

# The Somali microscope: Personal pronouns, determiners and possession\*

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## 1 Introduction

### Overview of this talk:

- We concentrate on Somali personal pronouns, which make visible functional material required by syntactic and semantic theory.
- Somali pronouns are composed of phi-features and what has been described as a definite determiner.

- **Proposal**

1. A presuppositional account for gender,
2. The existence of a null definite determiner.

- **Note**

(2. goes against the current descriptive literature for Somali.)  
Possessives are a key piece of the argument in favor of 2.

### Background information

There is a general consensus that:

- Pronouns can be decomposed.  
Déchaine & Wiltschko (2002); Harley & Ritter (2002), a.o.
- Third person pronouns can be treated as covert definite descriptions in *all* of their uses.

she  $\approx$  [<sub>DP</sub> the [<sub>NP</sub> woman]]

- First and second persons can have definite-description-like uses.  
Postal (1969); Elbourne (2013); Patel-Grosz & Grosz (to appear), a.o.

### Novel import

- Somali + typology: Novel data; Finer grained description.
- Theory: Treatment of  $\phi$ , definiteness and pronoun structure.

### Elicitation

- Primary consultant at the East African Cultural Center.  
Springfield, MA. · Fall 2015–current
- Contributions from four occasional attendees of the EACC.
- E-elicitation with linguistically non-naïve speaker.  
MN. · October–November, 2015
- Primary consultant reports to speak Central Somali.

### Roadmap

1. Introduction
2. Somali independent pronominal paradigms
3. Phi-features
4. Definiteness
5. Proposal
6. Concluding remarks

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## 2 Somali independent pronominal paradigms

Somali noun classes:	
MASCULINE	
Suffixes usually begin with [k] or [g].	
FEMININE	
Suffixes usually begin with [t] or [d].	

### (1) Somali long independent pronouns

person	number		
	singular	plural	
1	INCL.	<i>ani-ga</i>	<i>anna-ga</i>
	EXCL.		<i>inna-ga</i>
2		<i>adi-ga</i>	<i>idin-ka</i>
3	MASC.	<i>isa-ga</i>	
	FEM.	<i>iya-da</i>	

What to remember from table (1):

- $\phi$ -feature stem: *ani-*, *adi-*, *isa-*, ...
- Described as a definite article: *-ga/-ka* and *-da*.<sup>1</sup>  
(Saeed, 1993, 1999; Green et al., 2015)  
[Other determiners can attach to the  $\phi$ -stem: the remote determiner *-kii*; demonstratives and interrogatives.]
- Cross-linguistically, there is a relationship between D and pronouns in the third person; but not in other persons.

### (2) Somali short independent pronouns

person	number		
	singular	plural	
1	INCL.	<i>ani</i>	<i>(anna)</i>
	EXCL.		<i>(inna)</i>
2		<i>adi</i>	<i>idin</i>
3	MASC.	<i>*isa</i>	<i>(*iya)</i>
	FEM.	<i>*iya</i>	

\*PRON. : not accepted<sup>2</sup> in tested positions  
(PRON.) : extrapolated from observed forms

What to remember from table (2):

- $\phi$ -feature stems, like in (1),
- No *-ga/-ka* or *-da*.
- 1st and 2nd persons have short forms; 3rd persons do not.

### (3) Pronoun in subject position:

- {*ani* / *ani-gu*} waxaan ku arkay Axmed.  
1S / 1S-DET.NOM FOC.1S ADP saw Axmed  
I saw Axmed.
- {*\*isa* / *isa-gu*} wuxuu ku arkay Maxamed.  
3SM / 3SM-DET.NOM FOC.3S ADP saw Maxamed  
He saw Maxamed. [03/17/2016]

### (4) Pronoun associated with adposition:

- Cabdi ul buu igu tuuray {*ani* / *ani-ga*}.  
Cabdi stick FOC.3SM 1S.ADP threw 1S / 1S-DET  
Cabdi threw a stick at me.
- Cabdi ul buu ku tuuray {*\*isa* / *isa-ga*}.  
Cabdi stick FOC.3SM 3S.ADP threw 3SM / 3SM-DET  
Cabdi threw a stick at him. [11/03/2015]

[Direct object and conjunction data pattern similarly.]

<sup>1</sup>Feminine agreement is isolated in the paradigm, but elsewhere robust in the language. This points towards the fact that long independent pronouns are compositional, with grammatically active parts.

<sup>2</sup>Our main informant comments: *'isa' is not a word* [11/03/2015] or *'isa' is a proper name*, or asks where we got that word and thinks that it's some kind of joke (that we do not understand) [03/17/2016]. A second informant equally reports *isa* to be unacceptable [11/02/2015], which makes the 1st/2nd and 3rd persons difference unlikely to be idiosyncratic. All short forms listed grammatical in Saeed (1999) and Green et al. (2015), although not specified in which environments.

- (5) Observation:  
Third person pronouns do not have short forms.

+

- (6) Third person forms are argued to lack person features.  
Harley & Ritter (2002), a.o.

↓

- (7) Generalization:  
Only pronouns with person features have a short form.

**Referential principle:**

- Only pronouns with a person feature refer (1st:speaker/2nd:addressee) by virtue of their features.
- For pronouns without a person feature (3rd) an additional “deictic” component is required to achieve reference (-*kal-ta*).
- (In many languages third person forms are what appear to be bare demonstratives: Turkish, Hindi, Telugu, ...)

**3 Phi-features**

In the literature phi-features are analyzed as:

- Presupposition triggers:  
[[FEM]] ≈ [λx : x is female · x] Heim & Kratzer (1998)
- Agreement:  
she ≈ [DP she [NP woman]] Sauerland (2007)

Sauerland: evidence that gender is not presuppositional in German:

- (8) Tim hat eine Gabel gestohlen. ✓ Sie war aus Gold.  
Tim has a fork.F stolen. she.F was of gold  
Tim stole a fork. It (lit. she) was made of gold.

- (8) is felicitous without there being a female entity in the context. If gender were presuppositional in German, we would expect #.

sie ≈ [sie [ Gabel ]]

In Somali, masculine and feminine pronouns are preferred with animates with natural gender.

- (9) a. Axmed saw the knife.F...  
# Iya-du miiska ayay saarayd.  
3SF-DET.NOM the.knife FOC was.on  
# She was on the table.
- b. Axmed saw the bird.F...<sup>3</sup>  
# Iya-du waxay ku jirtay qolka.  
3SF-DET.NOM FOC in was the.room  
# She was in the room.
- c. Axmed saw the woman.F...  
Iya-du waxay ku jirtay qolka.  
3SF-DET.NOM FOC in was the.room  
She was in the room.

[03/17/2016]

**Interim conclusion:**

- We take gender to be presuppositional in Somali.
- Determiner suffixes agree in gender with φ.  
*isa-ga*: 3SM; *iya-da*: 3SF.
- Reminder: Long and short forms available for 1st/2nd person.  
“long”: *aniga*; “short”: *ani*. (1S)

<sup>3</sup>As far as we can tell, *shimbir-ta*, ‘the bird.F’ can pick out male as well as female birds, i.e., the grammatical gender of the noun does not correspond to the natural gender of the referent. When the noun’s grammatical gender corresponds to natural gender (e.g. *hal*, ‘she-camel’), *iyada* is an option.



(18) does not sound contradictory in Somali (it does in English).  
→ The possessive is being interpreted as indefinite.

(18) Saxiib-kay wuu jiifaa saxiib-kay-na wuu ordayaa.  
friend-my DECL sleep friend-my-CONJ DECL run  
# My friend is running and my friend is sleeping.  
Comment: “There are two friends.” [03/23/2016]

(19) is compatible with two situations:  
The friend who arrives laughed. → Definite.  
A different friend laughed. → Indefinite.

(19) Context: My son and one of my friends came...  
Saaxiib-kay baa qoslay.  
friend-my FOC laughed  
My friend laughed. [03/23/2016]

There are *definite* DPs *without* -ka/-ta.

• **Argument 2:** Short pronouns can be interpreted as definite descriptions.<sup>6</sup>

(20) Context: Clinton won against Trump, in a tight competition. She’s sitting in the Oval Office and says:  
“If the vote had been a little bit different...  
{ani / ani-gu} waxaan ahaan lahaa Republican.  
1S / 1S-DET.M FOC.1S be have Republican  
I would have been a Republican.  
# I≈Clinton  
✓ I≈The President [03/17/2016]

Both *ani* and *ani-ga* are interpreted as definite descriptions  
→ definiteness not (solely) contributed by -ka.

• Third person *iyada* has definite description uses as well.

**Camel** (read *donkey*) **anaphora**  
(Strawson (1961); Geach (1962); Elbourne (2013))

(21) Qof walba oo hal leh iya-da wuu garacaa.  
person every REL she-camel has her DECL beats  
Everyone who has a she-camel beats it (lit. her). [03/17/2016]

Reminder: \**iya* is ungrammatical across the board.

Short forms, when available, and long forms are interpreted as definite descriptions.

Q: Do we ever see the null definite determiner on non-possessive or non-pronominal DPs?

A: Perhaps.

(22) Context: An inspector storms into my company and asks: “Who’s the manager?”  
Maamule / maamuluhu waa {ani / ani-ga}.  
manager.∅ / manager.DET.M.NOM DECL 1S / 1S-DET  
The manager is me. (Cf. # A manager is me.) [02/20/2016]

• **Benefit of ∅<sub>def</sub>:** There are a number of overt determiner-like suffixes: -ka, -kii; -kan, -kaas (demonstratives); -kee (interrogative).

These qualify the way entities are being referred to, in addition to (apparently) encoding definiteness.

So, we can divorce the encoding of definiteness from a “deictic” component. (Following work by Ihsane & Puskás (2001); Schwarz (2009); Patel-Grosz & Grosz (to appear), a.o.)

We can have a *single* null definite determiner, sometimes co-occurring with these overt functional elements.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Called “descriptive indexicals” or “deferred reference” pronouns. For the semantics, see Elbourne (2013); Grosz & Zobel (2014).

<sup>7</sup>An alternative account would maintain that -ka (and -kii) are definite determiners, in addition to a null definite determiner, that we observe on short pronouns and some possessives. This approach is strictly less economical than ours, and still must describe/explain the conditions under which these definite determiners are grammatical/felicitous.

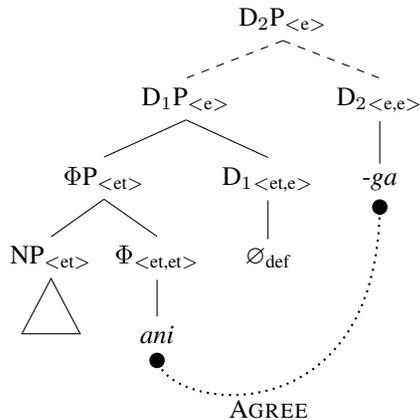
**Interim conclusion:**

- Phi-features are encoded as presuppositions.
- There is a single, phonologically null, definite determiner.
- *-kal-ta* and others are deictic functional elements.

**5 Putting it all together**

In this section, we illustrate the syntax and the semantics of a Somali pronoun.

(23) Structure for *ani(-ga)*, ‘1S.’

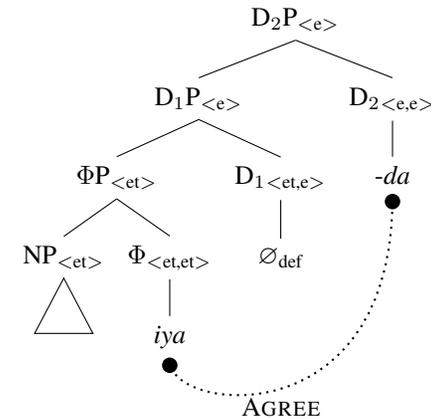


At the  $\Phi P$  node, 1st/2nd person pronouns are already referential by virtue of their person feature (speaker, addressee). Consequently, *-ka/-ta* is not required for interpretation.

(24) **Lexicon:**

- $\llbracket NP \rrbracket = [\lambda x_e . x=x]$
- $\llbracket ani \rrbracket = [\lambda f_{et} . \lambda x_e : x=\text{speaker}(c^*) . f(x)]$
- $\llbracket D \rrbracket = [\lambda g_{et} : \exists! x_e \text{ s.t. } g(x) . \text{the unique } x \text{ s.t. } g(x)]$
- $\llbracket ga_7 \rrbracket^g = [\lambda x_e . x=g(7)]$

(25) Structure for *iya-da*, ‘3SF.’



**Lexical entry for *iya***

(26)  $\llbracket iya \rrbracket = [\lambda f_{et} . \lambda x_e : x \text{ is FEMALE} . f(x)]$

At the  $\Phi P$  node, 3rd person pronouns are not referential. They lack a person feature (Harley & Ritter, 2002) and need extra functional material, here *-kal-ta*, to refer.

**6 Concluding remarks**

- We find a novel contrast between long and short pronouns: Only 1st/2nd have short forms.
- We attribute this contrast to the lack of a person feature in the case of 3rd person.
- Data from short forms + possessives suggest that the definite determiner in Somali is null.
- What have been described as definite determiners qualify mode of reference.

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## Appendix

- The second person can have impersonal uses:

(27) Haddad rabtid in=aad sameysid saandewij waa in=aad rooti-ga ukala laba jartaa.  
 if want C=2S make sandwich DECL C=2S bread-DET.M into two cut  
 If you want to make a sandwich, you have to cut the bread in two.

- Although 1S can have definite description uses, it does not seem to simply mean “the speaker.”

Crucially, 1S does not seem to mean “the speaker” (Kaplan, more recent renditions of test etc.)  
 Ani(ga) does not mean “the speaker.”

(28) Markaas-ta Obama hodabayo, {*pro* / ani / ani-gu} waan farhaa.  
 time-DET Obama speaks *pro* / 1S / 1S-DET.M DECL.1S happy  
 When Obama speaks, I am happy.  
 a. I  $\not\approx$  Obama.  
 b. I  $\approx$  speaker of context of utterance.

- Definite description use of a referential third person:

(29) Context: The mayor of Springfield does not prioritize the needs of the Somali community. Axmed feels frustrated by this.  
 Pointing his finger toward city hall, he says:  
 a. {*pro* / isa-gu} had iyo jeer waa Latino.  
*pro* / 3SM-DET.M always DECL Latino  
 He’s (=the mayor) always a Latino.  
 b. #Domenic Sarno is always a Latino.  
 (Domenic Sarno, current mayor of Springfield.)

- (30) forms a minimal pair with (14). -ga is not licensed for reasons we do not yet fully understand.

(30) Wiil iyo gabadh baa yimid...  
 boy and girl FOC came  
 A boy and a girl came...  
 ... Wiil{-kii/\*-ka} baa qoslay.  
 boy-RDET/-DET FOC laughed  
 ... The boy laughed.