

A Lexical Aspect of Somali and East Cushitic Languages

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Generally speaking, Somali dialects can be classified into five groups: Northern Somali, Banaadir, Maay, Digil and Ashraaf dialects (Lamberti 1963: 162).

The Northern Somali dialect cluster is spoken by the majority of the Somali people, in particular by the pastoral nomads who live from the Juba river to the North and West of the Shabelle river. These dialects, which have a rich oral literature, and are also remarkably rich in their lexicon, make up the **standard somali language**.

Three groups of words are present in their lexicon:

1. words of everyday speech;
2. words no longer in current use, but of frequent occurrence in classical poetry, and often unintelligible to many of the younger generation of town dwellers;
3. modern words.

The modernization of the Somali lexicon began with the programmes in the Somali language broadcasted by Radio Hargeysa since 1943; but it strongly increased after 1972 with the introduction of the Somali official orthography. Vocabulary expansion is achieved in two basic ways:

- a) through native invention and adaptation, through semantic shifts, by reviving archaic words fallen into disuse, by morphological derivation, by compounding;
- b) through loan words or calques.¹

The use of loan words developed out of linguistic necessity, as in science or technology, where concepts may be impossible to be translated adequately, and where an international vocabulary is understandable. But in the words of everyday speech many innovations can be found that were introduced a long time ago. Most of them are Arabic loan words which have no connection with religion or commerce, while, as regards other words, it is still unclear where they came from.

These loan words have displaced a large number of Proto-East Cushitic words that still survive in some Somali dialects. So the aim of this paper is to try to examine a number of such lexical innovations of Standard Somali, comparing them with words in some Southern Somali dialects and East Cushitic languages.

The Southern dialects with which these lexical comparisons are made are spo-

¹ For instance *Saddexagal* = triangle, *qalabka cayrin* = raw material, *adke* = solid, etc.

ken in the inter-riverine zone, and are in particular Maay and one of the Digil dialects, namely Dabarre (in Dinsor District).

In collecting the list of words of such dialects, especially the ones that are nearly unintelligible, or are not of common use for Standard Somali speakers, even though some of them occur in classical poetry or in some idiomatic phrases, I tried to be faithful to the dialectal meaning and phonetic shape. Indeed, in the works of some illustrious scholars, such as Reinisch, Von Tiling, Moreno and others, who deal with Maay dialects, there may be found certain misconceptions about them, since they call these dialects with different names: Jabarti, Digil, Central Somali, etc. I also came across some lexical mistakes, that I think were due to the informants. For instance, Reinisch's informant confused Maay with Maxaatiri (the name for all the Northern and Banaadir dialects). Even the name Jabarti that Reinisch gave to this dialect is not only inappropriate, but it means the opposite.

Unfortunately, most of Maay speakers, especially when they live among or near speakers of Standard Somali, tend to standardize their lexicon. This is what happens whenever speakers of a language/dialect come into contact with a more prestigious form of speech. As is well known for some countries, this may give origin to the phenomenon known as *diglossia*.

A similar phenomenon obviously happened with the Somali and Arabic languages, because there is no good reason to borrow an Arabic lexeme, where there still exists a corresponding word in Somali.

This, probably, came from the fact that Somalia is a Moslem country, and has always had strong and close cultural and commercial links with the Arab world since time immemorial; these links, of course, exerted a profound influence on the Somali language. In Somalia for many years Arabic has been used as a medium of written communication, whether among the Somalis themselves or with foreigners, even after the arrival of the colonial powers. The Somalis used it occasionally for writing religious books, and even for composing poetry. Thus Arabic became a language of prestige among the Somalis, especially in the Northern regions, which are, geographically speaking, so close to the Arabic peninsula. Then borrowings have become extensive, and innovations are arising daily.

With this impact many Somali archaic words are going to disappear or have already been suppressed. These lexemes can be classified into three groups:

1) Words that have completely lost ground vis-à-vis the borrowed ones, e.g.:

EAST CUSHITIC	SOUTHERN SOMALI DIALECTS	STANDARD SOMALI
'kill'		
* <i>agis</i> - * <i>gsi</i> (P.E.C.) ²	Dab. ³ <i>igees</i>	<i>dil</i> (? Amharic, Gurage)

² P.E.C. (Proto-East-Cushitic). Most of P.E.C. words that are used in this paper are reconstructed by Sasse (1979).

³ The following abbreviations are used in the present paper:

Af. = Afar	Dab. = Dabarre	Kon. = Konso
Arb. = Arbore	Das. = Dasenech	Or. = Oromo
Aw. = Aweera	Elm. = Elmolo	P.E.C. = Proto-East-Cushitic
Am. = Amharic	E.C. = East Cushitic	Rend. = Rendille
Ar. = Arabic	Gid. = Gidole	Sa. = Saho
Ban. = Banaadir	Had. = Haddiyya	Sid. = Sidamo
Ba. = Bayso	Ji = Jiiddu	S. = Somali
M. = Maay	Kam. = Kambata	S.S. = Standard Somali
P.S.L. = Proto-Sam Language	P.O.T. = Proto-omo Tana.	

			dël 'victory' Harari dël/dil 'id'; Beja dir 'kill'. Somali <i>l</i> & beja <i>r</i> have regular correspondence, e.g. <i>laab</i> = <i>raab</i> 'bend', <i>galab</i> = <i>garib</i> 'afternoon'
'smoke'			
Or. <i>aara</i> 'smoke, vapour; anger'; Af. <i>er</i> Das. <i>eer</i> Arb. <i>irjat</i>	Dab. <i>er</i> Dab. M. <i>ir</i> (anger)		<i>qiiq/qaac</i> (? cf. kaf. <i>qaqo</i> 'fever') <i>caro</i> 'anger'
'sack'			
Arb. <i>arar</i> Aw. <i>àràrè</i> Or. <i>daro-to</i>	M. <i>araar</i> Dab. <i>araar</i>		<i>jawaan</i> (South. Ar.) <i>jawaan</i> <i>kiish</i> (Ar. <i>kiis</i>)
'neighbours'			
Or. <i>olla</i> , Arb. <i>ollah</i> ; Sid. <i>olla</i> ; Had. <i>olla'a</i> ; Dara. <i>olla</i> ; Bur. <i>olla</i>	M. <i>ollog</i>		<i>deris</i> (?)
'faeces'			
Or. <i>udaan</i> ; Arb. <i>udu</i> ; El. <i>utu</i> ; Ren. <i>udu</i> ; Aw. <i>uddi</i> ; Sid. <i>fuda</i> (excrement of horses, mules and donkeys)	M. <i>uddë</i> Dab. <i>udë</i> Ji. <i>uda</i>		<i>xaar</i> (cf. Ar. <i>khari'a</i> 'defecate'; Hebrew <i>ḥarâ'im</i> 'dung'; Tigrinya <i>har'e</i> ; Argobba <i>har</i> , etc) <i>saxaro</i> (cf. Ar. <i>zuhar</i> 'disentry')
'evil eye'			
Or. <i>buda</i> , Arb. <i>bed'd</i> (evil, badness), Ba. <i>buda</i> , Bur. <i>bud-a</i>	M. Dab. <i>budaale</i> 'man with evil eye', <i>buda</i> . Ji. <i>budaale'id</i>		<i>qumay</i> (cf. Ar. <i>qami</i> 'despectus' Rein).
'be ashamed'			
* <i>d'eer</i> (P.E.C.)	M. Dab. <i>j'eer</i> Ji. <i>j'uir</i> (other instances of <i>j'</i> these dialects versus <i>d'</i> in other languages is: * <i>d'iif</i> (P.E.C.) 'grow tall, stretch oneself'; <i>j'iif</i> (M. Dab.) 'stretch oneself, lie down'		<i>xishood</i> (<i>xil</i> < ? ar. <i>khajal</i>) <i>khajil</i> (Ar. <i>khajal</i>)
'hide (cau.)'			
* <i>d'eg</i> /* <i>d'og</i> (P.E.C.)	Dab. <i>dag-as</i> M. <i>dag</i> .		<i>qari</i> (?)
'leave off/ abandon'			
Or. <i>d'iisuu</i> , Arb. <i>d'ihis</i> , Ba. <i>iis</i> , Sid. <i>do'ossa</i> 'to throw'	M. <i>dhi</i> Dab. <i>dhiis</i> Ji. <i>dhisë</i>		<i>dëyn</i> , <i>daa!</i>
'be dirty'			
* <i>d'ur</i> (P.E.C.)	M. <i>dhusug</i> Dab. <i>dhusug</i> , Ji. <i>dhëddë</i> , Ban. <i>dhusuq</i>		<i>wasakh</i> (Ar. <i>wasakh</i>)

Linguistics

'day' *guyy (P.E.C.)	M. <i>gee</i> 'day, today' Dab. <i>gee</i> 'id'	<i>maalin</i> (Ge'ez <i>mā'alt</i> Reinisch)
'nose-bleeding' *sun(u)n- (P.E.C.)	Dab. <i>sanuun</i> M. <i>sanuun</i>	<i>sangoror</i> (innovation)
'liver' *tir/tira (P.E.C.)	M. <i>túrraw</i> Dab. <i>tarrow</i> J. <i>turúw</i>	<i>beer</i> (no trace of the etymology of this word, while *tir is so common in East & South Cushitic, and even in some Omotic languages).

2) Words that have got a safe refuge only in classical poetry, in idiomatic phrases, and have disappeared from everyday speech:

EAST CUSHITIC	SOUTHERN SOMALI DIALECTS	STANDARD SOMALI
'heart, soul, life' *lubb-i/rubaz (P.E.C.)	M. <i>rubud</i> Dab. <i>rubud</i>	<i>naf</i> (Ar. <i>nafs</i> . 'soul') <i>rubadjar</i> 'deprive of life, kill'
'hit strike' *d'aw (P.E.C.)	M. Dab. <i>dhaw</i>	<i>garaac</i> (Ar. <i>qara'a</i>) <i>dhaw</i> 'to posses someone in carnal pleasure', but in compound words. The original meaning is retained in e.g. <i>dhabaandhaw</i> 'beat again', <i>suuldhabo</i> 'to snap one's fingers'.
'face, front' *fool/*fuul (P.E.C.)	M. <i>fool</i> , Dab. <i>fuul</i> Ji. <i>fuul</i> , Ban. <i>fool</i>	<i>weji</i> (Ar. <i>wajh</i>) <i>fool</i> 'incisor; throes' <i>fool ka fool</i> 'face to face' <i>fool xume</i> 'to be ugly faced, to be bad'
'house' *man/*min (P.E.C.)	M. <i>mañ/min</i> Dab. <i>miñ</i> Ji. <i>miñ</i> Ban. <i>minan</i>	<i>guri</i> (? Harar <i>gār</i>) <i>aqal</i> (? cf. Am. Ge'ez <i>säqāla</i> 'tenda' Reinisch) <i>min</i> 'uterus', <i>minyaro</i> 'wife married for last'. <i>minfüiq/mafiiq</i> 'sweep, house cleaning'

'meat'
**so'* (P.E.C.)

M. Dab. *so'*
Ji. *su'*

hilib (cf. Ar. *habra* 'meat with bones', Ge'ez *abaal* 'meat').
so' (idiomatic phrases: *so' iyo sar toona ma laha* 'it has neither meat nor hide'. The word appears also in classical poetry).

'footprint, heel'
**sa'n* (P.E.C.)

M. *saan* 'print, step'
Dab. *saan* 'id.'
Ji. *saam*
Ban. *saan*

raad (Ar. *rāda* 'cercare' Reinisch)
saanqaad 'taking the first steps'.

3) Words still surviving, but not used frequently or primarily. Some of such words are used with shifts in meaning:

EAST CUSHITIC

SOUTHERN SOMALI DIALECTS

STANDARD SOMALI

'time, now'
**amm(-an)* (P.E.C.)

M. *ammañ* 'time'
Dab. *ammañ* 'id.'

waqti (Ar. *waqt*)
ammin 'time',
imminka 'now'

**d'iif* (P.E.C.) 'grow tall, stretch oneself'

M. Dab. *j'iif-*
'to lie down, to sleep' (for *d'/j'* correspondences, see **d'eer* in the first group).

seexo (cf. Ar. *sakhā* 'quievit' Rein.)
jiif 'to lie down'

'truth'
**d'ug* (P.E.C.)

M. Dab. *dhug*
'intelligence'

caqli (Ar. *caql*)
dhug 'intelligence'

'group clan'
Or. *gosa*,
Arb. *gosa*
Bur. *gosa*

M. *goos(ën)* 'group'
Ji. *gooson*
Dab. *goos(ën)*

koox (Ar. *kūkh* 'capanna' Rein.)
goosan 'a part of a group'

'grave'
**hawaal* (P.E.C.)

M. *habaal*
Dab. *hebeel*

qabri (Ar. *qabr*)
xabaal 'id.'

'be fat'
klis*/klus* (P.E.C.)

M. *kulus*
Dab. *shilis*

cayil (?)
naax (?)
shilis (not frequent)

'how much?'
Af. *magidey* (?)
Das. *miya*

M. Dab. *meeqaa*
Ban. *meeqaa*

immisa (innovation)
meeqa (not frequent)

Linguistics

Or. *meeqa* (?)
 Kon. *meeqaa*, Gaw. *mee'e*
 Had. *me'i*

'morning'
sa' (P.E.C.) M. *saa* (—)
 Dab. *saa* (—) *subax* (Ar. *ṣubḥ*),
saaka'
saakay 'this morning'

'nasal mucus'
 **sirn/surn-* (P.E.C.) M. Dab. *siin* *duuf* (innovation)
siin (very rare)

'smoke'
 **uum* (P. Sam) M. Dab. *uun* *qiic/qaac* (see *qiic* in the first
 Ban. *uun* group)
 Ji. *bun* (?) *uumi-* 'to fumigate'.

Apart from the phenomenon of loan words, where Standard Somali has many innovated or lost words, the Southern Somali dialects have often preserved the original form of words inherited from Proto-Omo-Tana. As an example, a short comparative vocabulary of these dialects and Galaboid⁴ is given below:

Gloss	Elmolo	Arbore	Dasenech	Maay/Dabarre	Stn. Som.
'dog'	<i>ker(e)</i>	<i>ker</i>	<i>cir</i>	<i>ker-kerē</i> 'pig'	<i>doonfaar</i> 'pig'
'fire'	<i>eek, ɛɛk</i>	<i>eeg</i>	<i>g'ietti</i>	<i>M. oog</i> 'flame, in- flame	<i>olol</i>
'go'	<i>a-ɛɛte</i>	<i>se'ad</i> 'go to'	<i>si-(sezi, sietti)</i>	<i>seed-</i> 'arrive, go to'	<i>tegid, aadid</i>
'go away'	<i>ar-ke'</i>	<i>ke'</i> 'stand'	<i>ke'</i>	Dab. <i>she</i> 'stand up'	<i>kac</i>
'head'	<i>mete'</i>	<i>metteh</i>	<i>me</i> (pl. <i>mett-u</i>)	<i>madē</i>	<i>madax</i>
'heavy'	<i>ilsida</i>	<i>ilsa</i>	<i>hiliš^v</i>	Dab. <i>ilis</i>	<i>culus</i>
'ill'	<i>ɛkis</i>	<i>ek'es</i>	<i>ees-</i>	Dab. <i>igees-</i>	<i>dil</i>
'look at'	<i>an-doya</i>	<i>dooy-'see'</i>	—	<i>dey</i>	<i>day</i>
'meat'	<i>onyur</i>	<i>henč^vur</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>so'</i>	<i>hilib</i>
'navel'	<i>onyur</i>	<i>henč^vur</i>	<i>'onyir</i>	<i>ukur(?)</i>	<i>xuddun</i>
'one'	<i>toko', taka</i>	<i>toko, taka</i>	<i>taka-č^v</i>	<i>took-to</i> 'once'	<i>mar</i>
'sheep'	<i>elem</i>	<i>'ellém</i> 'ram'	<i>'ellem</i> 'female young sheep'	<i>eleen</i> 'ram'	<i>wan, idò</i>
'smoke'	<i>iiri'</i>	<i>irjat</i>	<i>'eer</i>	Dab. <i>er</i>	<i>qiic</i>
'ten'	<i>tomon</i>	<i>tommon</i>	<i>tommon</i>	<i>tomon</i>	<i>toban</i>
'tongue'	<i>ɛrep</i>	<i>'erréb</i>	<i>'ere</i>	Dab. <i>errep</i>	<i>carrab</i>
'two'	<i>laama?</i>	<i>lama</i>	<i>naama</i>	<i>lammē</i>	<i>labo</i>
'eat'	<i>-aam/-oom-</i>	<i>ahom-</i>	<i>kòm</i>	M. <i>aam-</i>	<i>cun</i>

⁴ Galaboid includes the three East Cushitic languages, ie., Arbore, Dasenech and Elmolo, which are spoken around Lake Rudolf.

Although some of these words have cognates outside of Omo-Tana languages, it is significant that there is a considerable core of vocabulary items that are restricted to these dialects for Omo-Tana. Another very interesting example is given by lexical and phonological affinities of the Dabarre dialect with Bayso. This dialect, like Bayso, has lost the P.E.C. pharyngeal fricatives: the voiced *c* and the voiceless *h*; but morpho-initially the voiceless pharyngeal sound has a reflex *h*. What is very impressive is that wherever a pharyngeal fricative has been lost or replaced by *h*, the vowel has usually changed to *e*. In polysyllabic roots there is vowel harmony, with assimilation of other vowels to *e* (Hayward 1979: 75-76) e.g.:

Gloss	Bayso	Dabarre	P.E.C.
'hand'	<i>gene</i>	<i>dene</i>	* <i>gana</i> ^c - / * <i>gan</i>
'cow'	<i>se</i>	<i>se</i>	* <i>sa</i> ^c
'rise up/start'	<i>ke-</i>	<i>she</i>	* <i>ka</i> ^c
'go'	<i>seet-</i>	<i>seed</i> 'arrive'	* <i>so</i> ^c - <i>at-</i> (POT)
'intestines'	<i>men'eer</i>	<i>med'eer</i>	* <i>mind'far</i> (POT)
'love/like'	<i>geelaat-</i>	<i>jeelaad</i> 'love'	* <i>ge</i> ^c <i>el</i> (PSL)
'name'	<i>mege</i>	<i>mej'e</i>	* <i>mag</i> ^c
'salt'	<i>esebo</i>	<i>esbë</i>	* <i>a/osbo</i>
'thorn'	<i>e'en</i>	<i>ereen</i>	* <i>kod'an</i>
'tongue'	<i>erreb</i>	<i>erreb</i>	* <i>arrab</i>
'grass'	<i>ees</i>	<i>ees</i>	* <i>aws-</i> / * <i>ayš</i> ^y
'go out'	<i>be-</i>	<i>be'</i>	* <i>bah</i>
'head'	<i>mete</i>	<i>madë</i>	* <i>matah</i>
'pus'	<i>mele</i>	<i>melë</i>	* <i>malah</i>
'steal'	<i>het-</i>	<i>hed-</i>	* <i>hat</i> (PSL)
'become heavy'	<i>islaat</i>	<i>islaat/ilisaat-</i>	* <i>ils</i> / * <i>uls</i> .
'colt (milk)'	<i>it-at</i>	<i>eedag</i>	* <i>it</i> (t.) / * <i>itit</i> . s. <i>caano fadhi</i>

This overwhelming identity of lexical elements demonstrated above between Southern Somali dialects and East Cushitic leads us to conclude that Southern Somali is, in some aspects, more archaic linguistically, and can be considered as a link between the Omo-Tana or East Cushitic languages and Standard Somali, thus confirming the idea that, from a linguistic point of view, the older speech community of early Somalis expanded from the South (around Lake Rudolf) to the East and North of the Horn of Africa. During this immigration, the Somali internal dialect differentiation took place. In the second Somali expansion from North to South, from the beginning of the last millenium, the inter-riverine Somali people conserved many lexemes, even though they were subjected to many cultural and linguistic superimpositions.

This conclusion is certainly a further confirmation of the very genuine inspiration evidenced in the works of such illustrious scholars as H. Fleming, H.J. Sasse and B. Heine.

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