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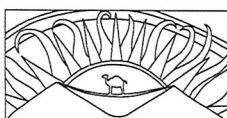
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Grammatical Gender and Number in Somali Nouns¹

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Abstract

In many of the existing textbooks and pedagogical grammars of Somali, issues related to the gender and number of nouns are presented in rather complex ways. In my experience, these descriptions and explanations are often perceived as difficult by learners of Somali grammar, both Somali speakers and foreign language learners.

I therefore argue in this article that it is possible to present the same facts in a simpler and yet precise manner. The formation of the plural of most Somali nouns, the indefinite as well as the definite form, can be handled by just a few straight-forward principles, but in order to do so, it is also necessary to carefully reconsider which forms are really plurals and which forms are actually singular forms of collective nouns.

Other closely related issues that are discussed in the article are gender polarity, uncountable nouns, *pluralia tantum*, mass nouns and corporate nouns, as well as the agreement of verbs and pronouns with nouns.

¹ I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the more than 50 students, all L1 speakers of Somali, in the Somali mother tongue teachers programme at the University of Gothenburg, for the many enlightening discussions and remarks during our grammar classes in 2014/2015 and 2015/2016. Abbreviations: coll. = collective; def. = definite; f. = feminine; indef. = indefinite; m. = masculine; pl. = plural; sg. = singular; sgtv. = singulative.

1 Introduction

Somali has two genders, masculine and feminine, and two numbers, singular and plural. It has two morphemes expressing definiteness, {k} and {t}.² Each morpheme is traditionally tightly associated with one gender, {k} with masculine gender and {t} with feminine gender. The actual realisation of these morphemes depends on the stem-final phoneme: {k} is realised as either /k/, /g/, /h/ or zero, whereas {t} is realised as either /t/, /d/, /d̥/ or /s/.

The same two morphemes are used both in the singular and in the plural, and the majority of Somali nouns take the opposite morpheme in the plural compared to the morpheme that they take in the singular. This is traditionally interpreted as a change of gender so that the plural form of a noun has the opposite gender when compared to the singular form of the same noun. For this phenomenon, the notion of GENDER POLARITY is applied, explicitly or implicitly, in most descriptions of Somali grammar, meaning that all nouns that are feminine and take the article {t} in the singular become masculine and take the article {k} in the plural, whereas most nouns that are masculine and take the article {k} in the singular become feminine and take the article {t} in the plural. Only a smaller group of nouns, which are masculine in the singular, remain masculine also in the plural and hence take the article {k} irrespective of their number. This means that a distinct gender value has to be associated with the plural form of nouns, and that the definite article is then assigned according to the plural gender of each specific noun (El-Solami-Mewis (1988), Saeed (1999: 54–5), Berchem (2012: 48–9) among others). Lecarme (2002), however, suggests that the gender value is instead associated with the individual plural morphemes and that it is the plural morpheme that bears the gender value in the plural forms of nouns, not the nouns themselves.

This standard point of view is illustrated in Table 1. It is applied in practically all modern reference works on Somali grammar, also by Moreno (1955), Saeed (1993), Maxamed X. Raabbi (1994),

²Curly brackets indicate underlying morphemes that are realised differently in different phonological contexts.

Puglielli and Abdalla Omar Mansur (1999), Omer Haji Bile Aden (2009), Alejnikov (2012) and others.

Table 1: Gender polarity: the traditional view of gender in Somali nouns

	SINGULAR	PLURAL	
FEMININE	{t}	{k}	MASCULINE
MASCULINE	{k}	{t}	FEMININE

The horizontal line in the middle of the table is discontinuous as some nouns are masculine in both numbers.

In Section 2, I will however argue that the form of the plural definite article is morphologically predictable without reference to plural gender. The exact principles for the distribution of the definite article suffixes in the plural will be discussed in detail in Section 4.

2 Plural gender

Two basic questions for the description of Somali gender and number are: What purposes does the gender value in nouns serve in the description of Somali? Is there an actual need for a specific gender value in plural nouns?

Of course, for nouns in the singular, the gender value of a noun is indispensable in order to choose the correct agreement form of pronouns and verbs, as well as to choose the correct form of the definite article suffix to be added to the noun itself. In the plural, however, the gender value is not needed in order to choose a specific agreement form for pronouns or verbs, as no gender distinction exists in the plural forms of pronouns and verbs, as shown in Table 2. There exist other tenses and moods of verbs and other types of pronouns, besides those listed in the table. The pattern, however, remains the same. The important point is that there is not a single category in

which we find a gender distinction in the plural. This is typologically quite a common pattern which is also found in languages such as Russian, Swedish and German.

Table 2: Morphological exponents of agreement in Somali

			SG	PL
VERBS	Present indicative	M	-aa	
		F	-taa	-aan
	Past indicative	M	-ay	
		F	-tay	-een
	Present subjunctive	M	-o	
		F	-to	-aan
PRONOUNS	Reduced personal	M	uu	
		F	ay	ay
	Full personal	M	isaga	
		F	iyada	iyaga
	Demonstrative	M	kan	
		F	tan	kuwan
	Possessive	M	-iis	
		F	-eed	-ood

The only reason to define a specific gender value for the plural form of nouns differing from the gender value in the singular is therefore to provide the means to correctly choose the appropriate definite article to be added to the noun itself in the plural.

If we consider how the gender value of a plural noun is established,

there are various possibilities. Either the plural gender value is simply encoded in the lexicon alongside the singular gender value or it is established on the basis of the form of the definite article, the form of the plural suffix, or some other information about the noun, such as its singular gender and the form of the word's stem.

If the plural gender is encoded in the lexicon, this would mean that evident grammatical regularities are not captured in the grammar, but encoded in the lexicon as if plural gender were unpredictable. This would not be an economical way of describing Somali as it would load the lexicon and the speakers' memory with huge amounts of information that could easily be handled by a number of morphological rules.

If the plural gender value is instead established on the basis of the form of the plural definite article, and the sole purpose of ascribing a plural gender value is to predict the correct form of the definite article, we end up with circular reasoning: if we already know the definite form, we do not need the gender value to be able to generate this very form! Furthermore, the plural definite form would either have to be encoded in the lexicon or formed according to grammatical rules. Encoding the plural definite article in the lexicon would be just as uneconomical as encoding the plural gender.

Finally, if we assume that the plural gender can be deduced from other information present in the noun and that the purpose of ascribing the plural gender is solely to predict the correct form of the plural definite article, then the question arises as to why the plural definite article cannot instead be directly predicted based on the very information that is used in order to predict the plural gender. Why would we need to take this superfluous extra step via the gender value if we do not need the gender value for any other purpose?

Support for this point of view is also found in the typological literature. Elaborating the claim made by Hockett (1958: 231) that gender is 'reflected in the behavior of associated words', Corbett (2013: 89–90) states that the

relevant 'reflection' in the associated words is agreement [...]. No amount of marking on a noun can prove that the language has a gender system; the evidence that nouns

have gender values in a given language lies in the agreement targets which show gender.

This is exactly the problem with the traditional description of plural gender in Somali. In the plural we do not find any trace of agreement in gender in other parts of speech, hence there is no reason to talk about gender in the plural. It is only in the singular that Somali exhibits gender agreement, and it is only this gender value that constitutes the necessary information to be encoded lexically in the noun. This gender value can be assumed to be stable, i.e. it may also be considered to be present in the plural. It will, however, not be referred to by any grammatical rule.

Therefore, I will instead argue that the form of the plural definite article may be in a straightforward manner predicted based on a noun's singular gender and its morphophonological characteristics. I will discuss in more detail the formation of the indefinite plural of nouns in Section 3 and then the choice of the definite plural article in Section 4.

3 The indefinite plural form of nouns

For the correct choice of the plural morpheme, the gender of the singular noun is crucial.

Regular feminine nouns fall into two main categories, as shown in Table 3. Those ending in *-o* in the singular will end in *-ooyin* in the plural, as in (a). Other nouns will add *-o* in the plural, as in (b-f). If the stem ends in *-i*, */y/* is inserted before the ending to avoid hiatus, as in (c). It should also be noted that a small number of nouns have a stem that differs from the singular surface form. The stem becomes evident in the plural, but because the stem ends in a consonant cluster, this stem-final cluster must be divided by an epenthetic vowel in the singular, as in (d). Most often the epenthetic vowel is a copy of the vowel in the root of the word, but there are individual exceptions, as in (e). Finally, stem-final */m/* or */k/* will be realised as */n/* and */g/* in the singular, as in (f), as Somali words may not end with */m/* or */k/*.

Table 3: Examples of the plural formation of feminine nouns

(a)	hooyo	'mother'	hooyooyin
	dhalo	'bottle'	dhalooyin
(b)	kab	'shoe'	kabo
	kubbad	'ball'	kubbado
(c)	mind	'knife'	mindiy
	koofi	'hat'	koofiyo
(d)	gabadh	'girl'	gabdho
	dhibic	'drop'	dhibco
(e)	xubin	'bodypart'	xubno
(f)	maalin	'day'	maalmo

Regular masculine nouns fall into three main categories, as shown in Table 4.

Those ending in *-e* in the singular will end in *-ayaa*l in the plural, as in (a). Those having only one syllable in the singular will form their plural by reduplication, which means that the last consonant of the stem is repeated after an intervening /a/, as in (b). Other masculine nouns will add *-o* in the plural, as in (c-h).

A small number of nouns have a stem that differs from the singular indefinite form. This is so because the stem ends with a consonant cluster. The stem becomes evident in the plural, but this stem-final cluster must be divided by an epenthetic vowel in the singular, as word-final clusters are not allowed in Somali. Such nouns simply add *-o* in the plural, as in (c). Most often the epenthetic vowel in the singular is simply a copy of the vowel in the root of the word, but there are individual exceptions, as in (d). Also, stem-final /m/ or /k/ will be realised as /n/ and /g/ in the singular, as in (e), because Somali words may not end with /m/ or /k/.

If instead the stem ends in a single consonant, the plural suffix will be reinforced. This reinforcement is realised in two different ways. In principle, if the final single consonant is *b*, *d*, *l* or *n* (m)³ or *r*, this

³Somali syllables do not end in /m/. This means that /m/ that would be word-final is replaced by /n/, but when an ending is added to such a word, /m/

Table 4: Examples of the plural formation of masculine nouns

(a)	aabbe	'father'	aabbayaal
	fure	'key'	furayaal
(b)	miis	'table'	miisas
	bas	'bus'	basas
	qoys	'family'	qoysas
	dal	'country'	dalal
(c)	jilib	'knee'	jilbo
	xaraf	'letter of the alphabet'	xarfo
(d)	xarig	'rope'	xargo
(e)	ilig	'tooth'	ilko
(f)	aqal	'house'	aqallo
	albaab	'door'	albaabbo
	gambar	'stool'	gambarro
	xayawaan	'animal'	xayawaanno
(g)	dhinac	'side'	dhinacyo
	barnaamij	'programme'	barnaamijyo
	libaax	'lion'	libaaxyo
	yaxaas	'crocodile'	yaxaasyo
(h)	abti	'uncle (maternal)'	abtiyo ^a
	derbi	'wall'	derbiyo

^a There is also a frequent, irregular form: abtiyaal.

consonant is doubled, as in (f), but if the final single consonant is another phoneme, /y/ is inserted between the stem and the plural -o, as in (g). Also, if the stem ends in the vowel -i, /y/ is inserted before the ending to avoid hiatus, as in (h).

As in practically every language, there are of course a small number of exceptions, some of which are listed in Table 5.

Certain exceptions form small groups, as in (a & b), whereas others are simply individual exceptions, as in (c & d).

The most prominent group of exceptions are some masculine nouns with only one syllable in the stem, which contains a long vowel. These

is able to reappear.

Table 5: Some examples of irregular plural formation

(a)	geed (M)	‘tree’	geedo
	gees (M)	‘horn’	geeso
	naas (M)	‘breast’	naaso
(b)	wax (M)	‘thing’	waxyaalo/waxyaabo
	si (F)	‘manner’	siyaalo/siyaabo
(c)	walaal (M/F)	‘sibling’	walaalo
(d)	buug (M)	‘book’	buugaag

nouns exceptionally do not take the expected reduplication but simply add the suffix *-o*, as in (a), without any reinforcement of the stem-final single consonant.

4 The definite plural form of nouns

As shown in Section 2, Somali does not exhibit any gender agreement distinctions in the plural in any associated words. There is therefore no reason to define the gender of a noun in the plural. The form of the plural definite article is instead easily predictable on morphophonological grounds. The singular gender and the syllabic structure of the noun are enough to make the right choice.

All feminine plural nouns take the definite article {k}, as shown in Table 6.

It is realised as /k/ after the suffix *-ooyin*, as in (a), and as /h/ after the suffix *-o*, as in (b), while the plural suffix itself changes to /a/ as it is no longer word-final.

The choice of the plural definite article for masculine nouns depends mainly on the length of the noun, as shown in Table 7.

Indefinite masculine plural forms with only two syllables take the definite article {k}, which is realised in the same way as in the singular for nouns with reduplication, as in (a), and as /h/ after the suffix *-o*, which itself becomes /a/ as it is no longer word-final, as in (b).

Indefinite masculine plural forms with more than two syllables take the definite article {t}, which is realised as /d/ after the suffix

Table 6: Examples of the formation of the definite plural of feminine nouns

(a)	hooyooyin	'mothers'	hooyooyinka
	dhalooyin	'bottles'	dhalooyinka
(b)	kabo	'shoes'	kabaha
	kubbado	'balls'	kubbadaha
	mindiyoo	'knives'	mindiyaha
	gabdhoo	'girls'	gabdhaha
	xubno	'body parts'	xubnaha
	maalmoo	'days'	maalmaha

-o, which itself becomes /a/, as in (c), whereas it is realised as /ʃ/ after the suffix -yaa1, leading to the loss of the preceding /l/, as in (d).

As can be expected, there are some exceptions, some of which are listed in Table 8.

In particular, there is a small group of monosyllabic masculine nouns with a long vowel in the root and a stem ending in /l/. As expected, they form their plural by reduplication. These nouns, however, take the definite article {t}, which is realised as /ʃ/, as in (a), possibly under the influence of the very large group of words with the suffix -ayaa1, exemplified under (d) in Table 7.

Hence, the main principles for the choice of the plural definite article are as follows: (1) feminine nouns take the definite article {k} in the plural, (2) masculine nouns take the definite article {k} in the plural if the indefinite plural form contains only two syllables, whereas (3) longer masculine nouns take the definite article {t} in the plural.

Therefore, instead of the traditional view, referred to as GENDER POLARITY, presented above in Table 1, I propose a simpler interpretation of the definite articles and the gender system, as shown in Table 9. This analysis of the Somali gender system and its morphological exponents of definiteness is typologically uncontroversial. The notion of polarity may of course still be applied, but if so, only in order to

Table 7: Examples of the formation of the definite plural of masculine nouns

(a)	miisas	'tables'	miisaska
	basas	'buses'	basaska
	qoysas	'families'	qoysaska
	dalal	'countries'	dalalka
(b)	geedo	'trees'	geedaha
	geeso	'horns'	geesaha
	naaso	'breasts'	naasaha
	jilbo	'knees'	jilbaha
(c)	aqallo	'houses'	aqallada
	albaabbo	'doors'	albaabbada
	saaxiibbo	'friends'	saaxiibbada
	yaxaasyo	'crocodiles'	yaxaasyada
(d)	aabbayaal	'fathers'	aabbayaasha
	furayaal	'keys'	furayaasha

refer to the morphological exponents of definiteness.⁴

5 Singular or plural?

In textbooks and reference grammars of Somali there is sometimes slight variation with regard to whether certain forms are treated as singular or plural. The general obstacle is obviously the fact that there may at times be a difference between a word's form and its meaning, i.e. between the grammatical number and the number of persons or objects that the form refers to.

In order to avoid such confusion, the grammatical number of a word, i.e. whether the word should be treated as grammatically sin-

⁴Already when the concept of gender polarity was newly coined, Speiser (1938) objected to this idea when he discussed the general interrelationship between feminine derivational morphology, collectivity and plurality in Afroasiatic languages in general, giving numerous examples from Arabic and Hebrew.

Table 8: Some examples of irregular formation of the definite plural of nouns

(a)	wiilal	'boys'	wiilasha
	geelal	'herds of camels'	geelasha
	ceelal	'wells'	ceelasha
	baalal	'feathers, wings'	baalasha
	suulal	'thumbs'	suulasha
	buulal	'huts, nests'	buulasha
<hr/>			
(b)	buugaag	'books'	buugaagta

Table 9: Polarity of the exponents of definiteness in Somali nouns

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
FEMININE	{t}	{k}
MASCULINE	{k}	{t}

gular or plural, should be based on purely grammatical criteria, not on the meaning of the word. The most practical way of handling this situation is to define the number of a noun on the basis of its form. A noun is singular if it has no plural morpheme, and plural if it has a plural morpheme.

As we shall see, there might however be some disagreement on the possible nature of a plural morpheme. In particular, there are several nouns with a collective form that has traditionally been interpreted as a plural form. These will be discussed in 5.4.1 and 5.4.2. There are also several nouns with an Arabic plural form with a somewhat unclear status in Somali. These nouns will be discussed below in 5.4.3.

5.1 Countables and uncountables

Besides the distinction between the singular and plural forms of nouns, there is also an important distinction to be made between nouns that have both a singular and a plural form and those that do not have both of these forms. The nouns that have both forms are referred to as countable nouns, whereas the nouns with only one number are referred to as uncountable nouns.

5.2 Types of uncountables

In Somali nearly all uncountable nouns are singular nouns, but there are some exceptions.

5.2.1 Pluralia tantum

Two Somali nouns have a plural form but no singular form. That the forms are actually plurals is confirmed by their agreement patterns in verbs and pronouns. They always agree in the plural, as in 1.

- (1) Waxa ay tagtay meel ay biyo ku jiraan.
She went to a place where there is water.

Also, the definite article would not be expected to be /h/ if the words were singular, as singular nouns ending in -o are feminine and take the definite article /d/. These kinds of plural uncountable nouns are typologically not unusual and are generally referred to as PLURALIA TANTUM.

Table 10: The two *pluria tantum* in Somali

biyo	'water'	biyaha
caano	'milk'	caanaha

Apart from these two nouns, there are two other words that often trigger plural agreement, namely wax 'something' and maxay 'what', as in 2.

- (2) a. Ma dareentay in *ay wax khaldanyihiiin*
Did you feel that something was wrong?
- b. *Maxaa aad u malaynaysaa in ay ku dhaceen waraabihii?*
What do you think happened to the hyena?

These words, however, lack a plural morpheme and they may also trigger agreement in the singular. This unexpected agreement is therefore best explained by the fact that in the above example both of these words function as pronouns, and not as nouns. Of course, there is also the noun *wax* 'thing' that will trigger the expected agreement in the singular.

5.2.2 Mass nouns

Many uncountable nouns, including the two *pluralia tantum* just mentioned, i.e. *biyo* 'water' and *caano* 'milk', denote a substance that cannot be directly counted with numerals such as two, three, four etc. Instead, they have to be measured with the help of different kinds of units of measurement, e.g. 'a kilo of ...', 'a litre of ...', 'a metre of ...', 'a bottle of ...', 'a box of ...', 'a package of ...'. Such nouns are referred to as MASS NOUNS. Some examples include *bur* 'flour', *bun* 'coffee', *saliid* 'oil', *ciid* 'sand' and *sonkor* 'sugar'. Verbs and pronouns which agree with a mass noun, other than *biyo* 'water' and *caano* 'milk', are always in the singular, as in 3.

- (3) ...Haddii maalintii la cabbo hal qasac oo cabbitaan
sonkortu ku *jiro* ...
...if every day you drink a can of soda in which there is sugar
...

5.2.3 Collective nouns

In many languages a certain variation can be observed in the agreement pattern of verbs and other words that refer to certain types of nouns. Sometimes the agreement is in the singular, sometimes in the plural. This type of variation occurs, for instance, in both English and Swedish with words such as 'the team', as shown in 4.

- (4) a. The team *is* friendly.
 b. The team *are* friendly.

Such variation is typologically interesting and motivates a distinction between two types of agreement, defined by Corbett (2000: 187) as SYNTACTIC agreement, which is determined by the grammatical form of a noun, and SEMANTIC agreement, which is determined by the semantic meaning of a noun. Typologically, there are certain types of nouns that typically trigger this kind of variation.

The most important type of nouns triggering this variation in agreement in a number of languages are COLLECTIVE NOUNS. Corbett (2000: 118–9) applies the term ‘collective’ to a noun to indicate that it is ‘referring to a group of items considered together rather than a number of items considered individually. [...] The primary function of collectives is to specify the cohesion of a group’. Most of the Somali nouns exhibiting variation in their agreement patterns can be included in this category, e.g. *dad* ‘people’, *dhallinyaro* ‘youngsters’, *carruur* ‘children’, *lo* ‘cattle’, *dhir* ‘plants’, *geelley* ‘camel owners, camel drivers’, *quraanjo* ‘ants’, *rag* ‘men’, *dumar* ‘women’ etc., for which agreement occurs both in the singular and the plural, as shown in 5.

- (5) a. Maxaa ay *carruurtu* ugu *tukataa* safafka dambe ee masaajidka?
 Why do children pray in the rear rows of the mosque?
 b. Maxaa ay arki *karaan carruurtu*?
 What can the children see?

The collective noun *carruur* ‘children’ is itself grammatically singular, as it has no plural ending. It may therefore trigger syntactic agreement in the singular, as in 5a, but more often it triggers semantic agreement in the plural, as in 5b. It is also an uncountable noun, as it only occurs in one number, the singular, without a corresponding plural form.

5.3 Types of countables

Countable nouns, i.e. nouns that have both a singular and a plural form, also fall into a few different categories with respect to their agreement patterns, and this may at times also cause uncertainty about their number values. More specifically, the singular form is sometimes mistaken for a plural form when it triggers semantic agreement in the plural.

5.3.1 Corporate nouns

The notion of collective nouns is often used in a very broad sense, regardless of whether a noun is countable or uncountable. However, in order to clearly distinguish between the relevant types of nouns in Somali, one should consider using the term ‘collective’ only when referring to uncountable nouns, and use another term for the type of countable nouns that are in some respects similar to the collective uncountables.

The nouns in question are called CORPORATE NOUNS by Corbett (2000: 188), and he defines them as ‘nouns which are singular morphologically and (typically) have a normal plural and yet, when singular, may take plural agreement’, i.e. the singular form of such nouns may trigger both syntactic agreement in the singular and semantic agreement in the plural. For example, in 6a we find the singular noun *qoyskiisu* ‘his family’ with the plural predicate verb *dhaqdaan* ‘breed’ and the plural subject pronoun *ay* ‘they’. The verb and the pronoun could, however, just as well have been in the masculine singular, like the predicate verb *yahay* ‘is’ and the subject pronoun *uu* ‘he, it’ in 6b.

- (6) a. *Faarax qoyskiisu waxa ay dhaqdaan geel.*
 Faarax’s family breeds camels.
- b. *Qoyskiisu waxa uu ka kooban yahay shan ruux.*
 His family consists of five persons.

Corporate nouns typically denote sets or groups of persons, animals or objects, and some further examples of such Somali nouns are found in Table 11.

Table 11: Somali corporate nouns

SG.INDEF		SG.DEF	PL.INDEF	PL.DEF
qoys	'family'	qoys-ka	qoys-as	qoysas-ka
koox	'group, team'	koox-da	koox-o	kooxa-ha
geel	'herd of camels'	geel-a ^a	geel-al	geela-sha

^a This noun is unique in realising the definite article {k} as zero in the singular.

5.4 Combinations of the above categories

The above types of nouns also enter into different types of semantic relations with each other, so that there is sometimes both a noun with a regular plural form and a collective noun with more or less the same meaning.

5.4.1 Nouns with three forms

A number of nouns are traditionally claimed to express number merely by means of a change in gender. This group of nouns, which has been called 'the 5th declension' by Saeed (1993: 134), Saeed (1999: 61) and Orwin (1995: 48), includes for instance the word *dibi* 'ox'. The form *díbiga* 'the ox', with a penultimate tonal accent on the stem, is masculine singular, whereas the form *dibída* 'the oxen', with a final tonal accent on the stem, is traditionally considered feminine plural. However, with the form *dibída* 'the oxen', a variation can be observed in the agreement patterns with verbs. They may occur in the plural or in the feminine singular, as in 7.

- (7) a. *Dibidu waa ay daaqayaan.*
 The oxen are grazing.
- b. *Dibidu waa ay daaqaysaa.*
 The oxen are grazing.

In 7a, the noun *dibidu* 'the oxen' is followed by the predicate verb *daaqayaan* 'are grazing' in the plural, whereas it may equally well, as in 7b, be followed by the verb form *daaqaysaa* in the feminine singular. This variation in agreement between the plural and the

singular has been taken as evidence that plural forms like *dibída* ‘the oxen’ must be feminine, as the singular agreement is in the feminine gender (Hetzron (1972: 259–60), Zwicky and Pullum (1983: 391–3), Lecarme (2002: 134–7)). The reason, however, for having singular verb agreement with a plural noun, as in 7b, is not made clear.

At the beginning of Section 5, I argued that nouns without an explicit plural morpheme should be considered singular, hence the question is whether the form *dibída* ‘the oxen’ is actually feminine singular or feminine plural. If it were plural, it would be difficult to explain the verb agreement in the feminine singular. However, if it is actually feminine singular, as predicted by the fact that it has no overt plural morpheme, it is natural that syntactic agreement may trigger the singular on verbs, whereas plural agreement can readily be explained as semantic agreement, as the meaning of the feminine singular collective form *dibída* ‘the oxen’ is the concept of several animals seen as a coherent group. A more detailed argumentation in favour of the standpoint that such feminine forms are not plurals, but instead feminine singular collective nouns, can be found in Nilsson (2016).

Puglielli and Ciise Mohamed Siyaad (1984: 82) also state that plurals of this type have been recategorised as collectives; however, despite this statement they refrain from actually treating these forms as singulars. Also Puglielli and Abdalla Omar Mansur (1999) treat such forms as plurals.

Finally, it is important to point out a fact that is often not made clear enough in the literature, namely that most of the nouns in the 5th declension also have a completely regular plural form with an overt plural morpheme, as shown in Table 12.

The feminine form without a plural morpheme is just one of two possible ways of expressing more or less the same semantic content.

The type of nouns found in the 5th declension is thus highly interesting, as these nouns exhibit a singular, a regular plural and a collective singular form based on the very same root. The number of such noun stems is just a couple of dozen, but interestingly enough some newer words, often not mentioned in the literature, have also found their way into this group, e.g. the Arabic loanword *baabuur*

Table 12: Somali nouns with both a plural and a collective form

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
M	díbi-ga	'the ox'	dibi-yá-da	'the oxen'
F.COLL	dibí-da	'the oxen'		
M	baabúur-ka	'the car'	baabuur-rá-da	'the cars'
F.COLL	baabuúr-ta	'the cars'		
M	búug-ga	'the book'	buug-aág-ta ^a	'the books'
F.COLL	buúg-ta	'the books'		
M	túug-ga	'the thief'	tuug-á-da	'the thieves'
F.COLL	tuúg-ta	'the thieves'		

^a This irregular form is much more frequent than the regular buugággá.

'car', as well as the English loanword buug 'book'.

5.4.2 Suppletive collective forms

Many ordinary countable nouns with a singular and a plural form have a semantically corresponding collective noun based on a totally different root. A number of such nouns are listed in Table 13.

Table 13: Different lexemes for collective and individualising meanings

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
F	naag-ta	'the woman'	naag-a-ha	'the women'
M.COLL	dumar-ka	'the women'		
M	nin-ka	'the man'	nim-an-ka	'the men'
M.COLL	rag-ga	'the men'		
M	wíil-ka	'the boy'	wíil-a-sha	'the boys'
F	gabadh-a	'the girl'	gabdh-a-ha	'the girls'
F.COLL	carruur-ta	'the children'		

5.4.3 Arabic plural forms

There are also many nouns that take Arabic plural forms and exhibit the type of variation already mentioned in their agreement patterns, i.e. they may trigger agreement in verbs and pronouns both in the singular and in the plural, as shown in 8.

- (8) a. Warqadaha daawooyinka ee *dhakhaatiirtu qorto...*
 Prescriptions for medications that doctors write...
- b. ...daawooyinka *dhakhaatiirtu u qoraan dadka bukaanka ah.*
 ...medications that doctors prescribe to people who are ill.

Such forms include both nouns with an Arabic plural suffix, like the form *macallim-iin-ta* 'the teachers', which is traditionally considered a feminine plural form of the masculine singular *macallin-ka* 'the teacher', and nouns with a so-called Arabic broken plural, e.g. the form *kutub-ta* 'the books', which is traditionally considered a feminine plural form of the masculine singular noun *kitaab-ka* 'the book'.

This variation in agreement is also confirmed by Puglielli and Ciise Mohamed Siyaad (1984: 86), but they refrain from calling these forms collectives. However, in order to be able to account for the variation in number agreement, I will argue that such feminine forms, containing Arabic plural morphemes, do not behave like ordinary plurals with an indigenous Somali plural morpheme. Instead, they have often, but probably not always, been reinterpreted as collective forms which are grammatically singular, based on the same type of agreement variation as was discussed in 5.4.1 with regard to nouns of the traditional 5th declension. Some further nouns with an Arabic plural are shown in Table 14.

5.4.4 Nouns without a grammatical plural

Another group of Somali nouns do not form any plural form with an overt plural morpheme. These nouns only have a singular form and a corresponding collective form which may trigger agreement either in

Table 14: Typical forms of nouns exhibiting a borrowed Arabic plural

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
M	kursi-ga	‘the chair’	kursi-ya-da	‘the chairs’
F.COLL	kuraas-ta	‘the chairs’		
M	kitaab-ka	‘the book’	kitaab-ba-da	‘the books’
F.COLL	kutub-ta	‘the books’		
M	dhakhtar-ka	‘the book’	dakhtar-ra-da	‘the doctors’
F.COLL	dhakhaatiir-ta	‘the doctors’		

the plural or in the feminine singular, thus this form is best described as feminine singular, e.g. beeraley ‘farmers’.

For nouns of this type, there has generally been less confusion about the number values in the available reference grammars and textbooks. I will however argue that nouns like Soomaali, traditionally included in the 5th declension, also belong to the group of nouns lacking a plural. Some of these nouns are listed in Table 15.

Table 15: Somali nouns with a collective but without a plural form

	SINGULAR		PLURAL
M	Soomaáli-ga	‘the Somali’	—
F.COLL	Soomaalí-da	‘the Somalis’	—
M	askari-ga	‘the soldier’	—
F.COLL	askar-ta	‘the soldiers’	—
M	beeraala-ha	‘the farmer’	—
F.COLL	beeraley-da	‘the farmers’	—

5.4.5 Singulatives

Finally, a very small number of nouns exhibit a collective form as their most basic form, and a singular form is then derived from the collective. Such a morphologically derived form is generally called a SINGULATIVE (Corbett, 2000: 19). The most typical noun of this kind is haween ‘women’, as shown in Table 16.

Table 16: A Somali noun with a derived singulative form

	SINGULAR		PLURAL
M.COLL	haween-ka	'the women'	
F.SGTV	haween-ey-da	'the woman'	—

6 Summary

In this article, it has been shown that Somali nouns need only have one gender value. In the singular, verbs and pronouns agree in gender with the gender value of the governing noun. In the plural, no such agreement exists in Somali: the gender of a noun does not play any specific role in the plural, hence there is no reason to assume a gender value in the plural that would differ from the gender value in the singular.

There are four different regular Somali plural morphemes for nouns:

1. **-o** is used with most words. Additional adjustments to the preceding stem or the insertion of /y/ are quite common, and these phenomena follow distinct morphophonological rules;
2. reduplication is used with masculine nouns that are monosyllabic in the singular;
3. **-ooyin** is used with feminine nouns that end in **-o** in the singular;
4. **-ayaal** is used with masculine nouns that end in **-e** in the singular.

There are two definite article suffixes: {k}, realised as /k/, /g/, /h/ or zero, and {t}, realised as /t/, /d/, /d/ or /ʃ/. Feminine nouns take the definite article {t} in the singular and the definite article {k} in the plural, whereas masculine nouns take the definite article {k} in the singular, and the definite article {t} in the plural, if the indefinite plural form has more than two syllables. An indefinite masculine plural noun with only two syllables instead takes the plural

definite article {k}.

The notion of collective nouns, i.e. formally singular uncountable nouns that denote a coherent set or group of persons, animals or objects, e.g. *carruur* ‘children’, is extremely important for the description of Somali nouns, as nouns of this type may trigger either syntactic agreement in the singular with regard to verbs and pronouns, or semantic agreement in the plural. The same is also true for the corporate nouns, e.g. *qoys* ‘family’, which differ from the collective nouns mainly in the fact that corporate nouns have both a singular and a plural form in order to denote one or several sets of objects. Many nouns with Arabic plural morphemes behave in a similar way to the collective nouns, e.g. *kuraas* ‘chairs’ or *macallimiin* ‘teachers’, with regard to the agreement patterns of verbs and pronouns.

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