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Does Somali have a genitive case?

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Aim

To demonstrate that from a **typological point of view** there is **little evidence** for a **genitive case** in Somali.

Outline

- **Background:** The traditional view on the genitive case in Somali.
- **Typological principles:** Canonical features (Corbett 2008, 2012)
- **Problems** with the Somali genitive from a typological point of view.
- **Evaluation:** How do the data score according to canonical typology?
- **Conclusion:** An alternative analysis of the Somali data.

Somali cases

The prevailing interpretation of the case system in Somali

ABSOLUTIVE **unmarked**: objects, adverbials, focused subjects...

NOMINATIVE only non-focused subjects

GENITIVE

VOCATIVE

Somali case marking: **Tonal accent**

INDEFINITE MASCULINE

ABSOLUTIVE	Cáli	HL	'Ali'
NOMINATIVE	Cali	LL	
GENITIVE	Calí	LH	
VOCATIVE	Cáli-yoów	HL-H	

Somali case marking: Suffixes

INDEFINITE FEMININE

ABS.SG	naág	‘woman’
NOM.SG	naag-i	
GEN.SG	naag-eéd	
VOC.SG	naág-eáy	
ABS.PL	naag-ó	
NOM.PL	naag-o	
GEN.PL	naag-oód	
VOC.PL	naag-á-yahów	



Somali case marking: **Definite forms**

	DEFINITE FEMININE	DEFINITE MASCULINE
ABS.SG	naág- ta 'the woman'	áqal- ka 'the house'
NOM.SG	naág-tu	áqal-ku
GEN.SG	naág-ta	áqal-ka
VOC.SG	—	—
ABS.PL	naag-á- ha	aqall-á- da
NOM.PL	naag-ú-hu	aqall-á-du
GEN.PL	naag-á-ha	aqall-á-da
VOC.PL	—	—

Overview of genitive markers

Genitive is only marked **explicitly** on morphologically indefinite nouns.

Feminine common nouns

singular	-eed (-aad)	(1) dhar naag-eéd	‘woman’s clothes’
		(2) caano riy-aád	‘goat milk’
plural	-ood	(3) dhowr naag-oód	‘a number of women’

Masculine nouns

singular	LH	(4) guriga Calí	‘Ali’s house’
		(absolute: Cáli)	



The use of the genitive

No genitive due to government by verbs or prepositions.

No agreement in case in the genitive.

The genitive only occurs as the second of two nouns constituting a NP.

The unmarked “genitive” construction

Although the genitive case is only marked explicitly on indefinite nouns, there is a very **strong preference** for **both nouns** in a genitive construction to occur in their **definite form**.

As the genitive and the absolutive of definite nouns are identical, the construction is basically a simple juxtaposition of two definite nouns.

? $N_{abs} + N_{gen}$

NB! def. $N_{gen} = \text{def. } N_{abs}$

(5) ákhris-ka búug-ga

‘the reading of the book’

(6) búug-ga macállin-ka

‘the book of the teacher, the teacher’s book’



Semantic types of NP's with the genitive

$N_{abs} + N_{gen}$

Possessive (7)	guriga <u>Calí</u>	' Ali's house'
Associative (8)	baarlamaanka <u>Soomaaliyá</u>	'the parliament of Somalia '
	(9) dhar <u>naag-eéd</u>	' woman's clothes'
	(10) xarunta <u>dháqanka</u>	' cultural centre'
Subjective (11)	go'aanka <u>Maxaméd</u>	' Mahamed's decision'
Objective (12)	akhriska <u>búugga</u>	'the reading of the book '
Partitive (13)	shan <u>naag-oód</u>	'five women '

Principles for canonical features and their values

- Canonical features [case, number, gender...] and their values [nom, gen...] are clearly distinguished by formal means.
- The use of canonical morphosyntactic features and their values is determined by simple syntactic rules.
- Canonical morphosyntactic features and their values are expressed by canonical inflectional morphology.

(Corbett 2012: 155-199)

Problem 1: Productivity of genitive markers (a)

All nouns in a given class should be inflected in the same way.

Strong impression in the literature that the three morphemes **-aad**, **-eed**, **-ood** are applicable to all feminine indefinite nouns.

However, judging from corpus data, **-aad** primarily derives adjectival ordinal numerals from cardinal numerals which in Somali are nouns.

(15) **fasalka shanaad** 'fifth grade' **shan** 'five'

Otherwise it occurs only in a handful of lexemes.

(16) **lo'aad** 'of cattle', (17) **subag lo'aad** 'cow butter'

(18) **riyaad** 'of goat', (19) **dhogor riyaad** 'goat fur'

This means that **-aad** is lexically restricted to a very high degree.

Problem 1: Productivity of genitive markers (b)

All nouns in a given class should be inflected in the same way.

The morpheme **-eed** is also not used with all feminine nouns.
There are clear lexical restrictions.

Such forms function rather as adjectives. No agreement in definiteness.

(20) **isbeddellada codeed** ‘the sound changes’ (lit. the changes of the sound)

Very frequently used in compounds, followed by a final definite article.

(21) **hees carruureedka** ‘the children’s song’

“Derivational” **-eed** is also used with masculine nouns.

(22) **cilmi afeed** (**af** ‘language’ is masc.) ‘linguistics (lit. knowledge of language)’

Problem 2: The genitive LH

All nouns in a given class should be inflected in a consistent way.

The change in tonal accent only occurs in the indefinite form of masculine nouns.

MASCULINE	INDEFINITE	DEFINITE
ABSOLUTE	gúri 'house	gúriga
GENITIVE	guri	gúriga

Problem 3: Definiteness of dependent nouns

Cases should be clearly distinguished and their use determined by simple rules.

In constructions with possessive, associative, subject and object genitive, both nouns must be indefinite or definite.

(23) **tartan baabuur** 'a car race' **tartanka baabuurta** 'the car race'

The definite form of both nouns (except proper names) is however highly preferred, even in an indefinite sense.

(24) **kubbadda cagta** 'a football/the football'

Only the partitive function after numerals requires the indefinite form of the dependent noun. The numeral itself is a noun which may be definite or indefinite, but the dependent noun must be indefinite.

(25) **shan gurí** 'five houses' **shanta gurí** 'the five houses'

Problem 4: Syntax with numerals

The use of cases should be determined by simple rules.

Masculine nouns always take the **gen.sg.** tonal accent LH.

(26) **gúri** 'house', **hal gurí** 'one house', **shan gurí** 'five houses'

Feminine nouns take **gen.pl.** after all numbers except *hal* 'one' where the **abs.sg.** is required. Gen.sg. is not possible.

(27) **hal naág** (*naageéd) 'one woman', **shan naagoód** 'five women'

Problem 5: Syntax of -ood

All morphemes expressing the same case should be used according to the same syntactic rules.

The suffix **-ood** forms the genitive plural of feminine countable nouns without lexical restrictions;

but it is practically only used in partitive constructions after numerals.

(28) **shan maalmood** ‘five days’

Only extremely seldom in other types of constructions which seem to constitute adjectival lexicalisations or fixed phrases functioning as proper names.

(29) **il biyood** ‘spring of water’

(30) **Naasa Hablood** (lit. girls’ breasts) two famous hills in Somaliland

(31) **Laas Caanood** (lit. well of milk) a town in Somaliland



Problem 6: Semantic differentiation

For any specific lexeme, a certain case should always be expressed by the same morpheme.

Two different “genitive” forms of indefinite feminine nouns depending on meaning and construction type.

- (32) POSSESSIVE: dhar **naag** ‘clothes of a specific woman’
- (33) ASSOCIATIVE: dhar **naageed** ‘clothes of a woman in general’

Problem 7: Case integrity

Rules for case marking should be simple. One case should not be overridden by another.

A genitive complement must be in the nominative if the whole NP is a non-focused subject.

- (34) **Gúri-ga macállin-ku wáa míd wéyn.**
house-DEF.ABS teacher-DEF.NOM DECL one big
'The teacher's house is big.'

Evaluation based on canonical typology

Is it easy to tell apart the different cases from each other?

- No.
- Most frequently (all def., some indef.): GEN = ABS.
- Less frequently (all masc. indef.): GEN only marked by tonal accent.
- Least frequently (some fem. indef.) GEN endings.

Are there simple syntactic rules for the use of the genitive ?

- No.
- Different "genitive" forms of the same noun depending on type of construction.
- Different rules depending on the type of dependent noun in the NP.

May the genitive form be easily formed from every noun?

- No.
- Only some of the nouns in a class form the genitive with the available suffixes.

Hence, the Somali genitive is an extremely weak category.



New analysis: Proposal # 1

Forms in **-ood** have been recategorised as a **counting form** of feminine nouns.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| (35) shan naag- ood | ‘five women’ |
| (36) afar gabdh- ood | ‘four girls’ |
| (37) shan nin | ‘five men’ |
| (38) afar wiil | ‘four boys’ |

New analysis: Proposal # 2

A handful of forms in **-aad**, **-ood**, and many forms in **-eed** have been recategorised as **derivational** and **lexicalised** as **adjectives**.

- (39) caano **riyaad** 'goat milk' (40) dhar **naageed** 'women's clothes'
(41) hees **Soomaaliyeed** 'a Somali song' (41) il **biyood** 'a water spring'

As such, they strongly contribute to the derivation of **compounds**.

- (42) cilmi **afeed**(ka) 'linguistics (lit. science of language)'
(43) khabar **magaceed**(ka) 'nominal predicate, i.e. predicate noun'
(44) yaxaas **badeed**(ka) 'shark (lit. crocodile of [the] sea)'

A few old genitives have been lexicalised in fixed expressions and names.

- (45) Laas **Caanood** a Somali town, lit. 'well of milk'



New analysis: Proposal # 3

NP final masculine nouns shift their tonal accent to LH.

(46) **shan gurí** ‘five houses’

(47) **gúriga Calí** ‘Ali’s house’

This only applies to nouns without a determiner, as the clitic determiner would be NP final, not the noun itself.

(48) **gúri-ga macállin-ka** ‘the house of the teacher’
 house-DEF teacher-DEF

Conclusion

With those three assumptions, the genitive is no longer needed in order to account for the Somali data.

What may seem as a genitive case rather isn't any more than some historical remnants of a case.



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