

Orthography Policy-Making by Fiat: The Policy to Romanize Somali

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Abstract. The Somali Revolutionary Council (SRC) took a decision to use the Roman/Latin script for the graphization of the Somali language. In 1979, the SRC declared Arabic as an official second language in the country. The latter policy decision made it imperative for the Somali public to learn and use the Arabic script. Those policy decisions created a bi-orthographic situation in the same country. This paper examines the efficacy of the policy from a multidimensional perspective. In sharp contrast with the literature on the Somali policy, which unanimously gives it a positive evaluation, this article argues that the demerits of this bi-orthographic policy outweigh its merits. However, the paper credits the SRC with formulating and implementing a policy on an essential language planning issue where its predecessors had failed.

I. Introduction

In 1972, the Somali Revolutionary Council (SRC) ended by a decree the long and protracted debate over an official script for Somali. The SRC made the Roman script the official system for writing Somali. In 1979, Arabic was declared an official second language in the country, Somalia having become a member of the Arab League of States. The latter language policy decision entailed the official use of the Arabic script. In effect, Somalia became a country with a bi-orthographic policy. Such a policy is quite rare, if not unique, in independent countries of similar remarkable homogeneity in language, ethnicity, culture, heritage, and religion.

Romanizing Somali has been highlighted and hailed in the literature as a rational and well motivated language policy decision, as will be noted below in the sources cited. This paper takes exception with writing on this topic, pointing out where positions are actually untenable on closer examination.

II. Theoretical Framework

The evaluation of any language planning policy can best be carried out in the light of current language planning theory and trends in sociolinguistics literature. Since the focus of this paper is on an orthographic policy, only those aspects of the language planning theory that are pertinent will be taken as guiding principles.

A. Language and Orthography

An orthography or script is a standardized conventional system, composed of a finite set of symbols and a set of rules for their use, devised for the graphic representation of a language.

Although orthographies currently in use have each been devised for a specific language, the scripts themselves are not iconic to those languages. That is to say, scripts are independent of their original languages, and, in fact, have been extended in use to other languages. Theoretically, any system can be used for any or all languages, allowing in some cases for modifications. The history of written languages gives dozens of such cases.⁽¹⁾ Furthermore, more than one script may be used for the graphization of any single language.⁽²⁾

B. Criteria of Orthography Devising, Adopting, and/or Adapting

Although our knowledge about the history and development of writing and writing systems is rich and detailed in many cases, the actual sets of criteria laid down or contemplated in the creation of the old, established systems have not been recorded in any explicit form. Claims to the availability of such criteria are either hypothetical or sheer speculative. However, the study of the problems emanating from the use of the old, established systems and of the circumstances surrounding their adoption and/or adaptation for other languages has resulted in the formulation of several constructs and parameters that aid researchers in the evaluation of new orthographic policies. One set of criteria relates to *technical/linguistic issues* – the graphic representation of the phonological system of the target language; the other set relates to *non-linguistic issues*.

(1) H. Wellisch. *The Conversion of Scripts* (New York: Wiley, 1978). p. 19.

(2) E. Gregerson, "Successes and Failures in the Modernization of Hausa," in *Advances in the Creation and Revision of Writing Systems*, ed. J. Fishman (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), p. 174.

1. Linguistic Criteria

From this perspective, the following are desired characteristics (of alphabetic scripts):

- a) accuracy : i.e., no phoneme is left unsymbolized.
- b) economy : i.e., only phonemes are symbolized.
- c) consistency : i.e., letters are mutually exclusive.
- d) monography : i.e., one letter per phoneme.
- e) sufficiency : i.e., no phoneme-letter value is dependent on any other one.⁽³⁾

Obviously, no script currently in use meets all the above criteria; every script in use is 'defective' in one respect or another. In fact, some of the criteria above make demands that either are impractical or at least are controversial in linguistic theory. On the practical side, the condition of consistency requires continuous changes in the spelling system and/or the script in order to cope with language change, a practice that is often shunned. On the other hand, there is no consensus in linguistic theory as to the morphophonemic alternations and their graphic representation, e.g. (in English) *electric* vs. *electricity*, *nature* vs. *natural*, *memory* vs. *memorial*, and the correspondence between the spelling and sound of the past tense morpheme of regular verbs. Indeed, in all alphabetic systems compromises among various linguistic criteria cannot be avoided, and the one-to-one correspondence between sound and letter cannot be maintained throughout the system.⁽⁴⁾

2. Needs of the Community (Societal Values of Orthographies)

While setting linguistic criteria and meeting the needs of the individual users can be viewed as micro-planning of orthographies, addressing the interaction between those criteria and other societal functions an orthography may serve can be considered macro-planning of writing systems. Both the micro- and the macro-levels are essential. Orthography systems are not merely means of graphically representing speech. In addition to this quintessential function, they serve, or at least are perceived by their users to fulfill, other important functions. Thus, orthographic systems carry *symbolic societal values* pertaining to the following:

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- (3) J. Berry, "The Making of Alphabets," in *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, ed. J. Fishman (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), p. 174.
 - (4) J. Berry, "The Making of Alphabets Revised," in Fishman, ed., *Advances*, pp. 1-6; D. Bolinger, *Aspects of Language*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1975), pp. 482 ff.; M. Stubbs, *Language and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1980), pp. 43-69.

- a) Political: They can promote and reinforce feelings of community independence; the political value becomes salient when a system in use in a particular community is felt to be jeopardized by total or partial change.
- b) Ethno-Nationalistic (Intra-National): They may be perceived as important links between various communities (nation states) belonging to the wider writing nation and/or ethnicity.
- c) Cultural: They may help the community maintain cultural identity; the continued use of a system is advocated so that present and future generations of the community can have relatively easy access to their heritage (written in that system).
- d) Religious: The use of the system is advocated because it helps maintain the spiritual bond between its users and their religious practices and facilitates the reading of the holy scriptures in the original form.
- e) Regional: a newly devised system should relate to that used by the dominant language in the region. The dominance of a language implies its spread in the region, in which case learning its orthography would be a task already accomplished at least in part. Nida suggests, for example, that a system devised for a community in Latin America would better serve that community in its contacts in the region if the devised system took after that used for Spanish, whereas an Arabic-based one should be used for a community in the Arab region.⁽⁵⁾
- f) Intercultural: The cross-cultural value of a devised system is sought in contexts where the community targeted by the orthography policy looks with favor to another language of cultural importance. In such a context, the devised system (or the one decided on) should relate or be similar to that used by the culturally important language.⁽⁶⁾

C. Criteria, Values, and Policy-Making

The criteria outlined above constitute desiderata about writing systems rather than a rationale for any single system currently in use. However, one does find that some of those criteria have been more instrumental or causal in effectuating writing and/or spelling reforms and policies. This is particularly the case because it is virtually impossible to integrate them all in any single policy. In fact, some criteria conflict with others. Furthermore, since intracommunity groups often differ in their value orientation and/or motives, they will have differing views about writing systems and, as a result, call for different, if not opposing or mutually exclusive, policies. Therefore, orthography policy-making is not a linear program.

(5) Stubbs, p. 95.

(6) Cf. Stubbs, p. 73.

III. The 1972 Somali Orthography Policy

Within the theoretical framework outlined above, this part of the paper examines the Somali Romanization policy-decision, the conditions of its implementation, and assesses its (potential) impact and consequences, within the sociolinguistic setting drawn in the profile at the beginning of this part.

A. The Sociolinguistic Setting

The features listed below are of importance for the study because they are pertinent to the evaluation that follows. In the evaluation of the policy, these features will be taken as constants or given premises.

1. Homogeneity

Somalia stands out as one of the few countries in the world with nearly total homogeneity in the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious spheres.⁽⁷⁾ Such a context provides a setting that is most conducive for a least complex language planning policy.⁽⁸⁾

2. Islam

Islam is a defining characteristic of the Somali identity; official institutions, though, are more secular than religious.⁽⁹⁾

3. Loyalty to Somali

Although Somalia was under colonial rule (British and Italian in different parts) for considerably a long time, and English and Italian were official, each in its territory, the attachment of Somalis to their language (Somali) was not significantly affected, as has been shown by Laitin, who reached this conclusion after assessing loyalty to Somali using the guise technique.⁽¹⁰⁾

(7) I. Kaplan, "The Somali Society and Its Environment," in *Somalia: A Country Study*, 3rd edition, ed. H. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1982); D. Laitin, *Politics, Language, and Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); S. Touval, *Somali Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

(8) P. Berghe, "Language and Nationalism in South Africa," in Fishman, ed., *Readings*; H. Kloss, "Notes Concerning a Language Nation Typology," in Fishman, ed., *Readings*; C. Okonkwo, "Toward an Integrated Theory of Language Planning Theory with Special Reference to Africa." Ph.D. dissertation, SUNY, Buffalo (1980).

(9) Laitin, p. 58; Nelson, p. 68.

(10) Laitin, pp. 31-33.

4. Status of Arabic

Due to its religious value for the Somalis, Arabic is known and used by the elites. This is true of both the pre-and post-independence periods. Besides its use by the public in the British and Italian ruled territories, official records in both territories were also kept in Arabic.⁽¹¹⁾ It was also used as a scholarly language of writing.⁽¹²⁾

In addition to the mosques and religious schools, the spread of Arabic in Somalia was made more extensive through the standard educational system. Laitin elaborates, "the twentieth century saw more effective penetration of the Arabic educational system. A modern school system, which until 1971 was under the Arabic medium of instruction ... was perhaps the best in Somalia, for both technical courses and the humanities From the dugsi, students went to an Arabic intermediate and secondary school where they developed a firm grasp of the language of instruction."⁽¹³⁾ Arabic is now an official second language in Somalia.

5. English and Italian

Unlike Arabic, neither English nor Italian was known away from the towns.⁽¹⁴⁾

6. Somali before 1972

Until the 1972 decision on Romanization, Somali had no official standard orthography, though it was variously written in different systems.

Previous (post-independence) governments failed to reach consensus on an official script. They were either too democratic⁽¹⁵⁾ or not powerful enough to withstand potential opposition to a policy-decision contemplated.

B. Policy Evaluation

In the discussion that follows, the focus will be on the policy-decision; other phases of a languages planning policy will be mentioned only in so far as they shed more light on the validity of the arguments presented, as to the consequences and impact of the policy-decision on several spheres affected by the decision. Specifically, an evaluation of the policy will take place within the following parameters:

(11) B. Zewesky, "The Introduction of a National Orthography for Somali," *African Language Studies*, 15 (1974), 199-203.

(12) Touval, p. 21.

(13) Nelson, p. 54.

(14) Laitin, p. 83.

(15) R. Rinehart, "Historical Setting [of Somalia]," in *Nelson*, ed., p. 234.

political, national-ethnic, heritage-cultural, religious, educational-pedagogic, technical-linguistic, development-progressive, and economic.

1. Political

One of the major objectives declared by the SRC in 1969 was the official graphi- zation of Somali. The conflicts and uncertainty shrouding the formulation of an offi- cial orthography policy before 1969 had a negative impact on the previous govern- ments. In such a state of affairs, a decision on an official script should have enhanced the political stability of the new government and legitimized it in the eyes of its sub- jects.⁽¹⁶⁾ Furthermore, the political machine of the country generally receives added legitimacy if/when the policy-decision is in harmony with the interests of a large sec- tion of the target population and with the national interests. Public and national interests in many Third World countries are often defined by the political elites rather than by the public at large through its elected leaders.⁽¹⁷⁾ The state of indeci- sion among elected representatives in pre-revolution Somalia regarding an official orthography policy had an adverse impact on the stability of those governments. Aware of the inertia of their predecessors, the SRC dealt with that legacy in accor- dance with their own orientations. Like their predecessors, all having been educated and trained in the West,⁽¹⁸⁾ they leaned towards the script of their training rather than towards the other alternatives. "Those people who were deriving some political and economic benefit from their knowledge of a Western language gave the Latin script their support."⁽¹⁹⁾ But whereas their predecessors in the 1960s avoided confrontation with groups opposed to Romanization proposals by making no decision on the issue, the new regime paved the way to do so by establishing itself firmly in power during its first two years in office. "By February 1971, most of the Somali population had been successfully intimidated by the new regime.... (It) had already established a reputation for locking up, and even killing, its political enemies."⁽²⁰⁾ Another spec- ialist on Somalia adds that "individuals who went beyond the narrow but ill-defined boundaries of acceptable criticism faced prosecution and jail sentences."⁽²¹⁾ Mem- bers of the language commission were genuinely afraid to discuss the script issue even

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- (16) M. Shorish, "Planning by Decree," *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 8, No. 1 (1984), 35-49.
- (17) B. Weinstein, "Language Strategists," *World Politics*, 31 (1979), 345-64. As current events in Somalia show about the situation in the country during the previous regime, opposition to the SRC has led to its downfall. In other words, the internal division has been endemic.
- (18) M. Abdulaziz, "Language and Politics in the African Horn," MS., 1985, p. 8.
- (19) Laitin, p. 93.
- (20) *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- (21) S. Tarttar, "Government and Politics [in Somalia]," in Nelson, ed., p. 207.

among themselves,... (not) even in private “(with Laitin).”⁽²²⁾ (See also below (4) on the intimidation of religious leaders, who make up a strong political lobby. At any rate, a decision on any of the competing scripts would have had its opponents.)

Among implementers, the policy decision was also marked by disunity and lack of support. Those who did not support the policy expressed their opposition to it by not volunteering for the literacy campaign among the population at large and especially among the nomads. These were subjected to both moral and material forms of punishment; their names were announced on the radio and/or published in the papers, and those among them who had had awards and/or privileges were stripped of those benefits. Obviously such measures of retribution would neither have been contemplated nor practiced had the decision makers not been aware that the policy was not in the national interest, or at least public, interest. The government, consequently, took tough measures to ensure acquiescence and implementation. Nevertheless, it seems that those who could somehow not comply with the implementation requirements did so. Andrzejewski⁽²³⁾ reports that senior civil servants scored lower on the orthography literacy test than junior staff did. This test result tells quite a bit about the attitude of the former group towards the policy, especially in the light of Andrzejewski's claim/assertion that “the system could be learned in a matter of weeks.”⁽²⁴⁾ In reality, civil servants had six months to learn the new script.

Taken from another perspective, the Romanization of Somali may have other political aspects of significance, however speculative they may be at this time. Somalia stands unique within the membership of the pan-Arab political organization — the Arab League of States — for it is the only member state whose indigenous language is not Arabic. This linguistic difference cannot be helped; however, the institution of Arabic as an official language together with upholding the policy on the use of the Latin script for the native language — Somali — gives an indication of some kind of relaxation of flexibility in the conditions of membership in the Arab League of States.

2. National-Ethnic

Somalis trace their ethnic origin to the Arab tribe of Quraysh, specifically to Sab and Samaal, two sons of prophet Muhammad's cousin Aqeel bin Aby Taalib.⁽²⁵⁾

(22) Laitin, p. 117.

(23) B. Andrzejewski, “The implementation of Language Planning in Somalia: A Record of Achievement,” *Language Planning News Letter*, 6, No. 1 (1980), 1, 4-5.

(24) Quoted by Rinehart, p. 54.

(25) Touval, pp. 15-17; Rinehart, pp. 6-8.

Whether this claim is historically and anthropologically accurate or subject to debate does not matter much for this discussion, for it, at least, symbolizes an emotional attachment to the Arab past, partially indicated at present by the fact that Somalia is a full member of the Arab League. This group is essentially a political association of nationalities of claimed common ethnic and cultural origin. According to Laitin, Somalis share common physical features as well as common ancestry with Arabs.⁽²⁶⁾

Among the Arabs, the question of language and script is of primordial importance. Therefore, unless we take Somalia to be an exception in this respect, the decision to use the Latin script only estranges Somalia from its own national and ethnic traditions.

On the other hand, the decision may have been meant to carry in part an expression of animosity or antipathy towards some Arab regime(s), as Laitin suggests.⁽²⁷⁾

Laitin distinguishes between the Somalis' feelings about their national ethnicity and their feeling about present day Arabs. He maintains that "while the Somalis are happy and even proud to pay deference to their Arab heritage – the form, they are not willing to pay deference to the Arabs – the substance."⁽²⁸⁾ If accepted, this proposition implies that the decision on the use of the Latin script for Somali may have been a concrete political stance by the SRC telling other Arab countries not to take Somalia, or the SRC, for granted; its suzerainty can be reaffirmed in more than one way.

Furthermore, as the choice of a script has some bearing on regional grouping (as mentioned above), Romanization may indicate a shift of the regional point of reference for Somalia from Arab to non-Arab Africa. Although no conflict necessarily obtains between the two regional groupings, this hypothetical shift can hardly be reconciled with the affiliation of Somalia with the Arab League, unless there are other considerations which have not been uncovered.

3. Heritage – Cultural

While there is no need to belabor the issue of culture in orthography policies, its role cannot be ignored in the evaluation of such a policy. Stubbs⁽²⁹⁾ illustrates this in

(26) Laitin, p. 56.

(27) *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 99ff.

(28) *Ibid.*, p. 51.

(29) Stubbs, p. 75.

an examination of Haitian Creole, noting that, “one orthography which was set up (by McConnell in 1941 and later amended by Eaubach in 1943) was impeccable on purely linguistic grounds, but was rejected ... and had to be replaced by a less consistent but *culturally more* appropriate system” (my emphasis).

Somali culture has largely been an oral one, but not exclusively so. Evidence to the existence of recorded heritage goes back centuries in history, written for the most part either in Arabic or in Somali in the Arabic script.⁽³⁰⁾ In this century, during both the colonization and independence eras, administrative affairs have been recorded bilingually in Arabic and English or in Arabic and Italian, respectively in the British and Italian territories. That was on the official level. On the popular level, national heritage has occasionally been recorded in Arabic or in Somali in the Arabic script. For example, Sheikh Uways published some of his poetry in Arabic and another portion of it in Somali in the Arabic script. Similarly, the most respected national hero, the Sayyid — Muhammad Abdallah bin Hassan (nicknamed the Mad Mullah by the British) — not only wrote poems in Arabic but used the Arabic script for his Somali poetry.”⁽³¹⁾

However limited in volume in contrast with that of some other countries, the Somali recorded heritage cannot be dismissed. To the Somalis, with the exception of some intellectuals,⁽³²⁾ it is an integral part of their culture which carries their imprint. Consequently, the Romanization of Somali severs present and future generations from their literary past. However, though it does not seem to have been formulated to maintain access to recorded heritage, the bi-orthographic policy has rendered access to this heritage unjeopardized in principle.

4. Religious

Interrelated with the political, ethnic and heritage-cultural dimensions above, the religious values popularly attached to the competing scripts proposed in Somalia come to the fore in the evaluation of the policy decision. As stated above, Islam is dominant among Somalis, giving them a sense of integrated unity.⁽³³⁾ Laitin illuminates this, noting, “The Somalis do pay unusual deference to the Islamic religion Being a Somali and being a Muslim are one and the same.”⁽³⁴⁾ Article one of the constitution reaffirms Islam as the state religion.⁽³⁵⁾

(30) B. Andrzejewsky, “Poetry in Somali Society,” in *Sociolinguistics*, eds. J. Pride and J. Hoimes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 252.

(31) Laitin, p. 95.

(32) *Ibid.*, p. 134.

(33) Touval, p. 25; Kaplan, pp. 105-116.

(34) Laitin, p. 53.

(35) *Ibid.*, p. 111.

For the populace, Islam also entails literacy in the Arabic script; it comes concurrently with religious learning in childhood. This has also continued to be the case even after the revolution and after the implementation of the Romanization policy decision. According to Kaplan, pre-school children still acquire literacy in Arabic and the Arabic script in Quranic schools.⁽³⁶⁾

The Romanization of Somali had been proposed by some groups within and outside Somalia, but had been vehemently opposed by others, especially the religious groups — the wadaads. According to the Assistant Director of the Ministry of Education in 1966, the twenty-one year long war against the British (the Dervish War, led by the Sayyid) was ignited by the Romanization issue.⁽³⁷⁾ Later on, “riots would often break out when its (Latin) ugly (sic) letters appeared in public.”⁽³⁸⁾ The 1966 UNESCO Commission tried to defuse the religious tones associated with the Arabic and Latin scripts by pointing out the common historical origin of both scripts – a North Semitic system. Their ploy having failed, the Commission came to no decision. Furthermore, even the publication of Abraham’s *Somali-English Dictionary* in Britain was delayed for several years due to the objections raised against its use of the Latin script for the Somali entries.⁽³⁹⁾

When the Romanization decision was made known to the Somalis, it was interpreted by religious leaders as an attempt by the government to weaken the role of religion, or at least incorporate it within scientific socialism. As the slogan coined by religious groups reveals, the use of the Latin script by Somalis for Somali was not interpreted as a shift to Christianity but a move away from Islamic beliefs. (*Laatiin waa laa Diin*, i.e., Latin and no religion).⁽⁴⁰⁾

Apparently to co-opt open conflict with religious leaders, the SRC took some preemptive measures, chief among which was the incorporation of their schools into the mainstream educational system. To SRC, the organizers and graduates of those schools were considered a formidable source of opposition. “The change may have reflected a wish to institute tighter government control over what was an autonomous source of perspective and information.”⁽⁴¹⁾ Later on, religious leaders were

(36) Kaplan, p. 120.

(37) Laitin, pp. 87, 110.

(38) *Ibid.*, p. 92.

(39) *Ibid.*, p. 88.

(40) *Ibid.*, p. 93.

(41) Kaplan, p. 121.

intimidated by top officials, and, according to the official weekly *Dawn*, were told that “whatever their religious legitimacy, they had better not challenge the military government.”⁽⁴²⁾ The Minister of Education met with a group of them and rebuked them for objecting to the use of the Latin script when they had never objected to the use of (one of its letters) (*x*) in marking their livestock.⁽⁴³⁾

Acquiescence to the Romanization ensured, retaining the use of the Arabic script for religious functions tactfully neutralized opposition to the Latin script on those grounds. In addition, the new status of Arabic after 1979 may have reduced conflict with the main religious groups — the wadaads. These groups, as a religious-oriented political lobby also, had their fears of Arabic losing all grounds somewhat allayed by the 1979 decision.

5. Educations/Literacy-Pedagogical

Improvement of literacy levels and education is a common objective of orthography policies. When options are considered for a new orthography policy, the comparative readability of the alternatives comes up. At present, this issue cannot be resolved objectively due to the absence of standardized criteria of readability and the lack of measurement instruments for this comparative purpose. Nevertheless, claims have been made from the perspective of problems arising from the use of one or another of the world orthographies. For example, Tauli quotes the US Director of College Education Research, “The English orthography puts an intolerable and often traumatic burden on beginning learners.”⁽⁴⁴⁾ Later on, p. 30, Tauli adds that ‘the majority of Frenchmen have difficulty in learning French orthography.’ Similar statements can be culled from the literature about other systems in use in the world. Accordingly, lower literacy levels and/or reading problems cannot justifiably be attributed solely to the use of X or Y orthography. If we were to accept the causal relationship between the use of an orthography and low literacy levels, all orthographies would be discarded on the basis of such existing problems. Nevertheless, stereotype views appear about orthographies. For example, it is commonly held that the Chinese and Japanese writing systems are difficult to learn and constitute formidable obstacles to learning, but we find counter-evidence from individual cases. Don Stuart relates that his daughter ‘mastered the hiragana and katakana systems of Japanese much faster than she did English’ and also claims that “Japanese children begin reading earlier than European children.”⁽⁴⁵⁾ In the same vein, Crump reports

(42) Laitin, p. 118; see also Rinehart, p. 116, on the execution of eleven religious leaders.

(43) Laitin, p. 118.

(44) V. Tauli, “Speech and Spelling,” in Fishman, ed., p. 28.

(45) D. Stuart, “Comments on Berry,” in Fishman, ed., p. 750.

that children in Japan master 46 characters by the end of the first year in school (more than the number of letters in most alphabets).⁽⁴⁶⁾ Another system commonly given negative literacy-evaluation is the Arabic script. Stubbs, for example, ascribes the low literacy level among Muslim communities in the USSR at the turn of this century to their use of the Arabic script.⁽⁴⁷⁾ In fact, this was the argument made by the Soviets in bringing about the change from the use of the Arabic script to the use of the Roman script. The same views were themselves used against the Latin system, but now in favor of the Cyrillic system.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Though still in its early beginning, research on contrastive readability of scripts gives evidence that hitherto judgements on the ease or difficulty of scripts are highly subjective and invalid.

The above sidetrack was taken because the literature about Somalia contains numerous evaluative remarks and propositions about literacy-furthering merits of the Roman script over that of Arabic. The Romanization policy, it is often claimed, has helped reduce illiteracy levels in Somalia.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Kaplan writes, "training in reading and writing (has been) made much easier by the use of the Somali (Roman) script."⁽⁵⁰⁾ Looking at the Somali setting from another angle, Andrzejewski fears "a substantial lapse back into illiteracy if Romanization does not fare well."⁽⁵¹⁾ Such opinions totally lack support of studies and statistics. Therefore, the onus is still on those making these claims to prove that literacy levels in Somalia after 1972 are the result of the decision on Latin. In addition to lacking empirical bases, such positions confuse two points: the official standard graphization of Somali and the Romanization of Somali. To say the least, those arguments do not take the distinction into account. Before 1972, Somalia had no official standard orthography. Any policy-decision officially adopting any of the alternatives under consideration would have rendered Somali an officially written language. Whichever system was adopted would have reduced illiteracy levels, if followed by an efficient process of implementation. Whatever the orthography may be, its effectiveness derives from the supportive institutional environment provided by the policy-makers, from the acceptance (or acquiescence) of the target population, and from the gains perceived by that population. Furthermore, the literacy level actually realized is also determined by

(46) T. Crump, "Literacy and Hierarchy in Modern Japan," *Sociolinguistics Newsletter*, 16 (1986), 56-57.

(47) Stubbs, p. 84.

(48) Shorish, p. 88.

(49) Andrzejewski's three works *op cit*; I. Lewis, "The Conflict of State and Nation in the Horn of Africa," Ms., 1985.

(50) Kaplan, p. 122.

(51) Andrzejewski, "The Implementation," p. 4.

the learners' view as to how much is needed for achieving the perceived gains. These aspects determine the level of success of a policy and its implementation more than the orthography chosen itself. In rural Malaysia, the government makes some of its printed media materials available in both the Arabic and the Latin scripts. In those areas, materials in the Arabic script are more popular than those in the Latin script.⁽⁵²⁾

From the practical pedagogical perspective, the Romanization decision could distract learners receiving instruction in the Arabic script. Since the Arabic script is the medium for most preschool children,⁽⁵³⁾ using that system for Somalia would mean consistency in directing the learning focus of attention. In this respect, I concur with Winter, who, writing from long experience (1956-1978) with Walapai, a Yuman language of North Arizona, recommends that "a practice-oriented orthography will usually take the native speakers' experience with other systems into account rather thoroughly, even though such a decision might hurt the linguist's feelings. The arguments in favor of such a decision are fairly strong."⁽⁵⁴⁾

6. Technical/Linguistic

To begin with, the mainstay of sociolinguistics as a discipline, and of its sub-fields, especially language planning, is the investigation of the reconciliation and integration processes that interrelate the mutual interaction and influence of the societal and the linguistic in popular and official language use and language policy, hence the compound label of the discipline *sociolinguistics*. Within this field, the literature on new and adopted/adapted orthographies unequivocally shows that language policy decisions have never been formulated on pure linguistic grounds, though such grounds are taken into consideration. Invariably, however, when the linguistic aspects seem to be rational but conflict with the social, the linguistic values give way to the social.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The linguistic constructs outlined above in the theoretical framework are not isolated from or independent of the other, non-linguistic, constructs. Those technical principles have more of an academic standing than real life

(52) A. Omar, "Language Spread and Recession in Malaysia," in *Language Spread*, ed. R. Cooper (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 74-80.

(53) See also above and Kaplan, p. 120.

(54) W. Winter, "Tradition and Innovation in Alphabet-making," in *Writing in Focus*, eds. F. Coulmas and K. Ehlich (Berlin: Mouton, 1983), p. 234.

(55) See T. Reagan, "The Economics of Language," *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 7, No. 2 (1983), 149-52.

language planning policy decisions. Furthermore, these constructs can be subject of debate, for they have been posited within Western-cultural and alphabetic orientation. Therefore, there is an inbuilt bias resulting from their origins. Consequently, ethno-linguistic centrism mars their absolute suitability on a universal scale of application.

In the second place, notwithstanding the conflict resolution pattern observed in language planning policies, the Latin and Arabic scripts will be considered below on certain major points of contrast of suitability of representing Somali.

Somali is a Cushitic language; hence its major structural features are largely African, within the Afro-Asiatic language family, yet sharing some features with the languages of the Asiatic sub-family. In phonology, the focus of concern in graphization, Somali and Semitic languages (Arabic in this case) are expected to be less different than Somali and Indo-European languages with which the Latin script is commonly associated.

On the segmental level, a comparison of the consonantal systems of Somali and Arabic⁽⁵⁶⁾ shows relatively fewer points of difference between them than between Somali and other Western European languages. On a letter-grapheme basis, the Arabic consonantal letters have a higher representational value than the consonants of the Latin script. As for the vowel phonemes of Somali and the vowel letters of Arabic, there is an obvious shortage in the Arabic script. Therefore, even on the basis of a monograph per vowel phoneme, the Latin script better represents the Somali vowels.

As current practice shows, the Somali Latin-based spelling in its consonantal and vowel values is inconsistently used. For example, we find Hussein vs. Xuseen, Mohammad vs. Maxamad. Hersi vs. Xeersii, and Abdul vs. Cabdul.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Considering also that Somali is a tone language,⁽⁵⁸⁾ and in view of the above shortcomings of the Arabic and Latin scripts, diacritics are inevitable for a "faithful" representation of Somali.

(56) Analyses of Somali phonology, especially the vowel system for which different analysts give different numbers of vowel inventories ranging from nine to seventeen are posited. See for example M. Ruhlin, *A Guide to the Languages of the World* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Language Universals Project, 1976); T. Anbar, "The Phonological System of Somali," Ms. 1985; J. Kirk, "Notes on the Somali Phonology" (which came to my attention in one of the comments from one of the reviewers of this paper).

(57) See Ruhlin, p. 159 for Arabic and p. 269 for Somali.

(58) Ruhlin; Anbar.

Furthermore, linguists and others concerned with the issue do not agree on the point whether the graphization or spelling of a language should be purely phonological only or whether other aspects should also be incorporated.⁽⁵⁹⁾ This calls into question the grapheme-phoneme theoretical desideratum (see II above).

Two major drawbacks of the Arabic script are often mentioned in the literature as obstacles to reading and writing. First, the varied shapes of letters according to their position in the word. This point, about letter shapes in scripts has recently been investigated.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The conclusions alert scholars that the issue is not a straightforward matter. More goes in the optimum recognition of letters for beginning readers than is commonly believed. As far as the Arabic script is concerned, this point has not been rigorously investigated, particularly in contrast with other scripts. The other drawback relates to the Arabic convention of incomplete representation of all vowel phonemes in a word. This particular feature is not unique to the Arabic system; it is also a feature of some other Semitic languages, especially Hebrew.

The incomplete representation of vowels may or may not be a problem; deletion of some or all vowels is now practiced in some communication forms even in languages that normally indicate all vowel phonemes, e.g. English. However, in telexes, cables, and some computer programming, it is not uncommon to see few or no vowels at all; readers are expected to supply them from context, and they do so. One sentence in English should be sufficient to demonstrate this point, namely: "rdrs r xptcd t sply vwls whn rdng sntncs smlr t ths sntnc."

In the absence of scholarly studies on demerits or merits of the Arabic normal system (i.e., indicating only radical vowels), no sound judgement can be presented here, though value judgements abound in the literature. However, the other system that uses diacritics for vowels, the Hebrew system, has been investigated in a number of studies. Sampled for this paper are those by Rabin,⁽⁶¹⁾ Rabin and Schlesinger,⁽⁶²⁾ and Navon and Shimron.⁽⁶³⁾

(59) W. Haas, "Determining the Level of a Script," Coulmas and Ehlich, eds., pp. 15-29.

(60) P. Kolers, "Polarization of Reading Performance," in Coulmas and Ehlich, eds., pp. 355-69.

(61) C. Rabin, "Spelling Reform in Israel - 1968," in *Can Language be Planned*, eds. J. Rubin and B. Jernudd (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1975), pp. 95-122.

(62) C. Rabin and I. Schlesinger, "The Influence of Different Systems of Hebrew Orthography on Reading Efficiency," in *Advances in Language Planning*, ed. J. Fishman (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), pp. 555-71.

(63) D. Navon and J. Shimron, "Reading Hebrew: How Necessary is the Graphemic Representation of Vowels?," in *Orthograph and Reading*, ed. L. Henderson (London: Erlbaum, 1984), pp. 91-102.

These studies looked into the difference in effect on reading between the full system (called in Hebrew *ketiv maleh* or *ketiv menuqqud*) and the defective system (called in Hebrew *ketiv hasir*). The findings of the three studies supported their original hypothesis, namely, that the *ketiv hasir* does not retard reading comprehension in a significant way. As the sub-title of Navon and Shimron's research project reads " ... Are the vowels necessary in Hebrew spelling?" , the answer was in the negative. In addition to this validated finding, Rabin adds that a text in the *ketiv hasir* is 25% shorter than its version in any other system indicating all vowels. We can also point out that, all other things being equal, a text written in such a system has an economic gain in the form of saving and printing materials.

With the similarity between the Arabic and Hebrew conventions of spelling in mind, the findings from the studies on the Hebrew script have strong bearing on the same feature in the Arabic spelling system. In principle, similar findings would be expected if studies were carried out on a similar design; though this writer does not claim to have done this kind of study in any form. But, the findings about the convention of writing Hebrew give a strong indication. They also turn the arguments against the Arabic convention 180° around in its favor. The widely held view, as well as the commonly reiterated cliché that in Arabic, unlike what applies to reading in other languages, one has first to grasp the idea of a written text before one can actually read it properly is more of an impressionistic exaggeration than one that is based on findings of research on reading problems in other languages. In fact, this writer has located the cliché itself in reference to other languages.⁽⁶⁴⁾ That is on the one hand; on the other hand, this cliché has never been made about other similar systems, for instance, Hebrew. In both Hebrew and Arabic conventions of normal writing, in Latin script there is no shortest and longest possible reading, a world like **שדח** (Hebrew and *hādāš*, (new, m.) phonologically containing five phonemes in the shortest possible reading, is represented by only *three* letters, the same discrepancy between phonemes and letters in both systems, e.g., /sēfêr/ ((book) **ك ت ب**). In both systems, context, however, determines the proper form if there is some ambiguity. Where ambiguity remains, it would be similar to ambiguity as a universal linguistic feature, as this example from English demonstrates: visiting relatives can be a nuisance.

What is hard to explain, however, is the double standard found in the literature about this feature. For Arabic, it is always considered a reading-retarding feature, an anachronism; for Hebrew, it is considered a unique merit.

(64) Tauli; Stubbs; three reports by three different Royal commissions in the U.K. over two decades, entitled: *The Bullock Report* (1975), *The Kingman Report* (1988), and *The Cox Report* (1989); the project report commissioned by the American Academy of Education, with the title *Toward a Literate Society*, eds. J. Carroll and J. Chall.

7. Development-Progressive

It is sometimes held that development, progress and/or economic prosperity achieved in the West (considered a state to be imitated) can be linked to the linguistic systems used.⁽⁶⁵⁾ By the same token, according to that belief, the use of the Latin alphabet can pave the road to advancement. Among researchers in the field of orthography systems, such a view is a myth that needs to be dispelled. Writing about the misconception regarding the Chinese writing system, Coulmas rightly asserts that the superiority of the West in technology cannot be attributed to the use of an alphabetic system altogether, in contrast with that used for Chinese. He gives an illustrative counter example. "The development of Japan over the past 100 years more than clearly demonstrated that prosperity and a modern economy can be achieved in spite of a non-alphabetic and highly complex writing system. Yet, in most cases, economic arguments were put forth in favor of a radical solution of writing reform issues; a solution that led Turkey to replace the Arabic script by the Latin alphabet in the 1920s."⁽⁶⁶⁾ What can safely be inferred from such an assertion is that no matter how simple or complex a writing system is, economic development, stagnation, or disaster are totally irrelevant to the kind of script used.

Some advocates of the Latin script for Somali subscribed to the link between script and modernity of national systems and institutions. Musa Galaal argued that "using the Latin script will put Somalia in the camp of modernization."⁽⁶⁷⁾ This view apparently confuses 'modernization' with 'Westernization,' but to the Somalis, Westernization does not coincide with modernization; as Laitin puts it, "Never had modernization in Somalia meant becoming Westernized."⁽⁶⁸⁾ Somalian modernization aspirations and plans are moderate in nature, relating to meeting immediate needs and solving mundane problems, e.g., more water resources, better health facilities, and overcoming educational problems.

(65) E. Bokamba and J. Tlou, "The Consequences of Language Policies of African States vis-à-vis Education," in *Language and Linguistics Problems in Africa*, eds., P. Kotey and H. Housikian (Columbia, SC: Hornbeam, 1977).

(66) F. Coulmas, "Writing and Literacy in China," in Coulmas and Ehlich, eds., p. 244.

(67) Quoted by Laitin, p. 92.

(68) *Ibid.*, p. 83.

8. Economic

To economists who consider language as a human capital and resource, the planning and use of such capital/resource interact with the planning and use of the overall economy of the country. The more efficient the planning and use of the language resource, the more efficient the planning of the national economy, on both the micro-and macro- levels.⁽⁶⁹⁾ In discussing the economics of a language policy, one needs to consider both the tangible (quantifiable) aspects as well as the intangible (non-quantifiable) aspects.⁽⁷⁰⁾

While all other subsections in this section of the paper deal with the intangible perspectives, this subsection deals with the strictly tangible economic aspect.

Making and implementing a bi-orthographic policy in Somalia entails management of both time and expenditure for each script. Both time and expenditure have, therefore, to be divided over the use of two systems simultaneously. The educational system has, in the first place, to allocate time for learning each script in the school timetable, i.e., more school hours for the students than in a mono-orthographic policy. Secondly, it also must allocate more manpower hours for instruction. "Since time is a scarce and valuable source,"⁽⁷¹⁾ the current policy places an unnecessarily heavier demand on time (than in a mono-orthographic policy). It may be argued, and sensibly so, that the time allocated to learning and teaching the Latin script for Somali is an investment that brings its returns when English (or any other foreign language using the Latin script) is introduced in the educational system. Valid as it may be, the argument holds true for familiarizing the learners with the manual aspect and the recognition ability, but it certainly would not be an asset in reading because the sound values of the letters are different in Somali than in other languages using the Latin script in some respects. (See section 6) on the technical/linguistic aspect). In fact, a sub-branch of contrastive error analysis deals with problems stemming from such misleading similarities across languages using the Latin alphabet. The current bi-orthographic policy has a time loophole. It is worthwhile investigating how far some Somalis, especially non-urbanites, "economize time"⁽⁷²⁾ by concentrating on acquiring competence in only one script — the learning of which satisfies their immediate needs — and choose the "exit approach"⁽⁷³⁾ on the other, a low competence in which does not alter their literacy gains.

(69) F. Vaillancourt, "The Economics of Language and Language Planning," *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 7, No. 2 (1983), p. 156.

(70) Reagan, pp. 149-52.

(71) Vaillancourt, p. 165.

(72) Idem.

(73) E. Keller, "Ethiopian Socialism: Political Economy and Rural Development," Ms., 1985.

In addition to implying a division and allocation of time for teaching and learning two scripts simultaneously, the bi-orthographic policy makes budgetary demands on the national economy in Somalia. As mentioned above, it first requires additional manpower pay for instruction. Secondly, it has to meet state requirements for office typing equipment, printing machinery, books, and other information storage and retrieval systems in both scripts. The demand for both types of equipment and machinery may not be on equal footing, but both needs have to be met at the country-wide scale.

IV. Summary and Conclusion

This paper has presented a *post hoc* evaluation of an aspect of language planning in Somalia, namely the orthographic policy of the SRC. It has specifically focused on the conditions pertaining to the 1972 decision to use the Latin script for Somali, and evaluated the decision as well as its impact on Somalis as individuals and as a nationality within the Arab nation. It has dealt with the issue in the light of the sociolinguistic literature on orthography policies. Emphasizing the double fork approach to studying language planning policies, the paper took as points of reference those parameters that are putatively considered essential in both the literature and theory of language planning. The paper presented ample evidence that although linguistic issues are basic in language planning policy making, they recede in priority and become subservient to the societal, national, cultural, and religious values, especially where a conflict does arise or is to be preempted. Both tangible and intangible costs and benefits were within the purview of the evaluation.

Probing the policy from an eight-dimensional perspective, the argument of the paper showed that where the Latin script is claimed to be superior to the Arabic script for Somali, empirical evidence to this effect was lacking in most areas and debatable in the rest. Since both systems have points of weakness and strength for writing Somali, the decision to use one or the other cannot have a purely linguistic rationale or justification. With both systems less than perfect on the technical/linguistic grounds, the other parameters remain as more decisive in determining the overall suitability of one or the other for the Somali setting in its overall setting. These non-linguistic considerations, this paper has argued, are better served by the use of the Arabic script, especially in default of concrete evidence of outweighing gains from the use of the Latin script. In its mildest form, the conclusion of the paper may be qualified to the effect that a bi-orthographic policy in Somalia is unnecessarily costly for Somalia in more than one way.

صنع السياسة الأبجدية بالقرار المفروض: دراسة لسياسة استخدام الأبجدية اللاتينية لكتابة اللغة الصومالية

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ملخص البحث. اتخذ مجلس الثورة الصومالي قراراً يقضي باستخدام الأبجدية اللاتينية لكتابة اللغة الصومالية عام ١٩٧٢م. وفي عام ١٩٧٩م وافق المجلس على استخدام اللغة العربية لغة رسمية ثانية في الصومال، مما تطلب من الصوماليين تعلم اللغة العربية وأبجديتها للكتابة. ونتيجة للقرارين فقد أصبحت الصومال ثنائية في الأبجدية. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تمحص هذه السياسة المزدوجة من منظور ذي أبعاد متعددة وشاملة.

ومع أن البحوث التي نشرت عن هذه السياسة (وخاصة في الغرب) تخلص إلى الاستنتاج بأن استخدام الأبجدية اللاتينية لكتابة الصومالية سياسة صائبة، فإن هذا البحث يبين أن استخدام اللاتينية لم يكن أصلاً مصيباً. كما أن السياسة الحالية المزدوجة هي حل وسط تغلب سلبياته إيجابياته. ولكن البحث يبين أن المجلس قد وضع حدًا للخلافات المستعصية حول هذا الشأن قبل قيام المجلس باتخاذ القرار.