ah** *being*.

**xabbád harúur ah** *a seed of sorghum*

a.seed sorghum being

## § 12.1.11 More than one modifier

If a head noun has more than one modifier, a connector word has to be inserted between the modifiers. Both **oo** and **ee** are used to connect modifiers to their head nouns.

(a) If the head noun is indefinite, the conjunction **oo** *and* is typically used before the second, third etc. modifier.

**úbax wéyn oo qurúx badan** *a big and beautiful flower*

Numerals are nouns and function as the head of their noun phrase.

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

two.items girls and siblings being

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

three.items boys and siblings being

**labá waxtar oo kale** *two other benefits*

two.items benefits and other

**sáddex kun oo qof** *three thousand people*

three.items thousand and person

(b) If the head noun is definite, the conjunction **ee** is typically used before the second, third etc. modifier.

**dúgsiga hoose ee Shéekh Bashiir** *Sheikh Bashir's primary school*

**macállinka af-Soomaáliga ee Xasan** *Hassan's teacher of Somali*

**dhárka dúgsiga ee Xasan** *Hassan's clothes for school*

**magacyada kala duwan ee qaybaha jirkeenna**

*the different names of the parts of our body*

(c) Also the conjunction **oo** is sometimes used after definite head nouns. It then introduces a modifier that is only parenthetical. The modifier very often expresses something that is only valid temporarily, in a specific situation.

**Gabadhii oo faraxsan ayaa u mahadcelisey aabbaheed.**

*The happy girl thanked her father.*

It may also express that something is not crucial in order to identify what the head noun is referring to. if so, one should be able to add *by the way* before the modifier in the English translation.

**Hilibluhu waxa uu qaataa neefkii oo qalan.**

*The butcher takes with him the slaughtered animal.*

We already know this animal from the previous context. That it has now been slaughtered is just mentioned as parenthetical information.

**Faadúmo wáxa ay qortay qoraalkan gaaban oo kú saabsan saaxiibáddeeda cusub.**

*Fadumo has written this short text **about/concerning** (by the way) **her new friend**.*

It is important to notice that **oo** is also used before the first modifier if it has a parenthetical meaning after a definite noun.

**(d)** The use of **oo** mentioned in the preceding section is especially common after proper nouns (i.e. names) and personal pronouns.

**Yusur iyo Maryan oo daallan** ayaa aqalkii laga furay.

*They opened their home to **the tired Yusur and Maryam**.*

*They opened their home to **Yusur and Maryam, who were tired**.*

**Aniga oo cadhaysan** ayaan dhanka albaabka u jeedsaday.

*I turned, **angry**, towards the door.*

The conjunctions **oo** and **ee** are also used in exactly the same way to connect relative clauses to their head nouns.

**Shéeg magacyáda labá ciidood oo Isláamku léeyahay.**

*Say the names of two feasts **that** Islam has.*

**Qór labá waxtar oo kale oo uu dábku léeyahay.**

*Write two other benefits that fire has.*

**Maxáa uu ahaa dhárka cusub ee Faadumó loó iibiyay?**

*What were the new clothes **that** they bought for Faduma?*

**Sheeg ilaha biyaha ee aad ku aragto sawirrada.**

*Tell the water sources that you see in the pictures.*

**Xasan oo madaxa ruxaya ayaa yiri “Maya.”**

*Hassan, shaking his head, said, “No.”*

*Shaking his head, Hassan said, “No.”*

**Adiga oo isticmaalaya erayadan buuxi meelaha bannaan.**

*(You,) Using these words, fill the empty spaces.*

For further details about such relative clauses see § 15.3.1.

## § 12.1.12 More than two nouns in a phrase

When, in a sequence of several nouns, each noun modifies the immediately preceding noun, no conjunction is needed. The result is sometimes a quite long series of nouns. Such phrases may usually be translated into English by inserting *of* between the nouns, but other solutions are often more elegant.

### **ilaalínta nadaafádda iláha biyáha**

the.protection (of) the.hygiene (of) the.sources (of) the.water

*protecting the hygiene of the water sources*

However, if two subsequent modifier nouns are referring back to the same head noun, one of the conjunctions **oo** and **ee** must be used before the second one, as discussed in the preceding section.

### **Xarunta Dhaqanka ee Hargeysa**

*the Hargeysa Center of Culture / the Cultural Centre of Hargeysa*

Hargeysa is a modifier of Xarunta. Two things are said about the centre, it's situated in Hargeysa and it is concerned with culture.

### **Xarunta Dhaqanka Hargeysa**

*the center for the culture of Hargeysa*

Hargeysa is a modifier of Dhaqanka. The centre is concerned with culture, and that culture is restricted to the culture of Hargeysa.

## § 12.1.13 The phrase **ká mid ah** of

The equivalent of the English preposition *of* expressing a selection within a set is commonly rendered by the Somali phrase **ká mid ah** *being one of*. This construction is necessary since Somali prepositions may not connect two nouns. A verb must always be involved.

### **Qór sáddex ká mid ah iláha biyáha.**

write three.items **of one being** the.sources the.water

*Write three **of** the sources of water.*

### **maalín maalmáha ká mid ah**

day the.days of one being

*one day of the days = one of those days*

## § 12.1.14 Prepositions before verbal nouns

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

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

Such a preposition does not have a high tone since it actually serves as a prefix in a derived, complex noun. Therefore the preposition is sometimes also written together with the verbal noun, but usually it is not.

## § 12.1.15 Prepositions before other nouns

In certain phrases, some expressions involving a preposition also occur before nouns that are not derived from verbs. Typical such phrases are, e.g.

**isla magaaladan** *the same town*

**isla markaas** *at the same time, simultaneously*

**isku mid**

**ka dib** *after, afterwards, after that, then*

## § 12.1.16 The particle **-ba**

The particle **-ba** has two very different functions, a negative function and a reinforcing function.

Typical uses of the negative **-ba** are, e.g.

**waxba** *nothing*

For the reinforcing function, the most idiomatic translations may vary quite a bit. In affirmative declarative clauses it may correspond to *also, all, every*.

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

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



## § 12.2 The verb phrase

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

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

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

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

The viewpoint and distribution particles have a concrete basic meaning, but in many instances they are also used with a more abstract meaning. See § 12.2.4 and § 12.2.5.

## § 12.2.1 Prepositions

Somali and English prepositions are not used in the same way, but they still have very much in common. The difference is that English has a large number of prepositions, and they are mainly used before nouns, whereas Somali has only four genuine prepositions, expressing four very basic meanings, and these four prepositions must be placed in the predicate phrase, normally before a verb or an adjective. They indicate the kind of relationship that holds between this verb or adjective and a noun or noun phrase. This makes perfect sense, since prepositions serve to connect two other words and express their relationship to each other. To put the preposition before one of those words (the noun) in English really isn't more "natural" than to put it before the other word (the verb) in Somali.

Sometimes something similar happens in other languages, e.g. in Swedish.

Jag pekade redan tidigt **på** problemet.

I pointed already early at the.problem.

≈ Jag **påpekade** redan tidigt problemet.

*Already early on, I pointed out the problem.*

Man tog alla privilegier **från** generalen.

one took all privileges from the.general

≈ Man **fråntog** generalen alla privilegier.

*All privileges were taken away from the general.*

Somali prepositions are always part of the predicate/verb phrase, and from that position they point to one of the noun phrases in the clause. However, it is only the context that makes clear which noun (phrase) a specific preposition is referring to. The grammar gives no clues at all.



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



## § 12.2.2 Object pronoun + preposition

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

**Digaagáddii waxa ay iská dhex aragtay biyíhii.**

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

*The hen saw itself down in the water.*

**Iskú qalláji shukumáan nadíif ah.**

self.with dry towel clean.thing being

*Dry yourself with a clean towel.*

## § 12.2.3 The negator *má*

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

**Igamá dúl boódi kartid.** (< i + ka + ma)

me.from.not surface jump you.can

*You cannot jump over me.*

## § 12.2.4 Viewpoint particles

The basic function of the particle **soó** is to express motion towards the place where the subject of the clause is located.

### Examples

The basic function of the particle **sií** is to express motion away from the place where the subject of the clause is located.

### Examples

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

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

*Write the **following** words in your exercise book.*

The particle **soó** is often also used to express the **completion** of an action.

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

*But he failed to make it come out of THE GROUND.*

**Immisa kalluun ayey **soo dabteen?****

*How many fish did they catch?*

In a similar way, the particle **sií** is used to express **continuation**.

**Ú shéeg fásalka wáxa aad kú **sií aragtay** waddáda.**

*Tell the class the things you saw (went on seeing) along the road.*

**Waxa aan kuu dhaaranayaa in aanan awoodin in aan **sii cabbo.****

*I swear to you that I am not able to drink any more (to continue drinking).*

## § 12.2.5 Distribution particles

**kala, wada**

**Examples**

## § 12.2.6 Position particles

A dozen or so nouns have developed into particles that can occur in the verb phrase in order to describe the place or position where the action is carried out.

**dul** *surface, top*

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

**Examples**

## § 12.3 The particle phrase

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

The particle phrase can maximally contain

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

### § 12.3.1 Sentence particles

(a) Sentence particles expressing **TYPE OF CLAUSE**:

**Add examples!**

**waa/wáa** expresses that the clause is affirmative. It may be a statement or a question with a question word.

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

**má** expresses that the clause is negative.

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

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

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

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

**ha** expresses warnings and prohibitions.

This particle is always toneless.

**há** expresses wishes and indirect commands in the 3rd person.  
This particle always has a high tone.

**(b) Sentence particles expressing FOCUS:**

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

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

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

Depending on the context, you would give slightly more emphasis to different words in English.

**Sahra waxa ay salaamaysaa saaxiibkeed / saaxiibteed.**

*Sahra is greeting her FRIEND.*

**Sahra baa salaamaysa saaxiibkeed / saaxiibteed.**

*SAHRA is greeting her friend.*

The focus particles **báa / ayáa** are optional after the interrogative suffix – **eé**. One could say that the suffix –**eé** itself is able to express focus.

**Example**

The focus particles **báa / ayáa** are obligatorily contracted with the interrogative pronouns **ayó?** *who?* and **maxáy?** *what?*, giving the focused forms **yáa?** *who?* (FOC) and **maxáa?** *what?* (FOC).

**Example**

## § 12.3.2 Short subject pronouns

The following subject pronouns occur in the particle phrase. See § 9.1.

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

NB!

**La one** occurs at the beginning of the verb phrase.

**Example**

## § 12.3.3 Obligatory subject pronouns

In positive declarative clauses a short subject pronoun is normally required.

**example + noun subj.**

The short subject pronoun has to be used even if there is also a long subject pronoun in the clause.

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

*I am big and you are little.*

## § 12.3.4 Omission of the short subject pronoun

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

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

*Warsame planted a TREE. NAASIR watered the tree.*

**Find better example**

(b) In questions and negative clauses, the short subject pronouns are optional.

### Example

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

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

(d) In clauses with the particle **waa**, the 3rd person short subject pronouns **uu** *he, it* and **ay** *she, it, they* are often omitted if the predicate consists of an adjective plus the verb **yahay/tahay/yihiin** *is, are*.

**Gabádh** **waa** (ay) **wéyn tahay.**

*The girl is big.*

**Dukáanku waa** (uu) **yár yahay.**

*The shop is small.*

(e) In other clauses with the particle **waa**, the 3rd person short subject pronouns are also sometimes omitted, thus putting more emphasis on the verb itself.

**Walaalkay waa joogay.**

my.brother DECL was.present

*My brother WAS there.*

**Walaalkay waa uu joogay.**

my.brother DECL he was.present

*My brother was there.*

**Baskii waa yimid.**

*The bus has ARRIVED.*

**Baskii waa uu yimid.**

*The bus has arrived.*

(f) The short subject pronouns are also optional whenever a subject noun phrase occurs between the particle phrase and the verb phrase.

### Example



## § 13. Simple clauses

A Somali simple clause or main clause normally contains a particle phrase and a verb phrase.

The particle phrase **always** precedes the verb phrase.

Wáa uu yimid. *He has arrived.*

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

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

### § 13.1 Sentence constituents

#### § 13.1.1 Subjects

In clauses where the subject is not focused, it has to be grammatically marked with a subject ending.

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

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

(a) In determiner suffixes added to noun as well as in the long forms of the personal pronouns, a final **-a** is replaced by **-u**.

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

**Mágacaygu** waa Sahrá. *My name is Sahra.*

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

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

Notice that nouns with a base form ending in **-aha** have a subject form ending in **-uhu**.

**Gabdhuhu** waa carruurtayda. *The girls are my children.*

(b) The high tone is missing on the last (or only) morpheme of the subject.

**Axmed wúu hurdaa.** *Ahmed sleeps.*

(c) Adjectives take the ending **-i**. The high tone on the stem of the adjective disappears.

**Bisádda yari** wáxa ay raadínaysaa hooyádeed.

*The little cat is looking for its mother.*

However, derived adjectives ending in **-aad**, **-eed**, **-ood** or **-e** do not take any subject ending. Ordinal numbers belong to this category.

(d) Pronouns and corresponding suffixes not ending in **-a** take the ending **-i**. A high tone on the morpheme preceding **-i** usually disappears.

**Tani** waa káb. *This is a shoe.*

**Kani** waa bás. *This is a bus.*

**Báskani** waa wéyn yahay. *This bus is big.*

**Sawirradani** waxa ay ina tusayaan meelaha aynu biyaha ka helno qaarkood.

*These pictures show us some of the places where we find water.*

(e) Feminine nouns with an indefinite form that ends in a consonant often take the ending **-i**, especially in a more formal style.

**Maalín maalmáha** ká mid ah ayáa **bisadi** gúrigeedii ká tagtay.

*On one of those days a cat set out from home.*

With proper nouns this ending is less frequent than with common nouns.

It may also occur with names ending in a vowel.

(f) Verb forms not inflected for person and ending in a consonant (**ah** *being*, **leh** *having*, as well as subjunctive forms ending in **-n**) take the suffix **-i**.

**Sideé bay dádka tuulo-jóogga ahi ú nadiifiyaan iláha biyáhooda?**

*How do people who live in the village keep their water sources clean?*

(g) Verb forms ending in a short **-a/-o** take the long vowel ending **-aa** in a subject noun phrase.

**Wiilka jiifaa wuu bukaa.** The boy that is lying down is ill.

**Sideé baa ay dádka sawirrada ká muuqdaa ú isticmaalan biyáha?**

*How do the people showing in the pictures use the water?*

The same noun phrases when not used as the subject:

**wiilka jiifa** *the boy that is lying down*

**dádka sawirrada ká muuqda** *the people showing in the pictures*

(h) In the adjective **kasta** *each, every*, the final vowel also becomes **-aa** when it refers to a subject.

**Qol kastaa wuxuu leeyahay dariishado waaweyn.** (as subject)

*Every room has BIG WINDOWS.*

cf. **Hawadu waxa ay joogtaa meel kasta.** (as adverbial)

*The air is EVERYWHERE.*

(i) Short possessive endings take over the high tone from the preceding morpheme, hence these endings are not affected by the rule in (b) above.

**Hooyaday waa macallimád.** *My mother is a teacher.*

cf. non-subject: **Tani waa hooyaday.** *This is my mother.*

## § 13.1.2 Predicate agreement

If a clause contains a subject noun phrase, the short subject pronoun and the predicate verb must agree with it in grammatical number, and in the singular also in gender. In some cases, however, there is a discrepancy between the grammatical form of the subject and its meaning. The most common case is collective nouns which are grammatically singular, but

have a “plural” meaning, e.g. **carruur** *children*, **dumar** *women*, **qoys** *family*, etc. The verb and the short subject pronoun, which are always in the same form, may then be either in the singular or in the plural. In the following example, the subject is a feminine singular collective noun, followed by a plural subject pronoun and verb in the first clause, and by a feminine singular subject pronoun and verb in the second clause.

**Carruúrtu waxa ay aádayaan gúriga adeérkood.**

*The children are going to THEIR UNCLE’S HOUSE.*

**Carruúrtaydu áad baa ay ú fiicán tahay.**

*My children are VERY good.*

There are also instances where a word’s grammatical gender and biological sex do not coincide, e.g. **xaas** (m.) *wife*, **sac** (m.) *cow*. If the noun denotes a human being, the biological sex generally determines the form of the short subject pronoun and the verb, whereas if the noun denotes an animal, the word’s grammatical gender takes precedence.

**Xáaskiisu wáxa ay karínaysay cuntó.**

*His wife was cooking FOOD.*

**Sácu waxa uu ká mid yahay xayawáanka naásleyda ah.**

*The cow belongs to THE MAMMALS.*

In clauses with the focus particle **waxa** where the subject comes after the verb, the verb may agree with either the real subject or with the focus particle **wáxa**, which is originally a definite masculine noun meaning *the thing*.

**Waxa ká muuqda wasákh.**

the.thing(M) from can.be.seen(M) dirt(F)

*It looks DIRTY.*

### § 13.1.3 Focused subjects

If the subject noun phrase of a clause is focused,

- 1) the subject phrase is not marked with a subject ending,
- 2) there is no short subject pronoun,
- 3) the predicate verb appears in the reduced form (see § 11.9).

**Cáli** < baa < akhrínaya.

*ALI is reading. It's ALI who is reading.*

**Cali** < waa uu < akhrínayaa.

*Ali is reading.*

**Wíilka** < baa < kú riixaya < baaskíilka.

*THE BOY pushes the bike.*

**Wíilku** < wáxa uu < kú riixayaa < baaskíilka.

*The boy pushes THE BIKE.*

**Aníga** < ayáa < raba.

*I want to. (with focus on I)*

**Anígu** < wáa aan < rabaa.

*I want to (do it).*

A focused subject may also occur at the end of the clause. It is then focused with the particle **waxa(a)**. Such clauses are often translated in the passive.

**Baaskíilka** < waxaa < kú riixaya < saaxíibkiis.

*The bike is pushed by HIS FRIEND.*

*It's HIS FRIEND who pushes the bike.*

**Daaqadáha** < waxa < kú jira < muraayadó.

*In the windows there are PANES.*

### § 13.1.4 Objects

In Somali there is no formal difference between object noun phrases and adverbial noun phrases. If one still wishes to make this distinction, it has to be based on either the meaning of the phrases or on the presence of an associated preposition in the verb phrase. Noun phrases that are

associated with a preposition may then be regarded as adverbial phrases, whereas noun phrases that are directly associated with the verb, without a preposition, are considered object noun phrases.

#### § 13.1.4a Two objects

A few Somali verbs take two objects without any preposition. Such objects are traditionally often referred to as direct and indirect objects. The indirect object is also commonly referred to as a recipient. See § 13.1.5h for more details.

**Hooyádu *dériska* ayaa ay sínaysaa *hílib*.**

*Mother is giving the NEIGHBOURS meat.*

## § 13.1.5 Adverbials

Noun phrases that are associated with a preposition are referred to as adverbials. The preposition is always found in the verb phrase, and from there it refers to one of the noun phrases in the clause. Which noun phrase it points to can only be inferred from the context.

Wáxa aan ◊ biyáha ◊  ká helnaa ◊ meeló badan.

*We get water from MANY PLACES. / We find water in MANY PLACES.*

Wáxa aynu ◊  guryáha ◊ kú cunnaa ◊ cuntó kala duwan.

*In the homes we eat DIFFERENT KINDS OF FOOD.*

Certain adverbial noun phrases are not accompanied by any preposition.

Wáxa uu ◊ tágayaa ◊ masaájidka ◊ MAALÍNTA JIMCÁHA.

*He is going to the mosque ON FRIDAY.*

When a preposition is referring to a noun in a previous sentence, it often corresponds to English pronominal adverbs such as *there*.

### Example

Sometimes the noun phrase governed by the preposition is only implied. This kind of use resembles English particle verbs.

**Kú** buúxi sháqalka oo ákhri érayga!

*Fill in the vowel and read the word!*

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

ú keenaa brings sth. to somebody

but without a preposition keenaa brings sth. to a place

**Xaawó ayaa *ú* keentay kıldhi sháah ah iyo kóob.**

*HAWO brought him/her a tea kettle and a cup.*

**Jawáan wéyn ayáa uu keenay gúriga.**

*He brought home a big sack.*

**kú qoslaa** *laughs at sth./sb.*

**Daanyéerkii wáxa uu *kú qoslay* digaagáddii iyo bisáddii.**

*The monkey laughed at THE HEN AND THE CAT.*

**kú yidhaadhaa** *says sth. to sb.*

**ká shaqeeyaa** *works in a place*

§ 13.1.5a The preposition *u*

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Kallúunka waxa ay *ú* shiílaysaa qóyskooda.**

*She is frying/grilling the fish for her family.*

**Warkii Cali baa aan *u* sheegay.**

*I told the news to Ali.*

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

**Biyáha waxa aynu *ú* isticmaalnaa cabbitaan.**

*We use water for drinking / as a drink.*

(iv) MANNER: *in, like*



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

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

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

**Biyaha** waxa aynu **u** isticmaalnaa **siyaabo** kala duwan.

*We use water in different ways.*

**Si fiican** isugu garaac iskujirkaas.

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

*Whip that mix together properly.*

**Sidaas** ayaa uu socdaalkii **u** dhammaystay.

*The journey ended in that way / like that.*

**Sidee** baa aad **u** nadiifisaa gurigaaga?

what.manner FOC you in clean your.house

*How* do you clean your house?

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

**U dhig** weerooyinkan **habka** ay isugu xigaan.

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

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

**Laba-labo** **u** shaqeeya.

*Work in pairs.*

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

*Go outside, and then play in different groups.*

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

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

**Carruúrtaydu áad baa ay ú fiicán tahay.**

my.children high.degree FOC they to good are  
*My children are VERY good.*

**Wíilkiina áad buu ú qoslay.**

and.that.boy high.degree FOC.he to laughed  
*And that boy laughed very much.*

**ú fiirsadaa, ú fiirsataa** *looks at*

**Ú fiirsó** *nínka.*

*Look at the man.*

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

**Wáxa aynu ú baahán nahay cuntó.**

FOC we for needing are food

*We are in need of FOOD. = We need FOOD. / We are hungry.*

**ú ég yahay** *is similar to*

**Kabáhaygu kúwaaga ayaa ay ú ég yihiin.**

my.shoes yours FOC they to similar are

*My shoes are similar to YOURS.*

With some verbs goal is expressed by *ku* + place, but *u* + person.

Or without preposition for place, but *u* + person, e.g. *tagaa*

### § 13.1.5b The preposition *ku*

Remember that Somali also has the object pronoun **ku** *you* (SG) (see § 9.1), as well as the indefinite pronoun **ku** *a, an* (see § 9.2.3).

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

(i) Place, position: *in, on, at.*

**Téneggan súbag baa kú jira.**

*In this container there is butter.*

Xasan wáxa uu **kú** nóol yahay **Boosaasó**.

*Hassan lives in Bosaso.*

Sáhra wáxa ay kallúun **kú** iibínaysaa **súuqa**.

*Sahra is selling fish at the market.*

Wáxa ay biyáha **kú** rartaan **awrtooda**.

*They load water onto their camels.*

Ímmisa wiil ayaa **fásalka** **kú** jira?

*How many boys are there in the class?*

(ii) Tool: *with*.

Erayádan **fár fiican** **kú** qór.

*Write these words with nice handwriting.*

**Iskú** qalláji **shukumáan** **nadíif** **ah**.

oneself.with dry towel clean.thing being

*Dry yourself with a clean towel.*

The money used to buy something, as well as the languages a person speaks, are also expressed as tools in Somali.

**Shán shilin** wáxa ay **kú** iibsatay **liín**.

five.items shilling FOC she with bought CITRIC.FRUIT

*For five shillings she bought citrus fruit.*

**Anigu** waxa aan **ku** hadlaa **afka Ingiriiska** iyo **afka Carabiga**.

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

*I speak English and Arabic.*

Sometimes it might be difficult to draw a clear line between position and tool, but the tool interpretation is usually preferred.

**Dabka** waxa aan **ku** karsannaa **cuntada**.

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

*With / On the fire we cook FOOD.*

**Kalluunka waxaa lagu qallajinayaa qorraxda.**

the.fish FOC one.in is.drying the.sun

*They are drying the fish in the SUN (i.e. using the sun).*

(iii) Circumstance

**Carruurtu habeen walba gaajo baa ay ku seexdaan.**

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

*The children fall asleep hungry every night.*

(iv) Spatial goal (expressing place, with certain verbs): *to*

**Wáxa ay kú órdayaa gúriga.**

FOC she to is.running the.house

*She is running home.*

(v) Abstract aim or goal: *to, for*

**Eraygee baa ku habboon sawirka?**

WHICH.WORD FOC for suitable the.picture

*Which word suits the picture?*

(vi) The interlocutor as recipient (with verbs of saying): *to*

**Wáxa uu kú yiri xáaskiisa, “Má kartid.”**

FOC he to said his.wife NOT YOU.CAN

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

**“Má rabo,” ayáa ay kú jawaabtay.**

NOT I.WANT FOC she to replied

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

(vii) Special uses

**kú saabsán yahay** – *is about, tells about, discusses*

**Qoráalkani wáxa uu kú saabsán yahay qóyskayga.**

text.this FOC it about regarding is FAMILY-MY

*This text is about my family.*

### § 13.1.5c The preposition *ka*

Somali also has the demonstrative pronoun **ka** *the, this*. See § 9.2.3.

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

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

**Webi Shabeelle meeshee buu ka yimaaddaa?**

*From what place does the River Shabeelle come?*

**Guuleed dugsigu waxa uu ka yimaaddaa laba iyo tobanka iyo barka.**

*Guled comes (home) from school at half past twelve.*

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

**Waxa aan biyaha ká helnaa meelo badan.**

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

**Magacow cuntada kala duwan ee sawirka ka muuqata.**

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

**Badda ayaa uu kalluun ka dabanayaa.**

*He is catching fish in the sea. (lit. from the sea)*

**Dugsiga maxaa aad ka barataa?**

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

(ii) Material: *of*

**Markaa burkii ayey ka samaysay rooti.**

*Then she made bread of the flour.*

(iii) Topic: *about*

**Ka hadal sawirrada.**

*Talk about the pictures.*

**Hodan waxa ay wax ka qortay xeebta.**

*Hodan wrote something about the coast.*

(iv) Comparison: *than*

**Soddon waa ay ka yar tahay konton.**

*Thirty is less than fifty.*

**Faadumo waa ka dheer tahay Caasho.**

*Faduma is taller than Asha.*

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

**Lúg baa uu ká dhaawacmay.**

LEG FOC he in was.hurt

*He was hurt in a leg.*

**Axmed walaashiis gacan baa ay ka jabtay.**

Ahmed his.sister ARM FOC she in was.broken

*Ahmed's sister got a fracture in an ARM.*

*Ahmed's sister has broken AN ARM.*

(vi) In certain fixed phrases.

**Ká jawáab su'aaláhan.**

*Answer these questions.*

**Waxa uu ká shaqeeyaa dukáankiisa yar.**

*He works in his little shop.*

**Waa uu ká helaa iyáda.**

*He likes / fancies her.*

§ 13.1.5d The preposition *la*

Somali also has the indefinite subject pronoun **la** *one, you, they*. See § 9.1.4.

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

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

Waxa uu **la** socdaa **saaxiibkiis**.

*He walks together with his friend.*

Sahra waxay **la** ciyaaraysaa **Farhiya**.

*Sahra is playing with Farhiya.*

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

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

Waxa ay **ila tahay in** aanu taas samayn karayn.

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

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

### § 13.1.5e Variation in the use of prepositions

In certain constructions, variation occurs in the use of prepositions.

**ú dhow / kú dhow** *close to*

Booqó iláha biyáha ee **kú / ú dhow** dúgsigaaga.

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

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

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

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

FOC she with helped Ali THE.HOMEWORK

*She helped Ali with the homework.*

Sometimes this variation seems to be geographically conditioned.

### § 13.1.5f Preposition with position particle

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

Digaagaddii iyaduna waxa ay **iska dhex** aragtay **biyihii**.

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

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

The combination **ka dul** most often corresponds to English *over*, expressing a motion of going over an “obstacle”.

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

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

### § 13.1.5g Complex "prepositional phrases"

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

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

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

Add more....

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

**Ku sawir bisad kursiga hoostiisa.**

in draw cat the.chair its.underside

*Draw a cat under the chair.*

**Saýnab qoýskoodu wáxa uu kú nóol yahay bádda ágteeda.**

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

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

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

FOC I in see the.water its.middle hen

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



### § 13.1.5h Recipient or indirect object

Most verbs express a recipient or indirect object through the proposition **u** *to, for*, but a few verbs take two objects without any preposition, e.g. **baraa** *teaches sth. to sb., introduces sb. to sb., siiyaa* *gives sth. to sb. or gives sb. sth.* **tusaa** *shows sth. to sb. or shows sb. sth.*, and **weydiyyaa** *asks sb. sth.*

**Waxa uu Aamina siiyay SIDDEED NEEF OO GEEL AH.**

*He gave Amina EIGHT CAMELS.*

**Hooyo wax má ku weydiisay?**

*Did mother ask you something?*

**Maxamed carruurta waxa uu siinayaa LACÁG.**

*Mahamed is giving the children MONEY.*

### § 13.1.5i Place adverbials

Some Somali motion verbs, such as **aadaa** *goes*, **tagaa** *leaves*, **yimaaddaa** *comes*, take an adverbial of place without any preposition. If the goal of a motion is a person, however, it is usually expressed with a preposition.

**Carruurtu <> waxa ay <> aadayaan <> guriga adeerkood.**

*The children are going to their uncle's house.*

**Diinkii <> waxa uu <> yimid <> gurigiisa.**

*The turtle came to its house. = The turtle came home.*

**Diinka iyo xaaskiisu <> waxay <> tageen <> guriga Maroodiga.**

*The turtle and his wife went to Elephant's house.*

**Kaalay <> bannaanka.**

*Come to the open space. = Come outside.*

**Xayawaannadii <> waxa ay <> yimaadeen <> biyihii dushooda.**

*The animals came to the surface of the water.*

*= The animals arrived at the water's edge.*

A few verbs that take an object, such as **saaraa** *puts*, are also accompanied by an adverbial of place without any preposition.

Cumar ⇨ cawska ⇨ ayuu ⇨ saarayaa ⇨ saqafka.

Omar *puts* GRASS *on* the roof.

### § 13.1.5j Time adverbials

Many Somali phrases expressing time are used without any preposition.

Waxa uu ⇨ tágayaa ⇨ masaájidka ⇨ maalínta Jimcáha.

He is leaving for the mosque *on* Friday.

Noun phrases that express time and refer to the past most often take the demonstrative ending **-kii/-tii**.

**Áfartii** galabnimó ayaa uu ká soo baxay áqalkii.

*At four* in the afternoon he came out of the house.

**Toddobáadkii** hore aábbe wuxuu tagay magaaló kale.

*Last week* Mother and Father went to another city.

When reference is made to the future or to something that is repeated as a habit, the ordinary definite article is used. **Check!?!**

**Maalin kasta Faadumo** waxa ay kacdaa **shanta** aroornimo.

*Every day* Faduma gets up **AT FIVE** IN THE MORNING.

### § 13.1.5k Manner adverbials

si

gaar ahaan, dhab ahaan, tusaale ahaan, qiyaas ahaan, run ahaan etc.

### § 13.1.5l Nouns with possessive endings

weligaa, laftayda...

## § 13.1.6 Vocatives

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

**Mácallin!** is used to address a teacher, whereas

**macállin** is used to talk about a teacher.

**Fáadumo!, Máxamed!** are used to address these persons, whereas

**Faadúmo, Maxámed** are used to talk about them.

Vocative phrases can also be formed with suffixes. At the end of a phrase with a feminine singular head noun, the ending **-ey** is added after a consonant and only **-y** after **-o/-a**. The vocative ending for phrases with a masculine head noun is **-ow**. There is one high tone on these vocative endings and one also on the head noun itself.

These endings may be written with a long or a short vowel, i.e. **-ey/-eey**, **-ay/-aay**, **-oy/-ooy**, **-ow/-oow**. If one is very emotional, even more than two vowels may sometimes be written.

**Máryanéy!**                      *Hey, Maryan!*

**Bisádda yaréey!**              *Dear little cat!*

**Digaagádéy!**                    *Hey, hen!*

**Maxámedów!**                    *Hey, Mahamed!*

**Daanyéerów!**                  *Hey, monkey!*

There are also longer endings that are mostly added to common nouns. The ending **-yahow** is used for masculine singular nouns as well as all plural nouns, whereas **-yahay** is used for feminine singular nouns. These longer endings do not have any high tone.

**shimbiró**                          *birds*

**shimbiráyahow!**              *hey, birds!*

Notice that the plural morpheme /o/ changes to /a/ before the long vocative ending.

## § 13.2 Declarative clauses

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

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

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

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

ROOTI IYO CAANO (baa uu) rabaa.  
*He wants BREAD AND MILK.*

Cuntadu XOOG (baa ay) inoo yeeshaa.  
*The food generates ENERGY for us.*

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

Nájma wáxa ay léedahay BÚUG.  
Najma (the.thing she has) book  
*Najma has A BOOK.*

(Wáxa uu) rabaa ROÓTI IYO CAANÓ.  
the.thing he wants bread and milk  
*He wants BREAD AND MILK.*

The focus particle **wáxaa** frequently refers to a whole subordinate clause.

Cali (wáxa uu) rabaa ÍN UU FUULÓ BAASKÍILKA.  
Ali FIN.FOC he wants that he rides the.bike  
*Ali wants to RIDE THE BIKE.*

### § 13.2.1 Clauses with the verb *to be*

Declarative clauses that contain the verb **yahay** *is* differ in some respects from ordinary declarative clauses.

(a) If the predicative complement does not contain a noun, but just an adjective, the adjective goes in the verb phrase, immediately before the verb **yahay** *is*. The short subject pronoun is often omitted.

**Dukáanku** < **waa** (**uu**) < **wéyn yahay**.

*The shop is big.*

**Gabádhu** < **waa** (**ay**) < **wéyn tahay**.

*The girl is big.*

(b) In Somali, as in languages such as Arabic and Russian, no present tense form of the verb *to be* is necessary if the predicative complement is a noun or a noun phrase. The short subject pronoun is also omitted.

**Sahro** < **waa** < **macallimad**.

*Sahra is a teacher.*

**Cumar** < **waa** < **arday wanaagsan**.

*Omar is a good pupil.*

This type of clause lacks a verb phrase and a short subject pronoun. Instead, the particle **waa** relates to and has a fixed position relative to the noun phrase that functions as the predicate part of the clause, also called the predicative complement.

It is also possible, however, to use a full clause with the verb **yahay**, **tahay** *is* and a focus particle that focuses the predicative complement.

**Sáhro** < **MACALLIMÁD** < **baa ay** < **tahay**.

*Sahra is a TEACHER.*

**Cumar** < **wáxa uu** < **yahay** < **ÁRDAY WANAAGSAN**.

*Omar is a GOOD PUPIL.*

## § 13.2.2 *To be* with focused subjects

(a) If the subject is focused and the predicate complement is a noun phrase, the reduced verb form must be used, just as with any other verb.

**Shimbiraha qaar** < **baa** < **ah** < **xayawaan waxtar leh**.

*SOME BIRDS are useful animals.*

(b) If the subject is focused and the predicate complement is an adjective, the reduced form **ah** *being* is omitted in the present tense.

**Dád badani** < waxa ay < kú nóol **yihiin** < magaaloóyinka.

*Many people live in (the) CITIES.*

**Dád badan** < baa < kú nóol **\*** < magaaloóyinka.

*MANY PEOPLE live in (the) cities.*

### § 13.2.3 Comparison

When two items are compared, the words *like* or *as* are often used in English. In Somali the noun **sida** *the way, the manner* is most often used as the head of a noun phrase. This noun phrase often becomes a predicative complement.

**Midabkeedu** < waa < **sida qiiqa.**

its.colour.SUBJ                      DECL                      the.way the.smoke

*Its colour is like smoke.*

### § 13.2.4 Telling the time

Numbers used to tell the time in the present or past usually take the demonstrative endings **-kii/-tii**.

**Waa immisadii? – Waa shantii.**

*What time is it? – It's five o'clock.*

**Waa kowdii iyo badhkii.**

*It's half past one.*

When referring to future or repeated events, the definite article **-ka/-ta** is used.

**Examples**

## § 13.3 Questions

### § 13.3.1 Wh-questions with focus

Wh-words are usually focused by means of a focus particle.

**Qóysku xaggeé baa uu aaday ugu horréyntii?**

*WHERE did the family go first of all?*

Two of the wh-words are obligatorily contracted with the following focus particle into one word.

**maxáy what? + baa / ayaa > maxáa WHAT?**

**ayó who? + baa / ayaa > yáa WHO?**

**Yaa ay siisay hooyo hilibkii?** *WHO did mother give the meat to?*

**Maxaa ay u samaysay sidaas?** *WHY did she do it that way?*

**Maxaa uu ahaa dharka cusub ee Faadumo loo iibiyay?**

*WHAT were the new clothes that one had bought for Faduma?*

As always, the short subject pronoun can of course be contracted with the focus particle in a more casual style. Notice especially the irregular form **muxúu** *WHAT ... he?* < **maxáy + baa / ayaa + uu**.

**Faadumo iyo Xasan adeerkood muxuu siiyay?**

*Faduma and Hassan's uncle, WHAT did he give to them?*

If the focused wh-word phrase is also the subject of the clause, there will of course not be any short subject pronoun and the verb will be in its reduced form. The form **ah** *being* is omitted after an adjective.

**Ímmisa wiil ayáa fásalka kú jira?**

*HOW MANY BOYS are there in the class?*

**Maxáa dhíci doona?**

*WHAT will happen?*

**Yáa rabá in uu falo haruurka?**

*WHO wants to sow the sorghum?*

### Maxáa ká duwán ✕ ?

*WHAT is different (than ...)?*

After the pronoun **kee/tee?** *which?* and nouns with this ending, the focus particle **baa** or **ayaa** is often contracted with the focus question word. In clauses where such focused question words are the subject, there is no short subject pronoun and the verb is used in its reduced form.

### Examples

The form **ah** *being* is omitted after adjectives.

**Kee dhээр ✕ ?** *Which one is (the) long(est)?*

**Kee gaabán ✕ ?** *Which one is (the) short(ast)?*

## § 13.3.2 Wh-questions without focus

More seldom, wh-questions without focus do occur. The clause then contains the sentence particle **waa**, otherwise typically used in declarative clauses.

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

## § 13.3.3 Yes/no questions

In a question that requires *yes* or *no* for an answer, the sentence type particle **ma**<sup>18</sup> is used together with the ordinary forms of the verb. The short subject pronoun is optional.

Compared to the corresponding statement form of the sentence, **ma** replaces **waa**, but it is added to clauses containing **waxa/waxaa** or **ayaa/baa**.

**Waxaan tagayaa Burco.** *I'm going to Burao.*

**Ma waxaad tagaysaa Burco?** *Are you going to Burao?*

---

<sup>18</sup> A similar particle exists in many other languages, such as Arabic (*hal*), Finnish (*-ko/-kö*), French (*est-ce que*), Persian (*āyā*), Polish (*czy*) and Russian (*li*), but in most languages it is not obligatory, whereas it is obligatory in Somali.



The question particle **ma** has a high tone if the following phrase doesn't have a high tone. This is particularly the case for the simple aspect of verbs and the object pronouns.

**Má** ◊ **i aragtaa?**

*Do you see me?*

**Adígu** ◊ **má** ◊ **tahay** ◊ **hooyáday?**

*Are you my mother?*

The question particle **ma** does not have a high tone if the following phrase has a high tone. This is particularly the case for the progressive and habitual aspect of verbs, as well as for prepositions and nouns.

**Adígu** ◊ **ma** ◊ **kú nóoshahay** ◊ **gúri magaalo?**

*Do you live in an urban house?*

**Ma** ◊ **nabád** ◊ **baa?**

*Are you doing okey? How are you doing?*

Many yes/no questions also contain a focus particle alongside the question particle **ma**. This is especially frequent with the verb *to be*.

If the predicative complement is a focused noun, the present tense forms of **yahay** are omitted in yes/no questions, just as in the corresponding declarative clauses.

– **Kani ma Áxmed baa?** – **Haa, kani waa Axmed.**

– *Is this Ahmed?* – *Yes, this is Ahmed.*

– **Tani ma Sáhraa<sup>19</sup>?** – **Haa, tani waa Sahrá**

– *Is this Sahra?* – *Yes, this is Sahra.*

If **ayáa** is used instead, **ma** goes after the focused noun or noun phrase and **ma + ayáa** is contracted into **miyáa**.

---

<sup>19</sup> **Sahraa** is an obligatory contraction of **Sahro+baa**.

Maxamed **ma** macállin **baa**?  
= Maxamed macállin **miyáa**?

*Is Mohamed a teacher?*

Without focus, the verb **yahay** is functions just like any other verb.

**Gurigiinnu** ◊ **ma** ◊ **yahay** ◊ **sida Rooble gurigooda**?

your.house.SUBJ    QUEST    is    the.way Roble    their.house

*Is your house the way Roble's house (is)? = ...like Rooble's house?*

### § 13.3.4 Multiple choice questions

In questions where one is expected to choose one of the alternatives, **mise** or **is** is used between the two phrases.

**Ma waxay joogtay xagga bari **mise** xagga galbeed?**

*Was it located in the east or in the west?*

**Ma magaalo baa aad ku dhalatay **mise** miyi?**

*Were you born in the city or in the countryside?*

If **mise** is used between clauses, the first clause contains the question particle **ma**, whereas the second clause is a declarative clause with the particle **waa**.

**Ma oggolaatay **mise** waa aad diidday?**

*Did you approve or did you say no?*

## § 13.4 Commands

Commands are mainly expressed by the imperative form of the verb.

**Clauses in the imperative have no particle phrase.**

**Sheeg** magacyada laba ciidood.

*Tell the names of two holidays.*

**Qor** laba waxtar oo kale oo uu dabku leeyahay.

*Write two other benefits that fire has.*

### § 13.4.1 Warnings and prohibitions

In Somali grammar, warnings and prohibitions are often presented as negative imperatives, but they are actually expressed through a special construction which may be referred to as the PROHIBITIVE. The construction consists of the sentence particle **ha** *don't* followed by the reduced subjunctive in the simple aspect form. The tone is on the second to last vowel position.

**Ha tégin** hádda, waáyo waa mádow.

*Don't go now, since it's dark.*

When addressing several persons, a final **-a** is added, just like in the imperative. The tone is on the second to last vowel position.

**Ha tegína** hádda, waáyo waa mádow.

*Don't go now, since it's dark.*

## § 13.5 Negative clauses

In negative declarative clauses the sentence type particle **má** *not* is used. It always has a high tone. The verb is in the subjunctive. See § 11.10. The short subject pronouns are not obligatory, but are frequently used by some.

**Má (aan) rabo.** *I don't want it. / I don't want to (do it).*

cf. **Wáa aan rabaa.** *I want it. / I want to (do it).*

### § 13.5.1 Negative questions

Questions usually contain a focused noun phrase. When negation and noun phrase focus occur in the same clause, the negator **aan** *not* must be used together with the verb in the reduced subjunctive form ending in **-n/-in/-nin**.

**Maxaa aanad jeclayn in aad cunto?**

*WHAT don't you like to eat?*

#### Write about 'negation' in general

There are two negations, **ma** and **aan**. **Ma** is a sentence particle, and replaces **waa**.

Waa ay ordaysaa. She is running.

Ma (ay) ordayso. She is not running.

**Aan** is not a sentence particle, and it can be added in sentences that already contain a sentence particle, e.g. a focus particle. It is also used in subclauses, since a subclause can never contain a sentence particle.

Cali baa ordaya. ALI is running.

Cali baa aan ordayn(in). ALI is/was not running. (**aan** always combines with the reduced subjunctive)

And finally, both are often used together in main clauses in the past tense, as in the example above.

Often double negation in the past tense.

Negative progressive (see 11.10.1) either negation + progr. subj. OR inf. + neg. progr. aux.

## § 14. Coordination

There are three words in Somali that correspond to English *and*, namely **iyó**, **oo** and **-na**.

(a) The conjunction **iyó** *and* is used between nouns or noun phrases.

**Safiya iyó Cali** *Safiya and Ali*

**lix iyó toban** *sixteen*

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

Most subclauses begin with a noun. This means that subclauses are noun phrases and such subclauses are therefore joined by **iyó**.

### Example

Even if **ín** *that* is usually considered to be a subjunction, its origin is the noun **ín** *amount*. Therefore also subclauses beginning with **ín** are joined through the use of **iyó**.

### Examples

(b) Noun modifiers (adjectives, adjective phrases and relative clauses) are connected with either **oo** or **ee**. In most instances **oo** is used to connect modifiers of indefinite nouns, whereas **ee** is used with definite nouns. For more details see §

**Waa isbitaal weyn oo wanaagsan.**

*It is a big and good hospital.*

**Qor qoraal gaaban oo ku saabsan qoyskaaga.**

write text      short      and to relating      your.family

*Write a short text about your family.*

### exempel med ee

(c) The conjunction **oo** *and* is used between two verbs or verb phrases.

**Akhri oo sawir!** *Read and draw!*

**Aniga ayaa shaqeeyay oo cunaya.**

*I'm the one who has done the work and will eat.*

**Oo** can also be used between full main clauses or fragments of main clauses, as long as there is a predicate verb in the fragment that follows.

ariga uu raaco waxay ka kooban yihiin riyo iyo ido oo wuxuu soo daajiyaa guriga agtiisa. Markaii duhurka la gaaro ayaa waxaa loo geeyaa cunto iyo biyo. Markay qorraxdu dhacdo ayuu ariga guriga ku soo celiyaa. Habeenkii geedi waxaa loo lisaa caano oo wuxuu jecelyahay caanaha lo'da iyo geela,

It may also be used to introduce follow-up questions.

**Waxaan ku nool ahay meel fog. – Oo waa xaggee?**

*I live in a place far away. – And where is that?*

The conjunction **oo** is also used for subordination. See § 15.3.3.

**(d)** The conjunction **–na** *and* is used between main clauses. It is attached to the first phrase of the second clause.

**Maroodigani waa weyn yahay, maroodiganina waa yar yahay.**

*This elephant is small and this elephant is big.*

**Fasalku waa weyn yahay, ardayduna waa badan yihiin.**

*The classroom is big and the pupils are many.*

It may also be used to introduce follow-up questions.

**Magacaygu waa Xasan. – Adigan magacaa?**

*My name is Hassan. – And you, what's your name?*

## § 14.1 The conjunctions *ama* and *mise*

Somali has two conjunctions corresponding to English *or*, namely **ama** and **mise**.

The conjunction **ama** *or* is used in declarative clauses.

**Cali waxaa uu jiraa guriga ama dugsig.**

*Ali is at home or at school.*

**Shaqadaydu ma aha in aan dilo ama dhaawaco.**

*My job is not to kill or injure.*

A repetition of **ama** before both the alternatives corresponds to English *either ... or*.

**Ama isaga ama wasiiraddiisa, khasab ma aha inuu isagu yimaaddo.**

*Either he or his minister, it is not necessary that he comes himself.*

In questions where one is expected to choose one of the alternatives, **mise or** is used.

**Ma magaalo baa aad ku dhalatay mise miyi?**

*Were you born in a city or in the countryside?*

If **mise** is used between clauses, the first clause contains the question particle **ma**, whereas the second clause is a declarative clause with the particle **waa**.

**Ma oggolaatay, mise waa aad diidday?**

*Did you approve or did you say no?*

If you are not expected to make a choice, **ama** is also used in questions.

**Ma maqashay sheeko kale oo ku saabsan diiq ama dawaco?**

*Have you heard any other story about a cock or a fox?*

## § 14.2 The conjunction *ee*

The conjunction **ee** is used between two main clauses to express that there is a logical relation between the clauses, often pertaining to cause and effect. The corresponding English word is often *so, then* or *and*.

**Digaagad ayaa biyaha ku dhex jirta ee waa in aad noo soo gurmataa.**

*There is a hen down in the water, so you must come and help us.*

**Ee** is often used to contrast two clauses. Then one clause is usually negative, and the other one positive. After a negative clause, **ee**

corresponds fairly well to English *but*. Before a negative clause, though, English usually doesn't have any conjunction at all.

**Maya, ma aha Safiya, ee waa Khadra.**

*No, it's not Safia, (but) it's Khadra.*

**Anigu dhakhtar baan ahay, ee askari ma ihi!**

*I'm a doctor, (so) I'm not a soldier!*

The conjunction **ee** is also used to interconnect subclauses. See § 15.3.2.

### § 14.3 The conjunctions *laakiín*, *-se* and *balse*

The three conjunctions **laakiín**, **balsé** and **-se** *but* are used to connect two main clauses. There is always a sentence particle in both clauses.

**Soomaáli baan ahay, laakiín waxaan kú dhashay Itóobiya.**

*I am SOMALI, but I was born in ETHIOPIA.*

**Cumar waa wiil fiican, balse dhibaataa ka haysata xagga akhriska.**

*Omar is a GOOD BOY, but he has DIFFICULTIES with regard to reading.*

The conjunction **-se** is added to the first phrase of the second clause. It puts less emphasis on the contrast than do **laakiín** and **balsé**.

**Anigaa dugsi dhigta, Faadumase ma dhigato.** *I attend school, but Faduma doesn't (attend).*

**-se and** can also be used in a contrasting follow-up question.

**Nin miyaad leedahay? – Haa. – Wax carruur ahse? – Shan carruur ah baan leeyahay.** *Do you have a husband? – Yes. – And any children? – I have five children.*

### § 14.4 The conjunction *waáyo*

The conjunction **waáyo** *because, since* connects two main clauses and introduces a reason or explanation. There is always a sentence particle in both clauses.



**Waxa uu xidhán yahay dhár fudud waáyo waa xílli kulul.**

*He is dressed in LIGHT CLOTHES since it is a warm season.*

## § 14.5 The conjunctive phrase *sababta oo ah*

## § 15. Subordinate clauses

A Somali subordinate clause can straightforwardly be identified by its lack of a sentence particle. Only main clauses contain sentence particles.

**Waxa ay tagtay meel ay biyo ku jiraan.**

FIN.FOC she went place they water[PL] in exist

*She went to a place in which there was water.*

Notice that imperative clauses are main clauses even though they don't contain any sentence particle.

**Fiiri sida ay u samaynayso.**

look the.way she in is.doing

*Look at the way she is doing it. / Look how she is doing it.*

In this chapter subordinate clauses will be underlined.

### § 15.1 The form of the verb in subclauses

Subclauses are divided into three main types depending on the presence of a subject word or a negator particle in the subclause.

(a) In positive subordinate clauses that contain a noun or a pronoun representing the subject of the subclause, a present or future tense verb must appear in the subjunctive mode since the verb describes an imagined event.

**Sawirradani waxa ay ina tusayaan meelaha aynu biyaha ka helno.**

these.pictures FOC they us show the.places we the.water from find

*These pictures show us the places (which) we get water from.*

**U sheeg fasalka waxyaabaha aad ku aragto sawirka**

to tell the.class the.things you in see the.picture

*Tell the class the things (that) you see in the picture.*

**Sheeg waxyaabaha laga helo guriga kalluumaystaha**

tell the.things one.from finds the.house the.fisherman

*Tell the things (that) one finds in a fisherman's home*

Only past tense events are expressed by the ordinary past tense since the verb describes a real event.

Saaka markii aan dugsigu ku soo socday waxa aan arkay shimbir aad u qurux badan.

*This morning when I walked to school I saw a very beautiful bird.*

Notice that the present “subjunctive” forms of **yahay** *is* and **leeyahay** *has* used in subclauses with a subject word are identical to the ordinary present tense forms used in main clauses.

Marka ay xilli kulul tahay waxa aynu xidhannaa dhar fudud.

the.moment it season warm is PART we put on clothes light

When it is a warm season we put on LIGHT CLOTHES.

Qor laba waxtar oo kale oo uu dabku leeyahay.

write two benefit and other and it the.fire has

*Write two other uses that fire has. / ...that there are for fire.*

(b) In positive subclauses that do not contain any subject word the ordinary reduced verb forms are used. Such subclauses are relative clauses where the subject of the verb is equal to the head noun of the relative clause. The head noun is not part of the relative clause itself, but belongs to the main clause.

Waxa aan ahay arday dhigta fasalka 2aad.

*I'm a pupil who studies in the 2nd grade.*

*I'm a pupil studying in the 2nd grade.*

or even: *I'm a pupil in the 2nd grade.*<sup>20</sup>

In this kind of clauses, many languages of the world use a participle or a gerund, as in the second line of translation above.

---

<sup>20</sup> Often, a verb in a relative clause like this may be omitted in English if it does not really contribute anything to the meaning that is not evident from the context. The reason for this syntactic difference between the two languages is that a preposition may connect two nouns in English, whereas in Somali prepositions always connect a verb (or adjective) and a noun.

(c) Negative subclauses always contain verbs in the reduced subjunctive form, which leads to a lack of distinction between present and past tense. The temporal interpretation must depend on the context.

**Waan kuu dhaaranayaa in aanan ridaadii cunin.**

*I swear to you that I haven't eaten your goat.*

**Waxa aan kuu dhaaranayaa in aanan awoodin in aan sii cabbo.**

*I swear to you that I am not able to drink any more.*

The use of the reduced subjunctive form is due to the two simultaneous cues for the subjunctive: subclause and negation.

### § 15.1.1 The time relation between clauses

The time relation between the event in the main clause and the event in the subclause is expressed in different ways in different languages. In English it is common to apply the same tense in both clauses if the events are simultaneous, but in Somali the present tense is used in the subclause to express simultaneity also when the main clause is in the past tense.

**Waxa ay tagtay meel ay biyo ku jiraan.**

FIN.FOC she went place they water[PL] in exist

*She **went** to a place where there **was** water.*

**Odaygii baa u sheegay in ay toddoba nin yihiin.**

*The old man **told** them that they **were** seven men.*

Past tense in a subclause often means that the event of the subclause preceded the event in the main clause, which will often correspond to the past perfect tense in English.

**Nimánkii maxáa ay ugú maleeyeen in nin ká dhumay?**

*Why **did** the men **think** that a man **had disappeared** from them?*

In many temporal subclauses, the progressive present tense is used to express that the events in the subclause and the main clause are simultaneous.

**Marka ay dugsiga tagayaan iyo marka ay ka imanayaan**ba way is raacaan. *Both when they are going to school and when they are coming (back) from (it) they accompany each other.*

On the other hand, the simple present tense means that the action in the subclause has come to an end before the action in the main clause starts. Often both present and past tense may be used in English.

**Waxbarashadaada dadka waaweyn marka aad dhammayso** maxaa aad qaban doontaa? *When you finish (have finished) your adult education, what will you do (then)?*

## § 15.1.2 Future from the perspective of the past

Together with a main clause in the past tense, the conditional construction is used in subclauses to express a future, planned action from the perspective of the past, without really saying anything about whether that action was realised or not.

**Khudaartii baa baxday, waxana soo dhawaadey wakhtigii la goyn lahaa.** Markii la gaaray waqtigii la goyn lahaa, ayey ku heshiiyeen in ay beerta u qaybiyaan saddex meelood. Mid kasta waxaa la siiyey qaybtii uu ka shaqayn lahaa ee uu goyn lahaa.

*The vegetables grew and the time approached when one should harvest. When the time came when one should harvest, they decided to divide the field into three parts. Each one was given the part that he should work on and that he should harvest.*

## § 15.2 *Ín* clauses

The only frequent subjunction in Somali is *ín* *that*.

A subject word is obligatory in an *ín* clause, and therefore the verb is always in the present or future subjunctive, or in the ordinary past tense.

### § 15.2.1 Object clauses with *ín*

Subclauses beginning with *ín* mostly occur as objects of the main clause verb.

**Ma jeceshahay ín aad soo booqato ayeeyadaa?**

Q you.like that you Cmpl visit your.grandmother  
*Do you like to pay a visit your grandmother?*

**Ma u malaynaysaa ín haramcadkii la hadlay Maxamed?**

Q in you.believe that the.leopard with talked Mahamed  
*Do you think that the leopard talked with Mahamed?*

Some verbs that are followed by an infinitive phrase in English correspond to Somali verbs that must be followed by an *ín* clause.

**Cali wáxa uu rabaa ín uu fuuló baaskíilka.**

Ali FIN.FOC he wants that he rides the.bike  
*Ali wants **TO RIDE THE BIKE.***

### § 15.2.2 Subject clauses with *ín*

Sometimes the *ín* clause functions as the subject of the main clause verb.

**Example**

### § 15.2.3 Predicative complement clauses with *ín*

**Explain this topic.**

**Shaqadayduna waa ín aan daweeyo, ma aha ín aan dilo ama dhaawaco!**

*And my job is to heal, it is not to kill or injure (lit. ...that I heal, it is not that I kill or injure).*

#### § 15.2.4 The construction *waa ín...*

The phrase **waa ín** corresponds to English *should, has to, must, need to*. In this construction, **ín** *that* may be followed by either the present subjunctive or the ordinary present tense.

**Waa in aynu [ilaalinnaa](#) nadaafadda ilaha biyaheenna.**

**Waa in aynu [ilaalinno](#) nadaafadda ilaha biyaheenna.**

*We must protect the hygiene of our water sources.*

One possible explanation for this variation could be that this construction is not straightforwardly felt to be a subclause, since there isn't much of a main clause preceding it.

## § 15.3 Relative clauses

English relative clauses typically begin with a relative word such as *that*, *who*, *which*, *where* etc.

*The letter that I received had been opened.*

*Did you watch the film that I recommended?*

But quite often the relative word may be omitted.

*The letter I received had been opened.*

*Did you watch the film I recommended?*

In Somali, relative clauses are always expressed in the latter manner. Somali doesn't have any relative words. Instead, the relative clause often begins with a short subject pronoun that expresses the subject of the relative subclause. And, importantly, the short subject pronoun occurs on its own, without any accompanying sentence particle, since Somali subclauses never contain any sentence particle.

**Waa maxay shaqada ay Aamina samaynaysaa?**

PR.FOC what    the.work    she Amina    is doing

*WHAT's the work (that) Amina is doing?*

The short subject pronoun may also occur before the verb, and it may be omitted if there is a subject noun phrase in the subclause.

**Waa maxay shaqada Aamina ay samaynaysaa?**

**Waa maxay shaqada Aamina samaynaysaa?**

### § 15.3.1 Relative clauses connected by a conjunction

A relative clause is a modifier phrase that says something about the preceding head noun. If there is more than one modifier, all but the very first one must be preceded by a conjunction, either **ee** or **oo**.

**(a)** The conjunction **ee** is typically used before the second (third etc.) modifier after a definite head noun.



Maxáa uu ahaa **dhárka** cusub ee Faadumó loó iibiyay?

*What are the new **clothes** that one bought for Faduma?*

Booqó **iláha** biyáha ee kú dhów dúgsigaaga.

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

Magaców **cuntáda** kala duwán ee sáwirka ká muuqata.

*Give the names of the different kinds of **food** shown in the picture.*

(b) The conjunction **oo** is typically used before the second (third etc.) modifier after an indefinite head noun.

### Add something that is not a numeral

Magacow **saddex** cunto **oo** kale **oo** aad ku cunto guriga.

*Give the name of three other kinds of food that you eat at home.*

Sheeg magacyada **laba** ciidood **oo** Islaamku leeyahay.

*Tell the names of two holidays that Islam has.*

Qor **laba** waxtar **oo** kale **oo** uu dabku leeyahay.

*Write two other uses that fire has.*

(c) After proper nouns and personal pronouns, **oo** must always be used, also before the first modifier.

Jaamac waxa uu maqlay **Xasan** **oo** ku hadlaya telefoonka.

*Jama heard Hassan who was talking on the phone.*

*= Jama heard Hassan talk(ing) on the phone.*

This use of **oo** indicates that the relative clause is parenthetical and not necessary in order to identify the person or object referred to by the head noun. This kind of relative clause often gives information that is only relevant in a specific situation. See also § 15.4.6.

This use of **oo** sometimes occurs also after nouns with a definite determiner.

**Awoowgay oo wiilka ugu weyn ahaa...**

**Kani waa Roóble iyo ardaydii fásalkooda oo soó booqday Saýnab dúgsigooda oo xeéba kú yaalla.**

**Sáwir gúriga reer-guuraága iyo árigii oo xeraysan.**

**Gabadhii aabbaheed oo meel u dhow joogey ayaa u soo orday oo ka fujiyey dhurwaagii. Waa uu cararay dhurwaagii.**

**Gabadhii oo faraxsan ayaa u mahad celisey aabbaheed.**

### § 15.3.2 Relative clauses in subject noun phrases

According to the rules of standard Somali, a final **-a/-o** in a verb in a relative clause should be changed into the long vowel **-aa** if the verb in the relative clause is the final word in a subject noun phrase.

The subject noun phrase has a grey background.

Add other examples that are not questions.

**Waa maxay shaqada ay Aamina samaynaa?**

PR.FOC what the.work she Amina is.doing

*What's the work (that) Amina is doing?*

**Waa maxay dharka aad dugsiga u xidhataa?**

PR.FOC what the.clothes you the.school for tie

*WHAT are the clothes (that) you put on for school?*

The use of this subject marker is not very widespread in colloquial Somali, and it is therefore frequently lacking in writing as well.

### § 15.3.3 Relative clauses in headings

Somali headings, story titles and captions of illustrations generally have the structure of a noun phrase, containing a head noun and a relative clause with a verb in its reduced form.

**Xayawaanka biyaha ku jira**

*The animal that is in the water = The animal in the water*

English headings, titles and captions may also contain a relative clause with a verb, but often they just contain a noun phrase followed by a preposition phrase. That kind of structure is impossible in Somali, since

prepositions can only be used if followed by a verb. That is why relative clauses are more frequent in Somali than in English.

### § 15.3.4 Relative clauses with a preposition

Many relative clauses contain a preposition that points back to the head noun in the main clause. In such cases the preposition may often correspond to another suitable relative word in English. If the head noun denotes a place, *where* is commonly used.

**Sawirkani waxa uu ina tusayaa meelaha aynu biyaha ka helno.**

*This picture shows us the places (that) we get water from.*

*= This picture shows us the places where we find water.*

**Ragga dabdemisku waxa ay isticmaalaan biyo ay dabka ku demiyaan.**

## § 15.4 Adverbial clauses

**Alternatively nouns with subjunctive functions**

Compare the subordinate clauses in the following two sentences.

*Sue immediately noticed Mary when she entered the room.*

*Sue noticed Mary the moment she entered the room.*

The noun *the moment* does the same job as the subjunction *when*. To use nouns as connecting words between clauses in this manner is extremely common in Somali. Actually, subjunctions are quite scarce, with the exception of the very frequent subjunction **in** *that* and a few others borrowed from Arabic.

### § 15.4.1 Temporal clauses

The most common subordinator word introducing temporal subclauses is the noun **marka / markii** *the moment*. It corresponds to English *when*.

The form **marka** is mainly used for general reference and with reference to the present and the future, whereas the form **markii** is mainly used with reference to a specific occasion in the past.

**Ku bilow xaraf weyn marka aad qorayso magac gaar ah.**

*Start with a big letter when you write a proper noun.*

**Qof waliba markii uu hoos u eegay biyihii waxa uu arkay hummaaggiisa.**

*Each person, when he looked down into the water, saw his mirror image.*

Other common subordinator words and phrases introducing temporal subclauses are:

**ka dib markii** *after (having)*

**Dad badan ayaa waqti badan noolaa ka dib markii ay qaadeen cudurkan.** *Many people have lived a long time after they got this disease.*

**inta / intii** *while, when*

**Samatar hooyadiis inta ay qososhay ayey madaxa ruxday.**

*While Samatar's mother laughed she shook her head.*

**Dukaanlihii inta uu muraayaddii gashaday ayaa uu si fiican warqaddii ugu akhriyey.** *When the shopkeeper put on his eye-glasses he read the letter very well with them.*

**inta / intii aan** (negator) *before* (followed by the reduced subjunctive)

**Waxaan toosaa qorraxdu inta aanay soo bixin.**

*I get up before the sun comes up.*

**Diinkii baa xariijintii gaaray intii aanu bakaylihii soo gaarin.**

*THE TURTLE reached the line before (he) the hare reached it.*

The expression **ká hor** *before* is sometimes added for additional clarity.

**Quraacda waxa ay ka cuntaa xaafadooda inta aanay dugsiga tegin ka hor.** *She eats breakfast in her neighbourhood before she goes to school.*

**ilaa** *until* (a subjunction of Arabic origin)

**Sidii ayaa warkii ku faafay magaaladii ilaa uu boqorkiina maqlay.**

*That way the news spread in the city until even the king heard it.*

## § 15.4.2 Conditional clauses

The most common subordinator word in conditional subclauses is the noun **haddii** *the occasion*. It corresponds to English *if*.

If the condition may easily be fulfilled, the present subjunctive is used in the conditional subclause. The main clause is in the ordinary present or future tense.

**Haddii aad erayó iskú darto waxa aad héli doontaa weér.**

*If you put words together you will get a clause.*

If it is impossible or less realistic that the condition may be fulfilled, the conditional construction is used.

This is especially so in sentences referring to a past situation, since the situation is only hypothetical. In this type of sentences, the conditional construction is used in both the main and the subordinate clause. The English subclause is usually in the past perfect.

**Maxáa aad samayn lahayd haddii aad lá socón lahayd Maxáméd iyó**

**Núur maalíntaas?** *What would you have done if you had been accompanying Mahamed and Nur that day?*

If the situation is perceived as general but still not very probable, with a possible reference to the future, only the main clause is in the conditional whereas the subclause is in the present subjunctive. The corresponding English subclause is usually in the past tense.

**Haddii uu saaxiibkaa jirran yahay maxaa aad samayn lahayd?**

*If your friend was/were ill, what would you do?*

Maxaa ugu habboon ee aad **samayn lahayd haddii aad aragto guri dab qabsaday**. *What's the most suitable thing that you would do if you saw a house that had caught fire?*

### § 15.4.3 Final subclauses

The verb in final subclauses is normally in the simple present subjunctive.

Andra tempus, konjunktiv? Bara presens? ej preteritum?

(a) Final subclauses are mostly introduced by the noun **si** *manner, way*, accompanied by the preposition **ú** *in (a way)* in the verb phrase of the subclause. This construction corresponds to the English subjunctive phrases *in order to* and *so that*.

Isticmaal erayadan **si aad ugu buuxiso meelaha bannaan**.

use these.words **way** you **in.with** fill the.places empty.

Use these words **so that** you fill the empty spaces **with them**.

Use these words **in order to** fill the empty spaces.

As shown by the last translation, this kind of subclause in English may be condensed into an infinitive phrase if the subject of both clauses is identical. Such a condensed construction does not exist in Somali.

(b) Final subclauses may also be introduced by the subjunction **ín** *that*, which then requires the use of the preposition **ú** *for* in the main clause.

**Shimbiríhii waxa ay ú yimaadeen ín ay díinka hílibkiisa jilicsan cunáan**.

*The birds came (in order) to eat the tender meat of the turtle.*

### § 15.4.4 Concessive clauses

Concessive subclauses are introduced by the subordinator phrase **in kasta oo**, corresponding to English *even though*. The contracted form **in kastoo** or **inkastoo** is also very frequent.

**Axmed waa yimid in kasta oo uu soo daahay.**

*Ahmed came, even though he was late.*

## § 15.4.5 Causal clauses

Causes are usually not expressed by subordinate clauses in Somali. Instead, the conjunctive phrase **sababta oo ah / sababtoo ah** *the reason being*, corresponding to English *since, because*, is most often used. It is followed by a complete main clause containing a sentence particle.

**Maryan ayeeyadeed waa ay farxi doontaa sababta oo ah waxa ay jeceshahay moos.**

*Maryan's grandmother will be happy since she likes bananas.*

Another possibility is to use the conjunction **waáyo** *since, because* followed by a complete main clause with a sentence particle.

**Waxa uu xidhan yahay dhar fudud waayo waa xilli kulul.**

*He is dressed in light clothes since it's a warm season.*

Yet another possibility is to use the subjunction **maadaáma** *since, because* (of Arabic origin) followed by a subclause.

**Maadaama uu bakayluhu baahnaa waxa uu go'aansaday in uu ukunta karsado.**

*Since the hare was hungry he decided to cook the eggs for himself.*

## § 15.4.6 Circumstantial clauses

A special type of relative clause is used to express different kinds of circumstances. A long personal pronoun, a name, and sometimes a common noun with a definite determiner, is followed by the conjunction **oo** and a relative clause. This type of construction may express time, manner, reason etc. and the interpretation depends only on the context.

TIME:

**Wáxaa la guraa miráha móoska oo weli cagaar ah.**

*One collects the fruits of the banana, still being green.*

*The banana fruits are collected when they are still green.*

**Maalin maalmaha ka mid ah isaga oo u socda iskoolka oo moos gacanta ku sita ayaa daanyeer ka hor yimid.**

*One day, (when) he (was) walking to school and carrying a banana in his hand, a monkey came in his way.*

MANNER:

**Xasan oo madaxa ruxaya ayaa yiri: ...**

*Hassan, shaking his head, said: ...*

**Waxa aan hubinayaa qiyaastaydii aniga oo adeegsanaya miisaan.**

*I am checking my estimation, (me) using a scale.*

A negative circumstantial clause often corresponds to an English clause introduced by the preposition *without*.

**Waxa ay noolaan kartaa muddo dheer iyada oo aan biyo cabbin.**

*It can live for a long period of time, (it) not drinking water.*

*= It can live for a long period of time without drinking water.*

CONDITION:

**Adiga oo cunto haysta haddii qof gaajeysan kuu yimaado maxaa aad fali lahayd?**

*(You) Having food, what would you do if a hungry person came to you?*

## § 15.4.7 Comparative clauses

Subclauses that express a comparison are usually introduced by the noun **sida** *as*.

**Sida la yiri qaar ayaa waxa ay noloshoodu gaartaa 150 sano.**

*As people have told, the life of some of them reaches 150 years. (turtles)*



## § 15.5 English indirect questions

English indirect questions are generally introduced by the same question word as the corresponding direct question, e.g., *when, where, how, what*.

*Where do you live?*

*I asked him **where** he lives.*

In Somali, question words are mostly formed through the addition of the interrogative suffix **-ee** to various nouns. In “indirect questions” the same noun is used, but in the plain definite form, without the interrogative suffix **-ee**.

**xaggee? – xagga**

**maxay? – waxa**

**Maxaa ay sidaasi u tahay?**

*Why is it like that / that way?*

**Sharax waxa ay sidaasi u tahay.**

*Explain why it is that way / like that.*

It is especially important to notice that **wáxa** *the thing* isn't always a focus particle. Sometimes it is a definite noun used to introduce an object subclause in the same way as English *what*.

**U sheeg fasalka **waxa aad biyaha u isticmaasho gurigiinna.****

to tell the.class the.thing you the.water for use your.house

*Tell the class **what** you use water for at your home.*

### § 15.5.1 Indirect yes/no questions

English indirect yes/no questions are usually expressed as subclauses beginning with *if* or *whether*. In Somali they usually begin with **in** *that*.

**Waxay weydiisay bisaddii iyo ridii **in ay burka ka sameeyaan canjeero ama rooti.****

*She asked the cat and the goat **whether** they should make flat bread or French bread with the flour.*

## § 15.6 Direct speech as object clause

Direct speech may occur as the object of a verb in a main clause. Both clauses are then main clauses and will contain sentence particles. It is very common for the dominant clause to contain a focus particle pointing to the object clause.

**Jiirkii waxa uu yiri “Anigu ma rabo.”**

*The mouse said: – I DON’T WANT TO.*

**“Waa qaamuus,” ayaa uu yiri.**

*– IT’S A DICTIONARY, he said.*

## § 15.7 Negative subordinate clauses

All negative subordinate clauses contain the negator word **aan** *not* and a verb in the reduced subjunctive form ending in **-n/-in/-nin**.

The negator word **aan** *not* usually accompanys the short subject pronoun, either before it (more common in the north), or after it (more common in the south). A long vowel in the second element, be it the negator or the pronoun, is shortened. The buffer consonant /s/ is inserted after the pronouns **uu** *he* and **ay** *she; they* before the negator. Cf. § 5.2.6.

**Haddii aanad<sup>N</sup>/aadan<sup>S</sup> sun haysan, dhalo yar oo fur leh ku xidh cayayaanka.** *If you don’t have poison, shut the insect into a small glass container with a lid.*

**Maxaad dareentaa haddii aadan<sup>S</sup>/aanad<sup>N</sup> helin hurdo kugu filan?**  
*What do you feel if you don’t get enough sleep (for yourself)?*

**Haddii carruurta aysan<sup>S</sup>/aanay<sup>N</sup> haysan biyo, maxaa dhici lahaa?**  
*If the children hadn’t had water, what would have happened?*

**Dawacadii waxa ay bakaylihii u sheegtay in uusan<sup>S</sup>/aanu<sup>N</sup> diinku shaqadiisa si fiican u qabanayn.**

*The jackal told the hare that the turtle was doing his job well.*

## § 16. Colloquial Somali

Everyday, casual Somali, both spoken and written, exhibits many smaller and larger differences compared to the norms that are most commonly applied in public written communication, i.e., what one may call standardised written Somali or simply standard Somali.

It is important not to forget that standard Somali also exhibits quite a bit of variation within the standard, as discussed earlier in this grammar. There are, however, many other phenomena that fall outside the generally applied written norm or standard, which are still very common in everyday, casual Somali. Some of those traits will be presented below.

Word forms that you usually don't see in writing will be marked with <sup>c</sup> for colloquial.

### § 16.1 The sounds

Certain principles are applied much more frequently in colloquial Somali than in writing, the most important being contractions and assimilations.

#### § 16.1.1 Contractions

When there is a variation at hand between uncontracted and contracted items, the contracted ones are generally preferred in colloquial Somali.

**wuxuu** or **waxuu<sup>c</sup>** rather than **waxa uu**  
**ayaan, ayuu** rather than **ayaa aan, ayaa uu**

The focus particles *baa/ayaa* are left out and the subject pronoun is attached to the focused noun or noun phrase.

**Xasanaan<sup>c</sup> arkay** rather than **Xasan ayaa aan arkay**.

#### § 16.1.2 Assimilation of /n/

In verbs, the 1st person plural /n/ is assimilated to a preceding /l/, /r/

**waan hadallaa<sup>C</sup>** for **waa aan hadalnaa** *we speak*

**waan furray<sup>C</sup>** for **waa aan furnay** *we opened*

/n/ followed by a consonant is assimilated to that consonant

**middi<sup>C</sup>** for **mindí** *knife*

### § 16.1.3 Distant vowel assimilation

Besides forms like **ilkúhu** *the teeth* and **ilkíhii** *those teeth*, with assimilation of /u/ and /i/ across /h/, the spoken language also shows assimilation with a following /e/ or /o/; however, the latter sound changes are usually not reflected by the orthography. The most frequent spelling is, e.g., **ilkáhooda** *their teeth*, **ilkáheeda** *her teeth*, but the pronunciation is usually **ilkóhooda<sup>C</sup>** and **ilkéheeda<sup>C</sup>**. To render this kind of assimilation in writing is somewhat more common in certain words, e.g.

	<i>more literary</i>	<i>more casual</i>	
<b>aabbáha</b> <i>the father</i>	<b>aabbáheed</b>	<b>aabbéheed<sup>C</sup></b>	<i>her father</i>
	<b>aabbáhood</b>	<b>aabbóhood<sup>C</sup></b>	<i>their father</i>

Distant vowel assimilation with /i/ also frequently occurs in a more colloquial style in the stem of some masculine nouns that end in /x/ or /c/.

<b>mágac</b> <i>name</i>	<b>mágac-iisa</b>	<b>mágic-iisa<sup>C</sup></b>	<i>his name</i>
<b>mádax</b> <i>head</i>	<b>mádax-iisa</b>	<b>mádix-iisa<sup>C</sup></b>	<i>his head</i>

## § 16.2 Inflection

### § 16.2.1 Gender of nouns

Some nouns exhibit variation in gender in some regions.

STANDARD		COLLOQUIAL/REGIONAL
<b>arrín -ta</b>	<i>matter</i>	<b>árrin -ka</b>
<b>gúddi -ga</b>	<i>committee</i>	<b>guddí -da</b>
<b>maalín -ta</b>	<i>day</i>	<b>maálin -ka</b>

<b>roóti -ga<sup>S</sup></b>	<i>bread</i>	<b>rootí -da</b>
<b>roodhí -da<sup>N</sup></b>	<i>bread</i>	
<b>Sabtí -da</b>	<i>Saturday</i>	<b>Sábtí -ga</b>

## § 16.2.2 Nouns with gender variation

A small number of nouns are used with different genders by different persons and/or in different parts of the Somali speaking area. A couple of common words with noticeable variation are:

<b>roótiga / rootída / roodhída</b>	<i>the bread</i>
<b>Sábtiga / Sabtída</b>	<i>the Saturday</i>
<b>súbaxa / subáxda</b>	<i>the morning</i>

## § 16.2.3 Determiner endings

The short possessive ending **-kiis/-tiis** is often further shortened to **-kii/-tii** or **-ki<sup>C</sup>/-ti<sup>C</sup>**.

Also the referential demonstrative ending **-kii/-tii** is often shortened to **-ki<sup>C</sup>/-ti<sup>C</sup>**.

## § 16.2.4 Verb inflection

### § 16.2.4a Present tense, 2nd person plural

Often **-tiin<sup>C</sup>** instead of standard Somali **-taan**.

**Ma ku aragtiin<sup>C</sup> qaybo yaryar?** (stand. **aragtaan**)

*Do you see small parts there?*

**...waxaad la kulmi doontiin<sup>C</sup> shaqaalaha caafimaadka...**

*...you will meet with helthcare staff... (stand. **doontaan**)*

### § 16.2.4b 1 p. sing. negative present subjunctive

1st person singular negative present subjunctive ends in **-i** in southern colloquial Somali instead of the standard form that ends in **-o**.

**má cuni** *I don't eat* instead of standard **má cuno**

### § 16.2.4c Forms of the verb *yahay*

The 3 person negative present tense **ma ahan<sup>c</sup>** instead of standard Somali **ma aha**, especially in the Mogadishu region.

**waaye** instead of **weeye**, especially in Benaadir

### § 16.2.5 Vowel length in the progressive morpheme

In some regions, the progressive suffix is realised with a long vowel, i.e. as /aay/. Again, in other regions it is realised as /oy/ or /ooy/.

#### Examples

### § 16.3 Syntax

Lack of subclause negator **aan** *not*, typical in Benaadir.

**Lee** 'only', typical word in Benaadir.

#### § 16.3.1 No subject case

In a colloquial style, the grammatical subject marking is often not used, especially in the south.

#### Examples

This phenomenon is especially common at the very end of a clause.

**Ma nadiif baa ilaha biyaha?** (instead of **ilaha biyuhu**)

*Are the water sources CLEAN?*

## § 16.3.2 Focus by subject pronoun

In colloquial Somali, the focus particle **baa/ayaa** very commonly disappears between a preceding noun phrase and a following short subject pronoun. The subject pronoun is contracted with the preceding noun phrase. This construction is a very frequent way of expressing focus in colloquial Somali.

Examples

## § 16.3.3 Subjunctive instead of reduced verb forms

In some regions it is common to use the subjunctive instead of the reduced verb forms, both in subclauses without a subject word and in main clauses with a focused subject NP.

Examples