

# Towards the Lexicographical Description of Somali Nouns with the Word “Road” as an Example\*

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Before the adoption of the Somali script, I knew of only two Foreign-Somali Dictionaries: *Somali-English Dictionary* and *English-Somali Dictionary*, by R. C. Abraham, published in 1964 and 1967, correspondingly. Their Somali parts are printed in Latin graphic slightly different from the Somali orthography accepted in 1972, which, however, does not hamper the use of these dictionaries.

Since then more than a dozen dictionaries have appeared in Somalia, Europe, and the United States. They include several defining Somali dictionaries: *Qaamuus kooban ee Af Soomaaliga* (1976); *Qaamuuska af-Soomaaliga*, by Yaasiin Cismaan Keenaadiid (1976); *Qaamuus*, by Saalax Xaashi Carab (2004); *Qaamuuska Af-Soomaaliga*, by Khaalid Cali-Guul-Warsame (2008); *Qaamuuska af-Soomaaliga*, by Annarita Puglielli and Cabdalla Cumar Mansur (2012); and *Qaamuus Af Soomaali*, edited by Aadan Xasan Aadan (2013).

Among the bilingual (Somali-Foreign) dictionaries of the general type, one should mention *Robles Wörterbuch der deutschen und somalischen Sprache*, by A. Roble and Elke Mähner (1989); *Somali-English Dictionary*, by R. David Zorc and Madina M. Osman (1993); and *Abwaan cusub oo af-Soomaali iyo af-Ingriisi ah/A Modern Somali-English Dictionary*, by Abdiraxmaan A. Farah “Barwaaqo” (1995). In addition, *A Dictionary of Somali Verbs in Everyday Contexts*, by Liban A. Ahmad, was issued in 2012.

As to the Foreign-Somali dictionaries published in the West (apart from the aforementioned Abraham’s dictionary), I know only three: *Dizionario Italiano-Somalo*, edited by Giorgio Banti, Cabdinasser Shek

Mohamed, and Annarita Puglielli (1985); *English-Somali Dictionary/Qaamuus Ingrïisi-Soomaali*, published by Haan Associates (1993); and *Advanced English-Somali Dictionary*, by Ahmed Hussein Mire (2008).

In Russia, the first lexicographical experiment in relation to the Somali language was abortive. *The Short Somali-Russian and Russian-Somali Dictionary*, issued in 1969 by two journalists, Dmitry Stepanchenko and Mohamed Hadji Osman, contained so many mistakes that its use was not possible.<sup>1</sup>

In 1977, the anonymous *Somali-Russian and Russian-Somali Military and Technical Dictionary* was published, followed in 2012 with *Somali-Russian Dictionary/Eraykoobka Soomaali-Ruush ah*, compiled by V. Oleynikov. A Russian-Somali dictionary which would translate the common Russian lexicon and phraseology into Somali has not been created yet.

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Although the above-mentioned Somali-Foreign dictionaries differ in the completeness and accuracy of the lexical material, all of them serve their purpose well. With their help, a person familiar with the grammar of the Somali language can read and understand Somali texts. In contrast to these dictionaries, *English-Somali Dictionary*, by Abraham; *Dizionario Italiano-Somalo*; *English-Somali Dictionary/Qaamuus Ingrïisi-Soomaali*; and *Advanced English-Somali Dictionary* meet the declared objectives only partially. One can learn Somali words with them, but cannot translate into Somali any coherent texts. The fact is that all of them ignore one important feature of the Somali syntax, which dictates a non-trivial way of lexicographical description of Somali nouns. Here is what was written about this by the pioneer of Somali studies in Russia, Alexander Zholkovsky: "... the particles that convey in Somali the prepositional and case meanings of European languages can accompany only the predicative members of the sentence, i.e., verbs and adjectives,<sup>2</sup> hence they are called preverbs. Accordingly, a Somali noun practically cannot govern other nouns and nominal phrases such as 'actants' and 'circumstants,' i. e., words that denote participants and circumstances of the situation it names."<sup>3</sup> It means that the direct translation into Somali of such phrases as *the road to Mogadishu*, for example, is not possible.

In Somali there is no preposition *to* (or other prepositions either), but there are prepositional particles (or preverbs) which precede verbs.

There are four: 'u,' which means *to, towards, for, on behalf of*; 'ku,' meaning *in, on, at, to, into, onto, upon, with, by means of*; 'ka,' meaning *at, from, off, away, out of, against, across, about*; and 'la,' denoting *with, together with*. And one of them, together with the so-called empty verb 'Vo'<sup>4</sup> (its role is purely syntactical), which is absent in English phrases, should be used for its translation. To do this the phrase must be transformed into the construction with the relative clause in which *the road* is an object, the indefinite pronoun 'la,' or *somebody* (3M person, grammatically), is the subject, the 'Vo mari' (*to pass, go*) is the predicate, and then to place the preverb 'u' (*to*) in front of it: 'Waddada [Waddo + fem. def. article -da] loo [la+u] maro Muqdisho' means *The road to Mogadishu* (literally, *The road somebody to goes Mogadishu*).

There are two types of relative clauses with 'Vo': (1) the relative clause in which the attributive word is an object (as in our example) and (2) the relative clause in which the attributive word is the subject, for example, 'Waddada u baxda Muqdisho' — *The road to Mogadishu* (literally, *The road [which] for leaves Mogadishu*). As we see, in this construction another 'Vo' (*to leave*) with the same preverb 'u' (*for*) is used.

The empty verbs are different for different nouns, therefore they should be learned separately with each noun. As estimated by Zholkovsky, the number of the verbs "able to act as ... Vo" does not exceed forty.<sup>5</sup> However, in my experience, they are more numerous.

'Mari' and 'bixi' from the previous examples are far from being the only 'Vo' used with the word 'waddo' (road), which, by the way, in Somali has a lot of synonyms or words with close meaning (see paragraph 3).

Below there are the examples of the use of all "empty verbs" with the noun 'waddada' (hereafter 'w') *the road, the way* of which we are aware. Under the heading A, there are the sentences in which this word is an object and under the heading B, those in which it is the subject:

#### A.

(u) mari *to go*; W. Muqdisho loo [la + u] maro<sup>6</sup> *The road to Mogadishu* (literally: *The road [which] Mogadishu somebody to goes*);<sup>7</sup>

(ka) bixi *to go (out of)*; Waddada Muqdishu looga/lagaga baxo [la + ku *by means of* + ka *out of*] *The road from Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road by means of [which] Mogadishu somebody out of goes*).

**B.**

tegi/aadi/<sup>8</sup>mari to go; W. Muqdisho takta/aadda/marta *The road to Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] Mogadishu [to] goes*);

(u) socon to go (to); W. Muqdisho u socota *The road to Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] Mogadishu to goes*);

geli to enter; W. Muqdisho gasha *The road to Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] Mogadishu enters*);

(u) bixi to leave (for); W. Muqdisho u baxda *The road to Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] Mogadishu for leaves*);

qaban to take; W. Muqdisho qabata *The road to Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] Mogadishu [towards] takes*);

geyn/(ku) ridi to bring/put (in); W. Muqdisho geysa/ku ridda *The road to Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] [to] brings/in puts Mogadishu*).

(ka) iman to come (from); W. Muqdisho ka timaadda *The road from Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] Mogadishu from comes*);

(ka) bixi to go (out of); W. Muqdisho ka baxda *The road from Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] out of Mogadishu goes*);

(ka) soo geli to enter (from); W. Muqdisho ka soo gasha *The road from Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] Mogadishu from enters*);

(ka) mari to pass (to the north/south, etc., of); W. waqooyi/koonfur ka marta Muqdisho *The road to the North of Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] North/South by passes Mogadishu*);

(dhex) mari to go (through); W. dhex marta Muqdisho *The road in Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] through goes Mogadishu*);

(ag/dhinac/hareer) mari to pass (near/beside/around); W. ag/dhinac/hareer marta Muqdisho *The road near Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] near goes Mogadishu*);

(ku) oolli *to be situated (in a place)*; W. ku taalla Muqdisho *The road in Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] is in situated Mogadishu*);

(ka) dhisan *to be built (in)*; W. ka dhisan Muqdisho *The road in Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road [which] is in built Mogadishu*);

(isku) xiri *to bind (together several things)*; W. isku xirta Muqdisho iyo Kismaayo *The road between Mogadishu and Kismayo* (lit.: *The road [which] together binds Mogadishu and Kismayo*);

(u/ka) dhexeyn/dhex mari *to be/go between*; W. u/ka dhexeysa/ dex marta Muqdisho iyo Kismaayo *The road between Mogadishu and Kismayo* (lit.: *The road [which] between is/goes Mogadishu and Kismaayo*).

Obviously, not all 'Vo' should be placed in the entry *road way*; however, the most common of them must accompany this noun without fail. In addition, it is useful to know (and to reveal in the dictionary) some other (not empty) verbs associated with the noun 'waddo' (hereinafter in the examples 'w') *road/way*:

w. raaci/haysan/(ku) socon/geli *to go along the road*:

w. (ka) fali/yeeli/sameyn *to make a road in*;

w. (ka) dhisi *to build a road in*;

w. (ka) gudbi *to cross the road*;

w. (ka) leexan/bayri *to swing off the road*;

w. cagta saari *to set off/out* (lit.: *to set one's foot on the road*);

w. ku dhici *to set off/out* (lit.: *to fall on the road*);

w. qaadi *to set off/out* (lit.: *to take the road*);

w. gudbin *to cause somebody to set off*;

w. (ka) dhumi/lumi *to lose one's way*;

w. istaagi *to halt, i.e., to stop going along the road;*

w. (ku) wadi *to proceed with one's way;*

w. (ku) joogi/jiri *to be on the way;*

w. dhexe joogi *to be halfway;*

w. bannayn *to clear the road;*

laba w. meel ay iska gooyaan *a cross-roads (lit.: two roads the place in which they intersect);*

jiiro-da *a bend of the road.*

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In Somali the meaning of the English words *road* and *way* is conveyed in many words. Apart from 'waddo-da,' which is used mainly in the northern and the Darood dialects, and 'jid-ka,' which is used chiefly in the Benaadir or southern dialects, there are also 'dhabbe-ha,' 'marinka,' 'hilin-ka,' 'daw-ga,' 'dariiqa,' 'dil-sha,' 'tub-ta,' and 'majare-ha.' Moreover, 'waddo-da' and 'jid-ka' also mean *street*, while 'hilin-ka,' 'daw-ga,' 'dil-sha,' and 'tub-ta' also mean *path*.

Besides, there are words for *the main road* 'xagaaf-ka'; *a straight road* 'toobiye-ha' and 'bogox-da'; *a straight and wide road* 'haloosi-da'/'haloodi-ga'; *an earth road* 'shag-ga,' 'jicadde-ha'; *a beaten track* 'wad-doohiye-ha'; *a road trodden by animals and people* 'jebis-ka'; *an off-shoot road* 'bogdoox-da'; and *a dangerous road* 'maaro-da.'

In Somali *a highway* is 'rasto-da' or 'waddo-da/jid-ka laami-ga ah.'

It is difficult to enumerate all Somali words meaning *a path, a foot-path, or a track*. Apart from the above-mentioned words there are also 'wadiiqo-da,' 'surin-ka,' 'budul-sha,' 'dardar-ta,' 'dhigdhiq-ta,' 'diqdiqo-da'/'diqdiq-da,' 'gudmo-ha,' 'jiqjiq-a,' 'luuq-a,' 'guurood-da,' 'mur-ta,' 'qallaal-sha,' 'suryo-da,' and 'araari-da.' 'Doqosh-ka' means *a path between two buildings*, 'dhabbagacal-ka' is *a foot-path between two neighboring houses*, 'tafaal-ka' is *a track connecting two roads*, 'qoode-ha' means *a cow trail*, 'falfal-ka' and 'sud-da' mean *a path in the opening*, 'waddo/jid-caanood-ka/hunguri-ga' is *a path between the house and the*

camel enclosure (lit.: a milk-path), 'waddo-dhaan-ta' means a path to the well, and so on.

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## Notes

1. See G. Kapchits' review, "The Short Somali-Russian and Russian-Somali Dictionary," *Folia Orientalia*, 16 (Kraków, 1975).
2. Actually there are no adjectives in Somali. Instead there are so-called adjectival verbs, like *cas* (*be red*) or *wanaagsan* (*be good*), etc.
3. A. Zholkovsky, "Materiali k russko-somaliyskomu slovari" (Some materials for Russian-Somali dictionary), *Voprosi afrikanskoi filologii*. M. 1974, p. 171.
4. Such a designation of the empty (functional) verb was used by A. Zholkovsky and I. Mel'chuk in a series of publications related to the development of the "meaning-text" model.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
6. Here and further another order of words is possible (see above the same example).
7. It seems that this sentence can also be translated into Somali by the combination of the indefinite subject *la* with some other Vo: (u) *qaadi to take (for)*; W. Muqdisho *loo qaado The road to Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road (which) Mogadishu somebody for takes*; (ku) *tegi to go (by means of)*; W. Muqdisho *lagu [la + ku] tago The road to Mogadishu* (lit.: *The road (which) Mogadishu somebody by means of goes*). The possibility of the use of these Vo has been confirmed by the informant speaking in one of the Darood dialects, but has been called into question by the informant speaking in one of the Northern dialects. The answer to the question whether the use of these Vo is connected with certain dialects requires further study.
8. *Tegi (to go)* is used in Northern dialects and the dialects of the Darood group, while *aadi (to go)* is used in the Benaadir (i.e., southern) dialects.

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