

Proceedings
of the
Second International Congress
of Somali Studies

University of Hamburg
August 1-6, 1983

edited by
Thomas Labahn

— VOLUME I —

LINGUISTICS
AND
LITERATURE

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SOMALI COLOUR TERMINOLOGY: AN OUTLINE

0. In the field of ethnolinguistics, not much has so far been done on Somali. Students of this language have mostly given their attention to its grammatical and phonological features, while anthropologists have devoted themselves more to the study of Somali social structure than to the interrelations between language and culture. This, therefore, appears to be a very promising field of research, the results of which might give a deeper insight into various aspects of Somali language and culture.

This paper aims at giving a first, tentative account of research being carried out in an area, that of colour terminology, on which much has been written in the last thirty years, particularly because it has become one of the main battlefields of the linguistic relativism vs. universalism contest which has been developing since the diffusion of the so-called Whorfian hypothesis (cf. Whorf 1956). A major attempt to give an empirical demonstration of the relativistic hypothesis is that provided by Lenneberg and Brown (Lenneberg 1953; Brown/Lenneberg 1954), while the universalistic positions have one of their milestones in "Basic Color Terms" (Berlin/Kay 1969).

In this paper, I shall first of all present the data so far collected on Somali colour terminology, and then try to place them in relation to the theoretical question of relativism vs. universalism. In the first stage of the research, the data have been drawn from the main existing lexicons of the Somali language (Abraham 1964; De Larajasse 1897; Reinisch 1902; Yaasiin 1974), from the glossaries contained in the Somali grammars (Bell 1953; Kirk 1905), and from a large Somali-Italian dictionary which a group of Italian linguists has elaborated and which is now in

print (cf. V. V. A. A., Dizionario somalo-italiano). The data have been checked in Rome with three informants, who have also added more terms. Further research should be carried out on the field, in order to give as realistic as possible a picture of the way the Somalis subdivide linguistically the domain of colour.

1. The examination of the data allows us to group Somali colour terms in two main sets, according to their references: the first set contains those colour terms which are referentially general, that it can be referred to any object, animate or inanimate, natural or artificial, etc.; the second set contains cattle colour terms, that is terms which can only be referred to the colours (or patterns) of cattle coat. Another, smaller set contains terms whose reference is restricted to human skin colours; and further research, besides certainly adding new members to the already mentioned sets, would probably lead to the identifications of other chromatic classifications, such as of human hair or eyes, or of plants, soil, etc. In this paper, however, we shall confine ourselves to the examination of the two main sets. Here are the terms in detail, with only a provisional translation; we shall deal later with the problem of their exact semantic content.

General colour terms

<u>Caddaan</u> (-ka)	- white colour, clearness
corresponding attributive verb:	
<u>Cad</u>	- to be white, to be clear
<u>Madow</u> (-ga)	- black colour, darkness
corresponding attributive verb:	
<u>Madow</u>	- to be black, to be dark
<u>Casaan</u> (-ka)	- red colour (Northern variant)
corresponding attributive verb:	
<u>Cas</u>	- to be red
<u>Guduud</u> (-ka)	- red colour (Southern-Central v.)

corresponding attributive verb:

<u>Guduudan</u>	- to be red
<u>Cagaar</u> (-ka)	- green colour

corresponding attributive verb:

<u>Cagaaran</u>	- to be green
<u>Cawl</u> (-ka)	- yellow colour

corresponding attributive verb:

<u>Cawlän</u>	- to be yellow
<u>Buluug</u> (-ga)	- blue colour
<u>Huruud</u> (-da)	- yellow colour
<u>Woob</u> (-ka)	- yellow colour
<u>Doog</u> (-ga)	- green colour
<u>Akhdar</u> (-ka)	- green colour
<u>Boor</u> (-ka)	- greyish, dusty colour
<u>Uuro</u> (-da)	- greyish, dusty colour
<u>Xaycad</u> (-ka)	- pale white colour
<u>Bulcad</u> (-ka)	- pale white colour
<u>Caddaansadaf</u> (-ka)	- ? pearly white colour
<u>Casuuro</u> (-da)	- reddish colour
<u>Casuus</u> (-ta)	- reddish colour
<u>Dhiin</u> (-ka)	- deep red colour
<u>Barabbaro</u> (-da)	- spotted colour pattern
<u>Tiniinix</u> (-a)	- colour mixture, multicoloured pattern

Cattle colour terms

<u>Beey</u> (-ga)	- grey, ash colour (of cows, camels and perhaps horses)
<u>Beeycad</u> (-ka)	- light grey colour (as above)
<u>Beeyguduud</u> (-ka)	- reddish grey colour (as above)
<u>Beeymadow</u> (-ga)	- dark grey colour (as above)
<u>Caar</u> (-ka)	- spotted pattern with grey or black (of the fore part of the body of goats)
<u>Camaajiir</u> (-ka)	- unspecified spotted pattern (perhaps white-black or white-red)

Carwajiis (-ka)

- spotted pattern with coloured (red or black?) spots on white (of cows, horses and perhaps goats)

Ciiro (-da)

- spotted pattern on black (of cows, goats and horses)

Jiciir (-ka)

- dotty black and white pattern, with more black than white (of cows and goats)

Dayrcad (-ka)

- pure white colour (of camels)

Maycad (-ka)

- dirty white colour (of camels)

Mayguduud (-ka)

- reddish grey colour (of camels)

Maymadow (-ga)

- light grey colour (of camels)

Goodir (-ka)

- dark grey colour (of camels)

Ashkir (-ka)

- bay colour (of horses)

Baroor (-ka)

- piebald colour (of horses)

Bood (-ka)

- dirty white colour (of horses)

Boos (-ka)

- ? grey colour (of horses)

Bullo (-da)

- isabel colour (of horses)

Xamar (-ka)

- dark red colour (of horses)

Giirbaq (-a)

- unspecified (perhaps streaked) colour (of cows)

Waraasi (-da)

- glossy brown colour (of cows)

Gorod (-ka)

- black colour of head and shoulders (of sheep and sometimes goats)

Biriir (-ta)

- white or otherwise coloured mark on the forehead (of cows and horses)

Horog (-ga)

- ? black colour of fore part of the body (of cows, sheep and goats)

Galaal (-sha)

- white stripe on the forehead (of horses, cows and sheep)

Oog (-ta)

- ? white spot on the forehead (of cows and horses)

Baraacuud (-ka)

- spotted pattern (of cattle)

Baraashirix or shirix(-a) - spotted pattern (of cattle)

Giirgiir (-ka)

- streaked colour pattern (of cattle)

As already mentioned, the list of terms in both sets is probably not complete, especially as far as cattle colour terms are concerned; but it is already large enough to give us the opportunity to advance a few ideas about the Somali system of colour classification.

2. First of all, I would like to stress that the Somalis, as it is instead the case among other pastoralists of East Africa, like e.g. the Mursi of South-Western Ethiopia (cf. Turton 1980) or the Dinka of Southern Sudan (cf. Lienhardt 1961), do not in principle use cattle colour terms to refer also to colours in general: as we have seen, they have a well developed set of referentially general colour terms, which appear to be independent from cattle colour terms, although some of them can be, and actually are, referred also to cattle colours, just in virtue of their generality of reference. These are, specifically: caddaan, madow, casaan, guduud, cawl, casuuro, casuus, dhiin, boor, caddaansadaf, barabbaro and tiniinix. Some of the cattle colour terms can in their turn be referred also to other objects, but this use is clearly felt as an extension of the terms. The picture seems therefore more similar, for instance, to that described by Whiteley (1973) among the Gusii of Western Kenya, with a set of general colour terms plus several other sets based on various parameters, and with some of the general terms occurring also in the other sets.

The set of general terms is consequently, in a sense, more "powerful" than the set of cattle colour terms (and also than the set of human skin colour terms we are not dealing with here, but to which the same considerations

apply). As we shall see, it also appears to be more open to innovation and modification than the other one, which, on the contrary, is essentially closed and subject to impoverishment more than to expansion through culture contact and social transformation. This is not to say that cattle colour terms are less important than the others in Somali culture: on the contrary, they are essential, for their high information content, in the nomadic environment, but their use tends to be more and more restricted in an urban context, and town-dwellers tend to lose competence in this field. My own informants, although they do not belong to the youngest generation of town-dwellers, and have been born and have lived at least part of their lives in the bush, were not so much self-confident in their answers about cattle colour terms as they were in most cases with general colour terms, and said that "only old men who had spent most of their lives in the bush might give precise information on the matter". This stresses more than I have so far done the necessity of field research in a domain in which resort to deixis and to natural stimuli (both in the sense of "belonging to nature" and of "belonging to one's own cultural environment") are of the greatest importance. This applies particularly, but not only, to cattle colour terms, since my informants showed a certain difficulty also in identifying a "typical example of the colour defined by general term X" in an artificial context. With all these caveats, let's give a closer examination to the two sets of terms.

3. If we look first at the general terms, we can note several things, the most striking of which is that, on 21 terms, only six appear to be correlated with an attributive verb having the same root (no cattle colour term, moreover, shows this correlation). These terms are: cad-daan, "white colour", madow, "black colour", casaan, "red

colour", guduud, "red colour", cawl, "yellow colour", and cagaar, "green colour". We are here confronted with a group of terms which might legitimately aim at being classified as "basic colour terms" in the sense intended by Berlin and Kay (1969; hereafter B./K.), in that they are general in reference and semantically included in no other colour term, they show a certain "distributional potential", and they are also "psychologically relevant" to the informants (they occur in the idiolects of all informants, tend to be quoted at the beginning of a list of colour terms, and show a stable reference). They also seem to satisfy the other criteria fixed by B./K. for a colour term to be considered as basic: they are monolexemic, or at least morphologically not too complex, they are not also the names of objects having the corresponding colour, and are not recent loan words.

No other term in the list presents all these correlations: some of them (casuuro, casuus, dhiin) are "types of red", some (xaycad, bulcad, caddaansadaf) are "types of white"; boor and uuro have as their first meaning that of "dust", and doog that of "new, fresh vegetation"; akhdar is considered by the informants as a "purely Arabic word", and woob as a term used only in the Ogaden region, and perhaps not a Somali word; buluug also means "blue cubes for washing clothes" and is probably derived from English, while huruud means also "saffron" and is not originally a Somali word. All these other terms should therefore, in B./K.'s terms, be classified as "secondary".

If, however, we consider specifically the criterium of "psychological relevance", we can see that, among the "secondary" terms, two stand out with particular relevance: buluug and huruud, which, on this basis, should rather be grouped together with the "basic" terms. We would then have a term for "blue" on the way of winning its place in the map of Somali basic colour terms; but, at the same time,

We would find a second term for "yellow" trying to assert itself in spite of the existence of a previous one, and gaining ground to such a point that it tends to be quoted more than cawl as a term for "yellow". How can we explain this unusual situation? (Remember that the two coexisting terms for "red" are regional variants.)

The present state of my research does not allow me to give a definite answer to this question, but I would like to put forward a hypothesis based on the comparison of the semantic content of the two terms, as far as I have been able to reconstruct it, and on some diachronic hints. The term cawl would then identify an area ranging over some light shades of the warm colours (yellow, light brown) and extending at the same time towards some light shades of the cold colours (from yellow-green to light green): an area, then, of particularly "natural" colours, that is, typically pertaining to the Somali natural environment (for an example of a "naturalistic" colour taxonomy, cf. Conklin 1955). Huruud, on the contrary, identifies an area of very deep yellow, and, in a context of culture contact, might be felt apter to refer to the bright shades of yellow shown by imported goods such as printed fabrics and plastic.

Moreover, cawl appears to have already lost ground on the "green side" of its meaning, since there exists a specific term for "green", cagaar: this (if the information given in the older Somali dictionaries is not wrong) should have until fairly recently meant only "new, fresh vegetation", just as we have already seen for doog; but, unlike doog, cagaar has been asserting itself more and more as a colour term, until reaching the present stage of being considered primarily a colour term, with an extended meaning "green vegetation". What is then left in the meaning of cawl? Apparently (also in agreement with the answers of the informants on this term), it might be on the way of special-

izing a term for "brown", or at least for light shades of brown, since other shades, as we shall see, might be included in other terms.

As far as the status of buluug and huruud is concerned, then, I would like to include them among the basic colour terms, in spite of the fact that they are not yet totally established as such (in particular since they lack correlated attributive verbs such as *buluugan or *huruudan). The map of Somali basic colour terms would then be organized as follows:

- caddaan would cover an area centering in white and extending towards very light shades of colour in general;
- madow would center in black and include dark shades of colour, in particular of green, blue, violet and brown;
- cas and guduud would center in red and include bright shades of other warm colours (orange, reddish brown and perhaps pink);
- cagaar would cover all the bright shades of green;
- buluug all the light and deep shades of blue (and perhaps of violet);
- for cawl and huruud we have already given the hypothetical semantic content.

This map still needs verification, especially in relation to the boundaries of the categories of colour which the various terms identify; this is one of the tasks to be performed in the future stage of field work, but the outline here given should not be too far from reality.

If we now look at the map of Somali basic colour terms given by B./K. in "Basic Colour Terms", we find a different picture: on the basis of their information, the authors classify Somali as a "stage IIIa" language, that is as a language having four basic colour terms, the fourth of which (besides the ones for white, black and red) being a term for green. If my reconstruction of the Somali situation is correct, Somali should instead (in a dia-

chronic perspective) have included a term for yellow, or yellow-green, before than one for green (and have therefore been a "stage IIIb" language), and have subsequently developed a term for green and one for blue. The Somali situation would then correspond more to that depicted in Kay (1975), where, at "stage III" of the evolutionary sequence presented in "Basic Colour Terms", the author introduces two new possible colour categories, the one just for yellow-green and the other for blue-green (GRUE). No matter what the diachronic sequence might have been, anyway, at present Somali should be considered as having not four, but five to seven basic colour terms, depending on if we actually want to include buluug and huruud and treat cawl as a possible term for brown. In B./K.'s terms, Somali would then be a "stage IV to VI" language; in any case, it would appear as undergoing changes in the domain of colour terminology which could only be dealt with in terms of linguistic (synchronic) variation and language (diachronic) change, as exposed in Kay (1975).

4. As for the other set of terms we have considered, that of cattle colour terms, at this stage, as already said, the list is probably far from complete, and it would therefore appear arbitrary to try and draw a map of this sector of the Somali colour terminology. What it is possible to say at present, until further research, especially on the field, is performed, is that this set of terms is divisible in various subsets, depending on if the terms can be referred to one or more kinds of animal. The general colour terms which, as we have seen, occur also in the set of cattle colour terms, can virtually be applied to any kind of animal the Somalis rear, while the others apply to one or more, but never to all kinds, the most idiosyncratic kind being the camel: most of the terms which apply to the camel apply to the camel only. This is of course in agree-

ment with the peculiar status of the camel in Somali culture, which is also reflected in other sectors of the lexicon; but it also depends on the fact that the camels's coat is actually rather different from that of cows, goats and horses, which instead can often share colours and patterns. Several terms, in fact, can equally be referred to cows, goats and horses, while camels only appear to share with these other animals the general terms we have already quoted and, as far as my information goes, the term beey and its compounds. Sheep too are idiosyncratic as to their colour configuration, since the Somali sheep always has black (or dark brown) head and shoulders, and white body; this pattern being invariable, there is only one term referring to it: gorod, "black colour of head and shoulders", which can moreover also apply to goats, when they show the same pattern (about the analogous term horog I have been unable to collect precise information).

If we now return to B./K.'s theory of basic colour terms, we would find ourselves obliged to discard all Somali cattle colour terms as "secondary", since they lack generality of reference. As already said, however, this does not imply that they are less important than general colour terms in Somali culture: on the contrary, they are probably much more significant. Furthermore, it cannot be excluded that, as remarked by Turton (1980:320) among the Mursi, Somali cattle colour terms be used to refer to "...categories of colour and pattern which are universally recognised, even though they may not be universally given and therefore perceived in the experience of all human beings." Further research is required to support this view in relation to Somali, and to confirm the existence of universal elements even in such a culture-bound domain as cattle colour naming: it would then be possible, anyway, as Turton (1980:320) also remarks, to account "...for cross-cultural differences in colour naming without having recourse to the 'strong' evolutionary assumption of Berlin and Kay, according to

whom stages in general evolution of colour lexicons accurately reflect the historical development of individual languages." B./K.'s evolutionary positions could therefore be re-interpreted less automatically, as trends in language which have to take into account particular historical and cultural situations, that can at certain points determine different solutions; and also the author's critics for individuating the basic colour terms might then be considered more elastically, and not as absolute conditions.

5. Many problems are left open after this first summary investigation on Somali colour terminology, but I hope what I have been exposing so far may show the extent and variety of questions raised by research even in such a limited field: linguistic aspects, both synchronic and diachronic, some side by side with cultural, anthropological aspects of referring to the Somalis' world view, and with historical and sociological aspects connected with culture contact and social transformation.

I also hope that, in spite of its incompleteness, this study may offer a contribution on the theoretical question of "linguistic relativism vs. universalism" I have mentioned at the beginning. In my opinion, and as I have tried to show, the two approaches are not incompatible: the search for universal elements in colour taxonomies (as well as in other linguistic and ethnographic domains) does not exclude, but on the contrary presupposes, a "culturalist" (relativistic) study of the aspect at issue. This not only as a starting point, in order to later curtail the most culture-bound aspects, but also in order to give a fuller and richer value to the search for universals, showing how certain trends in human thought meet, clash with, and merge with, concrete historical and cultural elements, leading to an original, though sharing in universal factors, creation.

In the case of colour taxonomy, this applies not only

to the question of basic colour terms, and their eventual evolutionary sequence, but also to the other possible co-existing chromatic classifications (an example of which is provided by cattle colour terms): it is not to be taken for granted that the basic terminology as such be more important than the others, and even in the others it should anyway be possible to identify classificatory principles analogous to those operating in the basic terminology. It is this fact, in my opinion, which is scientifically of the greatest interest, beyond any consideration on what may be the basic colour terminology of a language.

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