

Panel I: Somali language in the time of migration: Challenges and opportunities (chair: Marja Tiilikainen)

Somali is a Cushitic language which is spoken by ethnic Somalis in Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Yemen and Kenya and by the Somali diaspora. Even though a written standard of the Somali language was officially adopted as late as in 1972, oral literature has always been highly developed and appreciated. Over the past twenty years, Somalia has been ravaged by civil war resulting in successive flows of refugees. The on-going conflict has been devastating for the standardization and development of the Somali language as well as for the research on the language. Moreover, due to migration, unforeseen conditions and socio-linguistic challenges have emerged both in the Horn of Africa and in the diaspora. A sizeable community of Somalis has settled in Nordic countries. In 2009, there were some 11,000 native Somali speakers living in Finland constituting the largest African immigrant group in Finland. A good command of one's mother tongue is essential for the development of one's identity, for school achievement and relations with parents as well as the wider ethnic community. In Finland, however, both the quality and quantity of Somali language services and institutional support are deficient. For example, no university level courses in Somali language are offered for the increasing number of students and researchers interested in Somali studies, Somali language teachers who teach the second and third generations of Somali children or for authorities who work with Somalis. But despite the negative impacts that the ongoing instability has had on the research and development of the Somali language, exile may paradoxically also provide new opportunities. For example, in the Nordic countries and North America there are new resources and audiences for Somali writers and publishers to develop new literary traditions. This panel consists of an introduction and five presentations, given by well-known linguists and scholars in Somali studies as well as experts in the field of Somali language teaching and publishing.

1) Georgi Kapchits (Moscow State University, Russia): Towards the socio-linguistic situation in Southern Somalia

“Map of Somali dialects in the Somali Democratic Republic” and “Die Somali-Dialekte” by Marcello Lamberti are regarded as the only reliable scientific sources of data on the linguistic situation in Somalia. But since their publication in 1986 it has greatly changed due to the tectonic social shifts which followed the collapse of the regime of Mohammed Siyaad Barre and the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. The massive tribal migration, mainly in the southern parts of the country, has resulted in the intricate interaction of the dialects which had not been in close contact before. In fact, the linguists engaged in Somali studies are facing today a new dialectal reality the study of which seems to be an urgent and intriguing task. Its thorough accomplishment needs intensive field works which, unfortunately, cannot be organized in the contemporary South Somalia. But some actual data can be elicited from the interviews with the Somali refugees seeking asylum in Europe. My paper presents some observations on the socio-linguistic situation in the city of Balcad (Middle Shabeelle province, Southern Somalia) based on the study of several interviews and the information received from Somali informants.

2) Anne Alitolppa-Niitamo (The Family Federation of Finland, The Centre for Multicultural Expertise): Mother tongue – basis for identity, school achievement and relations with parents and beyond

The presentation will cover an overview on the importance of the command of mother tongue among young persons. Three essential areas of development will be touched upon: identity, school achievement and relations with parents and one's ethnic background. Each area will be covered shortly based on some recent scientific viewpoints. In the presentation some practical issues on ways of supporting the development and maintenance of minority tongues will also be discussed.

3) Candidate Abdalla Ali Duh (University of Helsinki): Somali language in Finland as a positive force for integration: a practical viewpoint

The majority of Somali-speaking population in Finland are youth. I will argue that in order to integrate positively to the Finnish culture, these children need to have good command of their mother tongue. Schools, libraries and universities in Finland should provide more Somali language teaching and books to deal with the dilemmas faced by second and third Somali generations. Mastering one's own mother-tongue can be a positive force for integration into the Finnish society. This presentation is based on over ten years' of teaching experience with Somali children in Finland.

4) Muddle Suzanne Lilius (independent researcher, Finland): The Somali Language in Finland and Scandinavia: audiences and teaching needs

In Finland, the importance of formal knowledge in one's mother tongue/first language has been officially recognized, and Somali classes are offered in the schools to children of Somali background. As a consequence, there must be teachers to teach the Somali language, and many have also been recruited. Somalis now form part of our society. Interaction with the host society is on a daily basis, and in several instances, knowledge of Somali among for example health personnel and social workers would help enormously. Somalis have also received much attention from researchers, and these researchers would benefit greatly from being able to speak at least a little in Somali, although many if not most of the Somalis living here now speak Finnish, and/or in some cases Swedish. All in all, as these three examples show, the need for more formal teaching of the Somali language is apparent, among several target groups, each with its specific needs. A serious university program should be launched, taking these needs into account accordingly. In view of the situation in the Horn of Africa, such a program in Finland could also be of direct benefit for Somalis in the Horn. In my presentation I will mostly address the situation in Finland, with some comparison to other parts of Scandinavia, finishing with some thoughts on contact with the Horn of Africa.

5) Mohammed Sh. Hassan (Scansom Publishers, Sweden and Canada): The Somali Publishing Industry in the Diaspora – Challenges and Opportunities

The Somali language was written in script as recently as in 1972. Major contribution was made by the former Somali Board of Education and the former Somali National Academy of Science and Arts. The Somali publishing industry is in its initial stage. Publications made in Somalia during 1972–1990 have been almost completely wiped out by the Somali civil war and the exact data on publications in Somali from that period is currently not available. Since the state collapse, Somali language publishing takes place almost entirely in the diaspora. More than 200 different titles were published for the past 10–15 years outside Somalia. The publishing of Somali literature in the diaspora has been and currently is a great effort in the

conservation of the Somali heritage. Many writers have contributed to this effect. Some 60% of the Somali publications has its roots in Scandinavia, mainly in Sweden. The Swedish Board of Education and the Swedish National Council for Cultural affairs have provided funding for minority languages, Somali being one of those. The most significant Somali book fair takes place every year in Helsinki/Espoo. Public and school libraries in Europe and in North America are central institutions for promoting multicultural books to the ethnic minorities living in their countries.