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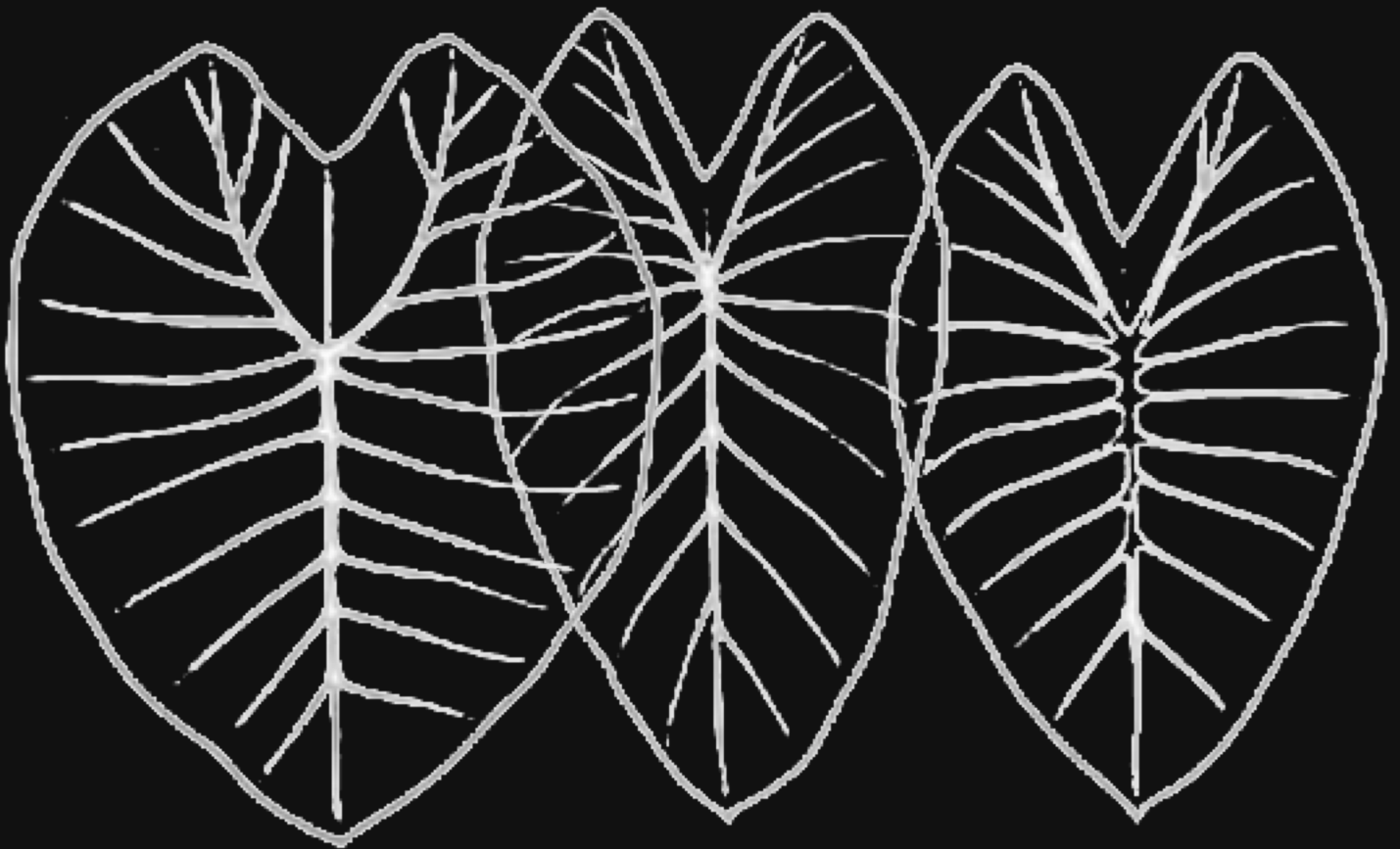
Fieldwork Perspectives on the
Semantics of African, Asian and Austronesian Languages

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Austronesian

The Somali Microscope:
Personal Pronouns, Determiners and Possession[1]

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Abstract.   This paper describes aspects of the morpho-syntax and the semantics of lexical nouns, pronouns, and possessives in Somali, with a focus on the expression of (in)definiteness. Novel data supports the claim that nominals marked with morphemes -KA and -KII, thought to be overt definite determiners, indeed pattern like definite descriptions. The core contribution is that there are nominals that do not bear -KA or -KII, which are interpreted as definites. Therefore, a phonologically null, definiteness encoding device must be available in Somali, either alongside, or instead of the morphemes -KA and -KII.

1   Introduction

This paper is a description of the Somali nominal and pronominal system with the goal of advancing the understanding of how definiteness is encoded in Somali, and cross-linguistically. Somali bare NPs are understood to be interpreted as indefinites, and definiteness is taken to be contributed by the suffixal definite determiners -KA and -KII, which are subject to allomorphic and phonological variation described in section 2.2.1 (Saeed, 1993, 1999; Green et al., 2015). These morphemes have received much attention in the literature on tense and modality in the nominal domain (Lecarme, 1996, 2008, 2012; Tonhauser, 2007; Nordlinger and Sadler, 2004; Thomas, 2014; Ivan and Özyıldız, 2016).

The main empirical contribution of this paper is that certain nominal forms are interpreted as definite descriptions, despite not featuring the morphemes -KA and -KII. Based on the data discussed in this paper, the main theoretical claim that there must be a null device that encodes definiteness in Somali is drawn. For concreteness, we claim that this is done through a phonologically null morpheme referred to as $\varnothing_{\text{DEF}}$. Covert type shifting mechanisms are also compatible with our proposal—with the caveat that the availability of these devices is usually restricted in languages with overt definite determiners.

The patterns observed here are consistent with two hypotheses regulating the distribution of definite determiners in Somali. The single determiner hypothesis states that Somali has a single definite determiner, $\varnothing_{\text{DEF}}$, and that -KA and -KII are functional morphemes that select for definite DPs, introducing independent interpretive constraints such as nominal tense or modality. The multiple determiner hypothesis states that Somali has a rich array of definite determiners, including

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-KA and -KII, but crucially also $\varnothing_{\text{DEF}}$. We leave the task of testing these hypotheses for further research.

2 Background information

2.1 Elicitation

The data for this project was mainly collected from a primary consultant, who self reports as a native speaker of Standard Somali, at the East African Cultural Center (EACC) in Springfield, MA., between Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. Occasional attendees of the EACC and a linguistically trained speaker from MN. also contributed.

2.2 Somali

2.2.1 Noun Classes

Somali has two noun classes, referred to as the masculine and the feminine. Masculine nouns are suffixed with morphemes whose initial segment is typically /k/ (phonologically realized as [k], [g] or [h] and noted K) as illustrated by (1-a), and feminine nouns with /t/ (realized as [d], [dh], [sh] and noted T) as illustrated by (1-b) (Saeed, 1993, 1999; Green et al., 2015)

(1)   a.   K/G suffixes for masculine nouns
             *aqal-**k**a,   telefoon-**g**a*
             house-KA telephone-KA
             the house, the telephone
       b.   T/D suffixes for feminine nouns
             *shimbir-**t**a, qorrax-**d**a*
             bird-KA   sun-KA
             the bird, the sun

All the instances of the morphemes in (1-a) and (1-b) are referred to as -KA throughout the paper.

2.2.2 Received Wisdom about Definiteness

The morphemes -KA and -KII are recognized in the literature as definite determiners (Saeed, 1993, 1999; Green et al., 2015). Most of the examples in the present paper use -KA. For a discussion on -KII and its temporal implications see Lecarme (1996, 2008); Ivan and Özyıldız (2016). Sentence (2) suggests that nouns marked with KA can be anaphoric. The entity denoted by "a house" is introduced in the discourse context. The target sentence contains an anaphoric NP, which cannot refer to the house introduced in the context unless it is suffixed by KA.

(2)   -KA marked nouns can be anaphoric
        Context: Axmed, who was walking in the desert, saw a house.
        Aqal#(-ku)   duug buu   ahaa.
        house-KA.NOM old   FOC.3S was
        The house was old.   [03/19/2016]

Moreover, (3) suggests that -KA marked nouns cannot introduce novel discourse referents.

(3)   -KA marked nouns cannot be interpreted as indefinites
        Ey(#-gu)   wuu jiifaa ey(#-gu)-na   wuu   ordayaa.
        dog-KA.NOM DECL sleeps dog-KA.NOM-CONJ DECL runs
        #The dog is sleeping and the dog is running. (Sounds contradictory.)   [03/19/2016]

If they could, (3) would not sound contradictory—a second dog having been introduced in the
discourse by the second occurrence of *eygu*. Note that the acceptability pattern flips: (2) is un-
acceptable with the anaphoric interpretation if -KA is omitted, and (3) becomes acceptable. This
suggests that bare NPs pattern like indefinites.

The examples in (2) and (3) are based on the familiarity condition on definite noun phrases,
namely that they can only refer to a familiar, previously introduced discourse referent, and the
novelty condition for indefinites, that they refer to novel discourse referents and may not refer
back to previously mentioned entities (Heim, 1982). The data discussed so far supports the claim
that NPs marked with -KA pattern like definites, while bare NPs pattern like indefinites.

2.2.3 Pronoun Paradigms

Somali has two series of non-clitic pronouns, referred to as long independent and short independent
pronouns. Their paradigms are given in tables (4) and (7).

Long pronouns are morphologically complex. They can be decomposed into a ϕ-feature root
(*ani-*, *adi-*, *isa-*, . . .) and the morpheme -KA, thought to be a definite determiner.

(4)   Somali long independent pronouns

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

All the forms in the paradigm feature the masculine [ka]/[ga] allomorph of -KA, except for the
third person singular feminine form, which features the feminine allomorph [da]. Though feminine
agreement is isolated in this paradigm, it is robust elsewhere in the language. Verbal agreement
with a feminine subject survives in conditions (e.g., when the subject is in focus) where person and
number agreement is neutralized (Green et al., 2015).

Other determiners are also reported to be grammatical when attached to the ϕ-stem, such as the remote determiner *-kii*, or demonstratives and interrogatives as in (5-a) and (5-b). We have found such forms to be difficult to elicit; this difficulty might be stemming from pragmatic effects associated with the use of these morphemes on pronominal forms.

(5) a. *Isa-gii   baa hadal-kii qaatay   oo yiri…*
         3S.M-KII FOC talk-KII   take.PST and said
         He began to speak, and said…   Lecarme (2008)
     b. *ani-gee?*
         1S-which
         Which me?   Saeed (1999)

Lecarme (1996) comments that -KII in a sentence like (5-a) "locates an individual temporally, at a past time." Regarding *anigee* in (5-b), Saeed (1999) reports that "[It is] an expression that may be used to protest when unfairly accused." We remain agnostic about the function of -KII in (5-a), given that -KII on a pronoun does not seem to be a necessary condition for situating its denotation in a past time. This is suggested by the acceptability of -KA in (6), with the same past tense morphology on the predicate:

(6) *Isa-ga   waxaa arkay   Axmed.*
     3S.M-KA FOC   saw.PST Axmed
     Axmed saw him.   [03/17/2016]

Regarding the pronoun form in (5-b), one might wonder about whether it is any different from the English, slightly awkward, *Which me*? *This/that me*, *A young me*, etc.

What is crucial for present purposes is that the morphological complexity of long pronouns is transparent. Their formation is to some extent productive, and submorphemes are visible to the grammar, as suggested by the agreement pattern with the third person feminine form.

Turning now to the short independent pronoun paradigm, table (7) shows that short forms consist of bare ϕ-feature roots. That is, the definite determiner present in the long forms is lacking.

(7)   Somali short independent pronouns

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

Our elicitation data contains tokens of *ani*, "I," *adi*, "you," and *idin*, "y'all." The third person forms *isa* and *iya* were strongly rejected by our consultants.[2] From this difference, we extrapolate

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[2]Our main informant, from MA., comments: *'isa' is not a word* [11/03/2015] or *'isa' is a proper name* (presumably referring to the equivalent of the name Jesus), or asks where we got that word and thinks that it's some kind of joke

and predict the acceptability of first person inclusive and exclusive plural forms *anna* and *inna*, and the unacceptability of the third person plural form *iya* (homophonous with the third singular feminine). Pending further research, the following generalization, to our knowledge novel, is tentatively proposed:

(8)   Third person forms do not have short forms.

We speculate, going back to the idea that first and second person pronouns are pure indexicals Kaplan (1989), that they may acquire their denotation by virtue of their local person (π) features (see also Harley and Ritter 2002). For instance, the *ani* morpheme would encode reference to the speaker, *adi* to the addressee, etc. Pronouns without π features require -KA, which might be a morpheme that introduces an additional functional layer giving the pronoun a denotation.

These paradigm differences might be an argument in favor of a non-uniform approach to the semantics of pronouns along the 1/2 vs. 3 distinction, and one in favor of a uniform treatment of third person forms as definite descriptions (Grosz and Zobel, 2014).

2.2.4 Syntactic Distribution of Independent Pronouns

To our knowledge, the literature on Somali is not specific on the licensing conditions of independent pronouns (as opposed to clitic forms), with short and long forms alike being called "emphatic" by Saeed (1999), and on the distribution of short vs. long forms.

The following examples illustrate that both short and long forms are licensed in major argument positions (subject, direct object, complement of adposition) and as predicates. Both short and long forms have the syntactic distribution of D/NPs. Recall that third person short forms are ungrammatical across the board.[3]

(9)   Pronoun in subject position:

    a.   {*ani / ani-gu*}   *wax=aan ku*   *arkay Axmed.*
        1S / 1S-DET.NOM FOC=1S ADP saw   Axmed
        I saw Axmed.

    b.   {**isa* / *isa-gu*}   *wux=uu* *ku* *arkay Maxamed.*
        3SM / 3SM-DET.NOM FOC=3SM ADP saw   Maxamed
        He saw Maxamed.   [03/17/2016]

(10)   Pronoun in direct object position:

    a.   {*ani / ani-ga*} *waxaa i*   *arkay Axmed.*
        1S / 1S-DET FOC   1S.OBJ.CL saw   Axmed
        Axmed saw me.

(that we do not understand), repeating the ungrammatical examples and repeatedly pointing to his chest [03/17/2016]. The morpheme *is* is a verbal reflexive marker, which is perhaps a clue to the puzzle. Our second informant, from MN., equally reports *isa* to be unacceptable, in contrast with *ani* [11/02/2015], which makes the 1st/2nd and 3rd persons difference unlikely to be idiosyncratic. All short forms are listed as grammatical in Saeed (1999) and Green et al. (2015), although not specified in which environments.

[3]Note also that 3S/P object clitics are not overtly realized, while 1S clitics are. It does not seem to be the lack of an overt object clitic that is causing the ungrammaticality of (10-b) and (11-b) with **isa*.

b. {*isa / isa-ga}   waxaa ∅   arkay Axmed.
   3SM / 3SM-DET FOC   3S.OBJ.CL saw   Axmed
   Axmed saw him.   [03/17/2016]

(11)   Pronoun associated with adposition (ku≈at):

a. *Cabdi ul   b=uu   i=gu   tuuray {ani / ani-ga}.*
   Cabdi stick FOC=3SM 1S.OBJ.CL=ADP threw   1S / 1S-DET
   Cabdi threw a stick at me.

b. *Cabdi ul   b=uu   ∅=ku   tuuray {*isa / isa-ga}.*
   Cabdi stick FOC=3SM 3S.OBJ.CL=ADP threw   3SM / 3SM-DET
   Cabdi threw a stick at him.   [11/03/2015]

(12)   Pronoun in predicate position:
        Maamulu-hu waa   {ani / ani-ga}.
        manager-DET DECL   1S / 1S-DET
        The manager is me.   [02/20/2016]

The above sentences show that there does not seem to be syntactic differences in the distribution of short vs. long forms. Semantic and pragmatic effects are known to give rise to differences in pronoun expression in languages with both null and overt pronoun paradigms. Whether such differences exist in Somali, a language with null pronouns and *two* overt pronoun paradigms, is a question that remains to be explored.[4]

2.2.5 Possessives

Somali makes a distinction between two kinds of possessives: alienable, in (13-a), and inalienable, in (13-b). Both kinds involve a possessive suffix which agrees in noun class with the possessed noun and encodes ϕ-features. The difference between alienable and inalienable come from the fact that the former are obligatorily suffixed with the determiners -KA or -KII, while inalienables are usually not suffixed with a determiner.

(13)   a. *telefoon-kay*(-ga),   dhala-day*(-da)*
           telephone.M-POSS.1S-DET.M, jar.F-POSS.1S-DET.F
           my telephone, my jar   [POSS&DET agree in gender with NP]

        b. *saxiib-kay-∅,   hooya-day-∅*
           friend.M-POSS.1S, mother.F-POSS.1S
           my friend, my mother

Green et al. (2015) list body parts, kinship terms, close relations, some verbal nominalizations ('his eating') and some ascribed properties ('her slowness') as inalienable. We have encountered

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[4]Perhaps, short forms are good information foci (e.g., filling in the *wh-* in an answer to a *wh-* question), long forms are good contrastive foci, while null forms are unfocused. Languages with both null and overt pronoun paradigms would collapse the first two focus conditions as licensors of overt pronouns.

instances of inalienable possessives used with -KA, when the possessive was modified by a su-perlative as in (14-a), or when, as in (14-b) it heads a restrictive relative clause.

(14)   a.   *Saxiib-kay-ga   u   fiicaan waa   Cali.*
             friend-POSS-DET COMP good   DECL Cali
             My best friend is Cali.

       b.   *Saxiib-kay-ga   runta ah waa   Cali.*
             friend-POSS-DET truth be DECL Cali
             The friend of mine who's right is Cali.   [03/23/2016]

This strongly suggests that the -KA/∅ alternation in inalienable possession is not semantically vacuous, though we must leave this for further research.

3   Arguments in Favor of the Existence of $\varnothing_{\mathbf{DEF}}$

3.1   Pronouns as Definite Descriptions

In many languages, there are morphological similarities between third person pronoun forms, and determiners or demonstratives (for English, see Postal (1969) and such similarities are found across Germanic and Romance, Hindi, Turkish, and Basque, to name only a few languages). In their semantics, there is evidence that at least some instances of pronouns must be analyzed as covert definite descriptions. (See Elbourne (2013), Sauerland (2007), and Grosz and Zobel (2014) for a general review). The structure of a regular definite description formed of a lexical NP and a determiner is given in (15-a). The semantic analysis of pronouns as definite descriptions, as shown in (15-b), takes on one of two forms:

(15)   a.   Regular definite description
             [$_{DP}$ **the** [NP]]   e.g., Heim and Kratzer (1998)

       b.   Pronouns
             (i)   [$_{DP}$ **he** [<NP>]]   Simplified from Elbourne (2013)[5]
             (ii)   [$_{\Phi P}$ he [$_{DP}$ <the NP>]]   Sauerland (2007)

The two main proposals concerning the structure of pronouns, in (15-b-i) and (15-b-ii), differ as follows: in the former the surface form of a pronoun is the definite determiner (one that happens to be pronounced differently from the regular definite determiner); while in the latter, the surface form expresses agreement features, but the definite determiner semantics is encoded by a *covert*, independent morpheme. Although we believe that Somali provides some evidence in favor of a structure like (15-b-ii), precisely in that agreement and definite determiner morphology are en-coded by distinct morphemes, and that Somali speakers might have access to this morphological decomposition, we are not yet committed to a particular analysis here. What is important is that the semantics of pronouns is independently argued to involve bona fide definiteness.

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[5]The structure argued for in Elbourne (2013) references situation pronouns which have been omitted here for the sake of simplicity.

The Somali long pronominal paradigm is interesting from this perspective because <u>all</u> of the forms appear to be regular definite descriptions on the surface. The short pronominal paradigm differs in that the definite determiner suffix is omitted. One expectation then, is that long forms (with definite determiner morphology) might semantically pattern like definite descriptions, while short forms do not, for instance, being confined to individual variable uses. This expectation is not borne out, suggesting that, at least for the short forms, a morphologically covert device encoding definite semantics needs to be postulated.

As might be expected from the cross-linguistic behavior of pronouns, Somali long pronouns can be either referential or bound by a quantifier. Referential uses of long pronouns were seen in examples (6), (9-b), (10-b), and (11-b) above. The sentence in (16) shows that a long pronoun can also be bound, at least in object position.

(16) *Qof   walba waxay   la tahay [in Cali arkay **isa-ga**].*
      person every FOC=3P think   C Cali saw   3SM-DET
      Everybody thinks Cali saw him.   [10/28/2015]
      a. [Every person] thinks Cali saw [DP him [NP ~~person~~]].   Elbourne (2013) style LF
      b. [Every person] thinks Cali saw [ΦP him [DP the [NP ~~person~~]]].
                                                                   Sauerland (2007) style LF

Note that we cannot straightforwardly test whether short third person pronouns can be bound given that there are no short third person forms. Second, although it might seem like the possibility of binding long forms is an argument against their definite description-hood, it is not. Examples of bound definite descriptions can be constructed:

(17) John fed no cat of Mary's before the cat was bathed.   Elbourne (2013)

Pronouns have readings that are thought to be strong arguments in favor of a definite description expansion, given that they are difficult to account for otherwise. Long pronouns in Somali have these readings as well. Sentence (18-a) is an instance of a donkey anaphor (see Strawson (1961), Geach (1962) and Elbourne (2013)), and (18-b) is an instance where <u>not</u> expanding the semantics of the pronoun into a definite description (that is, keeping it referential) would yield infelicity.

(18) a. **Camel** (read *donkey*) **anaphora**
          *[Qof   walba oo   hal   leh] **iya-da**   wuu   garacaa.*
          person every REL she-camel has 3SF-DET DECL=3SM beats
          Everyone who has a she-camel beats it (lit. her).

      b. **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**:
          Isa-gu   *had iyo jeer waa   Latino.*
          3SM-DET.NOM always   DECL Latino
          He's always a Latino.   [03/17/2016]
          cf.   ✓ *he≈the mayor*
                 # he≈Domenic Sarno

The next set of examples are intended to show that Somali short pronouns can also receive definite description interpretations, suggesting that the definite semantics is, in some cases, contributed by something other than what is thought to be the definite determiner -KA. Some uses of first and second person pronouns must also receive a covert definite description analysis. This allows us to test for the presence of definite description semantics on short pronouns, despite the existence of a paradigm gap in the third person.

(19)   a.   I am traditionally allowed to order whatever I like for my last meal.
The condemned prisoner (#the speaker) is traditionally allowed to order whatever he likes for his last meal.   Grosz and Zobel (2014)

    b.   We might have been liberals.
The Supreme Court Justices (#the speaker and entourage) could have been liberals.   Nunberg (1993) via Elbourne (2013)

In Somali both short and long forms are compatible with these definite description interpretations. This is seen in the acceptability of both these forms in the sentences in (20) and (21).

(20)   **Context**: Clinton won against Trump[6] 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.   [03/17/2016]

cf.   ✓ *I≈The President*
        # *I≈Hillary Clinton*

(21)   Impersonal 2ⁿᵈ person

Haddaad rabtid [in=aad	{***adi / adi-gu***}	*sameysid sandewiij] waa*	*in=aad rootiga*
if want	C=2S.CL 2S / 2S-DET.NOM	make sandwich DECL	C=2S bread

ukala laba jartaa.
in   two cut

If you want to make a sandwich you cut the bread in half.   [03/17/2016]
If the person who wants to make a sandwich wants to make a sandwich...

Given that both short and long forms are compatible with the relevant readings, the definiteness in the definite description does not seem to be encoded by -KA, at least not uniformly. This prompts the need of an additional, silent mechanism to account for the semantics of short forms. Note that phonologically null definiteness is not surprising in itself. It is surprising, however, in a language where there is an overt morpheme in alternation with a covert device. According to Chierchia (1998), a (null) type-shifter should not exist in languages with overt definite determiners. This typological claim lends to the hypothesis that Somali should not make use of both a definite determiner (reportedly -KA) and a null mechanism for definiteness as well.

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[6]The authors and the main consultant were unaware of the fact, and totally oblivious to the possibility, that the proposition expressed by this sentence would turn out to be false.

3.2 Bare Possessives: Definiteness and Indefiniteness without -KA

Recall from section 2.2.5 that Somali possessives come in two types: alienable possession is expressed by -KA marked possessives, and inalienable possession, by forms without -KA. The results of this section are based on the interpretation of inalienable possessives. It is suggested that forms without -KA can be interpreted as indefinites or as definites, an observation which, to our knowledge, is novel. We take the latter as an argument in favor of the availability of a null device contributing definite semantics.

Sentence (22-b) contains a coordination of two contradictory propositions if the following conditions are simultaneously met: a) the subject of that proposition denotes the same individual and b) the two propositions are co-temporal. The English sentence in (22-a) illustrates the oddity that arises when these two conditions are satisfied. However, our main consultant accepts (22-b) and comments that "there are two friends."

(22)　　a.　#My friend$_i$ is running and my friend$_i$ is sleeping.

　　　　b.　*Saxiib-kay wuu　jiifaa saxiib-kay-na　　wuu　ordayaa.*
　　　　　　friend-my　DECL sleep friend-my-CONJ DECL run

　　　　　　A friend of mine is running and a friend of mine is sleeping. (*cf.* (22-a))
　　　　　　Speaker comment: "There are two friends."　　　　　　　　[03/23/2016]

The contradiction mentioned above does not arise in Somali. Furthermore, the speaker's comment suggests that the expression *saxiib-kay*, "my friend", is interpreted as an indefinite, whose second occurrence introduces a novel discourse referent which is distinct from the referent introduced by the first occurrence of *saxiib-kay*. Note that this comment equally suggests that the coordination is not interpreted as temporal succession. If it were, the interpretation where *saxiibkay* denotes the same individual in both its occurrences would be available.

Sentence (23), on the other hand, suggests that *saxiibkay* can be interpreted as a definite description. The discourse context is such that two entities are introduced: "my son" and "one of my friends." The occurrence of *saxiibkay* in the target sentence is capable of being read as referring back to the friend introduced in the context sentence. A second reading, where the possessive has an indefinite interpretation and where another discourse referent is introduced (a different friend laughed), is also available.

(23)　　**Context**: My son and [one of my friends]$_i$ came. . .
　　　　Saaxiib-kay$_{i/j}$　baa qoslay.
　　　　friend-POSS.1S FOC laughed
　　　　My friend$_{i/\#j}$ laughed.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[03/23/2016]
　　　　Speaker comment: "[The friend] can be same or other."

　　　　a.　Anaphoric interpretation (index i):
　　　　　　The friend who arrived laughed.　　　　　　DEFINITE INTERPRETATION

　　　　b.　Novel referent (index j):
　　　　　　A third person laughed.　　　　　　INDEFINITE INTERPRETATION
　　　　　　cf. My son and [one of my friends]$_i$ came. [A friend of mine]$_{\#i/j}$ laughed.

The availability of the anaphoric reading above is unexpected if -KA-less forms were uniformly indefinite. Although "friend" is a bearer of inalienable possesion, it is likely that DPs like "my friend" should not pragmatically require unicity—one has multiple friends (whereas, "my mother", for instance, is more intrinsically unique). The availability of both an indefinite and a definite reading suggests that in (23) we are dealing with semantically encoded definiteness.

Note that configurations similar to (22-b), set up to create a contradictory conjunction of two propositions, do indeed result in semantic deviance if their subject is expressed by an alienable possessive, which bears -KA.

(24) *#Ey-gay-gu*   *wuu jiifaa ey-gay-gu-na*   *wuu ordayaa.*
dog-POSS.1S-DET.NOM DECL sleeps dog-POSS.1S-DET.NOM-CONJ DECL runs

#My dog is sleeping and my dog is running. (Sounds contradictory.)

In English, possessives in argument position are naturally interpreted as definites, which prompts some authors to think that they come with a silent definite determiner (Partee and Borschev, 2003). On the other hand, based on possessives in predicate position, Coppock and Beaver (2015), which the examples below are taken from, argue that possessives are not inherently definite.

(25)   a.   Is that your bike?   NOT DEFINITE
            Yes, and this other one is my bike too.
       b.   *cf.* Is that the bike that you have?   DEFINITE

(26)   a.   I consider this your problem.   NOT DEFINITE
       b.   *cf.* I consider this the problem that you have.   DEFINITE

Although possessives can be interpreted as indefinites in argument position as well, as illustrated by (27), this possibility seems restricted.

(27)   This artist has had enormous success. Her paintings are in the Louvre, her paintings are in the National Gallery, her paintings are everywhere!

If "her paintings" were definite in (27), the expected reading would have been: the maximal set of her paintings are in many places at the same time, interpretation which is infelicitous. Indeed, examples like (22-a) remain contradictory-sounding in English despite the possibility of interpreting certain possessives as indefinites. This seems to be a point of variation between English and Somali: both definite and indefinite readings for possessives in argument position are available in Somali, while the indefinite reading is strongly preferred in English.

4   Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This paper starts out with the observation that nominals marked with -KA, in Somali, are interpreted as definite descriptions. We find no evidence that -KA marked forms can be indefinite and we present data illustrating that some forms which do not feature -KA may receive a definite interpretation.

The table in (28) summarizes the data discussed in this paper.

(28)   (In)definiteness in Somali argument DPs

nominal	{-ka, -kii}	bare
lexical nouns	definite	indefinite
alienable possessives	definite	*
inalienable possessives	definite	indefinite **definite**
pronouns	definite	**definite**

It appears that being marked with (what have been thought to be) overt definite determiner suffixes is not a necessary condition for the definite interpretation of Somali nominal phrases. As shown, the diagnostics of definite readings are satisfied, independent of the -KA/∅ alternation. This observation is the basis of our claim that there must be a null device (either a null morpheme, or the availability of covert type shifting) that encodes definiteness in Somali. The distribution of these forms could be explained by the existence of a competition between the various means of expressing definiteness, the exploration of which we leave for further research.

A caveat to this claim comes from the observation that the availability of definite description interpretations in the absence of -KA appears to be restricted to short pronominal forms, and to inalienable possessives. Bare lexical NPs, it seems, must be interpreted as <u>in</u>definite descriptions. In (29-a), the bare *aqal*, "house", introduces a novel discourse referent. Sentence (29-b) shows that the bare NP *aqal* cannot refer back to the house introduced by the first occurrence of this expression, in (29-a). Finally, (29-c) is not a contradiction, which it would be if *ey*, "dog", were interpreted as an anaphoric definite, referring back to the same entity as the first occurrence of this expression.

(29)   a.   Bare NPs introduce novel discourse entities
             Axmed oo ban-ka   lugaynayey ayaa arkay aqal.
             Axmed REL desert-DET was.walking FOC saw   house
             Axmed was walking in the desert and saw a (*cf.* #the) house.

        b.   Bare NPs cannot anaphoric
             # *Aqal duug buu   ahaa.*
               house old   FOC=3S was
             # A house was old.

        c.   *Ey wuu jiifaa ey-na   wuu ordayaa.*
             dog DECL sleeps dog-CONJ DECL runs
             A dog is sleeping and a dog is running.

The question is *why*, if ∅$_{\text{DEF}}$ is available in the language, we do not observe it affecting the interpretation of bare lexical NPs. Its unavailability is striking in (29-b), where it could 'save' the sentence from deviance under the intended anaphoric interpretation. However, we must remain

agnostic at this point as to whether there is a single definite determiner in Somali, which is null, or whether there are at least three definite determiners in Somali, which interact.

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