

May

M. is the name of one of the largest groups of Somali dialects. In the past it has also been referred to as „Jabarti“, Raḥanween, Digil, and Central Somali. „Jabarti“ (cp. Ḡābārti) was a misnomer, as shown by Cerulli (1925:614ff.). Raḥanween and Digil are the names of the major M.-speaking tribal confederations. Central Somali was introduced by Saeed (1982) in an attempt to avoid tribal names in linguistics. The term M. became of general use with the dialectological studies of Lamberti (1985, 1986). In Somali M. is now commonly referred to as *Af-Maay* (‘M. language’) or *Af-Maymay* (‘Maymay language’). The word *maay* is the M. interrogative ‘what?’, used as a shibboleth in order to distinguish the „language of those who say *maay* (‘what?’)“ from the „language of those who say *maḥaa tiri* (‘what did you say?’)“, i.e., the other two major groups of Somali dialects – Northern Somali and Benaadir – perceived as a single language.

M. is a continuum of several varieties spoken as their native language by over 500,000 pastoralists and agriculturalists in the interriverine area of Somalia from Wanle Weyn to the right bank of the Juba River (Ḡanaalee; s. the map for the main M.-speaking areas in Somalia). M. is also used as a language of wider communication by speakers of less widespread dialects of the region such as Garre, Ġiiddu, Dabarre, and Tunni. Lamberti (1986) distinguished five varieties of M. spoken within the boundaries of Somalia. M. is known to be spoken also in southern and eastern Ethiopia, but its real extension there is still unknown (a dialectological survey of the Somali and Somali-related dialects has not been carried out yet). Pockets of M. speakers exist in north-eastern Kenya too. M. was the most widely spoken language in the interriverine area of Somalia until the mid-20th cent., and was adopted by incoming communities as their new language. It deeply influenced the phonologies and lexicons of the less widespread dialects of the region. Common Somali has become however increasingly important during the last decades as the language of the administration, the media, and the school system. Even though M. is not easily understood by other Somalis, songs in M. by popular singers have been circulating widely also in regions where M. is not spoken. M. was not used for literacy until the very end of the 20th cent.; one of the earliest written texts is a collection of poems by *šeeḥ* Abdulle Isaaq, a famous religious poet (Eedan Mad Isaaq 1987).

Most varieties of M. have both a low-toned ə

and a high-toned ɔ́, a palatal implosive ʃ, and an uvular implosive ɠ, as in *osbáde* ‘the salt’, *anfúuf* ‘spittle’, *Ḡób* ‘keep it!’. The retroflex plosive ɖ is frequently realized also as an implosive. The lack of the pharyngeals ɸ and ʕ is also typical of M., e.g., *madó* ‘head’, *magó* ‘name’, *galáŋ* ‘hand, forearm’ vs. Northern Somali *madáɸ* (sp. *madax*), *mágaʕ* (*magac*), *gaʕán* (*gacan*), resp. The clusters *h+t* and *l+t* are simplified to *tt* and *ll*, as in *bátti*, ‘she went out’ (from *bah-*, ‘go out’) and *wéelli*, ‘she did it’ (from *weel-*). Final *-n* is always realized as a velar *-ŋ*, as in *šéey* ‘bring it!’.

Nominative and genitive cases are never marked by segmental morphemes, differently from Northern Somali. With vowel-final masculine nouns the 3rd pers. possessives are *-šéy* ‘his’, *-šé* ‘her’ and *-šóo* ‘their’, e.g., *gurbá*, ‘male adult camel’ – *gurbášéy*, ‘his male adult camel’. With consonant-final feminine nouns they are instead *-tíis* ‘his’, *-tíye* ‘her’ and *-tíyo* ‘their’, e.g., *sár* ‘house’ – *sártíis* ‘his house’. The dative/benefactive preverbal particle is *iŋ*, as in *iŋ šéeg*, ‘tell him!’. Some varieties of M. still have a prefix-conjugated past tense *yarré*, ‘he said’, *tarré*, ‘you/she said’, etc. The typically M. present progressive has the endings 1st pers. sg. *-é*, 2nd pers. sg. *-áasə*, 3rd pers. sg. masc. *-é*, etc., as in *aamé*, ‘I eat / he eats’; its negative counterpart is *mə aamáw*, ‘I do not eat / he does not eat’, *mə aamáasə* ‘you do not eat’. The jussive has *-oy* in the sg. and 1st pers. pl., and *-éey* in the 2nd and 3rd pers. pl., e.g., *ha šéenoy* ‘he should bring it’, *iŋ šéentéey* (negative 2nd pers. pl.) ‘you should not bring it’, ‘do not bring it!’. High-toned *-óy* is the ending of the 2nd pers. sg. imperative of the middle verbs, like *goróy* ‘know it!’ (from *gorod-*).

M. shares with several other dialects of the interriverine area a cleft construction with an interrogative and a lengthened verbal form, e.g., *igáarkuŋ máy aaméy só?* ‘this boy ate meat (lit. what this boy ate is meat)’, with the lengthened form *aaméy* instead of *áami* ‘he ate’.

The basic ten word list in the M. of Baidoa (from Saeed 1982) is: *ków* ‘one’, *lamá* ‘two’, *siddá* ‘three’, *dáb* ‘fire’, *bíyá* ‘water’, *ʔirá* ‘sun’, *bíl* ‘moon’, *ḍiig* ‘blood’, *anráb* ‘tongue’, *ilíg* ‘tooth’.

Src.: ABULLAHI HAJI HASSAN (AW-SOOMOW) – AHMED MOHAMED ALI (YCAYCUIROW), *Alif-Maay* (‘Maay Alphabet’), Toronto 1994; EEDAN MAD ISAAQ, *Tusoow ii tilmaan* (‘Example and Explanation’), Mogadishu 1987, ms.

Lit.: ENRICO CERULLI [review of VON TILING 1921–22 and 1924–25], *Oriente Moderno* 5, 1925, 614–20; CHRISTOPHER EHRET – MOHAMED NUUH ALI, „Soomaali Classification“, in: THOMAS LABAHN (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies*, vol. 1, Hamburg

1984, 201–69; MARCELLO LAMBERTI, *Die Somali-Dialekte*, Hamburg 1985; ID., *Map of Somali Dialects in the Somali Democratic Republic*, Hamburg 1986; MARTINO MARIO MORENO, *Il somalo della Somalia*, Roma 1955; MARY PASTER, „Aspects of Maay phonology and morphology“, *Studies in African Linguistics* 35, 2006, 73–120; LEO REINISCH, *Der Dschäbarti-Dialekt der Somalisprache*, Wien 1904 (= *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, philosophisch-historische Klasse* 148); JOHN I. SAEED, „Central Somali – a Grammatical Outline“, *Afroasiatic Linguistics* 8, 1982, 77–119; MARIA VON TILING, „Die Sprache der Jabarti“, *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen* 12, 1921–22, 17–52, 97–162; EAD., „Jabarti-Texte“, *ibid.* 15, 1924–25, 50–64, 139–58.

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