

SOMALI COLOR TERM EVOLUTION:
GRAMMATICAL AND DIACHRONIC EVIDENCE

LUISA MAFFI
UC Berkeley
Psychology 220A
Spring 1987

0. This paper is a sequel to a previous work (Maffi 1984) in which I presented a first outline of Somali¹ color terminology. My aim here is to give some grammatical and diachronic evidence as to the evolution of this semantic field in Somali which reasons of space prevented me from including in detail in that work. Furthermore, I intend to reconsider my data in the light of the most recent findings of the World Color Survey (Berlin, Kay and Merrifield 198 ; henceforth B,K&M).

The original data had been collected by myself in 1983 (Maffi, unpublished ms.) while I was taking part in a lexicographic research project carried out by linguists of the University of Rome (Italy) and aiming at the compilation of a large Somali-Italian dictionary (V.V. A.A. 1985). The source of the data was our file, which included: 1) all the lexical items found in the main already existing Somali-other language dictionaries and glossaries and in a Somali monolingual dictionary (Reinisch 1902; da Palermo 1915; Bell 1953; Abraham 1964; Stepančenko-Osman 1969; Panza 1974; Philibert 1976; Yaasiin C. Keenadiid 1976); 2) a wide corpus of items drawn from the systematic scanning of almost all the texts (books, newspapers, reviews) published in Somali since 1973, after the introduction of the Somali script. The over 50,000 items (including the variants) had been checked several times with a large number of Somali informants both in Somalia and in Italy.

My search for color terms had yielded about fifty items, the bulk of which could be grouped in two sets: 1) referentially general terms, that is terms which could be referred to any kind of object (animate/inanimate, natural/artificial, etc.); 2) cattle color terms, that is terms which could only be referred to the colors (or patterns) of cattle coat. A much smaller set included terms whose reference is restricted to human skin colors. All of the terms were again checked with three informants in Rome. No formal experimental setting could be provided; tests as to the focus and range of the terms were confined to collections of available objects.

In the mentioned survey (Maffi 1984), I pointed out that the list of Somali color terms I presented was probably far from complete, especially in the cattle color set, and also that further research might have shown the existence of other "restricted reference" sets. In spite of this and of the lack of experimental evidence, I claimed that the available data was enough to allow for a tentative mapping of this semantic field in Somali. In particular, I concentrated on the reconstruction of Somali

basic color terms, along the line of the evolutionary sequence proposed by Berlin and Kay (Berlin and Kay 1969; henceforth B&K), and showed that the map of basic color terms in Somali given by these authors was incorrect, basically due to the scarcity and imprecision of the data they were relying upon (only two glossaries: De Larajasse 1897 and Kirk 1905, which I also examined). At the same time, I tried to show how cultural and historical factors should also be taken into account when dealing with color terminologies, not only as far as the "secondary" (and generally more culture-specific) terms are concerned, but also in connection with the evolutionary growth of the "basic" terminology itself.

This contention was based on a closer examination of the terms which I had isolated as "basic" within the set of the "referentially general" color terms. Besides not being semantically included in any other color term, they responded positively to psychological relevance criteria as defined by B&K (B&K 1969): in the course of elicitation procedures, these terms appeared to be present in the idiolects of all the informants, they tended to be mentioned at the beginning of a list of color terms, and showed a stable reference across informants and across occasions of use by the same informant. In fact, this criterion seemed to be the most powerful and unequivocal one among those proposed by B&K as tests for the "basicness" of color terms insofar as it yielded rather consistent results, which could therefore be interpreted as a likely synchronic picture of Somali color terminology.

However, when I tried to apply the other B&K criteria (distributional potential; being monolexic or at least morphologically not too complex; not being also the names of objects having the corresponding color; not being recent loan words), the results were much less clear-cut. This led me, on one side, to further inquiries as to the grammatical correlates of these terms, and on the other to a diachronic investigation as allowed by the already mentioned dictionaries and glossaries, which span over a period of almost a century (incidentally, a rather uncommon circumstance for an African language). The results of both studies seemed to give confirmation as to the "core" of the basic terminology, while at the same time suggesting some hypotheses as to the more problematic cases. It is on these results that I would like to expand here. First of all, however, let me briefly present the list of Somali basic color terms as I proposed it in my previous work (Maffi 1984).

1. On the basis of the criterion of psychological relevance alone, Somali basic color terminology seems to include the following terms² (given with an approximate translation):

caddaan (-ka³), "white color", "whiteness", "clearness"
corresponding attributive verb:
*cad*⁴, "to be white", "to be clear"

madow (-ga), "black color", "blackness", "darkness"
corresponding attributive verb:
madow, "to be black", "to be dark"

casaan (-ka), "red color", "redness" (northern variant⁵)
corresponding attributive verb:
cas, "to be red" (northern variant⁵)

guduud (-ka), "red color", "redness" (southern-central variant⁵)
corresponding attributive verb:
guduudan, "to be red" (southern-central variant⁵)

cagaar (-ka), "green color", "greenness"
corresponding attributive verb:
cagaaran, "to be green"

cawl (-ka), "?yellow color", "?yellowness"
corresponding attributive verb:
cawlan, "?to be yellow"

buluug, "blue color", "blueness"

huruud, "yellow color", "yellowness"

Apart from the case of the two regional variants for red (but see note 5), one can immediately notice that there are also two different terms for yellow: *cawl* (with the attributive verb *cawlan*) and *huruud*. Now, in the eliciting procedure *huruud* tended to be mentioned earlier than *cawl/cawlan*, and with little or no hesitation, as the term for yellow, while the other two came later and tended to elicit vaguer and less consistent responses, ranging from "yellowish" to "reddish" to "greyish". However, *huruud* (and, for that matter, also the equally well established term for blue, *buluug*) lacked the correlation with an attributive verb, which appeared to be another strong symptom of "basicness" (in terms of distributional potential): out of the about 50 Somali color terms collected by me, only the above-mentioned six show this correlation. This therefore appeared to be a critical area in Somali basic color terminology, in need of further examination; which is what I set out to do, after deciding to first look for other grammatical

correlates for the whole set of my "general" color terms, and then avail myself of the diachronic perspective offered by the existing Somali dictionaries to check the semantic status and derivational processes of the terms over time.

Before I go on to expose the results of these inquiries, however, let me just add that no basic term for purple, orange, pink and gray was I able either to elicit from my informants or to find in the dictionaries. The terms *boor* (-ka) and *uuro* (-da), both meaning "dust", appear to be used to refer to a greyish, dusty color, but this usage is clearly felt as a semantic extension of the terms. Furthermore, as I shall say later, such terms require different grammatical constructions from the previously mentioned ones. As for orange, purple and pink, as well as for brown, I shall later formulate my hypotheses about these categories.

2. My search for grammatical correlates led to several interesting findings. Apart from the absence of attributive verbs like **buluugan* or **huruudan* in association with *buluug* and *huruud*, it was immediately apparent that the six noun/verb pairs of Somali color terms could be divided into two subsets on the basis of grammatical evidence. For three of them, in fact, one could easily reconstruct a verb>noun derivation process, while for the other three the opposite appeared to be the case. From the verbal themes *cad* and *cas*, the nouns *caddaan* and *casaan* are derived by adding the nominalizing suffix ~~-aad~~ ^{-aan} (a very common form of nominalization in Somali). The same verb>noun derivation process can be postulated for the two identical forms *madow* (verb) and *madow* (noun), in this case on the basis of the examination of the whole set of derivative forms of the root *madoob-* (on which I shall not expand here). For the other three pairs, the noun forms *guduud*, *cagaar* and *cawl* appear to have given rise to attributive verbs by means of the typical verbalizing suffix *-an* (respectively, *guduudan*, *cagaaran*, *cawlan*).

Once this subdivision operated, another phenomenon was immediately apparent: the terms included in the first group, corresponding to the categories WHITE, BLACK and RED, are the only ones to show an original verbal nature. (Remember that Somali does not have adjectives.) Being a predicate (and therefore not possibly the name of an object having the corresponding color) was B&K's preferen-

tial criterion for inclusion in a list of basic color terms: from this point of view, therefore, only *cad*, *madow* (v.) and *cas* should be included in the list of Somali basic color terms. Now, if we discount the problem of the alternative term for red, *guduud*, which instead appears to belong to the noun>verb group (and this is not the only problem with this alleged regional variant, as we shall see), what we are left with here is a picture of a typical (in B&K's terms) Stage II language, with only terms for "black-cool", "white" and "warm" (cf. B,K&M 198). And, if one adds the World Color Survey data to the original B&K (1969) ones, 90% of the languages at this stage appear to be from Africa. Somali would therefore be no exception to this "strong areal bias" (B,K&M 198 : 4).

This, however, does not mean that *present day* Somali should be considered a Stage II language: all the other mentioned terms appear to be well established as basic color terms, both on the basis of their psychological relevance (as already said) and of further grammatical evidence. As well as the verbs *cad*, *madow* and *cas*, in fact, also the nouns *guduud* and *cagaar* appear to have a strong distributional potential in the language, giving rise to a wide set of derived nouns and verbs (e.g. *casow*, "to become red"; *cagaari*, "to make green"), as well as to instances of syntactic doubling, which yields the meaning "spotted color x" (e.g. *cadcad*, *cagcagaar*, etc.).

All this does not apply to *buluug* and *huruud*, which, as we have seen, also lack the corresponding attributive verb, and it applies in a restricted way to *cawl*, confirming the problematic status of this term. All the mentioned terms in their nominal form (therefore including *buluug* and *huruud*) appear however in exactly the same syntactic constructions, both in the subject and in the object functions (e.g. *casaanku waa midab fican*, "red is a nice color"; *buluugga ma jecelahi*, "I don't like blue"). In the predicative function, where an attributive verb exists, it is this form which is used (e.g. *maradaas waa caddahay*, "that cloth is white", *caddahay* being the form *cad* inflected with the verb "to be"; *maro cad*, "a white cloth", *cad* appearing here in the "restricted paradigm", with form 0 of "to be").

In this case, *buluug* and *huruud* appear to behave differently (the corresponding sentences would be: *maradaas waa buluug*, "that cloth is blue", and *maro huruud ah*, "a yellow cloth", where the nouns are used in a nominal predicate construction). But still we have some evidence of the integration

of these latter terms in the basic terminology: in the clause *maro huruud ah*, the noun *huruud* appears in conjunction with *ah*, which is one of the forms of the verb "to be" (the literal meaning of the clause being "a cloth which is yellow"). Here, then, *buluug* and *huruud* are unlike all the "secondary terms" (both in the "general" and in the "cattle color" sets): with all these other terms (including the mentioned *boor* and *uuro*) the corresponding clause would in fact be formed with the form *leh*, from the verb "to have" (e.g. *midab uuro leh*, "a greyish color"). If one remembers that all the other secondary terms are nouns, it appears evident that the nouns *buluug* and *huruud* are different from the others in at least one important respect, while they share with the attributive verbs the use of the auxiliary "to be" in at least some constructions. This fact would lend further support to the "strong" criterion of psychological relevance as I applied it in including *buluug* and *huruud* in the set of Somali basic color terms. However, the partly different grammatical and distributional behavior of these latter terms would speak for their more recent "promotion" to the status of basic terms.

As for *cawll/cawlan*, *cagaar/cagaaran* and *guduud/guduudan*, on the basis of the same structural criteria they should be placed at an intermediate position between *cad*, *madow and cas* ~~*y-should-be-placed-in*~~ *on one side*, and *buluug* and *huruud* on the other one: they are originally nouns, but have developed the corresponding verb forms and have the same (or similar, in the case of *cawl*) grammatical behavior and distributional potential as the first three.

What does all this tell us as to the status of Somali in the evolutionary sequence of basic color terms postulated by B&K (particularly in the most recent version presented in B,K&M 198)? Although on the basis of the evidence given so far it would seem possible to conclude that Somali is a six-term language (having terms for white, black, red, yellow, green and blue, with two regional variants for red and two conflicting terms for yellow⁶), the situation is not altogether clear, especially as to the status of *cawll/cawlan* . Further evidence is needed, and I therefore revert to the diachronic data I derived from the dictionaries and glossaries I mentioned at the beginning.

3. First of all, for each of the Somali basic color terms, I shall give the dictionary definitions in chronological order. I will not give the dictionary definitions in chronological order. I shall not quote from all

of the mentioned lexicons: most of the glossaries only give definitions which correspond to those of the main ones, or differ only because of easily detectable misspellings, errors of interpretation, etc.; and in some cases older lexicons had been incorporated into more recent ones. I will nevertheless quote from the oldest ones (De Larajasse 1897; Reinisch 1902; Kirk 1905) and the most reliable among the others (Bell 1953; Abraham 1964; Yaasiin 1976; V.V. A.A. 1985), whenever the terms we are considering are included therein.

For *caddaan* we have: R⁷, "von Natur oder Ursprung an weisse Farbe"; A, "whiteness, clearness"; Y⁸, "the state of being white, of having a white color"; VA, "colore bianco". *Cad*: DL, "white"; R, "weiss"; K, "white"; B, "white"; A, "white, clear"; Y, "having the color resulting from the combination of the seven colors of the solar spectrum"; VA, "essere bianco; essere chiaro".

Madow (n.): A, "blackness, darkness"; Y, "color opposed to white; absence of light"; VA, "colore nero; buio; oscurita". *Madow* (v.): DL, "black"; R, "schwarz, blau"; K, "black"; B, "black, dark, green"; A, "black"; VA, "essere nero; essere buio, scuro, oscuro".

Casaan: R, "die Röte, rote Farbe"; B, "redness"; A, "redness"; Y, "red color"; VA, "colore rosso; colore marrone; colore arancione". *Cas*: DL, "red"; R, "rot"; K, "red"; B, "red"; A, "red"; Y, "having a color between *guduud*⁹ and white"; VA, "essere rosso; essere marrone; essere arancione".

Guduud: R, "Hochröte, die kostbarste Farbe"; A, "brownness"; Y, "color similar to blood; deep *casaan*⁹"; VA, "[colore] rosso". *Guduudan*: R, "purpurrot"; B, "brown"; Y, "having a *guduud*⁹ color"; VA, "essere rosso".

Cagaar: A, "new foliage"; Y, "the color of grass and leaves; verdure, new vegetation after the rains"; VA, "[colore] verde; verzura, piante verdeggianti". *Cagaaran*: VA, "essere verde; verdeggiare, essere verdeggiante".

Cawl: DL, "Sömmering's gazelle [a very common type of gazelle in Somalia]"; R, "Mischfarbe zwischen rot, blond und grün; Antil. Sömmeringii, nach der Färbung so benannt"; K, "yellow"; A, "yellowness"¹⁰; Y, "color approaching *casaan*⁹"; VA, "maschio di gazzella di Sömmering; colore grigio rossiccio". *Cawlan*: DL, "brown, reddish"¹¹; R, "mischfarbig"; B, "yellow, brown"; A, "yellow"; Y, "whose color is *cawl*"; VA, "essere di colore grigio rossiccio".

Huruud: R, "crocus indicus"; A, "saffron"; Y, "saffron [plant and spice]; color between *cillaan*¹² and *guduud*⁹"; VA, "pianta dello zafferano; zafferano; color zafferano".

Buluug: B, "blue"; A, "blue cubes for washing clothes"; Y, "thing having the color of the sky"; VA, "blu, azzurro; cubetti di tintura blu per tingere le stoffe".

A first remark is immediately in point: while there is wide agreement among the sources as to the meaning of the terms referring to the categories WHITE and BLACK, there is much less consistency as to all the other terms. One has of course to take into account the possibility of incompleteness, lack of precision, etc., especially since most of the mentioned lexicons were compiled by missionaries,

travelers and educators who did not have a specific training in lexicography. It is also true, however, that the semantic domain of colors is a particularly tricky one, insofar as one relies, to determine the referents of the terms, on subjective perception alone. With all these caveats, I would nevertheless like to put forward some hypotheses concerning the interpretation of this data.

It is not necessary to dwell on the terms for WHITE and BLACK: they are unambiguously defined in all of my sources. It is worth noticing, however, that these terms also mean "clear(ness)" and "dark(ness)" respectively. These findings correspond to the ones already exposed in relation to the elicitation procedures. More importantly, for *madow* (v.) R also gives "blue" and B "green".

As to the terms for RED, I had previously mentioned that the two pairs *casaan/cas* and *guduud/guduudan* were considered by my informants to be widely overlapping regional variants (northern and southern-central respectively). A comparison of the dictionary definitions, however, shows that the status of these terms might be more problematic than expected. My sources are largely consistent as to *casaan/cas* referring to RED, apart from VA which also includes reference to BROWN and ORANGE. For *guduud/guduudan*, VA only mentions RED, while R and Y seem to refer to a deeper shade of red than that typically singled out by the other two terms¹³; B and A report a reference to BROWN. This goes in the same direction as the grammatical findings on the terms for RED. Even if one sticks to the "regional variant" interpretation, which my informants were fairly positive about, the less "basic" (originally nominal instead of verbal) nature of *guduud* vis-a-vis *casaan* as well as the "brown" glosses remain to be accounted for. At any rate, my data does not seem to confirm a complete overlap of the two sets of terms.

The cases of *cagaar/cagaaran* and *cawll/cawlan* are the most interesting (and also the most problematic) ones. In both instances, the already mentioned morphologic derivation processes are paralleled by processes of semantic derivation. As for *cagaar*, besides not being mentioned at all in the lexicons prior to A, it is only given in the latter as referring to new (therefore green) vegetation. The meaning "green color", then, would appear to have developed fairly recently, since it is not attested in 1964. This is confirmed by the complete absence of the attributive verb in all of the sources except VA. However, my informants were very consistent in producing *cagaar/cagaaran* as terms for GREEN, and

moreover in mentioning the meaning "green (color)" as the basic one vis-a-vis that of "(green) vegetation", which was reported to be semantically derived from the previous one (as also implied in Y and VA). My contention here is that at the present stage these terms have reached a point where the perception of the direction of semantic derivation has become inverted: the original "(green) vegetation" meaning is no longer felt as primary, and these terms now appear under every respect to be well established as basic color terms for GREEN.

When we go on to examine *cawl/cawlan*, however, the derivation processes, as well as the actual semantic content of the terms, are far less clear-cut. Although for *cawl* R first gives a definition in terms of color and then, as a derivation, the meaning of "Sömmering's gazelle, so named after the color [my italics]", other sources seem to suggest the opposite derivation process, or simply separate the two meanings as pertaining to two homophonous words. More importantly, there is a marked inconsistency as to the color referents of these terms, ranging from the puzzling definition found in R ("mixed color between red, blond and green") to a whole gamut of "yellow", "reddish", "reddish-gray" and "brown". Moreover, one should bear in mind that my informants' responses were correspondingly inconsistent as to the color(s) referred to by these terms; at the same time, however, they agreed in claiming that *cawl* is originally the name for a color similar to this gazelle's coat color. The data here is too ambiguous for us to decide about the direction of the semantic derivation process; it also shows, however, that we are at a very crucial point in Somali color terminology. Apart from those sources which definitely gloss them as "yellow (color)", *cawl* and *cawlan* seem to cover, as in R's definition, some sort of middle ground between red and green, including lighter shades of yellow ("blond") and green and extending towards brown and gray.

Anyway, one cannot, I think, simply dismiss these terms as "too messy" to be basic. This contention is supported by the already mentioned finding that *cawl* is one of the only six out of the fifty Somali color terms collected by me which correlates with an attributive verb, a fact I interpreted as a strong indicator of "basicness". One should, in my opinion, rather consider the hypothesis that Somali color terminology is undergoing change in this very area of the color spectrum. This, moreover, might be connected with the status of the term *huruud*. If we follow the sources chronologically, we can clear-

ly see a "color" meaning gradually emerging from the original meanings "crocus indicus [the saffron plant]" and "saffron [the spice]". Since saffron is not locally produced in Somalia, and the word itself is not originally Somali,¹⁴ it is likely that both the product and its name were imported at the same time (probably from Arabia or India). The extension of the term to the corresponding (deep, bright yellow-orange) color appears to be fairly recent (it is only reported in Y and VA); this would also help explain the absence of **huruudan*. However, while being very clearly aware of the connections between the two meanings of the word and of the direction of semantic derivation, my informants were much more consistent in designating *huruud* as a term for YELLOW than they were with *cawl/cawlan*.

It is perhaps premature to contend that *huruud* is in the course of replacing the previous two terms, but I would not be surprised if this were the case, and if an attributive verb **huruudan* should correspondingly develop at a later stage. And, although similar phenomena are still awaiting for a thorough empirical demonstration, I might go as far as to speculate that *huruud* might be gaining ground over *cawl* since it appears more appropriate to refer to the bright shades of yellow displayed by such recently imported goods as printed fabrics and plastic, while *cawl* should, if anything, refer to more "natural" (in ecologic terms) shades of yellow, ranging over yellow-green as well as reddish (or brownish) yellow (although the focus might anyway be in a "prototypical yellow").

To conclude this overview, I should add that *buluug* also is (as one could suspect) a loan word; it probably came attached to a product which was used in the recent past to wash and revive the dye of clothes. From the definition found in A and VA, and from the descriptions given by my informants, I suspect this product to be cubes of perborate which came wrapped in blue paper (they were still in use in Europe soon after World War II). The source language might be either of the colonial languages spoken in Somalia, English or Italian. At any rate, while the product itself is not used in Somalia anymore (they now have Tide), and this meaning is therefore fading away, the word stays, and is by now consistently used to refer to BLUE (although it still lacks **buluugan*).

4. To sum up what I have been saying so far, I would like to sketch a (partially revised with respect to Maffi 1984) mapping of Somali color terms onto the color space, while trying to show what the evolu-

tionary processes involved might have been and what the connections with the latest findings of the World Color Survey (B,K&M 198) seem to be. On the basis of the data available to me, the organization of Somali color terminology seems to be as follows:

caddaan/cad would cover an area centering in white and extending towards light shades of the other colors (perhaps including pink);

madow/madow would center in black and include the darkest shades of some other colors, in particular green and blue, and perhaps purple and brown. It should be borne in mind that for *madow* R also gives "blue" and B "green". Since Somali now has separate terms for both of these colors, possibly only the darkest shades of green and blue might be left within the range of *madow*. As for brown, I shall take up the issue later;

casaan/cas would center in red and range over the brightest shades of other warm colors (orange, reddish brown, bright purple and perhaps pink);

guduud/guduudan, whether we consider them as regional variants or not, might also center in red, but would include deeper and browner shades of red than *casaan/cas*;

cagaar/cagaaran would cover all the bright and deep shades of green, having probably taken them over from *madow*;

cawl/cawlan, as we have seen, are problematic: depending on the exact semantic content of these words, and of their relative sequence of development with respect to *cagaar* and *buluug*, we would get different pictures of the evolution of Somali color terminology (at least according to the World Color Survey data). I shall expand on this shortly;

huruud should also be considered in connection with the analysis of the previous two terms, in order to establish its position and prospects in Somali color terminology; anyway, it seems to cover brighter and deeper shades of yellow (and yellow-orange) than *cawl/cawlan*;

buluug would cover both the light and the dark shades of blue (while possibly leaving the darkest ones to *madow*), and perhaps also deep purple.

I should again stress that this is just a very tentative mapping, which is undoubtedly in serious need of experimental verification. However, it seems to be a plausible hypothesis on the basis of the data at present available to me.

5. If we now consider this data in relation to B&K's evolutionary sequence (B&K 1969), in particular in its latest version (B,K&M 198), we can put forward some other hypotheses. First of all, as already mentioned, it seems evident that Somali, like many other African languages, was until fairly recently a Stage II language, with three basic color terms (for WHITE, BLACK and RED).

It is much less clear, however, what the following stage might have been. The grammatical and dictionary evidence suggests that *cawl* developed as a color term well before *cagaar* and *buluug*, although my informants seem to be confused as to its present status. Whatever the direction of the semantic derivation might have been (gazelle>color or vice-versa), I suspect that when the word started asserting itself as a color term it picked shades of color both from *cas* (on the yellowish and brownish ends) and from *madow* (on the greenish and greyish ends)--which would justify its "mixed bag" nature as it transpires from R's definition. If this hypothesis is correct, and if we trust the dictionary information, the situation of Somali at this stage would appear to be what in the World Color Survey has come to be defined as Stage IIIc, with terms for WHITE, RED, BLACK/BLUE and YELLOW/GREEN (B,K&M 198 : 5): *madow* would label the BLACK/BLUE category and *cawl* the YELLOW/GREEN one.

The existence of such a variant of Stage III was only admitted as an unlikely possibility by Kay (Kay 1975), and has not been reported since as a present stage of any language. However, what Kay theoretically considered as the most likely development of such a stage, that is a Stage IV system with terms for BLACK, WHITE, RED, YELLOW/GREEN and BLUE (Stage IVb in B,K&M 198), is now attested for several Northwest Coast Indian languages (B,K&M 198 : 5). Such systems would plausibly further develop into Stage Va, with terms for BLACK, WHITE, RED, YELLOW, GREEN and BLUE. Now, although this latter stage seems to best fit the present state of Somali, it is very difficult to exactly establish through which stages Somali eventually got to this one. Even if we accept my hypothesis that Somali might have been a Stage IIIc language, there is no evidence that it subsequently became a stage IVb one (with a separate term for BLUE before the splitting of the YELLOW/GREEN category). As a matter of fact, the diachronic and grammatical evidence rather seems to suggest the appearance of a separate term for GREEN (*cagaar*) before that of the term for BLUE (*buluug*); in particular, *cagaar* seems to have longer been integrated in the basic color term system, since it is correlated with an attributive verb, while *buluug* is not.

What can we conclude from all this? One possibility would be that of calling for another Stage IV variant, in which the YELLOW/GREEN category would split before the appearance of a separate

term for BLUE. Alternatively, one might consider the hypothesis formulated by B,K&M for some "transitional" languages (both from Africa and Australia) that "appear as basic Stage II systems that have recently moved to Stage IV but have unexpected ranges for the standard cool category. (...) terms for black, white, and red and yellow appear with their expected ranges, but the normal distribution of cool is restricted to green, the other half of the category (including focal blue) being incorporated into black" (B,K&M 198 : 8). In this case, the intermediate stage for Somali would have been Stage IIIb, with the categories BLACK, WHITE, RED and YELLOW, where BLACK would also have included BLUE and GREEN and subsequently have split into BLACK/BLUE and (restricted) COOL. My data does not allow me to choose either hypothesis, especially until a better understanding of the status of the term *cawl* is reached. At any rate, it seems to me useful to stress that another alternative development between Stages III and IV might have to be considered.

Before concluding this section, I would like to spend some words about the category BROWN. It should by now be apparent that the status of Somali color terminology with respect to this category is not altogether clear. We have seen "brown" glosses for *guduud/guduudan* and *casaan/cas*, and "brown" or "brownish" or "reddish brown" glosses for *cawl/cawlan*. I have actually suggested that this category might be subdivided among the terms for RED (with *guduud* perhaps ranging more widely than *casaan* over the deeper and darker shades of brown) and those for YELLOW/GREEN (if we accept this interpretation for *cawl*), plus possibly BLACK (*madow*). Depending on further inquiries on all of these terms, one might speculate what the further development of Somali terminology might be from its present (not completely clear-cut) Stage Va situation. Since *cawl* seems to be losing ground to *huruud* as a term for YELLOW (in the same way as it might have lost ground to *cagaar* on the GREEN side), is it going to stay as a term for the residual reddish-brownish-greyish shades of color, therefore specializing as a term for BROWN?, or is it going to stay as just a secondary (animal-coat-like) color term, or to be dropped altogether from the color terminology? And what about *guduud*, which, besides its "red" glosses also seems to be a good candidate as a term for BROWN? Or is a completely new term for BROWN going to emerge from somewhere else in the lexicon? It is hard to answer such questions at this stage, but I think that, for a better understanding of how color terminologies actually evolve, it

would be very useful to keep an eye on Somali in the next few years to see what adjustments will finally be reached out of the present fluid situation.

6. As a way of conclusion, I would like to make some general theoretical and methodological remarks based on the study of Somali color terminology. First of all, as I hope what precedes has shown, in order to ascertain what the basic color terms in a language actually are it is necessary to carry out a detailed analysis along various parameters. Although the criterion of psychological relevance in the elicitation procedures appears to be the most reliable one as to the synchronic status of a color terminology, problems of inter- and intrasubjective variation (which are regularly found in this as well as in any other area of human categorization) and most of all problems due to diachronic change in the terminology (cf. Kay 1975) should be dealt with by taking into account other synchronic data, as well as diachronic data when available.

At the same time, it is not possible to rely exclusively on independent evidence, or to fix rigid external criteria for a word to be considered a basic color term. In the case of Somali, had we followed B&K's criterion of considering adjectives alone as possible basic color terms, we would have come up with an incomplete picture of Somali color terminology, leaving aside *huruud* and *buluug*, which instead the criterion of psychological relevance definitely places among the basic color terms. Had we relied on the criterion of semantic opaqueness alone (and only considered those terms which are not also the name of some object having the corresponding color), or had we excluded recent loan words, the list of color terms in Somali would have been even more drastically reduced: as a matter of fact, we would have been left with just the terms for white, black and red, and we should have concluded that Somali is, as many other African languages, a Stage II system. But, as I hope to have convincingly shown, this does not appear to be the case. It therefore seems to me that the criterion of psychological relevance should be considered the primary one as far as the synchronic status of a color terminology is concerned, while as many grammatical and semantic correlates as possible should be looked for in order to check the original list of terms obtained by means of eliciting procedures.

However, B&K's suggestion that one consider adjectives alone as candidates to the status of

basic color terms shows something important about Somali color terminology--at least, if one interprets this suggestion as referring to an *original* adjectival (in the case of Somali verbal) and non-descriptive nature. We have already seen that, from this point of view, the terms *cad*, *madow*, (v.) and *cas* actually stand out as forming a separate group just because they appear to be original attributive verbs, while the other terms seem to be nouns of objects before becoming color terms.

What is important here, however, is not this fact *per se*, all the more that, as I just said, it cannot be used as a discriminating factor for inclusion in the basic color terminology. As far as Somali is concerned, the important fact is that, beyond the three-terms stage, this language has not created any other non-descriptive attributive verbs to refer to colors, but has started incorporating nouns of objects, which had probably been descriptively used before as secondary color terms. From this point onwards, then, Somali basic color terminology starts expanding through processes of semantic derivation, which become coupled with processes of grammatical derivation (formation of attributive verbs, etc.) as the nouns become more and more integrated into the system. As we have already seen, at a certain stage the speakers' perception of the direction of semantic derivation can become inverted (as in the case of *cagaar/cagaaran*), or even the original non-color meaning of a term be lost (as I suspect to be the case with *buluug* for Somali youngsters, who probably have never seen or heard of the famous blue cubes of perborate).

This brings me to a final series of remarks, more specifically connected with a diachronic perspective and the evolutionary sequence of color terminologies proposed by B&K (B&K 1969; B,K&M 198), as well as with the question of the perceptual (universal) bases of color categorization (cf. Kay and McDaniels 1978). It seems to me that, although there is wide and convincing evidence of the psychophysical constraints on basic color lexicons, and that the evolution of this semantic domain is based on such phenomena, one cannot expect these factors too rigidly to determine the evolution of color terminologies in a language. More and more data from languages of different parts of the world are showing that at each stage beyond Stage II a range of possible solutions is available, and that languages can follow various paths to get from one stage to the other. This does not undermine the internal logic of the evolutionary sequence theory, but allows for the contention that, besides the

above-mentioned constraints, other factors may play a role in determining which of the available options a given language may actually exploit at each stage. In other words, it is at this point, I believe, that culturally relative and historical factors may come in and interact with the universal constraints until a particular option prevails.

This is not to be interpreted as a way of reintroducing cultural relativism through the back door: quite to the contrary, it should be taken as implying that even cultural differences can be made sense of in terms of general principles of human cognitive and behavioral functions. As Eleanor Rosch has observed, "the universality of theory comes from its ability to encompass and predict differences as well as universals in human thought and behaviour" (Rosch 1977: 1). While in the past the domain of color (as well as, for that matter, other domains of human categorization) had been the object of "unsystematic observation [which] had observed only the existing cultural differences" (Rosch 1977: 46), allowing for claims as to the "uniqueness" or "genius" of this or that group of human beings, it is now possible and necessary to deal with the undeniable differences in a systematic way and on theoretically solid grounds. The observed differences may then start appearing as due to a common human rationale rather than to some mysteriously unique "genius"--a finding which is by no means bound to diminish our sense of marvel vis-a-vis human ingeniousness.

At any rate, in the domain of color categorization--to quote again from Rosch--"What difference terms do make can now be explored against our background of knowledge of what is universal in color" (Rosch 1974: 116). And what is universal in color seems to be the perceptual salience of the colors which become encoded as basic color terms, while differences rather apply to the placement of the boundaries of the corresponding categories as well as to the degree of elaboration of the secondary color terminology (and perhaps, as I earlier suggested, to the adoption of one or other available option at a given stage of development of a color terminology).

There is little or no agreement about what the factors causing the intercultural differences in color categorization may be--"utilitarian" factors such as stage of technological development, as several authors claim, or less "material" ones such as, for instance, aesthetic judgement (Rosch 1974: 116)--and which role these and other factors (such as cultural contact, as my Somali data suggests) may play in

the evolution of a color terminology. To me, this but shows that more research, both inter- and intracultural, is needed in this domain, and that linguists, psychologists and anthropologists interested in cognitive matters should more and more join efforts in order to achieve a better understanding of this and other aspects of human categorization.

As for my outline of Somali color terminology, more fieldwork, and experimental evidence, are necessary for the hypotheses put forward in this paper to be tested. But I hope at least to have shown the importance of detailed, both synchronic and diachronic, analyses of color terminologies as a means of providing the kind of internal linguistic evidence which is needed in support of theories of cognitive universals in the domain of color categorization.

NOTES

1. Somali is a Cushitic (Afro-Asiatic) language spoken in Somalia (East Africa).
2. For reasons which will become clear later, I decided to chose color *nouns* as the citation form, adding the corresponding *attributive verbs* when applicable. Somali does not have a category "adjective": this function is performed by a particular class of verbs, variously called in the literature "weak" or "hybrid" verbs, and defined "attributive" in the *Dizionario somalo-italiano* (V.V.A.A. 1985). ✓ also used here
3. The standard citation form for Somali nouns indicates gender by means of the suffixed article. The masculine article *-ka* also has the alternative forms *-gal-hal-a* and the feminine *-ta* the forms *-dal-sha*, for phonetic reasons.
4. The citation form for Somali verbs is the imperative, except for the attributive verbs for which the verbal theme is given.
5. All my informants agreed in identifying the two different nouns for the category RED and the corresponding attributive verbs as being used in each of the two major dialects of Somali, the northern and the southern-central respectively. This identification does not go without problems, as we shall see later, but I have so far been unable to inquire any further into the matter.
6. At least one of my reasons for choosing color nouns as citation forms should by now be clear: having included *buluug* and *huruud*, which are nouns, in the set of basic color terms, it was handier to use the nominal forms also in those cases where an attributive verb is present. But there is more to this issue than this, as it should become apparent later.
7. The sources will henceforth be cited as follows: De Larajasse=DL; Reinisch=R; Kirk=K; Bell=B; Abraham=A; Yaasiin=Y; V.V. A.A.=VA.
8. For Yaasiin's Somali monolingual dictionary, I shall give my own translation from Somali.
9. See further.
10. In a separate entry, without establishing explicit connections, A also gives *cawl* as "male Sömmering's gazelle".
11. DL also gives, as a separate item, the form *owlaleed*, glossed "green", which must clearly be interpreted (in the standard Somali script) as *cawleed*, a genitival form derived from *cawlan* with the addition of the suffix *-eed*. The same form is also given by R as a synonym of *cawlan*. ←
12. *Cillaan*: "henna [plant, tincture]; colore della henna, rosso-arancio acceso" (VA).
13. Cf Y's definitions for *cas* and *guduud*.
14. I was unable to establish its exact origin.

REFERENCES

- Abraham, R.C. 1964. *Somali-English Dictionary*. London:
- Bell, C.R.V. 1953. *The Somali Language*. London-New York-Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Berlin, B. and P. Kay 1969. *Basic Color Terms. Their Universality and Evolution*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Berlin, B., P. Kay and W.R. Merrifield 198 . *Color Term Evolution: Recent Evidence from the World Color Survey*.
- Da Palermo, G.M. 1915. *Dizionario della lingua somala*. Asmara:
- De Larajasse, Rev. E. 1897. *Somali-English and English-Somali Dictionary*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co.
- Kay, P. 1975. Synchronic Variability and Diachronic Change in Basic Color Terms. In *Language in Society* 4: 257-70
- Kay, P. and Ch.K. McDaniels 1978. The Linguistic Significance of the Meaning of Basic Color Terms. In *Language* 3: 610-46
- Kirk, J.W.C. 1905. *A Grammar of the Somali Language*. London: Cambridge University Press
- Maffi, L. 1983. *La tassonomia dei colori in somalo*. Unpublished ms.
- Maffi, L. 1984. Somali Colour Terminology: An Outline. In *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske: 299-312
- Panza, B. 1974. *Af Soomaali*. Firenze: Le Monnier
- Philibert, Ch. 1976. *Petit lexique somali-français*. Paris:
- Reinisch, L. 1902. *Somali-Deutsch Wörterbuch*. Wien:
- Rosch, E. 1974. Linguistic Relativity. In A.L. Silverstein (ed.), *Human Communication: Theoretical Explorations*. New York: Halsted Press: 95-121
- Rosch, E. 1977. Human Categorization. In N. Warren (ed.), *Studies in Cross-cultural Psychology* (vol.I). London: Academic Press: 1-49
- Stepančenko, D.I. and Mohamed H. Osman 1969. *Kratij somali-russkij i russka-somali slovar'*. Moskwa:

V.V. A.A. 1985. *Dizionario somalo-italiano*. Roma: Gangemi

Yaasiin C. Keenadiid 1976. *Qaamuuska Af-Soomaaliga*. s.l. [Firenze: Le Monnier]