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BEGINNER’S

SOMALI GRAMMAR

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This is work in progress. Read it critically!
Feel free to contact me with comments.
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# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 1.</td>
<td>The Somali speaking areas</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 1.1</td>
<td>Regional variation within standard Somali</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 1.1.1</td>
<td>Variation in the pronunciation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 1.1.2</td>
<td>Variation in word forms</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 1.1.3</td>
<td>Variation in the vocabulary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 2.</td>
<td>The script</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 2.1</td>
<td>The alphabet</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 2.2</td>
<td>Orthography</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 2.3</td>
<td>Capital letters</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 2.4</td>
<td>Double letters</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 2.4.1</td>
<td>&lt;gg&gt; and &lt;dd&gt; in nouns with a suffix</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 2.4.2</td>
<td>&lt;nn&gt; in the 1st and 2nd person plural</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.</td>
<td>The sound system</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.1</td>
<td>Vowels</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.1.1</td>
<td>Heavy vowels</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.1.2</td>
<td>Short and long vowels</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.1.3</td>
<td>Diphthongs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.2</td>
<td>Consonants</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.2.1</td>
<td>Intense consonants</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3</td>
<td>Stress or high tone</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.1</td>
<td>Phrase final high tone or continuation tone</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.2</td>
<td>Tone in nouns</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.2a</td>
<td>Default tone</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.2b</td>
<td>Nouns in isolation</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.2c</td>
<td>Subject tone</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.2d</td>
<td>Modifier tone</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.2e</td>
<td>Vocative tone</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.3</td>
<td>Tone in adjectives</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.4</td>
<td>Tone in verb phrases</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.3.5</td>
<td>Tone in particle phrases</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.4</td>
<td>Phonotactics</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.4.1</td>
<td>Limitations on syllable structure</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 3.4.2</td>
<td>Restrictions on /m/, /t/ and /k/</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 4.</td>
<td>Morphophonology</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 4.1</td>
<td>Alternations of /k/ and /t/</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 4.1.1</td>
<td>Adjectives like jecel and nool</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 4.2</td>
<td>Distant vowel assimilation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 4.2.1</td>
<td>Distant assimilation across /h/</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 4.2.2</td>
<td>Distant assimilation in the infinitive</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 4.3</td>
<td>Vowel insertion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.</td>
<td>Contractions</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.1</td>
<td>Optional contractions</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.1.1</td>
<td>Sentence particle + subject pronoun</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.2</td>
<td>Obligatory contractions</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.2.1</td>
<td>Contracted prepositions</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.2.2</td>
<td>Contractions with la</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.2.3</td>
<td>Contractions with object pronouns</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.2.4</td>
<td>Contractions with the negator má</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.2.5</td>
<td>Longer contractions</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.2.6</td>
<td>The negator aan + short subject pronouns</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 5.2.7</td>
<td>Contractions with the particle baa or ayaa</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.</td>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.1</td>
<td>The gender of nouns</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.1.1</td>
<td>Stress in nouns</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.1.2</td>
<td>Nouns ending in –e/-o/-a</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.1.3</td>
<td>Exceptions</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.2</td>
<td>The indefinite form</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.3</td>
<td>The definite singular form</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.3.1</td>
<td>Generic definite form</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.4</td>
<td>The plural of feminine nouns</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.5</td>
<td>The plural of masculine nouns</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.6</td>
<td>Less straightforward plural forms</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.6.1</td>
<td>Sound changes</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.6.2</td>
<td>-ó, -óha instead of -yó, -yáda</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.6.3</td>
<td>-ó, -óha instead of reduplication</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.6.4</td>
<td>-yó, -yáda instead of consonant strengthening</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.6.5</td>
<td>Unexpected definite article</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.6.6</td>
<td>Gender alternations</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.6.7</td>
<td>Irregular plural forms</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.7</td>
<td>Arabic plural forms</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 6.8</td>
<td>The counting form of nouns</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§ 6.9 Countability 51
§ 6.9.1 General use of the singular 51
§ 6.9.2 Collective nouns 51
§ 6.9.3 Singular, plural and collective form 52
§ 6.9.4 Only singular and collective form 53
§ 6.9.5 Group nouns 53
§ 6.9.6 Plural only nouns 54

§ 7. Formation of nouns 55
§ 7.1 Persons 55
§ 7.1.1 Female persons 56
§ 7.1.2 Collectives 56
§ 7.2 Things and abstract notions 56
§ 7.3 Verbal nouns 57
§ 7.4 Compounds 58

§ 8. Numerals 60

§ 9. Pronouns 62
§ 9.1 Personal pronouns 62
§ 9.1.1 No 3rd person object pronouns 62
§ 9.1.2 Long forms of personal pronouns 63
§ 9.1.3 First person plural: we, us, our 64
§ 9.1.4 The indefinite subject pronoun la 64
§ 9.1.5 Obligatory short object pronouns 65
§ 9.1.6 The reflexive object pronoun is 65
§ 9.2 Demonstrative pronouns 65
§ 9.2.1 Demonstrative forms with –aa, –aa 67
§ 9.2.2 Demonstrative forms with –ii 67
§ 9.2.2a Adjectives after -ii 69
§ 9.2.3 Placeholder pronouns 69
§ 9.3 Possessive pronouns 71
§ 9.3.1 Short possessive endings 72
§ 9.3.2 Implied possessive relations 74
§ 9.3.3 Partitive use of possessive suffixes 74
§ 9.3.4 Possessive + demonstrative suffix 74
§ 9.4 Interrogative pronouns 75
§ 9.4.1 Interrogative use of possessive forms 76
§ 9.5 Nouns with pronominal functions 76
§ 9.5.1 qóf person; cíd people 77
§ 9.5.2 wákhti/wáqti time 78
§ 9.5.3 si manner 77
§ 9.5.4 mid one; isku-mid the same one 77
§ 9.5.5 meél, hál place; xág side, direction 77
§ 9.5.6 már, goór, kól moment; dhamaán the whole amount 78
§ 9.5.7 láf bone; náf soul, spirit; qúr/qúdh life 78

§ 9.6 Adjectives with pronominal functions 79
§ 9.6.1 dhán all, total 79
§ 9.6.2 kastá every 80
§ 9.6.3 kalé other; like 80

§ 10. Adjectives 81
§ 10.1 Formation of adjectives 81
§ 10.1.1 Adjectives derived from nouns 81
§ 10.1.2 Ordinal numbers 81
§ 10.1.3 Adjectives derived from verbs 82
§ 10.1.4 “Phrasal adjectives” 82
§ 10.2 The inflection of adjectives 83
§ 10.2.1 The distributive form 83
§ 10.2.2 Sound alternations in the stem 84
§ 10.3 The comparative degree 85
§ 10.4 The superlative degree 85

§ 11. Verbs 86
§ 11.1 The present tense 86
§ 11.2 The past tense 87
§ 11.3 The three conjugations 88
§ 11.4 The infinitive 89
§ 11.5 Progressive verb forms 90
§ 11.5.1 Present progressive expressing near future 91
§ 11.5.2 Verbs without progressive forms 91
§ 11.6 The habitual past tense 93
§ 11.7 The future tense 94
§ 11.8 Survey of tenses and aspects 95
§ 11.9 Reduced verb forms 96
§ 11.10 The subjunctive mood 98
§ 11.10.1 Negative progressive forms 99
§ 11.10.2 Reduced subjunctive forms 100
§ 11.10.3 The optative construction 102
§ 11.10.3a The negative optative 103
§ 11.10.4 The conditional construction 104
§ 11.10.4a The negative conditional 105
§ 11.11 The imperative mood 107
  § 11.11.1 The prohibitive construction 108
§ 11.12 Sound changes 109
  § 11.12.1 Conjugation 1 109
  § 11.12.2 Conjugation 2 118
  § 11.12.3 Conjugation 3 121
§ 11.13 Irregular verbs 130
  § 11.13.1 yahay is 130
    § 11.13.1a The use of yahay ‘is’ 131
    § 11.13.1b Different equivalents of English ‘is’ 132
  § 11.13.2 Adjectives with verb suffixes 133
    § 11.13.2a Stative verb suffixes 134
    § 11.13.2b Inchoative verb suffixes 135
  § 11.13.3 leeyahay has 136
    § 11.13.3a Equivalents of English has 138
  § 11.13.4 yaallaa lies, is 138
  § 11.13.5 yaqaanna know 139
  § 11.13.6 yimaadda comes 140
  § 11.13.7 yiraahdaa says 141
§ 11.14 Formation of verbs 142
  § 11.14.1 Inchoative verbs in –oobaa / –oodaa 142
  § 11.14.2 Inchoative verbs in –aadaa 142
  § 11.14.3 Causative verbs in –eeyaa 143
  § 11.14.4 Causative verbs in –iyaa 143
  § 11.14.5 Causative verbs in –siyaa 145
  § 11.14.6 Anticausative verbs in –maa 145
  § 11.14.7 Autobenefactive verbs in –(s)taa / –(sa)daa 146
§ 12. Phrases and word order 148
  § 12.1 The noun phrase 149
    § 12.1.1 Nouns as modifiers 149
    § 12.1.2 Adjectives as modifiers 150
    § 12.1.3 Noun + adjective as a modifier phrase 150
    § 12.1.4 Adjectives with headwords in –kii–tii 151
    § 12.1.5 Relative clauses as modifiers 151
    § 12.1.6 Noun + ah being as a modifier phrase 152
    § 12.1.7 Noun + leh having; with as a modifier phrase 152
    § 12.1.8 Agreement in definiteness 152
    § 12.1.9 Noun phrases expressing quantity 153
    § 12.1.10 Counting uncountable nouns 153
    § 12.1.11 More than one modifier 154
  § 12.1.12 More than two nouns in a phrase 157
  § 12.1.13 The phrase ká mid ah of 158
  § 12.1.14 Prepositions before verbal nouns 158
  § 12.1.15 Prepositions before other nouns 158
  § 12.1.16 The particle –ba 159
§ 12.2 The verb phrase 160
  § 12.2.1 Prepositions 161
  § 12.2.2 Object pronoun + preposition 162
  § 12.2.3 The negator má 162
  § 12.2.4 Viewpoint particles 162
  § 12.2.5 Distribution particles 163
  § 12.2.6 Position particles 164
§ 12.3 The particle phrase 167
  § 12.3.1 Sentence particles 167
  § 12.3.2 Short subject pronouns 170
  § 12.3.3 Obligatory subject pronouns 170
  § 12.3.4 Omission of the short subject pronoun 171
§ 13. Simple clauses 173
  § 13.1 Sentence constituents 173
    § 13.1.1 Subjects 174
    § 13.1.2 Predicate agreement 176
    § 13.1.3 Focused subjects 177
    § 13.1.4 Objects 178
      § 13.1.4a Two objects 179
    § 13.1.5 Adverbials 179
      § 13.1.5a The preposition u 180
      § 13.1.5b The preposition ku 182
      § 13.1.5c The preposition ka 184
      § 13.1.5d The preposition la 186
      § 13.1.5e Variation in the use of prepositions 187
      § 13.1.5f Preposition with position particle 187
      § 13.1.5g Complex “prepositional phrases” 188
      § 13.1.5h Recipient or indirect object 189
      § 13.1.5i Place adverbials 189
      § 13.1.5j Time adverbials 190
      § 13.1.5k Manner adverbials 191
      § 13.1.5l Various other adverbials 192
      § 13.1.6 Vocatives 192
  § 13.2 Declarative clauses 194
    § 13.2.1 Negative declarative clauses 195
§ 13.2.2  Clauses with the verb ‘yahay’ 196
§ 13.2.3  The verb ‘yahay’ with a focused subject 197
§ 13.2.4  Comparison 197
§ 13.2.5  Telling the time 197
§ 13.3  Questions 198
  § 13.3.1  Wh-questions with focus 198
  § 13.3.2  Wh-questions without focus 199
  § 13.3.3  Yes/no questions without focus 200
  § 13.3.4  Yes/no questions with focus 201
  § 13.3.5  Multiple choice questions 201
  § 13.3.6  Negative questions 202
§ 13.4  Commands 202
  § 13.4.1  Warnings and prohibitions 203

§ 14.  Coordination 204
  § 14.1  The conjunctions ama and mise 206
  § 14.2  The conjunction ee 207
  § 14.3  The conjunctions laakiín, -se and balse 207
  § 14.4  The conjunction waayo 208
  § 14.5  The conjuctional phrase sababta oo ah 208

§ 15.  Subordinate clauses 209
  § 15.1  The form of the verb in subclauses 209
    § 15.1.1  Negative subordinate clauses 211
    § 15.1.2  The time relation between clauses 212
    § 15.1.3  Future from the perspective of the past 213
  § 15.2  In clauses 213
    § 15.2.1  Oblique clauses with in 214
    § 15.2.2  Subject clauses with in 215
    § 15.2.3  The construction waa in... 216
  § 15.3  Relative clauses 216
    § 15.3.1  Relative clauses connected by a conjunction 217
    § 15.3.2  Relative clauses in subject noun phrases 219
    § 15.3.3  Relative clauses in headings 219
    § 15.3.4  Relative clauses with a preposition 220
  § 15.4  Adverbial clauses 220
    § 15.4.1  Temporal clauses 221
    § 15.4.2  Conditional clauses 223
    § 15.4.3  Final subclauses 223
    § 15.4.4  Concessive clauses 224
    § 15.4.5  Causal clauses 224
    § 15.4.6  Background clauses 225
    § 15.4.7  Comparative clauses 227
  § 15.5  English indirect questions 227
    § 15.5.1  Indirect yes/no questions 228
  § 15.6  Direct speech as object clause 228

§ 16.  Colloquial Somali 230
  § 16.1  The sounds 230
    § 16.1.1  Contractions 230
    § 16.1.2  Assimilation of /n/ 230
    § 16.1.3  Distant vowel assimilation 231
  § 16.2  Inflection 232
    § 16.2.1  Gender of nouns 232
    § 16.2.2  The colloquial ending –ki/–ti 232
    § 16.2.3  The superlative degree 232
    § 16.2.4  Colloquial verb forms 232
    § 16.2.5  The progressive morpheme 233
  § 16.3  Syntax 233
    § 16.3.1  No subject case 233
    § 16.3.2  Focus by subject pronoun 234
    § 16.3.3  Subjunctive instead of reduced verb forms 234
    § 16.3.4  Subclause negation 234
  § 16.4  Vocabulay 234
Abbreviations and signs

[ ] indicates the pronunciation of words
/ / indicates the sound structure of words
< > indicates the spelling of words

colloquial (common in colloquial Somali)
completive aspect (expresses a completed action)
final focus (focus on the final noun phrase)
focus (focus on the preceding noun phrase)
more common in the north
more common in the south
somebody
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.

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

§ 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/ (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

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

2 Approximately like Swedish and Norwegian /rd/, similar to /d/, but pronounced with the tip of the tongue touching a point higher up (farther back) on the roof of the mouth.
Regional State of Ethiopia), /dh/ may occur in any position in a word. In the remaining areas /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\textsuperscript{N} or gabár\textsuperscript{S} girl
- ádhi\textsuperscript{N} or ári\textsuperscript{S} 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:
- gabdho girls

\section*{§ 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\textsuperscript{N} / Sáhro\textsuperscript{S}, Faadúma\textsuperscript{N} / Faadúmo\textsuperscript{S}, Caásha\textsuperscript{N} / Caásho\textsuperscript{S}

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.

- **qáre**[^S] or **xábxab**[^N] *watermelon*
- **jaálle**[^S] or **húrdi** / **huruud**[^N] *yellow*
- **ukún**[^S] or **béed**[^N] *egg*
- **daaqád** or **dariishád**[^S] *window*
In some instances, one of the words in the pair has developed into the more neutral one in written standard Somali, e.g.

**kubbád** or **banoóni**\(^{5}\) *ball*

**kallúun** or **malláay**\(^{5}\) *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. ‘usbuw’), **wiig**\(^{N}\) (from Eng. *week*), **sitimáan**\(^{S}\) (from It. *settimana*) or **toddobáad** (purely Somali), all meaning *week*

**shukumáan**\(^{S}\) (from It. *asciugamano*), **tuwáal**\(^{N}\) (from En. *towel*) or **gacantír** (purely Somali), all meaning *towel*
§ 2. The script

Somali was introduced as the official language of Somalia in 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 alongside the Latin script. 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, 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soomáaliya</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soomaáli</td>
<td>a Somali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>af Soomaáli</td>
<td>Somali (language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sábti</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abríil</td>
<td>April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiiláal / jiiláal</td>
<td>winter/summer (warm dry season, Dec.–Feb.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koonfúr / koonfúr</td>
<td>south</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§ 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine Noun</th>
<th>Determined Noun</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>búug book</td>
<td>búugga the book</td>
<td>&lt; *búug–ka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>búuggayga my book</td>
<td>&lt; *búug–kayga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>búuggaaga your book</td>
<td>&lt; *búug–kaaga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine Noun</th>
<th>Determined Noun</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bisád cat</td>
<td>bisádda the cat</td>
<td>&lt; *bisád–ta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bisáddayda my cat</td>
<td>&lt; *bisád–tayda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bisáddaada your cat</td>
<td>&lt; *bisád–taada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§ 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: two dots above the letter, i.e. ī, Ė, ā, ō, ū, or a comma, a cedilla or a “tail” under the letter, i.e. ĭ, Ė, ā, ō, ū. If there is a need, ordinary vowels can be underlined, i.e. ā, Ė, ĭ, ō, ū. Of course, no such supplementary symbols are used in ordinary texts, for example in books and newspapers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ordinary vowel sounds</th>
<th>Somali words with ordinary vowels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/i/ similar to En. sit</td>
<td>diin religion, sariir bed, xafiis office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/ less</td>
<td>dheer long, beer field, sheeko story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/ arm</td>
<td>gaaban short, saxan plate, waran spear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/o/ hot</td>
<td>koob cup, roob rain, dood discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/u/ soup</td>
<td>suul thumb, duulaa flies, nuur light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy vowel sounds</td>
<td>Somali words with heavy vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/i/ similar to En. police</td>
<td>dīīn tortoise, dīīrāā peels, dhīīg blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/ convey</td>
<td>gēēd tree, bēēn a lie, gēēl camels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/ apple</td>
<td>līībāāx lion, wāālīād parents, dāāllāān tired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/o/ similar to Fr. sœur</td>
<td>dōōlli mouse, dōōn boat, fōōg distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/u/ similar to Fr. sur</td>
<td>gūūri house, dūūlāā attacks, dūūkāān shop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to stress that the comparisons made with English and French are only approximations. The European “heavy” vowels are simply pronounced with the tongue further 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.

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

§ 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. YouTube³ and Wikipedia⁴ 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.

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.

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

³ <dh> https://youtu.be/nU7H_aiG-kc
⁴ <dh> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiced_retroflex_plosive
/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. YouTube⁵ offers a helpful explanation and sound illustration.

Calî, Cumar, Cabdi, Jaamac, Sacdiya, Nimco

The <kh> is similar to <ch> in German Bach or Scottish Loch Ness. YouTube⁶ offers a helpful explanation and sound illustration.

Khadra, Sheekh, Khaalid, Kheyre, Khadiijo

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

The <q> is rather similar to /k/ or /g/, but the tongue is pushed 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 beginning and end of words. YouTube⁷ offers a helpful explanation and sound illustration.

Muqdisho, Qarshi, Ruqiya, Cabdiqani, Qaali

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/. YouTube⁸ offers a helpful explanation and sound illustration.

---

⁵ <c> https://youtu.be/3057MbWmH1k
⁶ <kh> https://youtu.be/y5AizU69VQA
⁷ <q> voiced (mainly between vowels) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQrmm4oLR3Q
<q> voiceless https://youtu.be/N98UVs85qII
⁸ <x> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Al1JaAfr88&t=680s
Farxiyo♀, Xasan♂, Maxamed♂, Maxamuud♂, Xamdi♀, Xaddiyo♀, Axmed♂

The letter <ʼ> 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♂, Faa’iso♀

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 [kʰap] shoe, kabta [kʰapˈta] 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.

§ 3.2.1 Intense consonants

Some Somali consonants exhibit a more “intense” version alongside the more simple or weaker version of the consonant. These more intense consonants are spelled with double letters and pronounced more distinctly, with somewhat more energy and longer duration. There may be some variation between regions as well as speakers. Therefore listen carefully to the pronunciation of native speakers.

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

Hibo♀, Liibaan♂, Hodan♀, Idil♀, Ladan♀, Faadumo♀, Magan♂, …
Double \(<\text{bb, dd, gg}\)> are however pronounced more distinctly and with more slightly more energy and longer duration.

Also double \(<\text{ll, mm, nn, rr}\)> are pronounced with some extra energy and duration.

In spelling, only intense \(<\text{bb, dd, gg, mm, nn, rr, ll}\)> may be doubled. Some of the other consonants are also pronounced intensely in certain words in some regions, especially /dh/, but they are never written with a double letter in standard Somali.

§ 3.3 Stress or high tone

The realisation of stress in Somali words 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\(^9\) or a higher tone than the rest of the word.

The Somali stress gives the word a kind of ”melody”, and the position of the highest tone in the word can sometimes serve to differentiate between words that are otherwise identical.

The illustrations below show the pitch level tracks for a few words. One might say that the line corresponds to a sequence of musical notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ínan</th>
<th>inán</th>
<th>bád wéyn</th>
<th>badwéyn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>boy</td>
<td>girl</td>
<td>a big sea</td>
<td>ocean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In English there are often stress differences between nouns and verbs, as in *We’re going to record a record*. Also in Somali, stress or tone mostly serves to distinguish between grammatical categories, e.g.

\(^9\) The pitch is the measure used for the speed of the vibrations that create the sound.
masculine noun versus feminine noun

**inan** boy

stem + grammatical suffix

**afartan** these four

imperative verb

**hées** sing!

masculine noun

**mádow** darkness

noun + adjective

**bád wéyn** a big sea

stem = root + derivational suffix

**afártan** forty

feminine noun

**heés** song

adjective

**madów** dark (adj.)

compound

**badwéyn** ocean

Tone contrast between lexical items is quite rare, and it practically always cooccurs with some kind of grammatical difference, e.g.

**béer** (masculine) liver

**beér** (feminine) garden, field

The position of the high tone in Somali is defined by counting from the end of (the stem of) the word. The dominating pattern is that the high tone occurs on the last or on the second to last vowel position. A short vowel is equal to one vowel position, whereas a long vowel equals to vowel positions. The high tone can be realised on either the first or the second of the two vowel positions in a long vowel.

A long vowel with a high tone on the first vowel position, e.g. áa, sounds falling, i.e. the tone falls within the time it takes to pronounce the long vowel, as in **hées** sing!, **béer** liver.

A long vowel with a high tone on the second vowel position, e.g. aá, sounds rising, i.e. the tone rises within the time it takes to pronounce the long vowel, as in **hées** song, **béer** garden, field.

---

10 A common scientific term for vowel position is **mora**.

11 In some (slightly older) descriptions of Somali, a long vowel with falling tone is written ãâ, following a phonetic tradition.

12 In some (slightly older) descriptions of Somali, a long vowel with rising tone is written åâ, following a phonetic tradition. Notice that there is a considerable risk for confusion, since the
§ 3.3.1 Phrase final high tone or continuation tone

At the end of a phrase there is often a high tone, but it is not obligatory. An important function of a phrasel final high tone seems to be to indicate that a continuation will follow. However, it is also very common that such a phrase final tone is not realised distinctly.

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

§ 3.3.2 Tone in nouns

It has already been mentioned that tone expresses the gender of most nouns. For more details see § 6.1.1. Another very important function of tone in nouns is to express the nouns syntactic function in a clause.

§ 3.3.2a Default tone

In most nouns the default high tone is on the last vowel position. It is only in masculine nouns that don’t end in -e as well as in many female proper names that the high tone is on the second to last vowel position. For more details see § 6.1.1.

§ 3.3.2b Nouns in isolation

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 the high tone on the second to last vowel position.

magaálo  a city
magaaló wéyn  a big city
báre  a teacher
baré wanaagsan  a good teacher

the PHONETIC transcription áa (rising tone) coincides with the PHONOLOGICAL transcription áa (high tone followed by low tone, i.e. phonetically falling tone).
§ 3.3.2c  Subject tone

Bare nouns and adjectives normally loose their high tone when they occur as the last or only word in a non-focused subject noun phrase. For more details see § 13.1.1.

Axmed wúu hurdaa. Ahmed is asleep.

§ 3.3.2d  Modifier tone

(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.

Sáhra  Sarah
dúgsiga Sahrá or dúgsiga Sahra  Sarah’s school

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

Áxmed  Ahmed
gúriga Axméd or gúriga Axmed  Ahmed’s house

(b) Women’s names that do not end in –o/-a normally have their high tone on the second to last vowel position. That kind of tone generally remains unchanged also when the name is used as a modifier.

dukáanka Máryan  Maryan’s shop

(c) If the modifier is in the definite form, the high tone always remains in its original position, but an additional phrasel final high tone may also occur.

baabúurka macállinka ~ baabúurka macállinká  the teacher’s car

§ 3.3.2e  Vocative tone

When addressing a person (or animal, or sometimes even a thing), a special vocative form is used. It may be expressed in two different ways,
either by the vocative ending or by just changing the position of the tone to the first vowel position of the noun.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Maxámed} \quad & \text{(default tone)} \\
\text{Máxamed} \quad & \text{(vocative with initial tone)} \\
\text{Maxámedów} \quad & \text{(vocative with suffix)}
\end{align*}
\]

§ 3.3.3 Tone in adjectives

Most adjectives have their default tone on the last vowel position.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{culús} \quad & \text{heavy, fiicán nice, good, wanaagsán good, yár little, small}
\end{align*}
\]

Only a few root adjectives, i.e. without any derivational suffix, have their tone on the second to last vowel position. These adjectives contain a long vowel or diphthong.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{dhéer} \quad & \text{long, wéyn big}
\end{align*}
\]

The ones with final default tone have a strong tendency to lose their tone when used as modifiers of nouns.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bisád yár} & \sim \text{bisád yar a small cat} \\
\text{but only: bisád wéyn a big cat}
\end{align*}
\]

When occurring in a verb phrase where it is followed by a form of the copular verb \textit{yahay is}, the high tone is always pronounced distinctly in adjectives.

\[
\text{Bisáddu waa yár tahay. The cat is small.}
\]

§ 3.3.4 Tone in verb phrases

Simple present and past tense forms (including all the auxiliary verbs) do not have any high tone.

\[
\text{Axmed wúu hurdaa. Ahmed is asleep.}
\]

The infinitive, the progressive verb forms and the imperative have a high tone. For details see § 11.4, § 11.5 and § 11.11.
Maryan way órdayaa. Maryan is running.
Maryan way órdi kartaa. Maryan can run.
Órod! Run!

Single prepositions have a high tone. Short pronouns don’t.

Ú shéeg. Tell (to) [him/her/them].
I síí. Give [it to] me.

In a cluster of pronoun(s), preposition(s) and the negator ma not, it is only the last vowel position that has a high tone.

Marka aan roob arko xoolaha ulamá ordo halkaas.
When I see rain, [I] don’t run with the livestock to that place.

§ 3.3.5 Tone in particle phrases

The negative particle ma and the optative particle ha are always pronounced with a high tone.

Axmed má órdayo. Ahmed is not running.
Há ordo. Let~Make him run.

The focus particles waxa(a), ayaa, baa usually have a high tone in careful speech, but in faster speech their tone is often not pronounced very distinctly.

Wáxa aan léeyahay hál walaál. ~ Waxaan léeyahay hál walaal.
I have one sibling.

The focus particle waa and the interrogative particle ma normally have a high tone only if the following phrase does not have any high tone.

Axmed wúu hurdaa. Ahmed is asleep.
Axmed wuu órdayaa. Ahmed is running.
Axmed má hurdaa. Is Ahmed asleep?
Axmed ma órdayaa. Is Ahmed running?
The prohibitive (negative imperative) particle *ha* does not have any high tone.

**Ha órdin.** *Don’t run.*

The short subject pronouns do normally not have any high tone, but contractions like *wáa uu* → *wúu* may of course lead to forms where the tone ends up on the pronoun part of the contraction.

And exceptionally, when a particle or a pronoun for some reason is emphasised, e.g. for contrast, they may receive a high tone.

§ 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, filín 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 tartámayaà 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., muhiim 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 <ـنبـ> (nb) in Arabic.

cámbe (cánbe) mango

There are, however, a few words where –nb– is the absolutely predominant spelling, above all balanbaális butterfly and baranbáro cockroach.
§ 4.  Morphophonology

Morphophonology 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After</th>
<th>/k/ becomes</th>
<th>/t/ becomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/g/</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/d/</td>
<td></td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/, /u/, /w/</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/i/, /y/</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>d / s (^i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/, /o/</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/c/, /h/, /x/, /kh/, /q/, /’/</td>
<td>Ø (^ii)</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/dh/</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ø (^ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/l/ (^iii)</td>
<td></td>
<td>sh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^i\) /s/ in verbs; \(^ii\) Ø means that /k/ or /t/ disappears; \(^iii\) /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 **jecál** 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/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aábbe</th>
<th>aabba-ha</th>
<th>aabbu-hu</th>
<th>aabbi-hiis</th>
<th>shimbiró</th>
<th>shimbirá-ha</th>
<th>shimbirú-hu</th>
<th>shimbirí-hiis</th>
<th>ilkó</th>
<th>ilká-ha</th>
<th>ilkú-hu</th>
<th>ilkí-hiisa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
<td>the father</td>
<td>the father (subj.)</td>
<td>his father</td>
<td>birds</td>
<td>the birds</td>
<td>the birds (subj.)</td>
<td>his birds</td>
<td>teeth</td>
<td>the teeth</td>
<td>the teeth (subj.)</td>
<td>his teeth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aabbáha</th>
<th>aabbá-heed</th>
<th>aabba-hood</th>
<th>(aabbé-heed)</th>
<th>her father</th>
<th>(aabbó-hood)</th>
<th>their father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Sometimes people also apply this type of assimilation to masculine nouns with a stem ending with /ax/ or /ac/.
§ 4.2.2  Distant assimilation in the infinitive

The same kind of distant assimilation also occurs in the infinitive. The infinitive ending –i affects the vowel /a/ in certain verb roots that end with one of the back consonants /h/, /x/, /c/, /ʃ/, e.g.

dhacaa falls; happens, inf. dhíci
baxaa comes out, inf. bíxi

§ 4.3  Vowel insertion

A Somali syllable can only begin and end with a single consonant. If the root or stem of a word ends with two consonants, an extra supportive vowel must be inserted into the form of the word that lacks an ending. In most cases the inserted vowel is a copy of the vowel already present in the word.13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>plural</th>
<th>root</th>
<th>singular with vowel insertion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>xarfó</td>
<td>/xar_f/</td>
<td>xáraf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gacmó</td>
<td>/gac_m/</td>
<td>gacán 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jilbó</td>
<td>/jil_b/</td>
<td>jilib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ilkó</td>
<td>/il_k/</td>
<td>ílig 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

| maalmó      | /maal_m/- | maalín            | day                        |
|-------------|------------|-------------------|
| xubnó       | /xub_n/-  | xubín             | member; body part          |

13 Similar principles exist in numerous other languages, such as Swedish, where the inserted vowel is normally /e/.

14 The sound change /m/ > /n/ also occurs, since /m/ cannot occur word finally. See § 3.4.2.

15 The sound change /k/ > /g/ also occurs since /k/ cannot occur word finally. See § 3.4.2.
A similar relation is also found between some derived words and their bases.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>afraád</td>
<td>fourth</td>
<td>/af_r/</td>
<td>áfar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tobnaád</td>
<td>tenth</td>
<td>/tob_n/</td>
<td>tobán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boqolaád</td>
<td>hundredth</td>
<td>/boq_l/</td>
<td>boqól</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§ 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
§ 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”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ú + Ú</th>
<th>Úgú</th>
<th>to ... to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ú + Kú</td>
<td>Úgú</td>
<td>to ... in/on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ú + Ká</td>
<td>Ugá</td>
<td>to ... from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ú + Lá</td>
<td>Ulá</td>
<td>to ... with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kú + Kú</td>
<td>Kagá</td>
<td>in/on ... in/on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kú + Ká</td>
<td>Kagá</td>
<td>in/on ... from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ká + Ká</td>
<td>Kagá</td>
<td>from ... from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kú + Lá</td>
<td>Kulá</td>
<td>in/on ... with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ká + Lá</td>
<td>Kalá</td>
<td>from ... with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 dúd iyo baabúr 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: kágá.

Wáxaan búugga kágá qoray qálín.

I wrote in the book with a PEN.

kú + búugga in the book

kú + qálín with a pen

Gaari-daméerkiisa waxa uu kágá shaqeeyyaa magaaláda.

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 yaaqaan iláha biyáha.
these.places  FFOC  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             | →  ií                        |
| 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       | →  inóó /a/ + /u/ > /oo/      |
| ina us + kú in/on       | →  inagú                     |
ina \(us + ká \text{from} \rightarrow \text{inagá}\)

ina \(us + lá \text{with} \rightarrow \text{inalá}\)

\[\text{Cuntádu xóog baa ay inóó yeeshaa.}\]

the.food strength FOC it us.for makes

Food gives us STRENGTH.

\[\text{la one + idin you} \rightarrow \text{laydin or uncontracted la idin}\]

\[\text{idin you + ú to/for} \rightarrow \text{idiín} \quad /i/ + /u/ > /ii/\]

\[\text{idin you + kú in/on} \rightarrow \text{idinkú}\]

\[\text{idin you + ká from} \rightarrow \text{idinká}\]

\[\text{idin you + lá with} \rightarrow \text{idinlá}\]

\section*{§ 5.2.4 Contractions with the negator má}

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

\begin{quote}
\textit{Biyáha kamá maaranno.}

We \textit{don’t} manage \textit{without} water.
\end{quote}

\section*{§ 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.

\[\text{iiigá} < \text{i me + ú in + ká from} \quad \text{cf. } i + u > \text{ii and } u + ka > \text{uga}\]

\begin{quote}
\textit{Sideé baad hurdáda iiigá kícin kartaa?}

How can you wake me up from sleep?

\textit{sideéé? + ú in what manner?, how?}

\textit{hurdáda + ká from sleep}\end{quote}
§ 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.

| *aan* + *aan* | → | *aanan* | *I not* |
| *aan* + *aad* | → | *aanad*<sub>N</sub> | *aadani*<sub>S</sub> | *you not* |
| *aan* + *uu* | → | *aanu*<sub>N</sub> | *uusan*<sub>S</sub> | *he not* |
| *aan* + *ay* | → | *aanay*<sub>N</sub> | *aysan*<sub>S</sub> | *she not* |

*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.

| *maxaý* what + *baa* / *ayaa* | → | *maxa*<sup>a</sup> |
| *ayó* who + *baa* / *ayaa* | → | *yáa* |

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

| *Aamíno* / *Aamína* + *baa* | → | *Aamínaa* |
§ 6. Nouns

Somali nouns are divided into two groups or grammatical genders: 
MASCULINE nouns and FEMININE nouns. This is similar to the situation in, e.g., French or Arabic. The gender of a noun is an important key to its grammatical behaviour, since 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 to 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 to last syllable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASC.</th>
<th>FEM.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ínan</td>
<td>inán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kúrsi</td>
<td>bisád</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>áqal</td>
<td>gabádh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASC.</th>
<th>FEM.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>géed</td>
<td>tree, plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dukáán</td>
<td>shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>míis</td>
<td>table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beér</td>
<td>garden, field, farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khudaár</td>
<td>vegetables and fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liín</td>
<td>citric fruit(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In words with only one short vowel, it is impossible to hear the gender. You simply have to memorise it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASC.</th>
<th>FEM.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nál</td>
<td>láp, electric light</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§ 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 to last vowel position. However, if the word is part of a phrase or a sentence, it is most often pronounced with the high tone on the last vowel position.

magaálo town, city magaaló yar a small town

§ 6.1.3 Exceptions

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

A few masculine nouns have the high tone on the final vowel:

All agent nouns that end in –aa as well as some other human nouns that end in –een.

- dilaá murderer, qoraá writer, etc.
- afhayeén spokesperson, haweén women.

Many nouns that end in –i and some nouns that end in –r.

- abtí maternal uncle, maroodí elephant, ratí pack camel, webí river,
- adeér paternal uncle, dhakhtár doctor, clinic, reér family,

Some foreign borrowings and some numerals.

- albaáb door, xafiís office
- sagaál nine, tobaán ten, boqól hundred
Among feminine nouns, practically all women’s names that do not end in –o or –a have their high tone on the second to last vowel position.

Lúul, Máryan

The same is true for a few numerals.

sáddex three, áfar four, sidéed eight

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 –(í)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/ the masculine article becomes –**ha**. At the same time /e/ is replaced by /a/. The high tone is always on this /a/, giving –**áha**.

**aábbbe** (a) father **aabáha** 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/, giving –**áda**.

**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 **gabáda** 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.

hoóyo  hooyáda  hooyóyin  hooyóyinka  the mothers
magaálo  magaaláda  magaalóyin  magaalóyinka  the cities
tíro  tiráda  tiroóyin  tiroóyinka  the numbers

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

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

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

mindí  mindída  mindiyó  mindiyáha  the knives
§ 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.

- aábbe aabbáha aabbayaál aabbayaásha the fathers
- fúre furáha furayaál furayaásha the keys

(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.

- qóys –ka family pl. qoysás qoysáska
- áf –ka mouth, language pl. afáf afáfka
- sán –ka nose pl. sanán sanánka
- bás –ka bus pl. basás basáska

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

- dálag –ga crop pl. dalagyó dalagyáda
- mágac –a name pl. magacyó magacyáda
- libáax –a lion pl. libaaxyó libaaxyáda
- webí –ga river pl. webiyó webiyáda

If the singular form ends in /y/, the plural form still only contains a single /y/, since this consonant may not be doubled in Somali.

- éray –ga word pl. erayó erayáda

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

- saaxíib –ka friend pl. saaxiibbó saaxiibbáda
- baabúur –ka car pl. baabuurró baabuurráda
- xayawáan –ka animal pl. xayawaannó xayawaannáda
Some singular forms that end in an /n/ actually have a stem that ends in /m/, but this /m/ can only be realised when it is followed by a vowel.

tártan –ka competition 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.

\[ /gal\_b/ \quad gal\acute{a}b\,\,\,{}^\text{ta} \quad \text{afternoon} \quad \text{pl.} \quad galb\acute{o} \quad galb\acute{a}ha \]

(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.

\[ /\text{weydiim}/ \quad \text{weydi\acute{i}n}\,\,\,{}^\text{ta} \quad \text{question} \quad \text{pl.} \quad \text{weydiim\acute{o}} \quad \text{weydiim\acute{a}ha} \]
\[ /\text{tim}/ \quad \text{tin}\,\,\,{}^\text{ta} \quad \text{a strand of hair} \quad \text{pl.} \quad \text{tim\acute{o}} \quad \text{hair} \quad \text{tim\acute{a}ha} \]
\[ /\text{nim}/ \quad \text{n\acute{i}n}\,\,\,{}^\text{ka} \quad \text{man} \quad \text{pl.} \quad \text{nim\acute{a}n} < /\text{nimam}/ \quad \text{nim\acute{a}nka} \]

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

\[ /\text{gac\_m}/ \quad \text{gac\acute{a}n}\,\,\,{}^\text{ta} \quad \text{arm, hand} \quad \text{pl.} \quad \text{gacm\acute{o}} \quad \text{gacm\acute{a}ha} \]
\[ /\text{mis\_k}/ \quad \text{mis\acute{ig}}\,\,\,{}^\text{ta} \quad \text{hip} \quad \text{pl.} \quad \text{misk\acute{o}} \quad \text{misk\acute{a}ha} \]

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

\[ /\text{maal\_m}/ \quad \text{maal\acute{i}n}\,\,\,{}^\text{ta} \quad \text{day} \quad \text{pl.} \quad \text{maalm\acute{o}} \quad \text{maalm\acute{a}ha} \]
\[ /\text{xub\_n}/ \quad \text{xub\acute{in}}\,\,\,{}^\text{ta} \quad \text{member} \quad \text{pl.} \quad \text{xubn\acute{o}} \quad \text{xubn\acute{a}ha} \]
§ 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.

/íl_k/ ílig -ga tooth pl. ilkó ilkáha
/jil_b/ jílib –ka knee pl. jilbó jilbáha
/mur_q/ múruq –a muscle pl. murqó murqáha
/xar_f/ xáraf –ka letter (of the alphabet) pl.xarfó xarfáha

(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/ gúri –ga house pl. guryó guryáha

§ 6.6.3 -ó, -áha instead of reduplication

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

géed –ka tree, plant pl. geedó geedáha
gées –ka horn; side pl. geesó geesáha
náas –ka breast pl. naasó naasáha
reér –ka family pl. reeró reeráha

§ 6.6.4 -yó, -yáda instead of consonant strengthening

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

insaym -ka enzyme pl. insaymyó
qurub -ka particle pl. qurubyó qurubyáda

The ending -yo is kept after practically all compounds that end in /d/.

falkaab-meeléed adverbial of place pl. falkaab-meeleedyó
§ 6.6.5 Unexpected definite article

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 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
(sánnad –da) pl. sannadó sannadáha

Alongside sánnad year, there is also an alternative form sáno, sanáda, pl. sanoóyín –ka, which is perfectly regular.

(súbax –a) morning pl. subaxyó subaxyáda
subáx –da (subxó) (subtáha)

§ 6.6.7 Irregular plural forms

sí –da manner pl. siyaabó siyaabáha
or siyaaló siyaaláha
wáx –a thing pl. waxyaabó waxyaabáha
or waxyaaló waxyaaláha

abtí –ga maternal uncle pl. abtiyáal, abtiyaásha
oday –ga old man, elder pl. odáyál, odayáashá
fáras –ka horse pl. fardó, fardáha

One word has two different forms with different meanings.
§ 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, asxaábtá  
reg. pl. saaxiíbbó, saaxiíbbáda

**kúrsi –ga** chair  
Ar. pl. kuraás, kuraástá  
reg. pl. kursíyó, kursíyáda

This Arabic pattern has sometimes spread to other borrowings.

**búug –ga** book  
Ar. pl. buugaág, buugaágtá  
reg. pl. buuguág, buugágga (rarely used)

Also the Arabic plural ending –íín is rather commonly used with Arabic borrowings in Somali. The definite form ends in –íínta.

**macállin –ka** teacher  
Ar. pl. macallimiíín, macallimiííntá  
(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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>búug  book</td>
<td>bisád  cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buugaág  books</td>
<td>bisadó  cats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hál buug  one book</td>
<td>hál bisad  one cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labá buug  two books</td>
<td>labá bisadood  two cats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baabúur  car</td>
<td>hoóyo  mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baabuurró  cars</td>
<td>hooyoóyin  mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hál baabuur  one car</td>
<td>hál hooyo  one mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labá baabuur  two cars</td>
<td>labá hooyo  two mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

ímmisa qof how many persons   ímmisa bilood how many months
dhówr jeer a few times        dhówr maalmood a few days

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.

labá hooyó  or  labá hooyo two mothers
labá bisadoód or labá bisadood two cats

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.

labádayda bisadood my two cats
labádaas bisadood those two cats

For more details about noun phrases with numerals, see § 12.1.9 and § 12.1.10.
§ 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. móos⁵/múus⁴ banana(s), tufáax apple, liín citrus fruit(s), but also, e.g., kallúun/malláay⁴ 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 large number of collective nouns than does English.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{carruúr –ta} & \quad \text{children} \\
\text{rág –ga} & \quad \text{men} \\
\text{ádhi}^{N}/ \text{ári}^{S} – \text{ga} & \quad \text{goats and sheep} \\
\text{dúmar –ka} & \quad \text{women} \\
\text{lo’ –da} & \quad \text{dairy cattle} \\
\text{digáag –ga} & \quad \text{chicken}
\end{align*}
\]

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.  baabúur –ka car    M.PLUR.  baabuurró –da cars  
F.COLL.  baabuúr –ta cars  

MASC.  búug –ga book    M.PLUR.  (buugág –ga) books  
F.COLL.  buúg –ta books  
AR.PLUR.  buugaág –ta books  

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

M.COLL.  digáag –ga chicken, hens  
F.SING.  digaagád –da hen  
F.PLUR.  digaagadó –ha hens  

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.  dhágax –a stone  
F.COLL.  dhagxaán –ta stones  
M.PLUR.  dhagaxyó –da stones
§ 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. Soomaáli –ga Somali
F.COLL. Soomaalí –da Somalis

M.SING. árday –ga pupil
F.COLL. ardaý –da (or ardó –da) pupils

M.SING. askári –ga soldier
F.COLL. askár –ta soldiers

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

M.COLL. haweén –ka women
F.SING. haweéney –da woman

§ 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. qóys –ka family
PL.COLL. qoysás –ka families

SG.COLL. géel, géela herd of camels
PL.COLL. geelál, geelásha herds of camels
§ 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*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>biyó</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caanó</td>
<td>milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biyáha</td>
<td>the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caanáha</td>
<td>the milk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 –áha* girls, *idó –áha* sheep and *xooló –áha* livestock 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. *gabár / gabádh / inán* girl, *láx* ewe, *naýl* lamb, *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 \( \rightarrow \) **wadajír** (m.) unity, solidarity
- **beeró** fields + -le, -ley \( \rightarrow \) **beeraále** (m.) farmer
  - **beeralé** (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.

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

Other, less common endings with the same meaning are –aá and –áal.

- **qорaa** writes
  - **qоре** / qораá (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
  - **tagsííle** (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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASCULINE</th>
<th>FEMININE</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>macállin</td>
<td>macallimád</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>árday</td>
<td>ardayád</td>
<td>student, pupil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The feminine –ley corresponds to the masculine –le.

dawaárle  
< dawaar sewing machine
dawaárley seamstress

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASCULINE</th>
<th>FEMININE</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adeége</td>
<td>adeégto</td>
<td>servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kalkaalíye</td>
<td>kalkaalíso</td>
<td>nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kariye</td>
<td>karíso</td>
<td>cook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

< kariyaa cooks

§ 7.1.2 Collectives

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASC. SG.</th>
<th>FEM. COLL.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beeraále</td>
<td>beeraléy farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kalluumaýste</td>
<td>kalluumaysáto fishermen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§ 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 –áal 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.

dhéer long, tall, high  dhérer –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.

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

§ 7.3   Verbal nouns

In English, nouns are most commonly formed from verbs with the ending –ing, but some other 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.), qoris -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!, samaýn/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.

Sálhra waa ay jecéshahay ákhriska. Sahra likes reading/to read.

Some verbal nouns have developed special meanings and usages.

horreeyaa is up front, comes first ugú horreýntii first of all
weydiiyaa 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 many verbal nouns are compounds consisting of e.g. a verb and its object, and that such compounds only have one high tone (stress).

sigáar cigarette + cabbíd drinking sigaarcabbíd smoking
Also prepositions and preverbal particles lose their high tone (stress) when they function as a prefix in a noun.

- **ká** from, **qaýb** part, **galaa** enters -> **ka-qayb-gál** – **ka participation**
- **ká qayb-galaa** participates in sth -> **ka-qayb-gále** – **ha participant**

In today’s written Somali, compounds exhibit a lot of spelling variation. Traditionally, the recommendation has been to write compounds as single words, but over time it has become more and more common to write the constituent parts separately. Sometimes a hyphen is also used.

- **eraysu’aaléed** / **eray su’aaléed** / **eray-su’aaléed** question word
- **magacuyáal** / **magac u yáal** / **magac-u-yáal** / **magac uyáal** 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 § 12.1.9). 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
labáda 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>éber (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ków (f.) / hál (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>lábo / lába (f.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>sáddex (f.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>áfar (f.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>shán (f.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>líx (f.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>toddóbo / toddóba (f.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>siddéed (f.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>sagaál (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>tobán (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>labáátañ (m.)</td>
<td>(–tan &lt; toban)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>sóddon (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>afártan (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>kónton (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>líxdan (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>toddobaátan (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>siddeétan (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>sagaáshan (m.)</td>
<td>/l+t/ &gt; /sh/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>boqól (m.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>labá boqol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>sáddex boqol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>kún</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4000</td>
<td>áfar kun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000000</td>
<td>milyan (or malyuun)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(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, siddeéd  
  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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHORT SUBJECT FORMS</th>
<th>SHORT OBJECT FORMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1sg. aan</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg. aad</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. m. uu</td>
<td>he, it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. f. ay</td>
<td>she, it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl. excl. aan / aannu</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl. incl. aynu / aan</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl. aad / aydin</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl. ay</td>
<td>they</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LONG FORMS

| 1 sg. aníga         | I, me             |
| 2 sg. adíga         | you               |
| 3 sg. m. isága      | he, him (it)      |
| 3 sg. f. iyáda      | she, her (it)     |
| 1 pl. excl. annága  | we, us (excluding you) |
| 1 pl. incl. innága  | we, us (including you) |
| 2 pl. idínka        | you               |
| 3 pl. iyága         | they, them        |

§ 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.*

**Aabbihiís 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 in noun phrases. The long personal pronouns are used for additional clarity or emphasis. They contain the definite article, and since these forms behave like any other noun they also take the subject ending -u when they denote the subject of the clause.

**Iyádu waa xáaska beerfaláha.** *She is the farmer’s wife.*

**Anígu wáxa aan ahay maroodí.** *I am an elephant.*

**Díb bay ú carartay márkii ay isága aragtay.**

*It (a deer) fled back when it saw him.*

The long personal pronouns are mostly used to refer to people. They are sometimes also used to refer to animals, but quite seldom to inanimate objects or abstract nouns. In those instances demonstrative pronouns are usually preferred instead of personal pronouns.
§ 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long personal pronoun</th>
<th>INCLUDING</th>
<th>EXCLUDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short subject pronoun</td>
<td>aynu</td>
<td>aannu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short object pronoun</td>
<td>ina</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short object pronoun + ú</td>
<td>inoo</td>
<td>noó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive pronoun</td>
<td>kéenna, téenna</td>
<td>kaayága, taayáda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§ 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.

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{Adíga yáa ku ilaaliya?} \\
\text{you who.FOC you.OBJ watches out} \\
\text{WHO takes care of you?} \quad \text{(contrastive emphasis on you)}
\end{array}
\]

§ 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.

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{Xáaskii Díinku wáy is qarisay.} \\
\text{The Turtle’s wife hid herself.} \\
\text{Sahró iyo Áxmed wáa ay is eegeen.} \\
\text{Sahra and Ahmed looked at each other.} \\
\text{Way islá hádlayaan.} \\
\text{They are talking to each other.}
\end{array}
\]

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

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{Wáa aan is qariyay.} \quad \text{I hid myself.} \\
\text{Wáa aad is qarisay.} \quad \text{You hid yourself.} \\
\text{Wáa uu is qariyay.} \quad \text{He hid himself.} \\
\text{Wáa ay is qarisay.} \quad \text{She hid herself.} \\
\text{Wáa aan is qarinnay.} \quad \text{We hid ourselves.} \\
\text{Wáa aad is qariseen.} \quad \text{You hid yourselves.} \\
\text{Wáa ay is qariyeen.} \quad \text{They hid themselves.}
\end{array}
\]

§ 9.2  Demonstrative pronouns

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

\[
\begin{array}{l|lll}
\text{MASC.SING.} & \text{FEM.SING} & \text{PLURAL} \\
\text{this} & \text{kán} & \text{tán} & \text{kúwan} \\
\text{these} & \\
\end{array}
\]
The borderline between 'this' and 'that' varies between languages. Therefore, in certain situations Somali kan corresponds to English that. Somali kan denotes something that is not very far away, whereas kaas denoted something that is quite far away. This is slightly different to English where this denotes something that is very close, and that denotes something that is not so close. The difference is captured in this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Far</th>
<th>kaas/taas</th>
<th>that</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHORT DISTANCE</td>
<td>kan/tan</td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOSE</td>
<td>kan/tan</td>
<td>this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- káb     mindí     (a) shoe, knife
- kábta   mindídá    the shoe, knife
- kábtan  mindídán   this shoe, knife
- kábtaas mindídáas  that shoe, knife
- kábtti  mindídii   that shoe, knife, you know
- kabó     mindiyó    shoes, knives
- kabáha   mindiyáha  the shoes, knives
- kabáhan  mindiyáhan these shoes, knives
- kabáhaas mindiyáhaas those shoes, knives
- kabíhii  mindiyíhii those shoes, knives, you know
- bás      gúri      (a) bus, house
- báska    gúriga    the bus, house
- báskan   gúrigan   this bus, house

16 /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.

| baskaas  | gúrigaas | that bus, house |
| baskii   | gúrigii  | that bus, house, you know |
| basás    | guryó    | buses, houses    |
| basáska  | guryáha  | the buses, houses |
| basáskan | guryáhan | these buses, houses |
| basáskaas| guryáhaas| those buses, houses |
| basáskii | guryíhii | those buses, houses, you know |

| kábtaan / kábtaan^s | mindídan / mindídaan^s | this shoe, knife |
| kabáhan / kabáhaan^s | mindiyáhan / mindiyáhaan^s | these shoes, knives |
| básan / báskaan^s   | gúrigan / gúrigaan^s   | this bus, house  |
| basáskan / basáskaan^s| guryáhan / guryáhaan^s | these buses, houses |

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

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

§ 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.
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.

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.

Sheekooyinkii Cigaal Shidaad The stories about Igal Shidad
Cali Baaba iyo afartankii 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 beeshaa deegaanka?
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 fyrtio procent, fyrtio av (varje) hundra

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

ugu horraýtii first of all
ugu dambaýtii 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 § 12.1.3.

wiílkiiisii weynaa 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEFININTE</th>
<th>MASC.SING.</th>
<th>FEM.SING</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>ka</td>
<td>ta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a, one</td>
<td>a, one</td>
<td>ku</td>
<td>tu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>kúwa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a, one</td>
<td>kúwo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These pronouns are used as placeholders or as the dummy head of a noun phrase when an adjective is used “on its own”.

- **ku kale**  
  *another*
- **kuwo kale**  
  *others, other ones*
- **ka kale**  
  *the other (one)*
- **kuwa kale**  
  *the other ones*
- **ka cusub**  
  *the new one*
- **ka labaad**  
  *the second one*

Waxa ay ahaan jireen **kuwo faraxsan**.  
*They used to be happy (ones).*
§ 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The owned object is:</th>
<th>MASC.SING.</th>
<th>FEM.SING.</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 SG.</td>
<td>káyga</td>
<td>táyda</td>
<td>kúwayga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 SG.</td>
<td>káaga</td>
<td>táada</td>
<td>kúwaaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 SG. M.</td>
<td>kiísa</td>
<td>tíisa</td>
<td>kúwiísa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 SG. F.</td>
<td>kéeda</td>
<td>téeda</td>
<td>kúweeda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 PL. EXCL.</td>
<td>kaayága</td>
<td>taayáda</td>
<td>kúwayága</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 PL. INCL.</td>
<td>kéenna</td>
<td>téenna</td>
<td>kúweenna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 PL.</td>
<td>kiínna</td>
<td>tíínna</td>
<td>kúwiínna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 PL.</td>
<td>kóoda</td>
<td>tóoda</td>
<td>kúwooda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

kábta the shoe
kábtaayda my shoe
kábtaada your shoe
kábteeda her shoe
kábtooda their shoe

mindída the knife
mindídaya my knife
mindídaada your knife
mindídéeda her knife
mindídooda their knife

kabáha the shoes
kabáhayga my shoes
kabáhaaga your shoes
kabáheeda her shoes
kabáhooda their shoes

mindiyáha the knives
mindiyáhayga my knives
mindiyáhaaga your knives
mindiyáheeda her knives
mindiyáhooda their knives
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full forms</th>
<th>Short forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-kayga</td>
<td>-kay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-kaaga</td>
<td>-kaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-kiisa</td>
<td>-kiis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-keeda</td>
<td>-keed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-kayaga</td>
<td>-kayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-keenna</td>
<td>-keen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-kiinna</td>
<td>-kiin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-kooda</td>
<td>-kood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words that are used with the short possessive endings are, above all, hoóyo mother, aábbe father, waálid parents, walaál sibling, habaryár

17 /i/ in the suffix spreads across /h/ so that a preceding /a/ becomes assimilated. See § 4.2.1.
maternal aunt, abtí maternal uncle, eéddo paternal aunt, adeér paternal uncle, ayeéyo grandmother, awoówe grandfather, saaxíib friend and saaxiibád female friend.\(^\text{18}\)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{hooyáday} & \text{my mother} \\
\text{hooyádaa} & \text{your mother} \\
\text{hooyádiis} & \text{his mother} \\
\text{hooyádood} & \text{their mother}
\end{array}
\quad \begin{array}{ll}
\text{aabbáhay} & \text{m father} \\
\text{aabbáhaa} & \text{your father} \\
\text{aabbáheed} & \text{her father} \\
\text{aabbáhood} & \text{their father}
\end{array}
\]

The full possessive endings are used, however, with nouns that do not exclusively denote a relationship between two persons, such as nin man, husband, wiil 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.

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{saaxiibádday} & \text{my (girl)friend} \\
\text{saaxiibáddayda cusub} & \text{my new (girl)friend} \\
\text{walaálkay} & \text{my brother} \\
\text{walaálkayga weyn} & \text{my older brother}
\end{array}
\]

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 riíxayaa baaskíilka.** (subject marked)  
*His friend pushes THE BIKE.*

\(^\text{18}\) 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 and her siblings’ father)

- **Rooblé fásal kooda**
  Roble’s class (lit. Roble their class, i.e. his and his classmates’ class)

- **adíga dériskiinna**
  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 other nouns expressing an amount, the short possessive suffixes are usually 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 mundulkiisii.**
  Omar has completed that hut of his, you know.
§ 9.4 Interrogative pronouns

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MASC.SG</th>
<th>FEM.SG.</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>which one?</td>
<td>keé</td>
<td>teé</td>
<td>kúwee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who?, which</td>
<td>kúma</td>
<td>túma</td>
<td>kúwama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who?</td>
<td>ayó</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>maxaý</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>INDEF. FORM</th>
<th>DEF. FORM</th>
<th>INTERROGATIVE FORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>xág</td>
<td>xág side, direction</td>
<td>xágga</td>
<td>xaggeé?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hál</td>
<td>hál place</td>
<td>hálka</td>
<td>halkeé?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>éray</td>
<td>éray word</td>
<td>érayga</td>
<td>eraygeé?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>erayó</td>
<td>erayó word</td>
<td>erayáda</td>
<td>erayadeé?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dhárka Xasan waa midab keé?
What colour are Hassan’s clothes?

Hal keé bay xayawaannádu kú nóol yihiiin?
Where do the animals live?

The focus particle baa/ayaa is often contracted with kee/tee? which? without leaving any trace. One could therefore also say that –ee itself is expressing focus. When such a focused form is the subject, there is of course no short subject pronoun and the verb is in its reduced form.

Kee ah walaalkaa? Which one is your brother?
The reduced form **ah being** is omitted after adjectives.

**Kee dhéer?** Which one is (the) long(est)?

**Kee gaabán?** Which one is (the) short(est)?

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEF. FORM</th>
<th>INTERROGATIVE FORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>goór moment</td>
<td>goormá? / goorteé?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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).

**Yáa qoray warqádda?** Who has written the letter?

**Yáa aad lá ciyaartaa?** Who do you play with?

**Maxáa aad árki kartaa?** What can you see?

**Maxáa dhacay íntii uu nínu hurday?** What happened while the man was sleeping?

The question word **aaway? where (is)?** is used without any verb.

**Aaway iyádu?** Where is she?

### § 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 **–eé**.

**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

§ 9.5.1 qóf person; cíd people
qóf somebody, someone, cíd somebody, some people
qofná nobody, cidná nobody
qofkeé? who?

Qofná kamá aqoon dúgsigeeda cusub.
She didn’t know anybody in her new school.

§ 9.5.2 wáx thing
wáx something
wáx XX ah any XX (in negative and interrogative clauses)
waxná, waxbá nothing

Má (uu) haysan wax lacág ah.
He didn’t have any money.

§ 9.5.3 sí manner
sídan like this, (in) this way, (in) this manner
sídáa(s) like that, (in) that way, (in) that manner
sideé? how?, (in) what way, (in) what manner

§ 9.5.4 míd one; isku-míd the same one

Dhammaanteen ma waxa aynu helnay jawaabo isku-míd ah?
Did all of us find the SAME ANSWERS?

§ 9.5.5 meél, hál place; xág side, direction
meél somewhere
meelná nowhere
hálkan, meéshan here, (in, to) this place
hálkaa(s), meéshaa(s) there, (in, to) that place
halkeé?, meesheé?, xaggeé? where?, (in, to) which place?

§ 9.5.6 már, goór, kól moment; wákhti/wáqti time
márkaa(s), kólkaa(s) then, (in) that moment
goormá?, wakhtigeé?/ waqtigeé? when?, (at) what time?

§ 9.5.7 dhammaán the whole amount
The indefinite form of the noun dhammaan the whole amount may precede another definite plural noun. It may also follow the other noun, but it then takes on a short possessive ending, usually –tood, which refers back to the measured item(s).

- dhammaán walxáha all the objects
- walxáha dhammaántood all the objects

Goobó géli dhammaán erayáda kú bilaabma J.
Put a circle around all the words that begin with J.

Dádká dhammaántood waa ay ú simán yihiiin shárciga.
All people are equal before the law.

It is also used independently with a short possessive suffix.

- dhammaanteen we all, all of us
- dhammaantiin you all, all of you
- dhammaantood they all, all of them

Dhammaánteen ma wáxa aynu helnay jawaabó isku-míd ah?
Did all of us find the same answers?

§ 9.5.8 láf bone; náf soul, spirit; qúr/qúdhd life
láftayda (I) myself, láftaada (you) yourself etc.
Waxa uu ú sheegay ín isága láftiisu uusan haysan wax lacág ah. He told him/her/them that he himself didn’t have any money. Ímminka aníga láftayda ayaa kú heesa gabayádayda. Now I sing my poems myself.

náftayda (I) myself etc.

Aníga ayaa náfteyda ú samaystay. I have made it for myself.

qúrtayda / qúdhayda (I) myself, only me etc.

Cuntáda ay iniíntu ú baahán tahay waxa kú kaydsán tahay iniínta qúdheeda. The nutrition that the seed needs is stored in the seed itself. Adíga qúdhaada ayaan ku léeyahay. 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.

Notice the sound change between dhan and the subject form dhammi.
Carruurta oo dhammi waxa ay xaq u leeyihiin in ay wax bartaan.
All children have [the] right to study[~go to school].

§ 9.6.2 kastá every
The adjective kasta can only be used with nouns in the singular, just like English each, every.

wáx kasta everything, each thing
maalín kasta every day

§ 9.6.3 kalé other; like
baabúur kale another car
A demonstrative suffix + oo kale such, similar, like (this, that)
baabúurkaas oo kale a car like that, such a car
§ 10. Adjectives

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

- **adág** hard, difficult
- **cúsùb** new
- **fóg** distant
- **madów** black, dark
- **xún** bad
- **cád** white, light
- **dhéer** long, tall, high, deep
- **fudúd** light, easy
- **nóol** living, alive
- **yár** little, small
- **culús** heavy
- **dhów** close
- **jécél** fond (of)
- **wéyn** big

§ 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.

- **wanáag** –ga sth. good
- **fárax** –a happiness
- **gáab** –ka shortness, sth. short
- **qurúx** –da beauty
- **wanaagsán** good
- **faraxsán** happy
- **gaabán** short
- **qurxoón** beautiful

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

- **Soomaáli** –ga a Somali
- **Soomaalíyeéd** Somali

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

- **kiimíko** –da chemicals
- **kiimikaád** chemical

§ 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.

- **1 = ków** one
- **1aad = koowaád / kowaád** first
- **2 = lába / lábo** two
- **2aad = labaád** second
§ 10.1.3 Adjectives derived from verbs

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

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

§ 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, dá’ 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 yihiiin 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASE FORM</th>
<th>DISTRIBUTIVE FORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yár</td>
<td>little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanaaagsán</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaabán</td>
<td>short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaryár</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanwanaaagsán</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaagaabán</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dhéer</th>
<th>long</th>
<th>dhaadhéer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wény</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>wawény</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

dád wawény grown-up people, adults
carrúúr 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASE FORM</th>
<th>STEM</th>
<th>INFLECTED FORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cad white, light</td>
<td>/cadd/</td>
<td>caddaa was white, light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culus heavy</td>
<td>/cul_s/, /cus_l/</td>
<td>cuslaa was heavy (metathesis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eg similar</td>
<td>/ek/</td>
<td>ekaa was similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhan all</td>
<td>/dhamm/</td>
<td>dhammi (subject form)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§ 10.3 The comparative degree

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

Shan waa ay kä yar tahay siddéed.

_five_ PFOC _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).

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

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. /si/-/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 1 / 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Past Tense</th>
<th>Heesay</th>
<th>Infinitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>-ay</td>
<td>heesay</td>
<td>I sang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>-tay</td>
<td>heestay</td>
<td>you sang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>he, it</td>
<td>-ay</td>
<td>heesay</td>
<td>he sang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>she, it</td>
<td>-tay</td>
<td>heestay</td>
<td>she sang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>-nay</td>
<td>heesnay</td>
<td>we sang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>-teen</td>
<td>heesteen</td>
<td>you sang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>-een</td>
<td>heeseen</td>
<td>they sang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§ 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.

| Conjugation 1 | –i | qor-taa | qór-i | write |
| Conjugation 2 | –n | fiiri-saa | fiír-n | look |
|               |    | samay-saa | samaý-n | do, make |
| Conjugation 3 | –n | haysa-taa | haysá-n | have, hold |
|               |    | soco-taa | socó-n | walk |

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 yihiiin ákhriska.
FFOC  they fond are the.reading
They like to read.
Wáxa aan rabaa ín aan tago.
FFOC  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–.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLE PRESENT</th>
<th>PROGRESSIVE PRESENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg. heesaa</td>
<td>I sing heésayaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg. heestaa</td>
<td>heésaysaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m. heesaa</td>
<td>heésayaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f. heestaa</td>
<td>heésaysaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl. heesnaa</td>
<td>heésaynaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl. heestaan</td>
<td>heésaysaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl. heesaan</td>
<td>heésayaan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLE PAST</th>
<th>PROGRESSIVE PAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg. heesay</td>
<td>I sang heésayay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg. heestay</td>
<td>heésaysay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m. heesay</td>
<td>heésayay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f. heestay</td>
<td>heésaysay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl. heesnay</td>
<td>heésaynay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl. heesteen</td>
<td>heésayseen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl. heeseen</td>
<td>heésayeen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In conjugations 2 and 3, the progressive suffix is always preceded by an /n/, since the progressive forms are based on the infinitive.

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C-stem, V-stem</th>
<th>V-stem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3. **booqdaa**, **booqa-taa** takes **booqá-n-ay-aa** he is visiting  
   **qaataa**, **qaada-taa** visits **qaadá-n-ay-aa** he is taking  
   **socdaa**, **soco-taa** walks **socó-n-ay-aa** he is walking  

§ 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.

_Bérri 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, such as:

- **haystaa, haysataa** holds, has  
- **hubaa, hubtaa** is sure, is certain  
- **léeyahay, léedahay** has, owns  
- **rabaa, rabtaa** wishes, wants  
- **waayaa, waydaa** cannot  
- **yaallaa, taallaa** is, lies, is situated  
- **yahay, tahay** is  
- **yaqaannaa, taqaannaa** knows
Many speakers avoid the use of progressive forms of certain other verbs, e.g.

- **hurdaa, huruddaa** *sleeps*
- **karaa, kartaa** *can*
- **socdaa, socotaa** *walks*

**Maxáa dhacay íntii uu nínku hurday?**
- What happened while the man *was sleeping*?

The verb stem **doon–** has developed a meaning difference between the simple and the progressive forms. The simple forms **doona, doonta** are used as a future tense auxiliary, corresponding to English *will*, whereas the progressive forms **doónaya, 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.**  *waa aan*  heési *jiray*  *I used to sing*
- **2 sg.**  *waa aad*  heési *jirtay*  *you used to sing*
- **3 sg.m.**  *waa uu*  heési *jiray*  *he used to sing*
- **3 sg.f.**  *waa ay*  heési *jirtay*  *she used to sing*
- **1 pl.**  *waa aan*  heési *jirnay*  *we used to sing*
- **2 pl.**  *waa aad*  heési *jirteen*  *you used to sing*
- **3 pl.**  *waa ay*  heési *jireen*  *they used to sing*

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

Maalín waliba *waa uu waraabín jiray moxóggii*.

*Every day he watered / used to water 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 events that occurred repeatedly in the past. The simple past 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td><em>waa aan</em></td>
<td><em>waa aan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td><em>waa aan</em></td>
<td><em>waa aan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td><em>waa aad</em></td>
<td><em>waa aad</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td><em>waa aad</em></td>
<td><em>waa aad</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td><em>waa uu</em></td>
<td><em>waa uu</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td><em>waa ay</em></td>
<td><em>waa ay</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td><em>waa ay</em></td>
<td><em>waa ay</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.*

It is also possible to leave out the auxiliary and use the infinitive on its own with a future meaning.
§ 11.8 Survey of tenses and aspects

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

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLE PRESENT</th>
<th>FULL FORMS</th>
<th>REDUCED FORMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>heesaa</td>
<td>heesa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>heestaa</td>
<td>heesa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. m.</td>
<td>heesaa</td>
<td>heesa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. f.</td>
<td>heestaa</td>
<td>heesta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>heesnaa</td>
<td>heesna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>heestaan</td>
<td>heesa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>heesaan</td>
<td>heesa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

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.

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TENSE:</th>
<th>SIMPLE</th>
<th>PROGRESSIVE</th>
<th>HABITUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAST</td>
<td>heesay</td>
<td>heésayay</td>
<td>heési jiray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>heestay</td>
<td>heésaysay</td>
<td>heési jirtn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>heesnay</td>
<td>heésaynay</td>
<td>heési jiray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESENT</td>
<td>heesa</td>
<td>heésaya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>heesta</td>
<td>heésaysa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>heesna</td>
<td>heésayna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUTURE</td>
<td>heési doona</td>
<td>heési doona</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>heési doonta</td>
<td>heési doonta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>heési doonna</td>
<td>heési doonna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
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 soco-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 expresses actions that do not take place in the real world. They may be imaginary, wished for, hoped for, or simply not occurring at all.

The subjunctive consist of two paradigms, one with full inflection in persons and numbers, and one that is reduced to only one common form for all persons in both numbers.

The full subjunctive forms are used to express present and future events
- in negative main clauses,
- in positive subordinate clauses with a subject word,
- in wishes and indirect commands (optative constructions).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJUNCTIVE</th>
<th>SIMPLE</th>
<th>PROGRESSIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>heeso</td>
<td>heésayó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>heesto / heestid</td>
<td>heésayso / heésaysid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>heeso</td>
<td>heésayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>heesto</td>
<td>heésayso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>heesno</td>
<td>heésayno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>heéstáan</td>
<td>heésaysáan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>heésáan</td>
<td>heésayáan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The forms of the full subjunctive paradigm end in –o instead of present tense –aa, whereas the forms ending in –aan are common to both the subjunctive and the present tense. However, the subjunctive –áan has a high tone that is pronounced as a long vowel with a falling tone.

In the 2nd person singular of the full subjunctive paradigm, there are two alternative endings: –to and –tid. The latter has a somewhat higher stylistic value.
### THE FUTURE CONSTRUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>heësi doono</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>heësi doonto / doontid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>heësi doono</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>heësi doonto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>heësi doonno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>heësi doontáan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>heësi doonáan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### § 11.10.1 Negative progressive forms

The progressive full subjunctive can be negated in two different ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 sg.</th>
<th>má heësayo</th>
<th>heësi maayo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>má heësayso</td>
<td>heësi mayso / maysid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. m.</td>
<td>má heësayo</td>
<td>heësi maayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. f.</td>
<td>má heësayso</td>
<td>heësi mayso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>má heësayno</td>
<td>heësi mayno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>má heësayñasan</td>
<td>heësi maysánan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>má heësayáan</td>
<td>heësi maayáan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 raise 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

The reduced subjunctive paradigm does only contain a single form for all persons in both numbers. It always ends in –n/-in/-nin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONJ.</th>
<th>SIMPLE ASPECT</th>
<th>PROGRESSIVE</th>
<th>HABITUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>heésin sing</td>
<td>heésayn(in)</td>
<td>heési jirin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>siín(in) give</td>
<td>siínayn(in)</td>
<td>siín jirin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sameýn(in) do</td>
<td>sameýnayn(in)</td>
<td>sameýn jirin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>booqán(in) visit</td>
<td>booqánayn(in)</td>
<td>booqán jirin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Future construction**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>heési doonin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>siín doonin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>booqán doonin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reduced subjunctive form is used to refer to past events in
- negative main clauses without focus.

The negation particle is ma not.

**Cabdulle ma dhisin kijin.** Abdulla didn’t build any kitchen.

The reduced subjunctive is used for both present and past events in
- negative subordinate clauses,
- negative main clauses with a focused noun phrase,
- negative questions with the question particle ma.

The negation particle is aan not.

**Maxaa aysan u lahayn carruurta qaar saaxiibbo?**
*Why do/did some of the children not have friends?*

**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.*
Future events can be expressed with the auxiliary **doonin** in the reduced subjunctive.

Waxaannu u sheegnay Chelsea in **aan** Thierry Henry lagu **iibin doonin** qiime kasta. We told Chelsea that they will not buy Thierry Henry at any price.

The irregular forms **má arag** didn’t see and **má maqal** didn’t hear are frequently used instead of the regular forms **má arkin** and **má maqlin**.

Liibáan iyo Ayáan **má arag** adeérkood.

*Liban and Ayan didn’t see their uncle.*
§ 11.10.3 The optative construction

The optative construction is subdivided into two types.

In the 1st and 2nd person, the full subjunctive form of the verb is preceded by the short subject pronoun and there is a high tone on the last vowel position in the stem of the verb.

- 1 sg. **aan heésō** = *let me sing*
- 2 sg. **aad heésto / aad heéstid** = *you should sing*
- 1 pl. **aan heésno** = *let’s sing*
- 2 pl. **aad heéstaaan / aad heéssteen** = *you should sing*

In the 3rd person, however, the full subjunctive form of the verb is preceded by the sentence particle **há**, and there is no high tone on the verb, only on the particle **há**.

- 3 sg.m. **há heeso** = *let/make him sing*
- 3 sg.f. **há heesto** = *let/make her sing*
- 3 sg.ind. **há la heesto** = *have/make sb. sing*
- 3 pl. **há heesaan / há heeseen** = *let/make them sing*

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 íí keeno seéf. Have someone bring me a sword.**

Also notice that 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.       yaanan heesín  don’t make/let me sing
2 sg.       yaanad/yaadan heesín  you shouldn’t sing
3 sg.m.     yaanu/yuusan heesín  don’t let him sing
3 sg.f.     yaanay/yaysan heesín  don’t let her sing
3 sg.ind.   yaan la heesín  don’t let anybody sing
1 pl. excl. yaanan heesín  let’s not sing
1 pl. incl. yaynu heesín  let’s not sing
2 pl.       yaanad/yaadan heesín  you shouldn’t sing
3 pl.       yaanay/yaysan heesín  don’t let them sing

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>waa aan</td>
<td>I would have sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>waa aad</td>
<td>you would have sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>waa uu</td>
<td>he would have sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>waa ay</td>
<td>she would have sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>waa aan</td>
<td>we would have sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>waa aad</td>
<td>you would have sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>waa ay</td>
<td>they would have sung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 § 15.1.3.

*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 reduced 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 sg.</th>
<th>2 sg.</th>
<th>3 sg.m.</th>
<th>3 sg.f.</th>
<th>3 sg.ind.</th>
<th>1 pl.</th>
<th>2 pl.</th>
<th>3 pl.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ma aan</td>
<td>ma aad</td>
<td>ma uu</td>
<td>ma ay</td>
<td>lama</td>
<td>ma aan</td>
<td>ma aad</td>
<td>ma ay</td>
<td>I would not have sung</td>
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<td>they would not have sung</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

SUBCLAUSE NEGATIVE CONDITIONAL FORMS WITH AUXILIARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 sg.</th>
<th>2 sg.</th>
<th>3 sg.m.</th>
<th>3 sg.f.</th>
<th>3 sg.ind.</th>
<th>1 pl.</th>
<th>2 pl.</th>
<th>3 pl.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aanan</td>
<td>aanad / aadan</td>
<td>aanu / uusan</td>
<td>aanay / aysan</td>
<td>aan la</td>
<td>aanan</td>
<td>aanad / aadan</td>
<td>aanan / aysan</td>
<td>I would not have sung</td>
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<td>they would not have sung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INFLECTED NEGATIVE CONDITIONAL FORMS

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

1 sg. heeseen would not have sung
2 sg. heesteen
3 sg.m. heeseen
3 sg.f. ma / aan heesteen
1 pl. heesneen
2 pl. heesteen
3 pl. heeseeen

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIMPLE PRESENT, 3 SG.</th>
<th>IMPERATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MASC.</td>
<td>FEM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sawir-aa</td>
<td>sawir-t-aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

| akhri-y-aa          | akhri-saa  | reads        | ákhri   | akhrí-y-a | read! |
| shaqee-y-aa         | shaqey-saa | works        | shaqée  | shaqé-y-a | work! |

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.19 Contrary to the general rule, the high tone in the singular form is on the final vowel position.

| booqa-taa           | visits     | boóqó       | visit!  |
| booqd-aa            | visits     | boóqd-a     | visit!  |
| qaada-taa           | takes      | qaadó       | take!   |
| qaat-aa             | takes      | qaát-a      | take!   |

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.

| bilaaab-aa          | bilow-daa  | begins      | bilów   | bilaáb-a | begin! |
| ogaad-aa            | ogaa-taa   | finds out   | ogów   | ogaád-a  | find out! |

19 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.
§ 11.11.1 The prohibitive construction

In Somali, negative imperatives 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 stem ending in a consonant and *–nin* after a stem ending in 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 that ends in *–nin*, not to the shorter that just ends in *–n*.

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 in conjugation 2 and 3.

Just like in the imperative, the high tone is on the second to last vowel position, with the exception of the shorter singular forms in the 2nd and 3rd conjugation.¹⁰

**CONJUGATION 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ha sheégíns</em></td>
<td><em>don’t say</em></td>
<td>(addressing one person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ha sheégínsa</em></td>
<td><em>don’t say</em></td>
<td>(addressing several persons)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONJUGATION 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ha fiiríns</em> (in)</td>
<td><em>don’t look</em></td>
<td>(addressing one person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ha fiirínína</em></td>
<td><em>don’t look</em></td>
<td>(addressing several persons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ha sameýns</em> (in)</td>
<td><em>don’t make</em></td>
<td>(addressing one person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ha sameynína</em></td>
<td><em>don’t make</em></td>
<td>(addressing several persons)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONJUGATION 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somali</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ha qaadán</em> (in)</td>
<td><em>don’t take</em></td>
<td>(addressing one person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ha qaadanína</em></td>
<td><em>don’t take</em></td>
<td>(addressing several persons)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁰ It would also be possible to say that in the singular the tone is on the last vowel position of the stem, but that would of course not apply to the plural.
§ 11.12 Sound changes

In the tables below, only the present tense forms are given, but of course, the exact 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 end in –íd (–da). Many verbs in the 1st conjugation also have verbal nouns ending with –ís (–ta).

(a) In the majority of verbs no sound changes occur. This applies to all verbs with a stem that ends in /b, f, g, n, r, s/ preceded by a vowel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 sg.</th>
<th>2 sg.</th>
<th>3 sg.m.</th>
<th>3 sg.f.</th>
<th>1 pl.</th>
<th>2 pl.</th>
<th>3 pl.</th>
<th>progr.</th>
<th>fut.</th>
<th>imp. sg.</th>
<th>imp. pl.</th>
<th>v. noun.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sings</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>shéeg</td>
<td></td>
<td>sheeg-id –da</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(b) If the stem ends in /d, y, w, kh, q, c, x, h, '/, a following /t/ becomes /d/, just like in the different suffixes added to nouns. See § 4.1.

1 sg.    bood-aa  jumps
2 sg.    bood-daa
3 sg.m.  bood-aa
3 sg.f.  bood-daa
1 pl.    bood-naa
2 pl.    bood-daan
3 pl.    bood-aan

progr.  boód-ayaa
fut.    boód-i doonaa

imp. sg.  bóod
imp. pl.  boód-a

v. noun.  bood-id –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’al, go’íd –da
qaadaa  takes
qaaddaa, qaádayaa, qaádi, qáad!, qaáda!, qaadíd –da
raacaa  accompanies
raacdzaa, raácayaa, raác, ráac!, raáca!, raacid –da
(c) In addition to the /t/ > /d/ change, when the stem ends in /c, h, x, ‘/ which is only preceded by a short /a/ and an initial consonant, the /a/ changes to /i/ before an ending with another /i/, i.e., before the endings in the infinitive and the verbal noun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>bax-aa</th>
<th>dhac-aa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>comes out, leaves</td>
<td>falls; happens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>bax-daa</td>
<td>dhac-daa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>bax-aa</td>
<td>dhac-aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>bax-daa</td>
<td>dhac-daa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>bax-naa</td>
<td>dhac-naa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>bax-daan</td>
<td>dhac-daan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>bax-aan</td>
<td>dhac-aan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   | báx-ayaa | dhác-ayaa |
|---|---------|----------|
| progr. |  |  |

   | bix-i doonaa | dhíc-i doonaa |
|---|---------|----------|
| fut. |  |  |

   | báx | dhác |
|---|-----|------|
| imp. sg. |  |  |

   | báx-a | dhác-a |
|---|-----|-----|
| imp. pl. |  |  |

   | bix-íd –da | dhíc-íd –da |
|---|---------|----------|
| v. noun. |  |  |

Other verbs of this type:

ba’aa is destroyed,
ba’daa, bá’ayaa, bí’i, bá’!, bá’al, bí’íd –da
kacaa gets up, rises
kacdaa, kácayaa, kící, kác!, káca!, kícíd –da
naxaa becomes afraid
naxdaa, náxayaa, níxi, náx!, náxl, nixíd –da
(d) The /t/ of the suffixes merges with a preceding /l/ in the stem. The result is /sh/. Some verbs with only one syllable in the stem changes /a/ → /e/ in the stem before endings containing /i/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>hel-aa finds, gets</th>
<th>gal-aa enters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>heshaa</td>
<td>gasha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>hel-aa</td>
<td>gal-aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>heshaa</td>
<td>gasha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>hel-aa</td>
<td>gal-aa</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>hel-naa</td>
<td>gashaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>heshaan</td>
<td>gashaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>hel-aan</td>
<td>galaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progr.</td>
<td>hél-ayaa</td>
<td>gál-ayaa</td>
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<tr>
<td>fut.</td>
<td>hél-i doonaa</td>
<td>gél-i doonaa</td>
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<tr>
<td>imp. sg.</td>
<td>hél</td>
<td>gál</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. pl.</td>
<td>hél-a</td>
<td>gál-a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. noun.</td>
<td>hel-íd –da</td>
<td>gel-íd –da</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other verbs of this type:

yeelaa  *makes*
yeeshaa, yeelayaa, yeeli, yée!, yeéla!, yeelíd –da
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 nort-east, the centre and the south, /dh/ has usually been replaced by /r/, which does not lead to any sound alternations.

1 sg. hadh-aa⁵ remains har-aa⁵ remains
2 sg. hadhaa [hadhdhaa] har-taa
3 sg.m. hadh-aa har-aa
3 sg.f. hadhaa [hadhdhaa] har-taa
1 pl. hadh-naa har-naa
2 pl. hadhaan [hadhdhaan] har-taan
3 pl. hadh-aan har-aan

progr. hádh-ayaa hár-ayaa
fut. hádh-i doonaa hár-i doonaa

imp. sg. hádh hár
imp. pl. hádh-a hár-a

v. noun. hadh-íd –da har-íd –da

Other verbs of this type:

xidhaa / xiraa ties, closes, links, connects
xidhaa, xidhayaa, xídhi doonaa, xídhi!, xidha!, xidhíd –da
/ xirtaa, xírayaa, xíri doonaa, xír!, xíra!, xiríd –da

gaadhaa / gaaraa reaches
gaadhaa, gaádhayaa, gaádhí doonaa, güadh!, gaádha!, gaadhíd –da
/ gaartaa, gaárayaa, gaárí doonaa, güár!, gaára!, gaáríd –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. | buk-aa is ill | tartam-aa competes
2 sg. | bug-taa | tartan-taa
3 sg.m. | buk-aa | tartam-aa
3 sg.f. | bug-taa | tartan-taa
1 pl. | bug-naa | tartan-naa
2 pl. | bug-taan | tartan-taan
3 pl. | buk-aan | tartam-aan

progr. | ——— | tartám-ayaa
fut. | búk-i doonaa | tartám-i doonaa

imp. sg. | bug | tartan
imp. pl. | buk-a | tartám-a

v. noun. | buk-íd –da | tartam-íd –da

Other verbs of this type:

salaamaa  
greets
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>gudb-aa</th>
<th>dalb-aa</th>
<th>ord-aa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>passes</td>
<td>requests</td>
<td>runs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>gudub-taa</td>
<td>dalab-taa</td>
<td>orod-daa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>gudb-aa</td>
<td>dalb-aa</td>
<td>orod-aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>gudb-taa</td>
<td>dalab-taa</td>
<td>orod-daa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>gudub-naa</td>
<td>dalab-naa</td>
<td>orod-naa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>gudub-taan</td>
<td>dalab-taan</td>
<td>orod-daan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>gudb-aan</td>
<td>dalb-aan</td>
<td>ord-aan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progr.</td>
<td>gúdb-ayaa</td>
<td>dálb-ayaa</td>
<td>órd-ayaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fut.</td>
<td>gúdb-i doonaa</td>
<td>dálb-i doonaa</td>
<td>órd-i doonaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. sg.</td>
<td>gudub</td>
<td>dalab</td>
<td>órod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. pl.</td>
<td>gúdb-a</td>
<td>dálb-a</td>
<td>órd-a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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:

- **jilca** becomes soft
- **jilicdaa, jilcayaa, jilci, jilic!, jilca! jilcid –da**

- **turqaa** pricks, pierces
- **turuqdaa, turqayaa, turqi, turuq!, turqa!, turqid –da**
Some verbs exhibit both vowel insertion and consonant alternation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>verb</th>
<th>verb</th>
<th>verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>ark-aa sees</td>
<td>hadl-aa talks</td>
<td>kulm-aa meets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>arag-taa</td>
<td>hadashaa</td>
<td>kulan-taa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>ark-aa</td>
<td>hadl-aa</td>
<td>kulm-aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>arag-taa</td>
<td>hadashaa</td>
<td>kulan-taa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>arag-naa</td>
<td>hadashaa</td>
<td>kulan-naa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>arag-taan</td>
<td>hadashaan</td>
<td>kulan-taan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>ark-aan</td>
<td>hadl-aan</td>
<td>kulm-aan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progr.</td>
<td>árk-ayaa</td>
<td>hádl-ayaa</td>
<td>kúlm-ayaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fut.</td>
<td>árk-i doonaa</td>
<td>hádl-i doonaa</td>
<td>kúlm-i doonaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. sg.</td>
<td>árag</td>
<td>hádal</td>
<td>kúlan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. pl.</td>
<td>árk-a</td>
<td>hádl-a</td>
<td>kúlm-a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. noun.</td>
<td>ark-id –da</td>
<td>hadl-id –da</td>
<td>kulm-id –da</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, gógo!, góglá!, 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 § 11.14.6.

- **dhaawacaa** hurts, injures, dhaawacdaa, dhaawacayaa...
- **dhaawacmaa** gets hurt, is injured (without anyone causing it)
- **dhaawacantaa, dhaawácmayaa, dhaawácmi, no imp., dhaawacmíd –da**
(i) In some verb with a stem that ends in /aab/, an alternation with /ow/ occurs before endings beginning with a consonant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 sg.</th>
<th>2 sg.</th>
<th>3 sg.m.</th>
<th>3 sg.f.</th>
<th>1 pl.</th>
<th>2 pl.</th>
<th>3 pl.</th>
<th>progr.</th>
<th>fut.</th>
<th>imp. sg.</th>
<th>imp. pl.</th>
<th>v. noun.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>magacaab-aa tells the name of</td>
<td>magacow-daa</td>
<td>magacaab-aa</td>
<td>magacow-daa</td>
<td>magacow-naa</td>
<td>magacow-daan</td>
<td>magacaab-aan</td>
<td>magacaáb-ayaa</td>
<td>magacaáb-i donoaa</td>
<td>magaców</td>
<td>magacaáb-a</td>
<td>magacaab-íd –da</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One verb exhibits a lot of variation in the stem:

illaabaa / illawaa / illoobaa forgets
illowdaa, illaábayaa, illaábi donoaa, illów!, illába!, illaabíd –da
illowdaa, illaáwaayaa, illaáwi donoaa, illów!, illáwa!, illaawíd –da
illowdaa, illoóbayaa, illoöbi donoaa, illów!, illoöba!, 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.  siiyaa  gives  fiiriyaa  looks
2 sg.  sii-saa  fiiri-saa
3 sg.m.  siiyaa  fiir iyaa
3 sg.f.  sii-saa  fiiri-saa
1 pl.  siinnaa  fiirinnaa
2 pl.  sii-saan  fiiri-saan
3 pl.  siiyaan  fiiriyaan

progr.  sií-nayaa  fiirí-nayaa
fut.  sií-n doonaa  fiirí-n doonaa

imp. sg.  sii  fiiri
imp. pl.  siíya  fiiriya

v. noun.  sií-n –ta  fiirí-n –ta

Other verbs of this type:

kariyaa  cooks
karisaa, karínayaa, karín doonaa, kári!, káriya!, 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** does, makes
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. **sameý-nayaa** or **samaý-nayaa**
fut. **sameý-n doonaa** or **samaý-n doonaa**

imp. sg. **samée**
imp. pl. **sameéya**

v. noun. **sameý-n –ta** or **samaý-n –ta**

Other verbs of this type:

**geeyaa** brings, transports

**geysaa, geýnayaa, geýn doonaa, géel, 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/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2nd conjugation</th>
<th>1rd conjugation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg. akhri__aa</td>
<td>reads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg. akhri-saa</td>
<td>or akhri-__aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m. akhri__aa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f. akhri-saa</td>
<td>or akhri-__aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl. akhrin__aa</td>
<td>or akhri-naa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl. akhri-saan</td>
<td>or akhri-daan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl. akhri__aan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

progr. akhri-nayaa or akhri\_\_ayaa
fut. akhri-n doonaa or akhri\_\_i doonaa

imp. sg. akhir
imp. pl. akhri\_\_a

v. noun. akhrí-n -ta or akhri\_\_id –da

Other verbs of this type:

**dheelliya**\_\_aa *leans sidewise*
dheellisaa/dheelidaa, dheellinayaa/dheelliya\_\_aa, dheellin/dheelliyi, dheelli!, dheelliya!, dheellin -ta/dheelli\_\_id -da

**fadhiya**\_\_aa *[dh:] sits*
fadhisaa/fadhidaa, fadhinayaa/fadhiya\_\_aa, fadhin/fadhiyi, fadhi!, fadhiya!, fadhin -ta, fadhiyi\_\_id -da
§ 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\(^{21}\) 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.

---

\(^{21}\) 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.  hayst-aa  holds, has  dhigt-aa  studies
2 sg.   haysa-taa  dhiga-taa
3 sg.m. hayst-aa  dhigt-aa
3 sg.f. haysa-taa  dhiga-taa
1 pl.   haysa-nnaa  dhiga-nnaa
2 pl.   haysa-taan  dhiga-taan
3 pl.   hayst-aan  dhigt-aan

progr.  haysá-nayaa  dhigá-nayaa
fut.  haysá-n doonaa  dhigá-n doonaa

imp. sg.  haysó  dhigó
imp. pl.  haýst-a  dhígt-a

v. noun.  haysá-sho –da  dhigá-sho –da

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, ʃ/, the stem final /t/ is replaced by /d/. See § 4.1.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-d-aa</strong></td>
<td>visits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-a-taa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-d-aa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-a-taa</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-a-nnaa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-a-taan</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-d-aan</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progr.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-a-nayaa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fut.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-a-n doonaa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. sg.</td>
<td><strong>boooqó</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. pl.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-d-a</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. noun.</td>
<td><strong>boooq-a-sho –da</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(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, bogsól, bogsáda!, bogsásho –da

daawadaa watches
daawataa, daawánayaa, daawán, daawól!, daawáda, daawásho –da

dhaansadaa fetches water
dhaansataa, dhaansánayaa, dhaansán, dhaansól!, dhaansáda, dhaansásho –da

eryadaa chases
eryataa, eryánayaa, eryán, eryól!, eryáda!, eryásho –da

karsadaa cooks for oneself
karsataa, karsánayaa, karsán, karsól!, 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, tukó!, 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 doona

imp. sg.   dhaló
imp. pl.   dhásh-a

v. noun.  dhalá-sho -da

Other verbs of this type:

dabaashaa  swims
dhabaalataa, dhabaalánayaa, dabaalán doona, dabaaló!, dabaásha!, dabaalásho –da

yeeshaa  earns, acquires, obtains
yeelataa, yeelánayaa, yeelán doona, yeeló!, 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. qaat -aa *takes*  
2 sg. qaada-taa  
3 sg.m. qaat -aa  
3 sg.f. qaada-taa  
1 pl. qaada-nnaa  
2 pl. qaada-taan  
3 pl. qaat -aan

progr. qaadá-nayaa  
fut. qaadá-n doonaa

imp. sg. qaadó  
imp. pl. qaat-a

v. noun. qaadá-sho -da

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

**sita** *carries, wears*  
sidataa, sidánayaa, sidán doonaa, sidó, sita, sidás –da
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.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>xidh\ -aa\N</td>
<td>[xidh\dh-aa]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>xidha-taa</td>
<td>[xidha-taa]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>xidh\ -aa</td>
<td>[xidh\dh-aa]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>xidha-taa</td>
<td>[xidha-taa]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>xidha-n\naa</td>
<td>[xidha-n\naa]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>xidha-taan</td>
<td>[xidha-taan]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>xidh\ -aan</td>
<td>[xidh\dh-a\naan]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

progr. xidhá-n\naa | xirá-n\naa
fut. xidhá-n doonaa | xirá-n doonaa

imp. sg. xidhó | xiró
imp. pl. xidha | [xidh\dh-a] | xírt-a

v. noun. xidhá-sho –\da | xirá-sho –\da
(g) Two verbs have a vowel stem ending with /o/ instead of /a/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Verb 1</th>
<th>Verb 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>socd-aa</td>
<td>noqd-aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>soco-taa</td>
<td>noqo-taa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.m.</td>
<td>socd-aa</td>
<td>noqd-aa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg.f.</td>
<td>soco-taa</td>
<td>noqo-taa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl.</td>
<td>soco-nnaa</td>
<td>noqo-nnaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pl.</td>
<td>soco-taan</td>
<td>noqo-taan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pl.</td>
<td>socd-aan</td>
<td>noqd-aan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progr.</td>
<td>socó-nayaa</td>
<td>noqó-nayaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fut.</td>
<td>socó-n doonaa</td>
<td>noqó-n doonaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. sg.</td>
<td>socó</td>
<td>noqó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imp. pl.</td>
<td>sócd-a</td>
<td>nóqd-a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. noun.</td>
<td>socó-sho –da</td>
<td>noqó-sho –da</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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. **dhammaad-aa** finishes, ends (intransitive)  
2 sg. **dhammaa- taa**  
3 sg.m. **dhammaad-aa**  
3 sg.f. **dhammaa- taa**  
1 pl. **dhammaa- nnaa**  
2 pl. **dhammaa- taan**  
3 pl. **dhammaad-aan**

progr. **dhammaá-nayaa**  
fut. **dhammaá-n doonaa**  
imp. sg. **dhammów**  
imp. pl. **dhammaád-a**  

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:

**og** aware  
**ogaadaa** becomes aware, finds out  
**ogaataa, ogaánayaa, ogaán, ogów!, ogaáda!, ogaán –ta/ogaánsho –ha**
§ 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 full subjunctive forms in the same way as other verbs do. Instead, there are three different forms for the different functions of the subjunctive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Is</th>
<th>Reduced present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>ahay</td>
<td>1 pl. nahay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>tahay</td>
<td>2 pl. tihiin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. m.</td>
<td>yahay</td>
<td>3 pl. yihiiin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. f.</td>
<td>tahay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>was</th>
<th>Reduced past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
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<td>1 pl. ahayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>ahayd</td>
<td>2 pl. ahaydeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. m.</td>
<td>ahaa</td>
<td>3 pl. ahayeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. f.</td>
<td>ahayd</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>be</th>
<th>Verbal noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ahaán</td>
<td>being, to be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperative</th>
<th>be!</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>ahów</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjunctive in negative present tense main clauses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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22 The quite rare form **ahaánayaa** exists, but its meaning is not progressive. It is synonymous with **yahay** and used for certain stylistical purposes.
3 sg.m. má aha  3 pl. má aha
3 sg.f. má aha

SUBJUNCTIVE IN SUBCLAUSES WITH A SUBJECT WORD

These forms are identical to the ordinary present tense main clause forms.

1 sg. ahay  1 pl. nahay
2 sg. tahay  2 pl. tihiin
3 sg.m. yahay  3 pl. yihiiin
3 sg.f. tahay

SUBJUNCTIVE IN THE OPTATIVE CONSTRUCTION

1 sg. aan ahaádo  1 pl. aan ahaánno
2 sg. aad ahaáto  2 pl. aad ahaáteen (ahaátaan)
3 sg.m. há ahaado  3 pl. há ahaadeen (ahaadaan)
3 sg.f. há ahaato

These forms (except those in –een) are also possible after waa in must, ought to.

REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE

(all persons) ahayn

§ 11.13.1a 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  PFOC teacher(F)

Gacantu waa wasakh. The hand is DIRTY.
the.hand  PFOC dirty.thing

(ii) If the predicative complement is an adjective, the verb yahay is must be used.
Gacántu waa yár tahay. The hand is SMALL.

(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.

Eraygéé baa kú habboon * sáwirka?

WHICH WORD is suitable for the picture?

§ 11.13.1b   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 belongs to the SMALL FLYING INSECTS.

jiraa exists, can be found, 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.

Whales are found in the ocean, and they don’t come close to the coast.

Doolligu ma ku dhex jiraa baaldiga? Is the mouse inside the bucket?

joogaa stands, stays, dwells, is. 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 weydiiyey 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.*

It may however also be found with objects that seem to move.

Halkee bay joogtaa qorraxdu galabtii?
*Where is the sun in the afternoon?*

*yaallaa* is *positioned, lies, is situated.* This verb is mainly used when stating the place where an inanimate 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.

Baaskiilkii wuxuu yaallaa dhulka.
*The bike is lying on the ground.*

Halkee buu ku yaal dalkeennu?
*Where is our country (situated)?*

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?*

§ 11.13.2  Adjectives with 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.

§ 11.13.2a  Stative verb suffixes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT</th>
<th><strong>am/are/is small</strong></th>
<th>REDUCED PRESENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>yar ahay</td>
<td>1 pl. yaryar nahay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>yar tahay</td>
<td>2 pl. yaryar tiihin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. m.</td>
<td>yar yahay</td>
<td>3 pl. yaryar yihiin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. f.</td>
<td>yar tahay</td>
<td>(subject marked)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAST</th>
<th><strong>was/were small</strong></th>
<th>REDUCED PAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
<td>yaraa</td>
<td>1 pl. yaryar ayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>yarayd</td>
<td>2 pl. yaryar aydeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. m.</td>
<td>yaraa</td>
<td>3 pl. yaryar aayeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. f.</td>
<td>yarayd</td>
<td>(default) yaraa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFINITIVE</th>
<th><strong>to be small</strong></th>
<th>VERBAL NOUN</th>
<th><strong>being small, to be small</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yaraán</td>
<td></td>
<td>yaraán–ta</td>
<td>yaraánsho–ha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPERATIVE</th>
<th><strong>be small!</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
<td>yarów</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJUNCTIVE IN NEGATIVE PRESENT TENSE MAIN CLAUSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 sg. m./f.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJUNCTIVE IN SUBCLAUASES WITH A SUBJECT WORD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 sg.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

23 The form **ahay** *I am* is not contracted with adjectives. An explanation might be that all the other present tense forms have a prefix, and this form is therefore also interpreted as having an prefix, although an empty one.
2 sg. yar tahay 2 pl. yaryar tihiin
3 sg. m. yar yahay 3 pl. yaryar yihiin
3 sg. f. yar tahay

REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE

all persons yarayn

All the forms in the above table 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.

§ 11.13.2b Inchoative verb suffixes

These forms denote a change in quality. The inflection is regular and follows the 3rd conjugation.

PRESENT becomes small

1 sg. yaraadaa 1 pl. yaryaraanna
2 sg. yaraataa 2 pl. yaryaraataan
3 sg. m. yaraadaa 3 pl. yaryaraadaan
3 sg. f. yaraataa

PAST became small

1 sg. yaraaday 1 pl. yaryaraannay
2 sg. yaraatay 2 pl. yaryaraateen
3 sg. m. yaraaday 3 pl. yaryaraadeen
3 sg. f. yaraatay

SUBJUNCTIVE

1 sg. yaraado 1 pl. yaryaraanno
2 sg. yaraato 2 pl. yaryaraatáan
3 sg. m. yaraado 3 pl. yaryaraadáan
3 sg. f. yaraato

REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE

yaraan(in)
INFINITIVE | VERBAL NOUN
---|---
**yaraán** | **yaraán –ta, yaraánslo –ha**

IMPERATIVE

| 2 sg. | 2 pl. |
---|---|
**yarów** | **yaraáda**

PRESENT PROGRESSIVE | *is becoming small*

| 1 sg. |
---|
**yaraánayaa** etc.

PAST PROGRESSIVE | *was becoming small*

| 1 sg. |
---|
**yaraánayay** etc.

PROGRESSIVE SUBJUNCTIVE

| 1 sg. |
---|
**yaraánayo** etc.

PROGRESSIVE REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE

| yaraánayn(in) |
---|

§ 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 full subjunctive forms in the way other verbs do. Instead, there are three different forms for different functions.

| PRESENT | REDUCED PRESENT |
---|---|
1 sg. | **leeyahay** | **leenahay** leh |
2 sg. | **leedahay** | **leedihiiin** (all persons) |
3 sg. m. | **leeyahay** | **leeyiihin** lihi |
3 sg. f. | **leedahay** |

| PAST | REDUCED PAST |
---|---|
1 sg. | **lahaa** | **lahayn** default **lahaa** |
2 sg. | **lahayd** | **lahaydeen** 3 sg. f. **lahayd** |
3 sg. m. | **lahaa** | **lahaayeen** 1 pl. **lahayn** |
3 sg. f. | **lahayd** |
INFINITIVE  have | VERBAL NOUN  having, to have
lahaán | lahaánsho -ha

IMPERATIVE  be!
2 sg.  lahów | 2 pl.  lahaáda

SUBJUNCTIVE IN NEGATIVE PRESENT TENSE MAIN CLAUSES

1 sg.  má lihi | 1 pl.  má lihin
2 sg.  má lihid | 2 pl.  má lihidin
3 sg. m.  má laha | 3 pl.  má laha
3 sg. f.  má laha

SUBJUNCTIVE IN SUBCLAUSES WITH A SUBJECT WORD

These forms are identical to the ordinary present tense main clause forms.

1 sg.  leeyahay | 1 pl.  leenahay
2 sg.  leedahay | 2 pl.  leedìhiin
3 sg. m.  leeyahay | 3 pl.  leeyìhiin
3 sg. f.  leedahay

SUBJUNCTIVE IN THE OPTATIVE CONSTRUCTION

1 sg.  aan lahaádo | 1 pl.  aan lahaánno
2 sg.  aad lahaáto | 2 pl.  aad lahaáteen (lahaátaan)
3 sg. m.  há lahaado | 3 pl.  há lahaadeen (lahaadaan)
3 sg. f.  há lahaato

The same forms (except those ending in –een) are also commonly used after waa in must, ought to.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 SG.</th>
<th>2 SG.</th>
<th>3 SG.M.</th>
<th>3 SG.F.</th>
<th>1 PL.</th>
<th>2 PL.</th>
<th>3 PL.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRESENT</strong></td>
<td><em>aallaa</em> / <em>aal</em></td>
<td><em>taallaa</em> / <em>taal</em></td>
<td><em>yaallaa</em> / <em>yaal</em></td>
<td><em>taallaa</em> / <em>taal</em></td>
<td><em>naalnnaa / naallaa</em> / <em>naal</em></td>
<td><em>(coll. taalliin)</em></td>
<td><em>(coll. yaalliin)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAST</strong></td>
<td><em>aallay</em> / <em>iil</em> / <em>iillay</em></td>
<td><em>taallay</em> / <em>tiil</em> / <em>tiillay</em></td>
<td><em>yaallay</em> / <em>yiil</em> / <em>yiillay</em></td>
<td><em>taallay</em> / <em>tiil</em> / <em>tiillay</em></td>
<td><em>(coll. taalliin)</em></td>
<td><em>(coll. yaalliin)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFINITIVE</strong></td>
<td><em>oolli</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IMPERATIVE</strong></td>
<td><em>not used</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FULL SUBJUNCTIVE</strong></td>
<td><em>aallo</em> / <em>aal</em></td>
<td><em>taallo</em> / <em>taal</em></td>
<td><em>yaallo</em> / <em>yaal</em></td>
<td><em>taallo</em> / <em>taal</em></td>
<td><em>(coll. taaloo)</em> / <em>(coll. yaaloo)</em></td>
<td><em>(coll. yaaloo)</em> / <em>(coll. yaaloo)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FULL SUBJUNCTIVE</strong></td>
<td><em>naalno / naallo</em> / <em>naal</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE</strong></td>
<td><em>oollin</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§ 11.13.5  *yaqaannaa* knows

This verb has no progressive forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>1 SG.</th>
<th>aqaannaa / aqaan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 SG.</td>
<td>taqaannaa / taqaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 SG.M.</td>
<td>yaqaannaa / yaqaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 SG.F.</td>
<td>taqaannaa / taqaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 PL.</td>
<td>naqaannaa / naqaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 PL.</td>
<td>taqaan (coll. taqaanniin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 PL.</td>
<td>yaqaan (coll. yaqaanniin)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>1 SG.</th>
<th>aqaannay / iqiin / iqiinnay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 SG.</td>
<td>taqaannay / tiqiin / tiqiinnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 SG.M.</td>
<td>yaqaannay / yiqiin / yiqiinnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 SG.F.</td>
<td>taqaannay / tiqiin / tiqiinnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 PL.</td>
<td>naqaannay / niqiin / niqiinnay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 PL.</td>
<td>taqaanneen / tiqiinneen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 PL.</td>
<td>yaqaanneen / yiqiinneen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>aqoon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperative</th>
<th>not used, replaced by ogów, ogaáda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Subjunctive</th>
<th>1 SG.</th>
<th>aqaanno / aqaan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 SG.</td>
<td>taqaanno / taqaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 SG.M.</td>
<td>yaqaanno / yaqaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 SG.F.</td>
<td>taqaanno / taqaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 PL.</td>
<td>naqaanno / naqaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 PL.</td>
<td>taqaannáan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 PL.</td>
<td>yaqaannáan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Reduced Subjunctive | aqoon(in) |
§ 11.13.6  *yimaaddaa* *comes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 SG.</th>
<th>2 SG.</th>
<th>3 SG.M.</th>
<th>3 SG.F.</th>
<th>1 PL.</th>
<th>2 PL.</th>
<th>3 PL.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present</strong></td>
<td>imaaddaa</td>
<td>timaaddaa</td>
<td>yimaaddaa</td>
<td>timaaddaa</td>
<td>nimaadnaa</td>
<td>timaaddaan</td>
<td>yimaaddaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past</strong></td>
<td>1 SG.</td>
<td>timid / timi (imaadday)</td>
<td>2 SG.</td>
<td>3 SG.M.</td>
<td>yimid / yimi (yimaadday)</td>
<td>3 SG.F.</td>
<td>timid / timi (timaadday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imperative</strong></td>
<td>kaalay, kaaláya / imów, imaáda</td>
<td><strong>Infinitive</strong></td>
<td>imán / imaán</td>
<td><strong>Progressive</strong></td>
<td>imánayaa / imaánayaa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full Subjunctive</strong></td>
<td>1 SG.</td>
<td>imaaddo</td>
<td>2 SG.</td>
<td>timaaddo</td>
<td>3 SG.M.</td>
<td>yimaaddo</td>
<td>3 SG.F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reduced Subjunctive</strong></td>
<td>iman(in) / imaan(in)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§ 11.13.7 *yiraahdaa* says

This irregular verb has developed parallel regular forms, thus giving rise to the completely regular verb *dhahaa* says.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TENSE</th>
<th>1 SG.</th>
<th>2 SG.</th>
<th>3 SG.M.</th>
<th>3 SG.F.</th>
<th>1 PL.</th>
<th>2 PL.</th>
<th>3 PL.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRESENT</td>
<td><em>iraahdaa</em> / <em>idhaahdaa</em> / <em>dhahaa</em></td>
<td><em>tiraahdaa</em> / <em>tidhaahdaa</em> / <em>dhahdaa</em></td>
<td><em>yiraahdaa</em> / <em>yidhaahdaa</em> / <em>dhahaa</em></td>
<td><em>tiraahdaa</em> / <em>tidhaahdaa</em> / <em>dhahdaa</em></td>
<td><em>niraahnaa</em> / <em>nidhaaunaa</em> / <em>dhaahnaa</em></td>
<td><em>tiraahdaan</em> / <em>tidhaahdaan</em> / <em>dhaahdaan</em></td>
<td><em>yiraahdaan</em> / <em>yidhaahdaan</em> / <em>dhaahaan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAST</td>
<td><em>iri</em> / <em>idhi</em> / <em>dhaahay</em></td>
<td><em>tiri</em> / <em>tidhi</em> / <em>dhaahday</em></td>
<td><em>yiri</em> / <em>yidhi</em> / <em>dhaahay</em></td>
<td><em>tiri</em> / <em>tidhi</em> / <em>dhaahday</em></td>
<td><em>niri</em> / <em>nidhi</em> / <em>dhaahnay</em></td>
<td><em>tiraahdeen</em> / <em>tidhaahdeen</em> / <em>dhaahdeen</em></td>
<td><em>yiraahdeen</em> / <em>yidhaahdeen</em> / <em>dhaheen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPERATIVE</td>
<td>dhéh, dháha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFINITIVE</td>
<td>orán / odhán / dhíhi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROGRESSIVE</td>
<td>oránayaa / odhánayaa / dháhayaa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FULL SUBJUNCTIVE</td>
<td><em>iraahdo</em> / <em>idhaahdo</em> / <em>dhaho</em></td>
<td><em>tiraahdo</em> / <em>tidhaahdo</em> / <em>dhahdo</em></td>
<td><em>yiraahdo</em> / <em>yidhaahdo</em> / <em>dhaho</em></td>
<td><em>tiraahdo</em> / <em>tidhaahdo</em> / <em>dhahdo</em></td>
<td><em>niraahno</em> / <em>nidhaahno</em> / <em>dhaahno</em></td>
<td><em>tiraahdáan</em> / <em>tidhaahdáan</em> / <em>dhaahdáan</em></td>
<td><em>yiraahdáan</em> / <em>yidhaahdáan</em> / <em>dhaaháan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REDUCED SUBJUNCTIVE</td>
<td>orán(in) / odhan(in) / dhíhin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
§ 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Verb 1</th>
<th>Verb 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beér-ta</td>
<td>beeraa, beertaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ciyaár-ta</td>
<td>ciyaaraa, ciyaartaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heés-ta</td>
<td>heesaa, heestaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sháah-a</td>
<td>shaahaa drinks tea, has tea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tártan-ka</td>
<td>tartamaa, tartantaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weérar-ka</td>
<td>weeraraa, weerartaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These suffixes are added to certain nouns. They produce verbs that describe the result of a change of state of the subject of the verb.

- biyó – ha water
  - biyoobaa, biyowdaa becomes water, melts
- wasákh – da dirt, filth
  - wasakhoobaa, wasakhowdaa becomes dirty
- cáro – da
  - caroodaa, carootaa
  - / cádho – da anger
  - / cadhoodaa, cadhoota becomes angry
- geeri – da death, passing away
  - geeriyoodaa, geeriyootaa passes away

§ 11.14.2  Inchoative verbs in –aadaa

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. For the inflection of these verbs see § 11.13.2b.

- kulúl warm
  - kululaadaa, kululaataa becomes warm
- nóol alive
  - noolaadaa becomes alive
- wéyn big
  - weynaadaa becomes big, grows big
§ 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.

wasákh –da filth  wasakheeyaa, wasakhaysaa sb. makes sth. dirty, pollutes
fudúd easy  fududeeyaa, fududaysaa sb. makes sth. easy, simplifies
kulúl hot  kululeeyaa, kululaysaa sb. heats sth.
yár small  yareeyaa, yaraysaa sb. makes sth. small, reduces

§ 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  aaddiyaa, aaddisaa
sb. goes, sb. sets off  sb. makes sb./sth. go/move somewhere
= sb. leads/takes sb./sth. somewhere

buuxaa, buuxdaa  buuxiyaa, buuxisaa
sth. is full  sb. makes sth. become full
= sb. fills sth.

guuraa, guurtaa  guuriyaa, guurisaa
sth. moves  sb. makes sth. move
= sb. copies sth.

karaa, kartaa  kariyaa, karisaa
sth. boils  sb. makes sth. boil
= sb. boils/cooks sth.

qalloocaa, qalloocdaa  qalloociyaa, qalloocisaa
sth. is bent, curved  sb. makes sth. bent
= sb. bends sth.
uraa, urtaa  uriyaa, urisaa
sth. smells  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  bixiyaa, bixisaa
sb./sth. comes out  sb. makes sth. come out
= sb. takes out sth.

In a few other verb roots with only one syllable, /a/ changes to /e/.

galaa, gashaa  geliyaa, gelisaa
sb. enters  sb. makes sb./sth. enter, go in
= sb. inserts sth.

/g/ and/q/ change into /j/ before the causative suffix /i/.

daaqaa, daaqdaa  daajiyaa, daajisaa
sth. eats grass, grazes  sb. makes sth. eat grass, graze
sb. pastures sth.

joogaa, joogtaa  joojiyaa, joojisaa
sb./sth. stands, stops  sb. makes sb./sth. stand, stop
= sb. stops sb./sth.

muuqdaa, muuqataa  muujiyaa, muujisaa
sth. appears,  sb. makes sth. appear, be seen
sth. can be seen  = sb. shows sth.

In a few verbs /l/ also changes into /j/ before the causative –i.

qallalaa, qallashaa  qallajiyaa, qallajisaa
sth. dries,  sb. makes sth. become dry
sth. becomes 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.

- **kuláyl** -ka *heat*  
  **kulayliyaa, kulaylisaa** *heats something*

- **nadiíf** -ka *cleanliness*  
  **nadiifiyaa, nadiifisaa** *cleans something*

- **qábow** -ga *coldness*  
  **qaboojiyaa, qaboojisaa** *cools something*

- **qaýb** -ta *part*  
  **qaybiyaa, qaybisaa** *divides something*

### § 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.

- **faham** –ka *understanding*  
  **fahamsiiyaa, fahamsiisaa** *sb. makes sb. understand sth., sb. explains sth. to sb.*

- **dareen** –ka *feeling*  
  **dareensiiyaa, dareensiisaa** *sb. makes sb. else feel sth.*

- **socod** –ka *motion*  
  **socodsiiyaa, socodsiisaa** *sb. puts sth. in motion*

### § 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.*

- **bilaab** *maa, bilaab** *antea* *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
fiiriyyaa, fiirisaa looks at X
ú fiirsadaa, fiirsataa observes X
An /l/ in the root merges with the /s/ and gives /sh/.

kaaliyyaa, kaalisaa supports, helps
/kaa/l/+s/+t/+a/ > /kaa/l/+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, phrases 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 that 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>qoys, qoyska</td>
<td>(a) family, the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qoyskayga, qoyskaaga</td>
<td>my family, your family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qoyskan, qoyskaas</td>
<td>this family, that family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qoyskee</td>
<td>which family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qoyskaygaas</td>
<td>that family of mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qoyskaagee</td>
<td>which family of yours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

- dúgsiga Sahra  | Sahra’s school
- gúriga Axmed   | Ahmed’s house
- dukáanka Máryan | Maryan’s shop
- baabúurka macállinka | the teacher’s car

(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.

- khatárta jídka  | the danger of the road
- dhakhtárka ilkáha | dentist (lit. the.doctor (of) the.teeth)

(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.

Áxmed gúrigiisa    or    gúriga Axmed
Ahmed    his.house
Ahmed’s house    the.house (of) Ahmed
Ahmed’s house
(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

If the quality expressed by the adjective is not a constant characteristic of the noun, but only a quality that is valid for a limited amount of time, then the adjective is usually preceded by the conjunction oo and, that.

**Sawir guriga reer-guuraaga iyo arigii oo xeraysan.**

_Draw the nomads’ house and the penned goats and sheep_ (i.e. the goats and sheep that are penned at that specific point in time).

§ 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**  
  a beautiful bike (a bicycle of great beauty)
- **daanyéerka xóogga weyn**  
  the strong monkey
- **gabdhó dá’ yar**  
  young girls

---

24 There is an interesting structural similarity between English _beauty-full_ and _qurúx badan_.

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§ 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 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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{digaagáddii yarayd} & \quad \text{that hen (you know) that was little} \\
\text{rootígii fiicnaa} & \quad \text{that bread (you know) that was good} \\
\text{wíilkeedíi yaraa} & \quad \text{her son/boy (you know) that was little} \\
\text{gabádhiíisíi weynayd} & \quad \text{his daughter/girl (you know) that was big}
\end{align*}
\]

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.

\[\text{Bannaannadu waa dhul siman oo hooseeya.} \]
\[\text{The plains are flat land that is elevated.}\]

\[\text{Ma jeceshahay jabaqda ay sameeyaan?} \]
\[\text{Do you like the sound (that) they make?}\]

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**  
  man Somali being  
  a Somali man, a Somali

- **gabár dhallinyaró ah**  
  girl youth being  
  a teenage girl, a teenager

- **shaáti bulúug ah**  
  shirt blue being  
  a blue shirt

§ 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**  
  trousers the.colour the.ash having  
  grey trousers

- **qadó hílib badán leh**  
  lunch meat much having  
  a lunch with a lot of meat

§ 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 Soomaáliga ah**  
  the.man the.Somali being  
  the Somali man
baaskiil qurux badan  baaskiilka quruxda badan
bike beauty much the.bike the.beauty much
a beautiful bicycle the beautiful bicycle

Also when the head noun has a demonstrative or possessive determiner suffix, the modifier noun has to be definite.

baaskiilkiisa quruxda 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.

guriga macallinka  guri macallin
the.house the.teacher
the teacher’s house
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)

labadaas reer  those two families
saddex dayda 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 laba two items, saddex three items... Therefore they can actually also be used with uncountable nouns that express collections of individually discernible objects, e.g. nacnac candy, sweets, carruir children or mius bananas. However, the
numeral must be connected to the following noun with the reduced verb form \textit{ah being}, which is added after the noun representing the counted objects.

\textbf{toddobá nácnac ah} (seven.items candy being) \textit{seven pieces of candy}  
\textbf{sáddex carruúr ah} (three.items children being) \textit{three children}  

The same is true for the question word \textbf{ímmisa?} \textit{how many?, how much?}

\textbf{ímmisa múus ah?} (how.many.items banana(s) being) \textit{how many bananas?}  

\textbf{(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 \textbf{xáabbo seed}, which is used in a similar way to English \textit{pieces, units} before a great variety of words.

\textbf{sáddex xabbo oo múus ah} \textit{three bananas}  
\textbf{áfar kiiloo oo hílib ah} \textit{four kilos of meat}  

Since the head noun \textbf{sáddex/áfar} now has two modifiers following each other, the connector \textbf{oo} has to be added between the two modifiers. See §12.1.11.

\textbf{(c)} When some kind of measure precedes a noun denoting a substance, the substance is again followed by the reduced verb form \textit{ah being}.

\textbf{xabbád harúur ah} \textit{a seed of sorghum}  

\textbf{§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 \textbf{oo} and \textbf{ee} are used to connect modifiers to their head nouns.

\textbf{(a)} If the head noun is indefinite, the conjunction \textbf{oo and} is typically used before the second, third etc. modifier.
úbax wéyn oo qurúx badan a big and beautiful flower

Erayadan far fiican oo yaryar ku qor.
Write these words in a nice and small handwriting.

Magaalada meel kastaba waxa aad ku arkaysaa dhismo cusub oo aad u qurux badan.
Everywhere in the city you will see a new and very beautiful building.

Numerals are nouns and function as the head of their noun phrase.

labá gabdhood oo walaaló ah two sisters (lit. two girl siblings)
two.items girls and siblings being
sáddex wiil oo walaaló ah three brothers (lit. three boy siblings)
three.items boys and siblings being
labá waxtar oo kale two other benefits
two.items benefits and other
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 Bashiiir 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 gaybaha 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 the given situation.

Gabadhii oo faraxsan ayaa u mahadcelisey aabbaheed.
The happy girl thanked her father.
Being so happy, the 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 qoráalkan gaaban oo kú saabsan saaxiibáddeeda cusub.**
*Faadumo 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 iibiyan?**
*What were the new clothes that they bought for Faduma?*
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.

Xarúnta Dháqanka ee Hargeysá
the Hargeysa Center of Culture / the Cultural Centre of/in Hargeysa
Hargeysa is modifying Xarunta. Two things are said about the centre: it’s situated in Hargeysa and it is concerned with cluture.

Xarúnta Dháqanka Hargeysá
the Center for the Culture of Hargeysa
Hargeysa is modifying Dhaqanka. The centre is concerned with culture, which in turn 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 ilaalínta 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 expressions, a preposition occurs before a noun that is not derived from a verb. Typical such phrases are, e.g.

isla magaaladan the same town
isla markaas at the same time, simultaneously
isku mid same, identical
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 jawaabéen. *

> “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 frântog 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.

Wáxa aan biyáha ká helnaa meeló badan.
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 saw itself down in the water.

Iskú qalláji shukumáan nadiif ah.

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)

You cannot jump over me.

§ 12.2.4  Viewpoint particles

The basic function of the particle soó is to express a motion towards the subject of the clause or some other relevant point of reference.

Bal soó órod! Go on, run over here!

The motion expressed by soó is not always concrete and spatial. It may also be more abstract and refer to time, as in the expression soó socdí coming, following, referring to something that will come to us in the future.

Kú qór erayáda soó socda búuggaga laýliga.

Write the following words in your exercise book.
The particle soó may also expresses the completion of an action.

Immisa kalluun ayey soó dabteen?
How many fish did they catch? (i.e., the result of their fishing)

U sheeg saaxiibbadaa waxa aad ku soó aragtay.
Tell your friends what you saw there. (i.e., the result of your seeing)

Waxa aad ku soó baratay fasalkii koowaad magacyada kala duwan ee qaybaha jirkeenna.
You learned in the first grade the different names of the parts of our body.

The basic function of the particle sií is to express motion away from the subject of the clause or some other relevant point of reference.

Markii uu albaabka ka sií baxayay ayuu ii sheegay in aan anigu ku soó waco. When he was going (away) out the door he told me that I should call you.

The particle sií is also often 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 aan awoodin in aan sií cabbo.
I swear to you that I am not able to drink any more (to continue drinking).

Finally, sií even may be used in comparative constructions.

Burco baa ka sii fog.
Burao is even further away.

Baaxaddoodu waxay gaadhaysaa ilaa 60 GB iyo wax ka sii badan.
Their size reaches up to 60 GB or even more.

§ 12.2.5 Distribution particles

The basic meaning of wada is together, but it may also correspond to other similar expressions, e.g. with each other.

Laba-laba u wada shaqeeya. Work together two and two.
Saddexda xayawaan waxay ku wada nool yhiin kaynta.
The three animals live together in the forest.

Labo nin ayaa safar wada aaday.
Two men went for a journey together.

The basic meaning of the particle kala is apart, i.e. motion in different directions.

Dabaýshu waxa ay kala káxaysaa daruuráha.
The wind drives the clouds apart.

Kala may also express other kinds of differences that do not involve motion.

Maxaa ay kala ahaayeen saddexda xayawaan ee ku wada noolaa kaynta? What were each of the three animals that lived together in the forest?

Midabbadeé ayáa ay kala lahaayeen dibiyádu? What colours did the oxen have (in different ways)? / What different colours…

Notice especially the adjective phrase

kala duwán different (from each other)

§ 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.

ag closeness, vicinity → close, near

Saynab iyo saaxiibtedd <> waa ay <> isku ag nool yihiiin.
Saynab and her friend live close to each other.
Bisaddu <> waxa ay <> ag joogaa <> dadka.
The cat stays near people.

dhex middle → inside, right into
Baqashii <> waxay <> ku dhex kuftay <> webi yar.
The mule fell into the middle of a SMALL RIVER.

dhinac side → beside, next to

Intaa ka dib <> is dhinac dhig <> labada musmaar.
Thereafter put the two nails beside each other.

dul surface, top → on (top of)

Cali buug buu miiska dul dhigayaa.
Ali is putting a BOOK on (top of) the table.

Xayawaanadan geeda-fuulka ah waa kuwa ku dul nool geedaha.
These tree-climbing animals are those that live up on the trees.

Kani waa sawir jalxad dul taalla miis yar.
This is a picture of a jug/jar standing on a small table.

ka dul often corresponds to English over expressing motion.

Waa aan kaa\textsuperscript{25} dul boodi karaa.
I can jump over you.

But not always. It may also refer to a source.

Buuráha qáar waxa ká dul baxa dhír.
On the surface of the mountains there grow PLANTS.
(I.e. they come out of the surface of the mountains.)

hoos underside → under

Dawacadii hog bay ka hoos qodday geed weyn.
The jackal dug a hole (in the ground) under a big tree.

Doolligu ma ku hoos jiraa miiska?
Is the mouse under the table?

hor front → in front of

\textsuperscript{25} The form kaá is a contraction of ku you + ká from. See § 5.2.3.
Jid dhexe markay marayeen, ayaa nin ka hor yimid.
When they were passing along the way in the middle, a man came in their way (literally: in front of them).

Hilibkii bay hor dhigeen.
They put the meat in front of him/her/them.

kor skin, surface → on (top of), above, over

Dukaanluhu alaabta uu iibinayo waxa uu ku kor qoraa qiimaheeda.
On the goods that he sells, the shopkeeper writes their price.

However, this particle more often occurs as an independent noun phrase, not as part of the verb phrase. It then serves as an adverbial of place or manner, usually together with the preposition ú.

Dabadeed adigu kor u akhri.
Then (you) read it aloud.

Kor u qaad buugga si ay carruurtu u aragto.
Hold up the book so that the children [can] see it.
§ 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

Main clauses normally contain a sentence particle. Subclauses don’t. There are two kinds of sentence particles: **sentence type particles** and **focus particles**.

(a) Sentence particles expressing **type of clause**:

**má** expresses that the clause is negative. This particle always has a high tone, and in this type of clause the verb is in the subjunctive mood.

Faarax wúu heesaa, Cabdise má heeso.
*Farah sings, but Abdi doesn’t (sing).*

Shálay roob má di’ín.
*It didn’t rain yesterday.*

**ma/má** expresses that the clause is a question that requires yes or no as an answer. This particle only has a high tone if the following phrase doesn’t. It is toneless if the following phrase has a high tone.

Warsáme kubbádda kólaya má ciyaaraa?
*Does Warsame play basketball?*

Sheekáda ma jecéshahay?
*Do you like the story?*

Tiroóyinka ków ilaa tobán ereyó ma kú qóri kartaa?
*Can you write the numbers [from] one to ten with[-as] words?*
The lack of any sentence particle expresses that the clause is a command or request. The verb is in the imperative form.

**Biyó cáb.**
*Drink water.*

**ha** expresses warnings and prohibitions. This particle is always toneless.

**Biyáha wasákhda leh ha cábbin.**
*Don’t drink dirty water.*

**há** expresses wishes and indirect commands in the 3rd person. This particle always has a high tone.

**Árday wálíba há sawiro dhówr goor gaadiidka dhúlka, magacyá-doodana há kú qoro.**
*A couple of times each student should draw [some] means of land transportation, and they should write their names on them.*

**(b) Sentence particles expressing focus:**

Positive declarative clauses practically always contain a focused constituent. Focus is an important function expressed by four different sentence particles. It 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 four special function words, called **FOCUS PARTICLES**.

**Waa/wáa** expresses that the predicate phrase is focused. This particle only has a high tone only if the following phrase doesn’t. It is toneless if the following phrase has a high tone.

**Márka hore waa ay ú qubaýnaysaa Xaawó.** *First she bathes Hawo.*
**Waraabayaáshu waa ay weerári karaan carruírtar.**
*The hyenas can attack the children.*

**Ayáa** and **báa** both express that the noun phrase immediately preceding the particle is focused. They are synonymous and mutually exchange-
able, although ayaa is often perceived as a bit more formal, and baa as somewhat more colloquial.

**Hoóyo cuntó ayaa ay karínaysaa.** Mother is cooking food.
**Baabúur baaan sawírayaa.** I’m drawing a car.
**Sháley ayáa uu tagay.** He left yesterday.

Wáxa(a) / waxáa expresses that the noun phrase at the end of the clause is focused.

**Hoóyo waxa ay karínaysaa cuntó.** Mother is cooking food.
**Waxa aan sawírayaa baabúur.** I’m drawing a car.
**Waxa uu tagay sháley.** He left yesterday.

The choice of focus particle in a positive declarative clause depends on the context and the speakers wish to give some extra emphasis to one word/phrase or another.

**Sahra waxa ay salaamaysaa saaxiibteed.**
Sahra is greeting her friend.

**Sahra ayaa salaamaysa saaxiibteed.**
Sahra is greeting her friend.

The focus particles báa / ayáa are optional after the interrogative suffix –éé. One could say that the suffix –éé itself expresses focus.

**Sidee baa ay dadku u isticmaalaan biyaha?** How do people use water?
**Sidee tahay?** How are you?

It sometimes happens that both baa/ayaa and waxa(a) are used together in the same clause.

**Maalín maalmáha ká mid ah ayaa waxa ay sócod ú aadeen meél kaýn ah.** One day they went for a walk to a place where there was a forest.

The focus particle waxa(a) may also be expanded by the modifier phrase kale oo menaing also.
Wáxa kale oo aan kú isticmaalnaa calaamáddaa yáabka weeráha muujínaya daréenka xóogga leh. We also use the exclamation mark in clauses expressing some strong feeling.

§ 12.3.2 Short subject pronouns

The following subject pronouns occur in the particle phrase. See § 9.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aan</td>
<td>I / we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aad</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uu</td>
<td>he / it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ay</td>
<td>she / it / they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aannu</td>
<td>we (excluding you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aynu</td>
<td>we (including you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aydin</td>
<td>you (pl.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that the indefinite subject pronoun la one, you, they occurs at the beginning of the verb phrase, not in the particle phrase.

Waxa cúdurka la isú hortaági karaa haddii la raaco tallaabóýinkan.

One can prevent getting the disease oneself if one follows these steps.  
You can prevent getting the disease yourself if you follow these steps.

§ 12.3.3 Obligatory subject pronouns

In positive declarative clauses a short subject pronoun is normally required.

Faadumo waa ay qaylisay, bisaddiina dibedda ayaa ay u carartay.  
Faduma (she) screamed, and the cat (it) fled outside.

The short subject pronoun has to be used even if there is also a long subject pronoun in the clause.

Anígú waa aan wéyn ahay, adíguna waa aad yár tahay.  
I am big and you are little.
§ 12.3.4 Omission of the short subject pronoun

(a) 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.

(b) If the subject of the clause is focused, short subject pronouns are never used. Compare:

Díiggii baa ciyey ku-ku-kuu.  
_The cock crew cock-a-doodle-doo._

Díiggii wáa uu ciyey ku-ku-kuu.  
_The cock crew cock-a-doodle-doo._

(c) In questions and negative clauses with the particle ma/má, the short subject pronouns are optional.

Sheekáda ma jecéshahay? ~ miyaad jecéshahay?  
_Do you like the story?_

Faarax wúu heesaa, Cabdise má (uu) heeso ~ múu heeso.  
_Farah sings, but Abdi doesn’t (sing)._  

(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.

Gabádhu 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 omitted sometimes, thus putting more emphasis on the validity of the clause, i.e. that it is valid or true.

Walaalkay waa joogay.  
My brother DECL was.present

Walaalkay waa uu joogay.  
My brother DECL he was.present
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.

Sidaas ayaa (uu) waraabihilii godka ka baxay markii hore.
That way the hyena came out from the hole first.

Sidaas darteed waxaa (ay) Sahra u caddaatay waxbarashadeedii.
Because of that (manner), Sahra got used to her education[~studies].
§ 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.

\[
\text{Wáa uu yimid.} \quad \text{He has arrived.}
\]

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, but the opposite is also possible.

\[
\text{Dhurwaagii waa uu cararay.}
\]

\[
\text{Waa uu cararay dhurwaagii.}
\]

The hyena fled.

§ 13.1 Sentence constituents

Somali makes a grammatical distinction between three types of noun phrases: subject NPs, oblique NPs and vocative NPs. The traditional grammatical distinction that is made between object and adverbial is not expressed grammatically in Somali, but it can sometimes be helpful to make that distinction from a semantic point of view. Since there is a strong tradition of distinguishing objects and adverbials, that distinction has been kept here, even if it is not really relevant in Somali.
§ 13.1.1 Subjects

In clauses where the subject is not focused, any subject noun phrase has to be grammatically marked and at the same time there is normally 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 nouns as well as in the long forms of the personal pronouns, a final –a is replaced by –u.

- Mágacaygu waa Sahrá. My name is Sahra.
- Wiilkaygu wúu yimid. My son has arrived.
- Hooyáda reérku waa Cambará. The mother of the family is Ambara.
- Anígu waan jéclahay. I like it.

Notice that nouns with a base form ending in –aha have a subject form ending in –uhu.

- Gabdhúhu waa carruúrtayda. The girls are my children.

(b) The high tone is missing on the last (or only) morpheme of the subject.


(c) Adjectives take the ending –i. The high tone on the stem of the adjective is missing.

- Bisádda yari wáxa ay raadínaysaa hooyádeed. The little cat is looking for its mother.

- Maalín ayaa ardayád cusubi kú soó biirtay dúgsiga. One day a new pupil joined the school.

- Wiilka dheeri wáa Cáli. The tall boy is Ali.

- Búugga cusubi wáxa uu yaal míiska kýrkiisa. The new book lies on top of the table.
However, derived adjectives ending in –e, –eed, -ood or –aad, including the ordinal numerals, do not take the subject ending.

(d) Pronouns and corresponding suffixes not ending in –a take the ending –i. Any high tone on the morpheme preceding –i disappears.

Tani waa káb. *This is a shoe.*
Báskani waa wéyn yahay. *This bus is big.*
Sawirrádani waxa ay ina túsayaan meeláha aynu biyáha ká helno qáarkood. *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. Any high tone on the morpheme preceding –i disappears.

Maalín maalmáha ká mid ah ayáa bisadi gúrigeedii ká tagtay.
*On one of those days a cat set out from home.*

The ending –i may also occur with feminine names ending in a vowel, but with names this ending is far less frequent than with common nouns.

Soomaaliya waa xaggee? ~ (rarely) Soomaaliyi waa xaggee?
*Where is Somalia?*

(f) Consonant final verb forms that are not inflected for person (ah being, leh having, and reduced subjunctive forms in –n) take the suffix –i.

Sideé bay dádka tuulo-jóogga ahi ú nadiifiyaa iláha biyáhooda?
*How do people who live in the village keep their water sources clean?*
Haddii wax aan caadi ahayni dhegta ka yimaaddo waa in degdeg dhakhtarka loo arkaa. *If something that is not normal comes from the ear one should quickly see a doctor.*

(g) Verb forms ending in a short –a/–o take the long vowel ending –aa in a subject noun phrase.

Wiilká jiifaa wuu būkāa. *The boy that is lying down is ill.*
Sideé baa ay dádka sawirráda ká muuqdaa ú isticmaalaan biyáha?
*How do the people showing in the pictures use the water?*
Compare with the same noun phrases not functioning as the subject.

**Wiilka jiifá’ má arkin.** I didn’t see the boy that was lying down.

**Dádka sawirráda ká muuqda’ má aqaan.**
I don’t know 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)** 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. These endings are not affected by the rule in (b) above.

**Hooyadaý waa macallimád.** *My mother is a teacher.*

**Saaxiibkiís wáxa uu kú riixayaa baaskiilká.**
*His friend pushes the bike.*

Cf. not subject marked:

**Tani waa hooyáday.** *This is my mother.*

**Saaxiibkiís baa kú riixaya baaskiilká.** *His friend pushes the bike.*

§ 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 masculine noun meaning *the thing*.

**Waxa ká muuqda wasákh.**
the.thing(M) from can.be.seen(M) dirt(F)

**Waxa ká muuqata wasákh.**
the.thing(M) from can.be.seen(F) dirt(F)

*It looks dirty.* (literally: *From[~On] it can be seen dirt.*)

**Qoyskeenna waxa ka dhexeeya~dhexeysa shaqada gurigeenna.**
Our family is united by the work in our home.

§ 13.1.3  Focused subjects

If the subject noun phrase of a clause is focused,

1) the subject phrase is not grammatically marked for subject case,
2) there is no short subject pronoun in the particle phrase,  
3) the predicate verb appears in the reduced form (see § 11.9).

Cáli <> baa <> akhrínay a.  
Ali is reading. It’s Ali who is reading.  
Cali <> waa uu <> akhrínay aa.  
Ali is reading.

Wiilka <> baa <> kú riixaya <> baaskíilka.  
The boy pushes the bike.  
Wiilk u <> wáa uu <> kú riixaya <> baaskíilka.  
The boy pushes the bike.

Aníga <> ayáa <> raba.  
I want to.  
Anígu <> wáa aan <> raba a.  
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, e.g. *siiyaa* gives, *tusaa* shows, *weydiyyyaa* asks. 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 ~ meat to the neighbours.

*Sawirkani waxa uu ina tusayaa xilli Jiilaal.*
This picture shows us the dry season from December to April.

*Baruuhu waxa uu weydiinayaa carruurta <> su’aalahaa soo socda.*
The teacher is asking the children <> the following questions.

§ 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 <> masaájíddka <> maalinta Jimcáha.*
He is going to the mosque on *Friday.*
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

*keenaa* (without a preposition) brings sth. to a place

> Xaawó ayaa ú keentay kíldhi 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.

> Daanyéerkií waxa uu kú qoslay digaagaaddii 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 *ú*

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

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

> Xaáwo *halkeé* bay ú socotaa? *Where is Hawo going?*
> **Dugsiga ayaa ay u socotaa.** *She is going to school.*

(ii) **RECIPIENT** or **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 cabbitáan.
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 nadiifiyaa 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.

Wílkiina 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 yihiiin.
my.shoes yours FOC they to similar are
My shoes are similar to YOURS.

§ 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.

Sámáh wáxa ay kallúun kú iibínaysaa súuqa.
Sahra is selling fish at the market.

Wáxa ay biyáha kú rartaan awróodaa.
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 iibsataay 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 qorrexda.
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 òrdaysaa 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 dugsiga 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 dhee 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 injured in a leg. He injured [his] leg.

Axmed walaashiis gacan baa ay ka jabtay.  
Ahmed his.sister ARM FOC she in was.broken  
literally: Ahmed’s sister got a fracture in an ARM.  
idiomatically: Ahmed’s sister broke AN ARM.

(vi) In certain fixed phrases.

Ká jawáab su'aaláhan.  
Answer these questions.

Waxa uu ká shaqeyya 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 Farxiya.  
*Sahra is playing with Farhiya.*

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

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

*Waxa ay ila tahay in aanu taas samayn karayn.*  

\[ \text{FOC} \quad \text{it me.with is that not.he that do could.} \]

*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 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.*  

\[ \text{FOC} \quad \text{she with helped Ali THE.HOMWORK} \]

*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.*

*Iga ma dul boodi kartid. You can’t jump over me.*
§ 13.1.5g   Complex “prepositional phrases”

The content of the English phrase near Mogadishu may also be rendered by the more complex phrase in the vicinity of Mogadishu. The specific 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASC.SING.</th>
<th>FEM.SING.</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agtiisa</td>
<td>agteeda</td>
<td>agtooda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhinaciisa</td>
<td>dhinaceeda</td>
<td>dhinacooda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhexdiisa</td>
<td>dhexdeeda</td>
<td>dhexdooda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dushiisa</td>
<td>dusheeda</td>
<td>dushooda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gadaashiisa</td>
<td>gadaasheeda</td>
<td>gadaashooda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hoostiisa</td>
<td>hoosteeda</td>
<td>hoostooda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hortiisa</td>
<td>horteeda</td>
<td>hortooda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>korkiisa</td>
<td>korkeeda</td>
<td>korkooda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 qoyskoodu 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 (i.e. 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 (i.e. down in the water).
Canab waxa ay fadhiisataa Faadumo dhinaceeda.
Anab sits next to Faduma.

§ 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 CAMEL.

Hoóyo wax má ku weydiisay?
Did mother ask you something?

Maxamed carrúrta waxa uu siínayaa LACÁG.
Mahamed is giving the children MONEY.

§ 13.1.5i Place adverbials

Some Somali motion verbs, such as aadaa goes, tagaa leaves, yimaaddaa comes, as well as the position verb yaallaa lies, is, take a place adverbial without any preposition.

Carruurtu <> waxa ay <> aadayaan <> guriga adeerkood.
The children are going to their uncle’s house.

Diinkii <> waxa uu <> yimid <> gurigiisa.
The turtle came to its house. = The turtle came home.

Diinka iyo xaaskiisu <> waxay <> tageen <> guriga Maroodiga.
The turtle and his wife went to Elephant’s house.

Kaalay <> bannaanka.
Come to the open space. = Come outside.

Xayawaannadii <> waxa ay <> yimaadeen <> biyihii dushooda.
The animals came to the surface of the water.
= The animals arrived at the water’s edge.
Baaskiilku wuxuu yaallaa dhulka.

The bike is lying on the ground.

However, if the goal of a motion is a living being, the preposition *u to* is normally used.

Waqti yar ka dib waxa uu u yimid haramcad.

After a short time he came—arrived to a cheetah.

The preposition *u for* is also used to express purpose.

Cali Mahdi 1959 ayaa Qaahira u aaday waxbarasho.

In 1959 Ali Mahdi went to Cairo for education.

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.

Cali <> buug <> buu <> miiska <> dul dhigayaa.

Ali is putting a BOOK on (top of) the table.

The same is true for the verbal adjective *saaran* standing, lying, situated.

Cuntadu <> waxay <> saaran tahay <> dabka. The food is on the fire.

But a preposition is of course necessary in order to express other meanings, e.g. *ká saaraa* takes out of, picks up, ú kala saaraa divides into, separates into.

Seefta galka ka saar! Take the sword out of the cover / sheath.

Magacyadan u kala saar lab iyo dheddig.

Divide these nouns into masculine and feminine [ones].

§ 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, the ordinary definite article is used.

Shirku wuxuu dhacayaa maalinta Sabtida ee lixda bishan Abriil.
The meeting is taking place on Saturday the sixth this April.

When reference is made to something that is repeated as a habit, both forms occur.

Halkee bay joogtaa qorraxdu galabtiin?
Where is the sun in the afternoon?

Maalin kasta Faadumo waxa ay kacdaa shanta aroornimo.
Every day Faduma gets up at five in the morning.

§ 13.1.5k Manner adverbials

Most manner adverbials consist of the preposition ú in and the noun sí manner, way.

Xayawaanku waxay si wanaagsan u koraan marka ay helaan cunto fiican. The animals grow well when they get good food.

There are also many manner adverbials that do not contain the noun sí, but most of them still require the preposition ú.

Koox-koóx ú shaqééya. Work in groups.
Degdeg ayuu cásharka ú bartay. He learnt the lesson quickly.
§ 13.1.5l Various other adverbials

Quite a few adverbials with quite different meanings are formed with the verbal noun *ahaan* being, e.g. *gaar ahaan* in particular, especially, specifically, *guud ahaan* generally speaking, *asal ahaan* originally, *gabi ahaan* completely, *dhab ahaan* properly, seriously, actually, *tusaale ahaan* for example, *qiyaas ahaan* at a rough estimate, approximately, *run ahaan* really, certainly, truly. These adverbials typically don’t require any preposition.

Geela waxa loo isticmaalaa gaadiid, *gaar ahaan* nooca labka ah ee loo yaqaan awrta.
*Camels are used for transportation, more specifically the male ones, which are known as ‘awr’.*

Waxaana *gabi ahaan* la xiray waddooyinkaas.
*And they completely closed those roads.*

Mohammed Emwazi wuxuu asal ahaan ka soo jeedaa waddanka Ingiriiska.
*Mohammed Emwazi originally comes from England.*

Certain nouns with short possessive endings also serve as adverbials, e.g. *weliga* I … ever~always, *weliga* you … ever~always.

Yaxáas weliga má aragtay?
*Have you ever seen a crocodile?*

Dhallinyarada Soomaaliyeed waxay weligood ahaayeen xoog horusocod ah.
*The Somali youth were always a progressive force.*

§ 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/-ooay, –ow/-ooow. If one is very emotional, even more than two vowels may sometimes be written.

Máryanéy! Hey, Maryan!
Bisádda yaréey! Dear little cat!
Diagaagádédéy! 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.

\[ \text{Ardaýdu waa ay akhrínayaan.} \quad \text{The students are reading.} \]

(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.

\[ \text{Rooti iyo caano baa uu rabaa.} \quad \text{He wants bread and milk.} \]
\[ \text{Cuntadu xoog (baa ay) inoo yeeshaa.} \quad \text{The food generates energy for us.} \]

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.

\[ \text{Nájma wáxa ay léedahay búug.} \quad \text{Najma has a book.} \]
\[ \text{Wáxa uu rabaa roóti iyo caanó.} \quad \text{He wants bread and milk.} \]

The focus particle *wáxaa* frequently refers to a whole subordinate clause.

\[ \text{Cali wáxa uu rabaa in uu fuuló baaskíilka.} \quad \text{Ali wants to RIDE THE BIKE.} \]
§ 13.2.1  Negative declarative clauses

Somali has two negator words corresponding to English *not*, má and aán. Má is a sentence particle, and it replaces wáa. The particle má *not* 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 (ay) órdayso. *She is not running.*

cf. Waa ay órdaysaa. *She is running.*

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).*

Aan is not a sentence particle. It may be added to sentences that already contain a sentence particle, e.g. a focus particle. It is also used in subordinate clauses, since subclauses can not contain a sentence particle. Aan *not* always combines with the reduced subjunctive.

Cáli baa órdaya. *Ali is running.*

Cáli baa aan órdayn(in). *Ali is/was not running.*

Both the verb and any pronominal expressions are normally used in their negative form. This is sometimes referred to as double negation.

Qofná kamá aqoon dúgsigeeda cusub.

*She didn’t know anybody in her new school.*

Another kind of double negation sometimes occurs in negative past tense main clauses, where both negator words may be used at the same time by some speakers. When following after a subject pronoun, aan *not* is shortened to –an, which in turn is preceded by an –s– when following a vowel or diphthong.

Ma aysan arag daanyeerrada geedaha ku jira.

*She didn’t see the monkeys (that were) in the trees.*
§ 13.2.2 Clauses with the verb ‘yahay’

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.*
§ 13.2.3 The verb ‘yahay’ with a focused subject

(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 <> magaalóyinka.

Many people live in (the) CITIES.

Dád badan <> baa <> kú nóol × <> magaalóyinka.

MANY PEOPLE live in (the) cities.

§ 13.2.4 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 the predicate of the Somali clause.

Midabkeedu <> waa <> sida qiiqa.

its.colour.SBJ   PFOC    the.way the.smoke

Its colour is like smoke.

§ 13.2.5 Telling the time

Numbers used to tell the time at the present moment or in the past take the demonstrative endings –kii/-tii.


What time is it? – It’s five o’clock. – It’s half past one.

Dhulgariirkii koowaad ayaa dhacay siddeeddii subaxnimo.

The first earthquake occurred at eight in the morning.
When referring to future events or repeated non-past events, the definite article –ka/ –ta is normally used.

Maalintaas waxa uu barnaamijku bilaabmayaa afarta galabnimo.  
That day the program will begin at four in the afternoon.

Maalin kasta Caasho iyo Xasan waxa ay kacaan shanta aroornimo.  
Every day Asha and Hassan get up at five in the morning.

§ 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 horreýntii?  
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 …)?*

The answer to a wh-question with focus has to contain focus on the phrase that provides the answer to the focused question word.

– Adígu xaggeé ayaa aad deggán tahay?
– Waxa aan deggán ahay Ceerigaabó.

Certain more general questions require answers that contain only new information. The whole sentence is then the answer to the question. In such cases the answer usually begins with the subject which is focused.

– Maxaa dhacay? *What has happened?*
– Dayaxii ayaa ku dhacay balliga, waana ka saari kari weynay.
– The moon has fallen into the pond, and we haven’t been able to get it out of there.

§ 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 without focus

In a question that requires yes or no for an answer, the sentence type particle ma\(^{26}\) is used together with the ordinary forms of the verb. The short subject pronoun is optional. Ma replaces waa.

**Xoolúhu daréen ma léeyihiin?**
*Do livestock[~animals] have feeling[s]*?

A declarative clause that does not contain any verb is turned into a question using the question particle together with one of the forms yahay, tahay or yihiiin.

**Gurigiinnu waa sida Rooble gurigooda.**
*Your house is like Roble’s house.*

**Gurigiinnu ma yahay sida Rooble gurigooda?**
*Is your house like Roble’s house?*

The question particle ma has a high tone if the following phrase doesn’t have a high tone. This is particularly the case when it is followed by a simple aspect verb form or an object pronoun.

**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 before a progressive or habitual aspect verb form, as well as before a preposition or noun.

**Adígu ma kú nóoshahay gúri magaalo?**
*Do you live in an urban house?*

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\(^{26}\) 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.
§ 13.3.4   Yes/no questions with focus

Yes/no questions may also contain a focus particle alongside the question
particle *ma*. Compared to the corresponding declarative sentence, *ma* is
then simply added to the corresponding declarative clause containing
*waaxa/waxaa* or *ayaa/baa*.

**Waxaan tagayaa Burco.** *I’m going to Burao.*

**Ma waxaad tagaysaa Burco?** *Are you going to Burao?*

Focus is especially frequent in questions with the verb *to be*. If the
predicate complement is a focused noun, the present tense forms of
*yahay* are omitted in the question.

**Ma nabád baa?**
*Are you doing okey? How are you doing?*

– **Kani ma Áxmed baa?** – *Haa, kani waa Axmed.*
– *Is this Ahmed?* – *Yes, this is Ahmed.*

– **Tani ma Sáhraa**? – *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*.

**Maxamed ma macállin baa?**
= **Maxamed macállin miyáa?**
*Is Mohamed a teacher?*

§ 13.3.5   Multiple choice questions

In questions where one is expected to choose one of the alternatives,
*mise* or is used between the two phrases.

**Ma waxay joogtay xagga bari mise xagga galbeed?**
*Was it located in the east or in the west?*

27 **Sahraa** is an obligatory contraction of **Sahro+baa**.
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?

§ 13.3.6  Negative questions

Question words usually constitute a focused noun phrase. When noun focus and negation 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.

Maxáa aanad jéclayn in aad cunto?
WHAT don’t you like to eat?

It is also possible to add one of the question particles sow or miyaa to a negative declarative clause.

Duqsi ma aad arag. → Duqsi sow ma aad arag?
→ Duqsi ma aad arag miyaa?
You didn’t see a fly. → You didn’t see a fly, did you?

§ 13.4  Commands

Commands are mainly expressed by the imperative form of the verb. See § 11.11.

Clauses with a verb in the imperative do not contain a 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

Warnings and prohibitions are often referred to as negative imperatives, but in Somali they are morphologically different from the imperative. This construction is therefore also referred to as the PROHIBITIVE. It consists of the sentence particle ha don’t followed by the reduced subjunctive in the simple aspect. For further details see § 11.11.1.

**Ha tégin hádda, waáyo waa mádow.**

*Don’t go now, since it’s dark.*

**Ha noqonína siyaasiyiín.**

*Don’t become politicians.*
§ 14. Coordination

There are three words in Somali that correspond to English *and*, namely *iyo, oo* and *–na*.

(a) The conjunction *iyo and* is used between nouns and noun phrases.

- **Safiya iyo Cali** Safiya and Ali
- **liix iyo toban** sixteen
- **Rooti iyo caano baa uu rabaa.** He wants bread and milk.

Most subclauses begin with a noun. This means that these subclauses are noun phrases and they are therefore joined by *iyo*.

- **Marka ay dugsgiga tagayaan iyo marka ay ka imanayaanba waa ay is raacaan.** Both when they go to school and when they come from there they accompany each other.

Even if *in that* is usually considered to be a subjunction, its origin is the noun *in amount*. Therefore also subclauses beginning with *in that* are joined through the use of *iyo*.

- **Qof kasta wuxuu xaq u leeyahay in uu helo waxbarasho iyo in caafimaadkiisa la daryeelo.** Everyone has the right to receive education and to have one’s health cared for.

Notice that *iyo* is also used between subordinate clauses that represent different alternatives. It then often corresponds to English *or*.

- **Marar badan waxaa dhacda in la kala garan waayo in qofka qodixi muddey iyo in la qaniiney.** It happens many times that you don’t realise that the person was stung by a thorn or that they were bitten.

(b) Noun modifiers (adjectives, adjective phrases and relative clauses) are connected with either *oo or ee*. In most instances *oo* is used to add modifiers to indefinite nouns, whereas *ee* is used after definite nouns. For more details see § 15.3.1.
Waa isbitaal weyn oo wanaagsan. It is a big and good hospital.
Qor qoraal gaaban oo ku saabsan qoyskaaga.
Write a short text about your family.
Waa ninka keli ah ee kawaanlaha ah ee xaafadeenna deggan.
He is the only man who is a butcher and lives in our neighbourhood.

(c) The conjunction oo and is used between two verbs or verb phrases.

Akhri oo sawir! Read and draw!
Aniga ayaa shaqeyay 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.

Habeenkii Geeddi waxaa loo lisaa caano oo wuxuu jecelyahay caanaha lo’da iyo geela. At night they get milk for Geeddi and he likes milk from cows and camels.

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 Error! Reference source not found..

(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, maroogidani waa yar yahay.
This elephant is small and this elephant is big.

Fasalku waa weyn yahay, ardayduna waa badan yiihin.
The classroom is big and the pupils are many.

Qofku kelidii waa taag yar yahay, wax weynna ma qabsan karoo.
A single person has a small capacity and cannot catch something big.
Wild animals are hunted because people can make food of them, they can sell their valuable skins and they can earn a lot of money on them.

It may also be used to introduce follow-up questions.

Magacaygu waa Xasan. – Adigana magacaan?
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 dugsiga.
Ali is at home or at school.

Shaqadaydu ma aha in aan dilo ama dhaawaco.
My job is not to kill or injure.

A repetition of ama before both the alternatives corresponds to English either … or.

Ama isaga ama wasiiraddiisa, khasab ma aha inuu isagu yimaaddo.
Either he or his minister, it is not necessary that he comes himself.

In questions where one is expected to choose one of the alternatives, mise or is used.

Ma magaalal 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/and you must rescue it for 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 for subordination when certain relative subclauses are added to definite head nouns. See § 15.3.1.

§ 14.3 The conjunctions laakiín, -se and balse

The three conjunctions laakiín, balse and –se but are used to connect two main clauses. There is always a sentence particle in both clauses.

Soomaáli báan ahay, laakiín wáxaan 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 laakiíin and balsé.

**Anigaa dugsiga 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 *waayo*

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 xilli kulul.**

*He is dressed in LIGHT CLOTHES since it is a warm season.*

§ 14.5  The conjunctional phrase *sababta oo ah*

The phrase *sabábta oo ah because, the reason being (that)* introduces a clause that expresses a cause or reason. The clause following this phrase is a main clause and it must therefore contain a sentence particle.

**Beeraley badan ayaa beera haruurka sababta oo ah dalaggani uma baahna biyo badan. Many farmers grow sorghum because that crop doesn’t need much water.**
§ 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.

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 event must appear in the subjunctive mood since the verb describes an imagined event.

Sawirradani waxa ay ina tusayaan meelaha aynu biyaha ka helno.
These pictures show us the places (which) we get water from.

U sheeg fasalka waxyaabaha aad ku aragto sawirka
Tell the class the things (that) you see in the picture.

Sheeg waxyaabaha laga helo guriga kalluumaystaha
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 dugsiga 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 full 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 xidhanna 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 reduced verb forms of the different tenses 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.*

In this kind of clauses, many languages of the world use a participle or a gerund, as in the second line of translation above.

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28 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 that is impossible.
Carefully notice the two present tense reduced forms \textit{ah} of \textit{yahay} \textit{is} and \textit{leh} of \textit{leeyahay} \textit{has}, which are used in all persons, numbers and genders.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Aníga ayaa ah bóqorkii.}
\textit{I am that king.}
\textit{Beeraley tiro yar ayaa leh cagaf-cagaf.}
\textit{Few farmers have a tractor.}
\textit{Hudheelkaasna waxa leh Axmed Xasan Seed.}
\textit{And that hotel is owned by Ahmed Hassan Sed.}
\end{quote}

\textbf{§ 15.1.1} Negative subordinate clauses

All negative subordinate clauses contain the negator word \textit{aan} \textit{not} and the reduced subjunctive form of the verb, ending in \textit{–in/–n(in)}. For more details see § 11.10.2.

No distinction is made between different tenses. The temporal interpretation depends on the context.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Waan kuu dhaaranayaa in aanan ridaadii cunin.}
\textit{I swear to you that I haven’t eaten your goat.}
\textit{Waxa aan kuu dhaaranayaa in aanan awoodin in aan sii cabbo.}
\textit{I swear to you that I am not able to drink any more.}
\end{quote}

As always, the root /ah/ is deleted when the copular verb is contracted with a preceding adjective.

\begin{quote}
\textit{walxo aan noolayn} < nool + ahayn
\textit{things that are not alive \textasciitilde inanimate objects}
\end{quote}

The negator word \textit{aan} \textit{not} usually accompannies the short subject pronoun, either before it (more common in the north), or after it (more common in the south). Any long vowel in the second element, be it the negator or the pronoun, is shortened. The buffer consonant /s/ is inserted after the pronouns \textit{uu} \textit{he} and \textit{ay} \textit{she; they} before the negator. Cf. § 5.2.6.
Haddii aanad⁴/aadan⁵ 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 aadan⁵/aanad⁴ helin hurdo kugu filan? What do you feel if you don’t get enough sleep (for yourself)?

Haddii carruurutu aysan⁵/aanay⁴ haysan biyo, maxaa dhici lahaa? If the children hadn’t had water, what would have happened?

Dawacadii waxa ay bakaylihii u sheegtay in uusan⁵/aanu⁴ diinku shaqadiisa si fiican u qabanayn. The jackal told the hare that the turtle was doing his job well.

§ 15.1.2 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. She went to a place where there was water.

Odaygii baa u sheegay in ay toddoba nin yihiiin. The old man told them that they were seven men.

Wii’alka jiifaa má arkin. I didn’t see the boy that was lying down.

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 (plusquamperfect) tense in English.

Waxa ay tagtay meel ay biyo ku jireen. She went to a place where there had been water.

Nimánkii maxáa ay ugu 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 dugsi ga 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 **dhammadysoo** maxaa aad qaban doontaa? When you finish (have finished) your adult education, what will you do (then)?

§ 15.1.3 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 garay 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 In clauses

The only frequent Somali subjunction is **in that**.
In a subclause beginning with \textit{ín}, a subject word is obligatory. It can be a noun phrase, a short subject pronoun, or both. The most common case is that a short subject pronoun follows immediately after \textit{ín}.

\textbf{Waxaanse u malaynayaa in ay goroyadu cuntay.}

\textit{But I think that the ostrich ate it.}

In subordinate clauses, past events are expressed by the ordinary past tense forms, as in the example above, whereas present and future events are expressed by the full subjunctive forms.

\textbf{Waxa aan kaa doonayaa in aad u geysa ayeeyadaa lacag.}

\textit{I want from you that you bring your grandmother (some) money.}

Full subjunctive forms are also used for subclause events that are simultaneous (present) from the point of view of a past main clause event. In English such simultaneous subclauses are very often expressed int the past tense.

\textbf{Waxayna ogaatay in ay Ugaaso bugto oo ay sariirta jiifto.}

\textit{She got to know that Ugaaso was/is ill and lying in bed.}

\section*{§ 15.2.1 Oblique clauses with \textit{ín}}

Subclauses beginning with \textit{ín} can be used in a few different wyas. Most of them occur as objects of the main clause verb.

\textbf{Ma jeceshahay in aad soo boqato ayeeyadaa?}

\textit{Do you like to pay a visit your grandmother?}

\textbf{Ma u malaynaysaa in haramcadkii la hadlay Maxamed?}

\textit{Do you think that the leopard talked with Mahamed?}

\textit{Ín} clauses may also function as predicative complements.

\textbf{Shaqadayduna waa in aan daweeyo, ma aha in aan dilo ama dhaawaco!}
And my job is to heal, it is not to kill or injure
(lit. And my job is that I heal, it is not that I kill or injure).

Some verbs that are followed by an infinitive phrase in English correspond to Somali verbs that must be followed by an in clause.

Cali wáxa uu rabaa in uu fuuló baaskíilka.

Ali FFOC he wants that he rides the.bike

Ali wants TO RIDE THE BIKE.

It is also important to notice that after certain verbs, such as doonayaa / rabaa wants, the choice of verb form in the subclause is restricted to the full subjunctive in the simple aspect, as in the preceding example.

When a Somali subclause beginning with in corresponds to an independent imperative clause, the English translation is often in the conditional.

Waxa aannu u sheegi doonnaa dadka kale in aanay jarin dhirta.

We will tell the others that they should not cut down plants.

Waxay u sheegeen in aanay biyaha wasakhayn.

They told them/her that they/she should not pollute the water.

§ 15.2.2 Subject clauses with in

Sometimes an in clause functions as the subject of the main clause verb. Since subject clauses like that often become quite long, they often occur at the end of the sentence, rather than at the beginning.

Waa muhiim in aan baranno sida caafimaadka loo ilaaliyo.

It’s important that we learn how to protect (our) health.

Compare the preceding sentence to the following much simpler one.

Ilaalinta caafimaadku waa muhiim.

To protect the health is important.

When an in clause is the subject of its main clause, then the main clause verb is in the feminine singular. The reason is probably that the noun in amount, from which the subjunction seems to derive, is feminine.
Waxa dhacday in daanyeerkii yaraa koray oo uu weynaaday.
It (so) happened that the little monkey grew and became big.

§ 15.2.3 The construction waa in…

The phrase waa in corresponds to English should, ought to, has to, must, needs to. In this construction, in that may be followed by either the full subjunctive forms or the basic present tense.

Waa in aynu ilaalinno nadaafadda ilaha biyaheenna.
Waa in aynu ilaalinnaa nadaafadda ilaha biyaheenna.
We must protect the hygiene of our water sources.

A possible explanation for this variation could be that this construction is not straightforwardly felt to contain a subclause, since there isn’t much of a main clause preceding it.

However, if the main clause is not in the present tense, it will contain the copular verb yahay in the required tense.

Waxa ay ahayd in aan u sheego hooyaday xanuunkayga.
I had to tell my mother about my disease.

§ 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?
PFOC 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 sáwirká 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.

Waxaa jirta si kale oo ka wanaagsan oo aan su'aashaas uga jawaabi karno.
There is another, nicer manner that we can answer that question in.
Maalin maalmaha ka mid ah ayaa wiil fiican oo arday ahi arkay oday da’ weyn oo sita alaab culus. One day a good boy who was a student saw an old man carrying some heavy stuff.

This use of oo is especially common after numerals.

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 usually gives information that says something about a specific situation. See also § 15.4.6.

This parenthetical use of oo sometimes occurs also after definite nouns.

Hooyaday oo waddan fog ku nool oo ii baahan ayaa aan rabaa in aan u tago. My mother, who lives in a distant country and needs me, she’s the one I want to go to.

Awoowgay oo wiilka ugu weyn ahaa...
My grandfather, who was the biggest boy…

Kani waa Rooble iyo ardaýdii fásalkooda oo soó boqday Saýnab dúgsigooda oo xeébta kú yaalla. This is Roble and the students in his class, who went to visit Saynab’s school, which is situated at the coast.
Gabadhii aабbaheed oo meel u dhow joogey ayaa u soo orday oo ka fуjiyey dhуrwaагii. The girl’s father, who was close by, came running and cut her out of the hyena.

§ 15.3.2 Relative clauses in subject noun phrases

According to the rules of standard Somali, a final –а/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.

Sida Jubba oo kale ayaa ______ bahаллo wax cунaa ku jiraан webi Shabeelle. Like in Jubba, wild animals that eat things are also (found) in the Shabeelle river.

cf. ______ bahалlо wax cunа wild animals that eat things

Waa maxay ______ shaqada ay Aamina samaynaysaa?

PFОС what the.work she Amina is.doing

What’s the work (that) Amina is doing?

cf. shaqada ay Aamina samaynaso the work that Amina is doing

Waa maxay ______ dhарkа aad dugsgiga u xidhataa?

PFОС what the.clothes you the.school for tie

WHAT are the clothes (that) you put on for school?

cf. ______ dhарkа aad dugsgiga u xidhато 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 one reason 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 (can) find water.*

In English the subclause may sometimes be connected to the main clause in a different way, and then the preposition might not be necessary.

**Ragga dabdemisku waxa ay isticmaalaan biyo ay dabka ku demiyaan.** *The firemen use water that they extinguish the fire with. / The firemen use water to extinguish the fire (with).*

§ 15.4 Adverbial clauses

Compare the subordinate clauses in the following two sentences.

*Sue immediately noticed Mary* **when she entered the room.**
*Sue noticed Mary** **the moment she entered the room.**

The noun *the moment* does the same job as the subjunction *when*. To use nouns as connecting words between clauses in this manner is extremely common in Somali. Actually, genuine subjunctions are quite scarce, with the exception of the very frequent subjunction *in that* and a few other subjunctions borrowed from Arabic.
Instead, most Somali adverbial subclauses are in fact a noun phrase with a head word followed by a relative subclause. What makes these "adverbial subclauses" stand out from ordinary relative subclauses, is the fact that a small number of such head nouns are extremely common in specific adverbial functions. Therefore, one could say that a grammaticalisation process is on its way to turn these nouns into subjunctions. Meanwhile, however, it makes sense to just call them "subordinator words".

§ 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:

isla markii as soon as, at the time that, just as

Isla markii ay maqashay oohinta ka macaan wax walba ayay illowday xanuunkii hayay. As soon as she heard the crying that was sweeter than anything else, she forgot about the disease that was tormenting her.

Isla markii uu gaaray gurigii ayeeydiis, digaagaddii waa dhimatay. At the time he reached his grandmother’s house, the chicken died.
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** when, while, (with punctual verb) as soon as

*Samatar hooyadiis inta ay qososhay ayey madaxa ruxday.*
While Samatar’s mother laughed she shook her head.

*Dukaanliihi inta uu muraayaddii gashaday ayaa uu si fiican warqaddii ugu akhriyey.* As soon as the shopkeeper put on his eyeglasses he read the letter very well with them.

**inta + oo dhan** the whole time that

*Sahro intii ay dugsiga joogtey oo dhan waxa ay ka walwaleysey waxa ku dhacay saaxiibted.* The whole time that Sahra was at school, she was worried about what had happened to her friend.

**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 xaafaddooda inta aanay dugsiga tegin ka hor._ She eats breakfast in her neighbourhood before she goes to school.

**ilaan 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 full 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 contruction 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 contruction is used in both the main and the subordinate clause. The English subclause is usually in the past perfect.

**Maxáa aad samaýn lahayd haddii aad lá socón lahayd Maxámed 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 subcluase is in the full 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 subjunctive simple aspect.
(a) Final subclauses are mostly introduced by the noun si manner, way, which requires the preposition ú in (a way) (expressing manner) before the subclause verb. This construction corresponds to English in order to or so that.

Isticmáal erayádan **si aad ugú buuxiso meeláha 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 condensed subclauses do not exist in Somali.

(b) Final subclauses may also be introduced by the subjunction in that, which then requires the use of the preposition ú for (expressing purpose) before the main clause verb.

Shimbiríhii waxa ay ú yimaadeen **in ay dúinka hilibkiisa 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 conjunctional 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.*

Shirkii waxa uu qaataa waqti dheer *sababtoo ah* waxaa jirey arrimo badan oo ay ahayd in laga doodo.

*The meeting took a long time, the reason being that there were many matters that had to be discussed.*

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 Background clauses

A background or circumstantial clause is a special type of relative clause that expresses various kinds of circumstances serving as a background to the event expressed in the main clause.

The head of a background clause is usually a long personal pronoun or a proper name, but sometimes also a common noun with a definite determiner. This head is always followed by the conjunction *oo* and a relative clause.

Background clauses may express time, manner, reason etc., and the interpretation depends only on the context.

**TIME:**
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.

Wáxaa la guraa miráha móoska oo welí cagáar ah.
One collects the fruits of the banana, still being green.
The banana fruits are collected when they are still green.

**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.

**REASON:**

Jiirkii libaaxii ayaa uu madaxa ka fuulay isaga oo doonaya in uu dhanka kale uga sii gudbo. The mouse climbed onto the lion’s head, wanting to pass over (it) to the other side.

**PURPOSE:**

Ninkii waxa uu la yaabay doqonnimada Juxa, waxa uuna ku yiri isaga oo ku ciyaaraya, ”Waxa aad dhimanaysaa marka dameer-kaagu seynta kor u taago oo…” The man was surprised by Juha’s stupidity and he said to him, playing around with him: “You will die when your donkey raises it tail and…”

**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?
/ If you had food…

A negative background 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.

Sidee baad ugu sheegi kartaa adiga oo aan la hadlin iyada?
In what way can you tell it to her, (you) not talking with her?
= How can you tell her about it without talking to her?

§ 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.

Meesheé ayaa uu kú nóol yahay?
Where does he live?

Shéeg meésha uu kú nóol yahay.
Tell the place he lives in.
Tell where he lives.

It is very important to notice that wáxa the thing isn’t always a focus particle. Sometimes it is a definite noun used to introduce a subclause in
the same way as English *what*. This is so because direct questions with *maxaa what* and *maxaa + u why*, correspond to subordinate clauses beginning with *waxa the thing*.

**Maxáa aad biyáha ú isticmaashaa gúrigiinna.**
whatFOC you the.water for use your.house
*What do you use water for at your home.*

**Ú shéeg fásalka wáxa aad biyáha ú isticmaasho gúrigiinna.**
to tell the.class the.thing you the.water for use your.house
*Tell the class what you use water for at your home.*

**Maxáa ay sídaasi ú tahay?**
What is it (in) that manner for?
*Why is it like that?*

**Shárax wáxa ay sídaasi ú tahay.**
Explain the.thing for which it is (in) that manner.
*Explain why it is like that.*

### § 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.*
§ 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 $^c$ 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.

\[ \text{wuxuu or waxuu}^c \text{ rather than waxa uu} \]
\[ \text{ayaan, ayuu} \text{ rather than ayaa aan, ayaa uu} \]

The focus particles baa/ayaa are left out and the subject pronoun is attached to the focused noun or noun phrase.

\[ \text{Xasanaan}^c \text{ arkay} \text{ rather than Xasan ayaa aan arkay.} \]

§ 16.1.2 Assimilation of /n/

In verbs, the 1st person plural /n/ is assimilated to a preceding /l/, /r/
/n/ followed by a consonant is assimilated to that consonant

middi  knife  mindi

Before consonants that may not be doubled, the /n/ simply disappears.

daayeer  monkey  daanyeer

Other kinds of assimilations also occur.

cunno  food  cunto

§ 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\textsuperscript{c} and ilkéheeda\textsuperscript{c}. To render this kind of assimilation in writing is somewhat more common in certain words, e.g.

\begin{itemize}
  \item aabbáha the father
  \item aabbáheeda
  \item aabbáhood
  \item more literary
  \item aabbéheeda\textsuperscript{c}  her father
  \item aabbóhood\textsuperscript{c}  their father
\end{itemize}

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/.

\begin{itemize}
  \item mágac  name
  \item mágac-iisa
  \item mágic-iisa\textsuperscript{c}  his name
  \item mádax  head
  \item mádax-iisa
  \item mádix-iisa\textsuperscript{c}  his head
\end{itemize}
§ 16.2 Inflection

§ 16.2.1 Gender of nouns

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD</th>
<th>COLLOQUIAL/REGIONAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arrín-ta</td>
<td>matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gúddi-ga</td>
<td>committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maalín-ta</td>
<td>day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roóti-ga^s</td>
<td>bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roodhí-da^N</td>
<td>bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sábti-da</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sábti-ga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§ 16.2.2 The colloquial ending –ki/-ti

The short possessive ending –kiis/-tiis is often further shortened to –kii/-tii or –ki^c/-ti^c.

Also the referential demonstrative ending –kii/-tii is often shortened to –ki^c/-ti^c.

§ 16.2.3 The superlative degree

The particle ugú the most is often contracted to the simple preposition ú.

márkii ú horreysay^C / márkii ugú horreeyay the (very) first time

Also notice that the feminine verb form is extremely common in this phrase, even though the noun mar is masculine.

§ 16.2.4 Colloquial verb forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLOQUIAL/REGIONAL</th>
<th>STANDARD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
-tiin $ \rightarrow $ -taan 2 pl.
yay, tay  \rightarrow $ yahay, tahay 2, 3 sg.
ma VERB-i $ \rightarrow $ ma VERB-o 1 sg.
ma ahan $ \rightarrow $ ma aha 3 sg./pl.
waaye $ \rightarrow $ weeye

Ma ku aragtiin$ ^S $ qaybo yaryar?  (stand. aragtaan)
Do you see small parts there?

Waxaad la kulmi doon$ ^{tiin} $ $ ^S $ shaqaalaha caafimaadka.
You will meet with helthcare staff. (stand. doontaan)

Má cuni$ ^S $ hilib-geel. (stand. má cuno)
I don’t eat camel meat.

§ 16.2.5  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/.

Gabaygaan wuxuu ka hadlaayaa guurka wanaaggiisa. <vidoser.org>
This poem speaks about the good [sides] of marriage.
Waxaan sugoo$ ^{oy} $aa 8 bilood. I have been waiting for 8 months.

§ 16.3  Syntax

§ 16.3.1  No subject case
In a colloquial style, the grammatical subject marking is often not used, especially in the south.

Magacayga waa Liibaan.  (instead of magacaygu)
My name is Liban.

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?
Focus by subject pronoun

In colloquial Somali, the focus particle *ayaa/baa* commonly disappears between a preceding noun phrase and a following short subject pronoun. The subject pronoun is contracted with the preceding noun phrase. This kind of construction is a very frequent way of expressing focus in colloquial Somali.

*Cásarkaan* < Cásarka ayaan … < Cásarka ayaa aan …

*I’m leaving in the afternoon.*

Subjunctive instead of reduced verb forms

In some southern regions it is common to use subjunctive forms instead of reduced present tense forms, both in subclauses without a subject word and in main clauses with a focused subject.

*Qorraxdii ayaa dhacday waxaase jira dayax buuxo* / *buuxa.*

*The sun has set, but there is a full moon.*

*Buurtaas dusheeda wax baa ka dhaco* / *dhaca.*

*On that mountain something happens.*

Subclause negation

The negator word *aan* *not* is sometimes omitted in subclauses, especially in the Mogadishu area and certain other southern regions. The reduced subjunctive is then, on its own, enough to express the negative.

*asiidh-dufaneedka dheregsanayn* *the unsaturated fatty acid*

*for standard: asiidh-dufaneedka aan dheregsanayn*

Vocabulary

Lee ‘only’ is a typical colloquial word in the Mogadishu area and certain southern regions.
Index