

THE MORPHOPHONEMICS OF SOMALI
AND THEIR PRESENTATION IN THE CLASSROOM

R. David Zorc
MRM Inc.

Morphophonemics might as well be a dirty word for the looks of horror or disgust it engendered in my first students years ago. Puns like "mournful phonemics" and "mortal phonics" abounded. While the term may have little place in the language classroom, the phenomena to which it refers are essential to gaining communicative competence, depending, of course, on their role in the target language. The consequences of saying [wayfs] instead of [wayvz] in an English sentence such as "He has three wives" are not dire, but in some languages the failure to change the form of a word in accord with inflectional or derivational rules may lead to genuine misunderstanding or miscommunication.

My first encounter was with fourteen of these rather mystifying sound changes when I was learning and (later) teaching the Bisayan dialects of the central Philippines. [For a pan-dialectal summary of the changes involved see Zorc 1977:54-60 and for Aklanon Bisayan see Zorc 1968:38-49.] Peace Corps volunteers needed to come to grips with these changes, not only to communicate coherently, but also to be able to find a word in the dictionary; for example, *kasúdlan meat; contents* must be sought under the headword *sulúd enter*. This was so because there is a long-standing lexicographic tradition in the Philippines of putting all derivations under the root word rather than in alphabetical order [a convention which, on pedagogical grounds, I have recently challenged (Zorc 1992)]. Realizing what a bitter pill this was to swallow for non-linguistically-oriented students, I once tried to get cute and called them "the case of the missing links" (Zorc 1969:32-34).

While the fourteen Philippine changes may have seemed an obstacle or a challenge to language pedagogy, I have since come across complex changes in word form in the Aboriginal languages of Australia and in Armenian, where I have had to deal with them within the curricula I was developing. But no language that I know of comes near Somali which has no less than thirty-nine. This is surely something worthy of mention in the Guinness Book of Records!

In developing the *Somali Textbook* (Zorc and Issa, 1990), we worked on two basic principles: that of high text frequency (and therefore importance to the curriculum whereby a student could get the greatest mileage out of language lessons) and that of programmed instruction (whereby harder units are built upon easier ones). Morphophonemic changes were therefore introduced where and when they were warranted. However, we felt that they were of such importance that we dedicated the last chapter of the book to a comprehensive review of them before the student left for the real world of Somali speech and literature. In the *Somali-English Dictionary* (Zorc, Osman and Luling, 1991; Zorc and Osman, 1993) we also presented a reasonably lengthy discussion of them because of the need for and difficulty of isolating a root word (headword) from speech forms encountered. A modified version of the latter is presented here, where I will be discussing general morphophonemic changes (2.01-06) and then the specific changes affecting individual sounds (2.07-39). Although most of these are covered in one or another of the grammatical articles or books listed in the References section, I am not aware of any study covering all 39.

GENERAL SOUND CHANGES

2.01. FUSION OR THE COMBINATION OF WORDS. The textually most frequent change in Somali is also the most complex. Often two or more words run together in a highly abbreviated fashion, e.g., *seyte so she said* = *si (da) way + ay she + tiri (she) said*. Most such combinations encountered in our resources were included in the dictionary, but the student was advised to be aware of the possibilities, and check out all potential component parts of new words encountered.

In particular, the subject pronouns *aan, aad, uu, ay ~ ey, aynu, annu, eydin* are attached to the end of other words, e.g., *inaanan that I not* = *in + aan [vpro] + aan [neg]*. In such combinations, various sound changes may also apply, e.g., *maxay + uu* → *muxuu what he?* (with VOWEL HARMONY) or *maanta today* and *uu* → *maantuu today he* (with VOWEL LOSS).

The classifiers *baa, ayaa* FOCUS, *waa* DECLARATIVE, and *ma* INTERROGATIVE OR NEGATIVE also run together with other words, e.g., *ninkaa = ninka the man + baa, waa + uu he* → *wuu he is/was, baannu = baa + annu we, maaha = ma + aha (he/she) is not*.

In addition, the prepositions *u, ku, ka, la* frequently combine with one another and with object pronouns, e.g., *idiin = idin + u for you*. Such combinations were also listed in the dictionary. Although in some cases an attempt was made to gloss the combined form, other translations can apply since the actual meaning will be heavily dependent on the context.

2.02. VOWEL HARMONY. A short vowel often changes to match the vowel of the suffix or next word, e.g., *sac cow + -kii* → *sicii the cow; xoolo cattle + -kii* → *xoolihii the cattle; dhac fall + -een* → *dheceen they fell; leh having + aa* → *lahaa; wax something + -a* → *waxa the thing, what [CLEFT FOCUS]; wax + ii* → *wixii the thing [KNOWN]; waxa + uu he* → *wuxuu* as in *wuxuu doonayaa what he wants*. In the flow of speech, final vowels are usually affected this way, e.g., *caano milk* → *caana in laba koob oo caana ah two cups of milk*. This is very frequent in Somali texts and is further treated in three common vowel shifts below (*e* → *a*, *e* → *i* and *o* → *a*).

2.03. VOWEL LOSS. Nouns of Declension 3 and verbs of Conjugation 3b regularly lose the final vowel of their stem, e.g., *gabadh girl + -o* → *gabdho girls* or *hayso have + -teen* → *haysteen they possessed*. In the derivation of some other verbs and adjectives, a final short vowel will drop out when additions are made to the root, e.g., *hadal talk + -ay* → *hadlay (he) talked; ladan good + ahay I am* → *ladnahay I feel fine*. But this change will not occur if the resulting word would have three consonants together; note: *orod + -tay* → *orodday (she) ran* (not **ordtay*).

Some words can be seen as interrelated if loss of a final vowel is posited in derivations, e.g., *caanee whiten with milk ~ caano milk, cashee dine ~ casho dinner*.

2.04. CONSONANT DOUBLING OR GEMINATION. Although consonant doubling (or gemination) is important in distinguishing many words, only *bb, dd, gg, ll, mm, nn,* and *rr* can occur. In the Northern dialects *dhdh* may occur in pronunciation, but it is generally spelled as a single *dh*: contrast *cadho anger* and *cadhdho scabies, mange*.

Some monosyllabic words end with a notional double consonant, since this comes out in derivations or inflections with vowel-initial suffixes, e.g., *cab* (*cabbay*) *drink*, *cad* (*caddaan*) *white*, *dheg* (*dheggan*) *stuck, attached*, *hel* (*helloon*) *obtainable*, *rim* (*rimman*) *pregnant (of animal)*, *ban* (*bannaan*) *open*, *hor* (*horree*) *precede*.

Nouns of Declension 2 double the final consonant before the -o suffix is added, e.g., *saaxiibbo* *friends*, *aqallo* *houses*, *inammo* *boys*, *habeenno* *nights*, *lambarro* *numbers*.

If a consonant may be double, in the formation of most COMPOUND WORDS it will be double, e.g., *galtibbax* *become assimilated*, *Maalmaddoone* *fourth month of Somali lunar calendar*, *labaggalley* *hypocrisy*, *tukallalmis* *"hanging crow" (wild plant sp.)*, *uurkummaanle* *clairvoyant*, *guryannoqod* *returning home of pets*, *ilmarrogad* *movement of the child in the womb*.

Conversely, if a consonant may not be double, a compound word bringing such consonants together will be spelled with a hyphen, e.g., *madax-xige* *vice-president*, or it may be fused into one word with a single consonant (*madaxige*), which may be construed as another instance of consonant loss (immediately below).

2.05. CONSONANT LOSS. When a combination of *d + t* would occur, the cluster reduces to *t*, as in *qaad(o) + -taa* → *qaataa* *I take*, *waad(o) + -tay* → *watay* *he drove*.

When a masculine noun ends in *c, h, kh, q* or *x*, the -*ka* suffix reduces to -*a*, e.g., *raha* *the frog*, *magacaa* *your name*, *dhinacee* *which side?*, and *dariiqaan* *this street*.

2.06. SOUND-SWITCHING OR METATHESIS. In a few words after VOWEL LOSS has occurred the two middle consonants will switch places, e.g., *culus + -aa* → *cuslaa* *he was heavy*; *duman + -ay* → *dunmay* *got organized*; *neceb + -ayd* → *nebcayd* *she disliked it*. This change is rather rare in word derivation, but it can be seen in the alternate forms of several loanwords, e.g., *abhi* ~ *ahbi* *plead*, *isxaan* ~ *ixsaan* *favor, grace*, *Kabco* ~ *Kacbo* *Kaaba*, *macalgad* ~ *malgacad* *metal spoon*, *tijaabi* ~ *jitaabi* *test*.

SPECIFIC SOUND CHANGES

The following are the most common variations for which students should be on the lookout; they are presented in alphabetical order as a reference guide.

- 2.07. *a* → *e* A short *a* in monosyllabic verbs will tend to become *e* when there is an *e* or *i* in an added syllable, e.g., *tag go + -i* → *tegi* *to go* [infinitive], *gal enter + -i* → *geli* *insert*. [This is somewhat like VOWEL HARMONY (see above).]
- 2.08. *a* → *o* Only affects a few pronoun + preposition compounds, e.g., *inoo* *for us* = *ina* *us* + *u* *for, to*, *loo* *for someone* = *la* *someone* + *u*.
- 2.09. *a* → *u* The final -*a* of a determiner becomes *u* to indicate subject marking, e.g., *naag + -ta + u* → *naagtu* *the woman* [SUBJECT], *nin + -ka + u* → *ninku* *the man* [SUBJECT].

- 2.10. ay ~ ey The verbal endings of conjugations 1 and 3 are generally written as -ay or -tay, but may also be seen as -ey or -tey, e.g., arkay ~ arkey *I saw*. Similarly the possessive suffixes reflect this alternation, e.g., -kayga ~ -keyga *my*, hooyaday ~ hooyadey *my mother*.
- 2.11. b → bb Although a legitimate consonant cluster, some verb roots that end in b may double this consonant when a vowel-initial suffix is added, e.g., cab *drink* + -ay → cabbay (*he*) *drank*. This may also happen in compound words, e.g., biyo *water* + beel *lose* → biyabbeel *evaporate*.
- 2.12. b ~ m These sounds are sometimes interchangeable, e.g., kibis or kimis *bread*, toban or toman *ten*. [See also m ~ b below.]
- 2.13. d → dd Although a legitimate consonant cluster, some verb roots that end in d may double this consonant when a vowel-initial suffix is added, e.g., cad *white* + -ee → caddee *whiten*, or when words are compounded.
- 2.14. dh ~ r The sound dh in Northern Somali is replaced by r in Standard Somali except at the beginning of words or where the dh is double: e.g., the word for *girl* is either gabadh {N} or gabar {S & C}. The latter form is increasingly becoming standard usage and is representative of that used here.
- 2.15. dt → t When a verb of Conjugation 3 ends in the sequence -do and the suffix would begin with -t, the dt reduces to a simple t, e.g., qaado + -tay → qaatay *I took it for myself*.
- 2.16a. e → a A final short -e in nouns will change to -a to match the vowel of any addition made to the word, e.g., madaxweyne *president* + -ha → madaxweynaha *the president*; bare *teacher* → barayaal *teachers*; aabbe *father* + -kaaga → aabbahaa *your father*. [This is an instance of VOWEL HARMONY (see above).]
- 2.16b. e ~ a These vowels are sometimes used interchangeably, e.g., the word beddel *change* may also appear as baddal.
- 2.17. e → i A final short -e in nouns will change to -i to match the vowel of any addition made to the word, e.g., fure *key* + -hii → furihii *the key (past reference)*. [This is an instance of VOWEL HARMONY (see above).]
- 2.18. g → j When verbs of Conjugation 1 that end in g are transformed to verbs of Conjugation 2a (with -i), g generally changes to j, e.g., nuug *suck* + -i → nuuji *suckle*.
- 2.19. g → k There is a general rule that stops at the end of syllables must be voiced, so that g is usually replaced by k when no longer in this position, e.g., arkay (*I*) *saw* from arag *see!*, adag *hard* + -ee → adkee *harden*.
- 2.20. i → y Some stems that end in -i have derived forms with -y-, e.g., guri *house* + -o → guryo *houses*, bari + -een → baryeen *they spent the night in peace*.
- 2.21. iy → sh Sometimes when verbs are conjugated the sequence of i + y will change to sh, e.g., tiri *count* + -yo → tirsho (*I do*) *not count*; is mari *rub on oneself* + -yaa → ismarshaa *for external use*.

- 2.22. k- (lost) The masculine noun suffix -k is dropped after c, h, kh, q, or x, e.g., sanduuq box + -ka → sanduuqa the box; rah frog + -ka → raha the frog, magac name + -kaaga → magacaa your name.
- 2.23. k → g The masculine noun suffix -k becomes -g after g, y, w, or i, e.g., rag mankind + -kii → raggii the men; oday old man + -ka → odayga the old man; guri house + -kee → gurigee which house?.
- 2.24. k → h The masculine noun suffix -k becomes -h after all vowels except i, e.g., ololo campaign + -ka → lolaha the campaign; bare teacher + -ka → baraha the teacher.
- 2.25. kh ~ q A few roots containing these sounds are sometimes found as alternatives, e.g., khasaaro or qasaaro damage, dhakhso ~ dhaqso hurry, duq ~ dukh old man. [See also q ~ kh below.]
- 2.26. ln → ll In noun derivation and verb conjugation, even though a legitimate consonant cluster, an l followed by an n may become ll, e.g., dil kill + -nay → dillay (we) killed.
- 2.27. lt → sh In feminine noun inflection and verb conjugation, the combination of l and t becomes sh, e.g., meel place + -ta → meesha the place; bil moon, month + tan this → bishan this month; qosol laugh + -tay → qososhay (she) laughed; calool stomach + tayda my → caloosheyda my stomach.
- 2.28. m ~ b In a few roots these sounds are sometimes interchanged, e.g., ammanduule or abbaanduule commander.
- 2.29. m → n In the inflection of a few verbs of Conjugation 3b that have an m between vowels, this sound will change to n after VOWEL LOSS brings two consonants together, e.g., dhimo die → dhintay (he) died; xamo gossip → xanteen (they) gossiped.
- 2.30. n → m In the inflection of many noun or verb roots that end in n, the sound changes to m, e.g., nin man → niman men; tun pound + -aal → tumaal blacksmith, kulan meet + -ay → kulmay (he) encountered.
- 2.31. nr → rr Although a legitimate consonant cluster, an r followed by an n may become rr, e.g., bar teach + -nay → barray (we) taught; fur open + -niin → furriin divorce.
- 2.32. o → a A final short -o will change to -a to match the vowel of any addition made to the root, e.g., magaalo city + -da → magaalada the city; ilko teeth → ilkaha the teeth; aarso take revenge → aarsaday (he) took revenge. [This is an instance of VOWEL HARMONY (see above).]
- 2.33. q → j When verbs of Conjugation 1 that end in q are transformed to verbs of Conjugation 2a (with -i), g generally changes to j, e.g., daaq graze → daaji make graze.
- 2.34. q ~ kh A few roots containing these sounds are sometimes found as alternatives, e.g., qaash ~ khaash rotten food, dawaq ~ dawakh be giddy.
- 2.35a. t → d On verbs a t becomes d after c, d, h, q, x, w, and between vowels, e.g., dhac fall + -tay → dhacday (she) fell; bax go out + -tay → baxday (you) went out; illow forget + -tay → illowday (you) forgot; joogso stop + -tay → joogsaday (I) stopped.

- 2.35b. t → d On nouns, the feminine -t becomes -d after all vowels and d, e.g., *kaalmo assistance + -ta → kaalmada the assistance; jamhuuriyad republic + -ta → jamhuuriyadda the republic.*
- 2.36. t → dh On verb roots and feminine nouns ending with -dh, when a suffix begins with t that consonant will assimilate to dh, e.g., *gabadhdha the girl; xidhdhay she tied it.* Note that this double dh is usually spelled single, i.e., *gabadha, xidhay.*
- 2.37. t → s In inflecting the PROGRESSIVE TENSES (with -ay-) and CONJUGATION 2 VERBS, s appears instead of t, e.g., *keen bring + -ay- + -taa → keenaysaa (she) is bringing, kari cook + -tay → karisay (you) cooked.*
- 2.38. w → b When words ending with a w are inflected, the sound will often change to b between vowels, e.g., *madow black → madoobeeyey it became black, illo forget → illobey I forgot, koow iyo toban → koobyo toban eleven.*
- 2.39. y+ In verbs of Conjugation 2, the consonant y is added when the suffix begins with a vowel, e.g., *tiri count + -ay → tiriyeey (I) counted, safee clean + -een → safeeeyeen they cleaned.*

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