

FIVE YEARS OF WRITTEN SOMALI: A REPORT ON PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS

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For the last five years Somali has been in a state of rapid development, and it seems appropriate at this point to take stock, and to make an assessment of the changes which have taken place and of the present position.

Until 1972 the Somali language had no official orthography and no official status in public life. Although unofficial methods of writing Somali had been in use for some fifty years or more, their use was limited to a small fraction of the population of the country. From time immemorial the Somali people have had a beautiful and vigorous oral literature, dominated by alliterative poetry, but its riches were in danger of gradual erosion and eventual oblivion.¹

This unfortunate state of affairs caused by the political deadlock over the choice of script, was finally resolved by the Supreme Revolutionary Council and the Council of Secretaries by their historic decision announced on 21st October 1972, the third anniversary of the Revolution. Somali then became the sole official language of the country, and plans were announced for introducing it into schools as the medium of instruction.²

One might venture to use the term 'the Somali miracle' if one considers the sudden transformation of the country from national illiteracy to a leading position in the whole continent of Africa as far as concerns the use of the paternal language in education and public life, a transformation which has taken only five years. Before 1972 it was very difficult to have a serious discussion in Somali on any subject involving science, mathematics or technology, without recourse to lengthy circumlocutions. Now such a discussion is possible with the same ease as in English or any other language, provided naturally, the participants know the subject matter and the requisite terminology in Somali.

There are of course limits, and as yet there is no Somali vocabulary for highly advanced levels of science and mathematics, but it is already possible to use Somali for describing complicated calculations which involve the use of trigonometry, algebra, logarithms and the set theory in new mathematics. Even in the sphere of linguistics we have no need to grope for basic terms, since two handbooks of grammar and a college handbook of Somali phonetics have been published.³ There are schoolbooks in Somali to supply educational needs up to the first year of secondary school. Textbooks for the remaining three years of secondary education are either already in the press or are in preparation, and textbooks now exist for technical schools and adult education.⁴

The change has also involved developments in the fields of literature and history. Several works have been published containing collections of oral poems, obtained from poetry-reciters, together with biographies of the poets. New poetry and prose have appeared both in book form and in periodicals, and research into Somali history has already resulted in a number of publications.⁵ Schoolbooks also contain excerpts from Somali literature, with background notes and glossaries of the poetic or archaic vocabulary which might be unfamiliar to young people brought up in towns.

The credit for these developments is without doubt due in the first place to the farsighted policy of the Somali government and their decision to divert a large part of the economic resources of the country to that purpose. At the creative levels, the implementation of this policy would not have been possible without the enthusiasm, hard work and undoubted talent and ingenuity of the people who created the new vocabulary and modernized the language. Among them the staff of the Ministry of Education and Youth Training, especially those working in the Curriculum Department, and the academic staff of the National University can be said to have laid the foundations for a system of education through the use of the mother tongue. No less important has been the contribution of the Somali language Commission, who coordinate vocabulary expansion on a national scale, and the Academy of Culture, who have already published two dictionaries, two grammars and a sizeable number of literary and historical texts, and who are entrusted with the collecting of the research into oral literature and other aspects of the Somali national heritage.⁶ Individual specialists throughout the various ministries, government departments, autonomous agencies and the armed forces have all contributed to the modernisation of Somali by providing the requisite terminology.

The success of this vocabulary expansion is to a large extent due to the wisdom of the principles applied to word-coining and borrowing. The general tendency is to invent new words, using as raw material the existing roots and derivational suffixes, for example:

saddexagal 'triangle' (saddex 'three',
xagal 'bend, angle')
isuugeyn 'addition' (is 'each other',
u 'to', geyn 'bringing')
lagajibbaarane 'square' labajibbaar
'twice', -an /participial suffix/;
-e /agentive suffix/ - thus suggesting
the meaning 'something that is
in some way doubled', the reference
being to the measuring of its area).

Sometimes the new terms are taken from the ordinary language and given a scientific meaning, e.g. jajjab 'fraction', which in the ordinary language means 'something broken into fragments', or eadaadiska hawada 'atmospheric pressure', which simply means 'the pressing down of the air'. The aim of using the Somali roots and derivational suffixes in vocabulary expansion is to provide mnemonic links between the ordinary and the scientific language, and this has apparently proved of considerable advantage in teaching. It is not carried to extremes, however, and some international terms which do not lend themselves easily to translation are simply adapted to Somali phonology: thus we have taanjent for 'tangent', kosayn for 'cosine' and logandam for 'logarithm'.

The progress which has been achieved so far provides grounds for an optimistic forecast for the future. If the present rate of progress is maintained for the next ten years, the modernization of the language could reach a point when Somali could become the normal medium of instruction at university level. Somali has already become, in this respect, a model for imitation and emulation by other countries of the African continent, and several educationalists showed interest in her achievements at the XIVth International Seminar on Language and Education in Africa, held in Kinshasa last December.

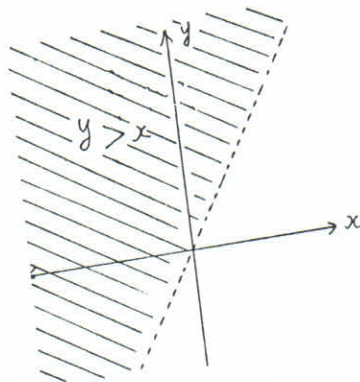
Paradoxically enough, the progress in the use of Somali in education and public life has intensified the need for a large core of Somali scholars, technologists and government officials who have a high level of knowledge of foreign languages. The strengthening of the existing core will soon become a pressing necessity, in order to feed into the Somali educational system the most up-to-date knowledge which originates from outside centres of learning, and to provide government departments and industry with a constant flow of reliable technical and scientific information. Intensive training in Italian is given already to science, medicine and technology students before they enter the university, and similar courses are now planned in other languages. Since the introduction of Somali as an official language, the recommendations and reports prepared by foreign technical experts have to pass into the channels of communication in which Somali is used, in order to reach the level of implementation. The feedback of information from the areas of implementation has to be presented to the experts, and this again involves a change in the linguistic medium. Eventually, of course, the need for foreign experts will diminish as Somalia develops a large cadre of her own specialists.

The position of the Somali language in its new, transformed state must also be seen in the wider perspective of the international scene today.

Thus it seems that, with the exception of languages with really gigantic numbers of speakers, all countries of the world are moving slowly to at least some degree of bilingualism or multilingualism among those sections of the community who have received higher education. At the same time there is no move anywhere in the world to diminish the role of patril languages in the national life, in education and in the arts. In fact, quite the opposite is the case, and there is growing awareness in many countries, especially those of the African continent, that the extensive use of patril languages is indispensable in education, literary activity and a development of a sense of clear group identity and self-confidence in dealing with the outside world.

NOTES

1. For bibliographical and other information concerning Somali oral literature see Johnson 1969 and 1973, and Andrzejewski 1975.
2. For an account of these events and bibliographical information see Andrzejewski 1974 and Omar Osman Mohamed 1975.
3. The handbooks of grammar are Cabdullaahi Xaaji Maxamuud Insaaniya and others 1973, and Shire Jaamac Axmed 1976. The handbook of phonetics is Maxamed Xaaji Xuseen Raabi 1977.
4. All schoolbooks in Somalia are now published by the Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education and Youth Training (Xafiiska Manaa-hijta, Wasaaradda Waxbarashada iyo Barbaarinta). Adult education materials are published by the Adult Education Department (Xarunta Waxbarashada Dadka Waaweyn) of the same Ministry. Some of the practical handbooks are published by the appropriate government departments and autonomous agencies, mainly for the use of their staff and of the public directly involved in various development and training schemes. The initial pioneering work in the preparation of schoolbooks was undertaken, however, by the Somali Language Commission (Guddiga Af Soomaaliga) between 1971 and 1973.
5. For an account of these developments see Andrzejewski 1975. The bibliographies given there should be supplemented by the following items: two works on history by Axmed Faarax Ibraahin (1975) and Jaamac Cumar Ciise (1976), and a work on the philosophy of the Somali Revolution by President Maxamed Siyaad Barre (1976).
6. The two dictionaries are: Cabdulqaadir F. Bootan (ed.) 1976 and Yaasiin C. Keenadiid 1976. For other items see references given in Notes 1 and 3.



Marka aan haysanno dhelli toosan oo ay la socoto sum-madda isle'egkaanshuhu sida $y \geq x$ ama $y \leq x$, xarriiqdu way ku jirtaa garaafka. Haddii aanay la soconse sida $y > x$ ama $y < x$, xarriiqdu kuma jirto garaafka. Marka ay ku jirto xarriiqdu garaafka waxa lagu muujiyaa xarriiq ishaysata; marka kalana xarriiq googo'an.

Tusaale 1:

Sawir garaafka dheelligan toosan $2x - y < 3$.

Furfuris:

U beddel dheelliga toosan mid ay isu dhigmaan sida:

$$2x - y < 3$$

$$-y < 3 - 2x$$

$$y > 2x - 3$$

Sawir garaafka isle'egta toosan ee ah $y = 2x - 3$, ku muuji xarriiq googo'an.

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