On the Somali Temporal Lexicon

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Let go of what has gone; hold onto what is coming.

(A Somali proverb)

The Somali attitude towards time, as expressed in the above proverb, i.e., what happens now is more important than what already happened, closely resembles that of the Russians: “Do not grieve for what happened in the evening: wait for what will happen in the morning.”1

The rich and diverse Somali temporal lexicon of over two hundred lexical units denoting different time intervals and actions related to the counting of time, is not completely original since parts of it came to Somali from Arabic along with some borrowings from the English and Italian languages. The Somali terminology itself is mostly common to all regional dialects which includes the variability of individual words and lexemes.

1. Time. For designation of the notion of time the Somalis use about a dozen words, the most common of which is Arabic waqti time. The temporal terms in the Somali language are mainly nouns.

There are also verbs and a few allologs, which are usually called adverbs. Somali nouns have a category of definiteness with the opposition of a definite and indefinite article (the latter has a zero indication). The definite article is attached to the stem as a suffix and indicates the gender of the noun – masculine or feminine. There are four definite articles for masculine nouns: -ka, -ga, -ha and -a, and three for feminine nouns: -ta, -da and -sha. The form of the article depends on the final phoneme of the stem. The article -sha is the result of the merging of the final l of the stem and the consonant of the article -ta (for example, bil a month, bil + ta = bisha the month).
Hereinafter, Somali temporal terms, expressed by nouns, are given with definite articles, separated from the stem by a hyphen. Thus, the aforementioned *waqti* (variant - *wakhti*), which is a masculine noun is followed by the article -*ga* and means *the time*. The idea of *present time* can be conveyed by the syntactic construction in the form of a relative clause with *waqtiga* the *time* as a defined noun and the indefinite subject *la* *someone* (the 3rd person masculine singular) or the short subjective pronoun *aan/aannu* we (exclusive) or its inclusive variant *aynu* and also with the verb *joogi* to be present as a predicate: *waqtiga la joogo* the present time (literally: *the time in which someone is present*) or *waqtiga aannu/aynu joogno*, which also means *the present time* (literally: *the time in which we [exclusive or inclusive] are present*).

In the same way Somalis obtain the *past time*. In this case, the article -*ga* of *waqtiga* the *time* adjoins the past tense marker -*ii* (*waqtigii*) and the verb *joogi* to be present is substituted for *dhaafi* to pass by with the adverbial particle *soo* in this direction: *waqtigii la soo dhaafay* the past time (literally: *the time which somebody passed*).

The same result can be achieved by the relative clause in which *waqtiga* the *time* itself becomes the subject and the short object pronouns *na* us (excluding you) or *ina* us (including you) replace the previously used short subjective pronouns: *waqtigii na/ina soo dhaafay* the past time (literally: *the time that passed us*).

There are also other nouns of similar semantics: *waaye-da/waayo-da* and *waagii hore* previous time and *waaya-waayo-ha* old times, former times.

The future tense is constructed by the relative clause in which the verb *socon* to walk and the particle *soo* take part: *waqtiga soo socda* the future time (literally: *the time that walks in this direction*). The similar meaning is conveyed by several nouns: *mustaqbal-ka, aayatiinka (dambe), aaye-da/aayo-ha* future (the last word also means *fate*).

Apart from *waqtiga* (in general) the Somali language has a number of words which also mean *time*, but their connotations are wider: *waa-ga* time, era, epoch; *seben-ka/semen-ka/saman-ka* time, period, era (this is the word uttered by the snake from the famous Somali tale “A Soothsayer Tested” in its prediction of the future events); *xilli-ga* time, season, epoch, *ammin-ka* time, period, *fiid-ka* time, early evening, twilight, *mar-ka, kol-ka, jeer-ka, goor-ta, shir-ka* time, instance, period of time, *shin-ka* time, season, *had-da/hed-da* time, moment, point in time, *kal-ka* time, season, *nabar-ka* time, occasion; *casri-ga* modern times, era, age; *muddo-da* period of time; *in muddo ah* some time; *muddo yar* (gaaban),
cabbaar-ka brief time, short while; muddo dheed long time; berisamaad-ka good times; da’da, cimri-ga, cumri-ga age.

2. The periodization of time (from eternity to instant)

2.1. Eternity or endless time is conveyed by daa’in-ka/daa’im-ka, which also means God. The corresponding verb daa’imi means to be eternal, to be permanent, to last forever.

2.2. The longest stretches of time for a Somali are a century and a year. Their meanings are conveyed by borrowing from Arabic qarni-ga century, and sano-da/sannad-ka/da or sanad-ka/da and also by the above mentioned polysemic kal-ka. Gu’-a/gu-ga and jir-ka also mean year, but they are mainly used when it comes to age. Anniversary in Somali is sannadguuro-da.

2.3. A Somali year consists of four seasons. Season in Somali is xilli-ga, cycle is adwaar-ta. Wet and hot season is called danbasame-ha, dry and cold season is known as qabooba-ha. Each of the four seasons (two of them are dry and two are wet) lasts three months.

Xagaa-ga in northern parts of Somalia is a hot season, the time of the south-west monsoon; in central and southern Somalia, it is the cooler and less hot season as compared with the second dry season. Xagaa-ga falls between July and September. Relatively speaking, this is the Somali summer, a time of the southwestern monsoon which causes great activities in the Arabian Gulf and makes it impossible for Somali sailing feluccas, is called Badxir-ka or Badxiran-ka (literally: closed sea). The cold part of this shorter dry season is called Yaare-ha.

Next season is Dayr-ta, the second most precipitation season that lasts from October to December. Its rainy part is called Lifato-da, its arid part is known as Axal-ka, which is between Ximir-ka and Xayska. Dayr-ta is the Somali autumn.

The third main dry and hot season is called Diraac-da and lasts from January to March. The verb diraacsan means to enter the dry season. Diraac-a is, so to speak, the Somali winter. The first and most severe part of the dry season is called Wajiine-ha or Wejiine-ha, the second, marked by sporadic short rains is Aminla’-da. The middle of the Diraac-da season, called Qorraxdheere-ha (literally: long Sun) is the hottest time of the year. A severe dry wind called musareen-ka blows in January and February.
Then comes the fourth season, a fertile and rainy time called **Gu’-ga** or **Gu’-a**, which lasts from April until June. This is the Somali spring. The hottest period before the wet season is known as **Kaliil-sha**. That is why the Somalis say: *When you see that everything becomes dry, expect rain*. Dry seasons – **Xagaa-ga and Diraac-da** – have a common name **Jiilaal-ka**. Its second interpretation is a synonym for **Diraac-da** (main dry season). The wet seasons **Dayr-ta** and **Gu’-ga** are united by the name of **Nur-ka**.

The beginning of each season falls around the third week of the corresponding month. The new year – **Neyruus-ka** or **Dabshid-ka** (literally: *kindling fire*) – falls on the beginning of **Xagaa-ga** season. In the city of Afgoye (in southern Somalia), the celebration of the New Year is famous for its **Istun**, stick-fight between representatives of two local tribes.

2.4. In Somali, three words stand for *calendar*: **taariikh-da** (the Arabic word meaning also *date* and *history*), **shintiris-ka** and **ammintiris-ka** (literally: *countdown of time*). For different purposes, Somalis use three types of calendars: Gregorian calendar, borrowed from Europeans, Solar calendar, apparently developed by themselves, and Lunar calendar, introduced by Arabs. In each of them, the year is divided into twelve months, but the number of days in a month is different.

2.5. **Month** in Somali, as already mentioned is **bil-sha**. The second meaning of this word is *the moon*. **Shahar-ka** which means *month* and *thirty day period of time* is also used.

The months’ names in the Gregorian calendar are taken from English and Italian: **Jannaayo**, February/Febrayaoyo, **Maaris/Maarso**, Abril/Abril/Abriile, **Maajo**, Juun/Juunyo, Luulyo, August/ Agoosto/Agosto), **Sebtenbar/Sebtember**/ Sibtambar/Setembar, **Oktoobar/Otoobar**, Noofembar, Disembar.

The names of the months for the Somali solar calendar are “talking”, but due the absence of their common interpretation and the inaudibility of their etymology (for example, the second month – **Habar-ari** – means *old women’s sheep and goats*) only their names in Somali are given here.4
1. Karan-ta - July (the first day of this month falls on July, 20)
2. Habar-ari-da - August
3. Diraacgood-ka - September
4. Dayrweyn-ta - October
5. Ximir-ka - November
6. Xays-ka - December
7. Lixkor-ka - January
8. Toddob-ka - February
9. Amminla’-da - March
10. Fushade-ha, Ceel-ka-geeye-ha - April
11. Gu’soore-ha, Badhayse-ha, Dhaseyne-ha - May

Month of the Somali lunar calendar is called rajal-sha, full month (which consists of 30 days) is gardhalad-ka. The adjectival verb toom-man means incomplete, which refers to the month that has only 29 days.

The months of the Somali lunar calendar generally have several names:

1. Dago-da, Seko-da/Sako-da, Muharram-ka
2. Safar-ta, Miira-da
3. Mowliid-ka/Mawliid-ka, Rabiic-cal-awal
4. Maalmadoone-ha, Rabiic-ataanii
5. Rajal-sha hore, Ban hore-da, Mille hore-da, Jamaad-al-awal
6. Rajal-sha dhexe, Ban dambe-da, Mille dambe-da, Dabbooje-ha, Jamaad-ataanii
7. Rajal-sha dambe, Sabbuux-da, Rajab-ta, Cawismaan-ka
8. Waabberiis-ka, Soondheere-ha, Gasayr-ta, Shacbaan-ka/-ta, Shabcaan-ka/-ta
9. Soonqaad-ka, Soon-ka Ramadaan-ka/ta
10. Soonfur-ka/-ta, Shawaal-ka/-sha
11. Sidataal-sha, Dul-qacdah-da

2.6. Week in Somali is toddobaad-ka (toddoba means seven), as well as asbuuc-a/usbuuc-a, wiig-ga and sitimaan-ka, borrowed from Arabic, English and Italian, respectively. The names of the days of the week came from Arabic. A week starts on Saturday: Sabti-ga Saturday, Axadda Sunday (girls born on Sunday are often named Axado), Isniin-ta
Monday, Talaada-da/Talaado-da, Salaasa-da Tuesday, Arbaca-da
Wednesday, Khamis-ta Thursday, Jimce-ha/Jumce-ha/Jimco-da Friday.

According to my informant Caliqeyr Muxumed Nuur, there are also seven Somali names for the days of the week which, however, are seldom used:

2.7. Twenty-four hours (daytime and nighttime) and their segments.

This part of the temporal vocabulary (in the form of individual words and phrases) was developed by Somalis in a very detailed way. Twenty-four hours in Somali are habeen iyo maalin (literally: night and day), where habeen-ka/hameen-ka/habeyn-ka, habeennimo-da, cawo-da is night, and maalin-ta is day. The other words which include the meaning of a day: aqool-ka, beri-ga, dharaar-ta (also daytime, daylight hours), gabbal-ka daylight, ayaan-ta, casho-da/cisho-da, gih-a, maalinnimo-da, caanammaal-ka daytime (the last word also means milking time of livestock), wadax-a sunny time of the day. Sometimes Arabic borrowing leel-ka is used for night.

The Somali day starts at 6 am and consists of twelve parts:
aroooryo-da, aroor-ta (6.00)
bariis-ka/bariiso-da (7.00)
bariisdheer-ta (8.00)
suqsuq-a (9.00)
barqo-da, barqin-ka (10.00)
barqo-kulul-sha (11.00)
har-ka (12.00)
duhur-ka, her-ta (13.00)
duhur-tegay-ga (14.00)
galabdheer-ta (15.00)
casar-ka/casir-ka (16.00)
gabbalgab-ka (17.00)

Somali night begins at 18.00 and is divided into eight parts:
himhimmow-ga, maqrib-ka (18.00)
fiid-ka, cishe-ha (19.00)
caweysin-ka (20.00)
caweysin-ka dambe (22.00)
It is interesting that in southern Somalia, time is counted with a six-hour shift back. This means that when it is 6:00 in the north it is midnight in the south. Accordingly, 7:00 a.m. in the southern regions is 1:00 p.m. in the north.

For the designation of various segments of day and night, in addition to those listed above, some other lexical units are used:

**subax-a/-da** morning
**saaka/saakay** this morning
**hiir-ta, xiskin-ta** early morning
**barqo-da** late morning
**gelin-ka** half of day/night
**gelinka hore** first half of the day/night
**gelinka dambe** second part of the day/night

Somalis say: *Adduunyo waa hooska labadiisa gelin* The world is like a shadow: in the first half of the day it is turned towards one direction, in the second half towards the opposite one (i.e. it is changeable).

**gadiid-ka** border between the first and the second half of the day/night
**cishe-ha, fiid-ka, fiidnimo-da, fiid-horaad-ka** early evening
**caweyesin-ka, galab-ta, galabnimo-da** evening
**casar gab-ka, casarliliq-a, gabbalgaab-ka, qorraxdheere-ha** late evening
**fiidaddow-ga** time before, during and after sunset
**cawaddaran-ta, cawaweero-ka/-ta, cawaweero-da, cirkuduud** time of sunset and onset of darkness and **micraaj-ka** night of the ascension of the prophet Mohammed to heaven

Prayer time during the day: **subax, duhur, casir, maqrib, cishe.**

2.8. **Hour, minute, second, moment** and so on.

**saac-a, saacad-da** hour
**nus saac (saacad)** half an hour,
**saacad iyo bar/badh** an hour and a half
**rubci-ga/rubuc-a/ruboc-a/rubi-ga, wax-da** quarter (of an hour)
The Somalis have no words for shorter fragments of time.

2.9. Some words with adverbial meanings (*yesterday, today, tomorrow, and others*) are conveyed by nouns, nominal phrases, and adverbs which are rare in the Somali language:

- **shalayto/shaley shalaytoole, shalay-da** *yesterday*
- **xalayo/xaley/xalay** *last night*
- **dorraato, darraad-da, doorad-da** *day before yesterday*
- **maanta** *today*
- **imminka/immika/amminka, hadda, haddeer** *now*
- **imminkadan** *just now*
- **imminka dabadeed** *later on*
- **berrito, berri-da, foog-ta** *tomorrow* (last word also means *morning*)
- **berri dambe, saa dambe** *the day after tomorrow*
- **beryoo kaddib** in a few days
- **beryahan, dhowaan, ayaan dhowayd** *recently*
- **berigii hore** *earlier, long ago, in former times*
berigii dambe later, after some time
saa then, at that time
saa kuub/kuun two days from today, three days hence
maalin walba, maalinba every day
maalin-dhaaf-ka every other day
maalin kale another day
maalmahan/maalmahakan these days
maalin uun (keliya, qura) any day, one day
gadaal-sha later, afterwards

3. The rich and highly original layer of lexicon pertaining to the counting of time (expressed by nouns, verbal nouns and verbs) reflects the nomadic way of life of Somalis, their traditions and customs:

kallahaad-da/kallaho-da getting up early
kallaahi to get up and set out early in the morning
(ku) waabberiisan to stay at a place until daybreak
bariiso-da any event happening at dawn
barqan to lie down late in the morning
barqin to graze livestock in the late morning
maalinjoogi to spend the day
maalinjoog-ga spending the day
gabbalgaabsan to pass the whole day
maalingaali to work without interruption for the whole day
maalingaal-ka uninterrupted work for the whole day
dharaarad-ka/dharaarasho-da daytime meal (dinner/lunch proper in Somali is qado-da)
casariye-ha afternoon snack, tea break
dharaarmaali to milk an animal during the day time
dharaarmaal-ka/dharaarmaalid-da milking an animal during the day time
dharaarin to set aside for the day what is not done in the morning
dharaarin-ta laying off for the day of what is not done in the morning
maalinsocod-ka one day travel; distance that can be covered in a day
galabcarraabi to travel in the afternoon
galban to head home after day’s work
carraabi to go home at the end of the day, to travel in the afternoon
carraabo-da going home at the end of the day, late afternoon travel
carraabin to bring something back home at the end of the day; to send guests before nightfall
fiid-horor-ka/ffiidooya-da milking at dusk
fiid-horori assault early in the evening
ffiidoosan to perform an activity in the first part of the evening
ffiidoona-da evening meal (supper in Somali is casho-da)
caweysimi stay up late
caweyn, ffiis to spend the evening, socialize in the evening
caweyn-ta, caweys-ka, ffiisad-ka, ffiissado-da spending the evening, socializing in the evening (caweyska also means dance that takes up the evening)
cawabbarin, bariyi to pass the night in peace; stay the night
cawabbari-ga spending the night in peace
cawabbarriyi/cawabbarasisin to have someone stay over the night
dheelmi to move camp at night
dheelman, guurayn, gudi, cawadhaxayn to travel at night
dheelamsha-da/dheelmatiin-ka, guurayn-ta/guurays-ka/guure-ha,
gudoodi-ka, cawadhaxmo, habeendhax-a travel at night
guureyisiin to make someone to travel at night
guuli to spend the night at the watering place with one’s livestock
guul-ka night spent with one’s livestock at the watering place
(ku) geshiinayn to camp in a place for a single night during a long journey
geshiino-da camp site for a single night
baadi to stay out overnight in an unknown place
dhaxi, dibban, dibjiri to spend a night away from home
dhax-a spending a night away from home
dibbood-ka livestock not brought into the fold at night
dibboodi be left out at night (of animals)
dibboodin not to let livestock come in at night
ciddo-da designated period of time that a divorced or widowed Muslim-woman has to wait prior to remarriage
ciddabbax-a end of the legal waiting period in which a Muslim woman cannot re-marry
ciddabbixi to come out of the prescribed period in which a Muslim wom-
This essay offers an introduction to a systematic collection of the Somali temporal lexicon. It does not claim to provide an exhaustive treatment of this vast subject. The author welcomes comments, suggestions and corrections.

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Notes

2. Hereinafter verbs are given in the form of infinitives: joog be present → joogi to be present, carraabi bring something back home at the end of the day → carraabin to bring something back home at the end of the day, barqo lie down late in the morning → barqan to lie down late in the morning etc.
4. Said M-Shidad Hussein. “The Somali calendar”. Garowe, 2014, p. 7. This calendar does not mention the month of Axal-ka, which, according to different sources, follows Ximir-ka and precedes Xays-ka. Besides, in several publications Diraac-good-ka is marked as the seventh month of the Somali solar calendar. See also Caliqeyr Muxumed Nuur. “Abtirsiinta Erayga Af-Soomaalia”. Stockholm, 2009 which contains the regional names for the months of the Somali solar calendar.
5. In different publications the names of the months for the Somali lunar calendar significantly vary.
6. I am not aware of the definite articles of several months of this calendar.
7 “The Somali calendar”, p.37. Not all temporal units used in this source for the designation of different parts of the daytime and the nighttime have been confirmed by my Somali informants. There is evidence that the daytime is divided only into seven parts.
References
Qaamuus kooban ee Af Soomaaliga. Xamar, 1976.