

Report

**Somalia: Language situation and
dialects**



The Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) is an independent body that collects and analyses information on current human rights situations and issues in foreign countries. It provides the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Utlendingsdirektoratet – UDI), Norway’s Immigration Appeals Board (Utlendingsnemnda – UNE) and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police with the information they need to perform their functions.

The reports produced by Landinfo are based on information from both public and non-public sources. The information is collected and analysed in accordance with source criticism standards. When, for whatever reason, a source does not wish to be named in a public report, the name is kept confidential.

Landinfo’s reports are not intended to suggest what Norwegian immigration authorities should do in individual cases; nor do they express official Norwegian views on the issues and countries analysed in them.

© Landinfo 2011

The material in this report is covered by copyright law. Any reproduction or publication of this report or any extract thereof other than as permitted by current Norwegian copyright law requires the explicit written consent of Landinfo.

For information on all of the reports published by Landinfo, please contact:

Landinfo
Country of Origin Information Centre

Storgata 33A

P.O. Box 8108 Dep

NO-0032 Oslo

Norway

Tel: +47 23 30 94 70

Fax: +47 23 30 90 00

E-mail: mail@landinfo.no

Website: www.landinfo.no

SAMMENDRAG

I motsetning til de fleste andre afrikanske landene, er Somalia språklig svært homogent. Det er få språklige minoriteter i Somalia, og disse gruppene har en svært begrenset utstrekning. Foruten å være det dominerende språket for hele befolkningen i Somalia, er somali også morsmålet til den somaliske befolkningen bosatt i nabolandene Djibouti, Etiopia og Kenya. Det finnes imidlertid få skriftlige kilder som omhandler de ulike somaliske dialektene på en samlet og tilgjengelig måte, og det ikke er utført noen systematiske feltstudier av de somaliske dialektene etter 1980-tallet.

SUMMARY

In contrast to most African countries, Somalia presents a considerable linguistic homogeneity. There are few linguistic minorities, and they are limited to small territories. Besides being the medium used all over the country, Somali is also the mother tongue of Somalis living in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. However, there are few written sources that present the various Somali dialects in a comprehensive and easily accessible manner, and systematic field studies of the Somali dialects haven't been carried out since the 1980s.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	5
2. The linguistic situation in Somalia	7
2.1 The distribution of Somali.....	7
2.2 Factors influencing the dialect situation.....	8
2.2.1 <i>Nomadism as an influencing factor</i>	8
2.2.2 <i>The clan system and regional mobility</i>	8
2.2.3 <i>Migration</i>	8
2.2.4 <i>Language convergence</i>	8
2.3 Standard Somali.....	9
2.4 Linguistic minorities.....	10
2.4.1 <i>Oromo</i>	10
2.4.2 <i>Boon</i>	10
2.4.3 <i>Mushungulu</i>	11
2.4.4 <i>Swahili</i>	11
3. Categorisation of Somali dialects	11
3.1 The Northern Somali dialect group	11
3.1.1 <i>Characteristics of the Northern Somali dialects</i>	12
3.2 The Benadir group	13
3.3 The Ashraf group.....	13
3.4 The May dialects	14
3.4.1 <i>Characteristics of May Dialects</i>	15
3.5 The Digil dialects	15
3.6 Concurrence of dialect phenomena within the various dialect groups	16
4. The current language situation	17
5. Maps	18
6. References	23

1. INTRODUCTION

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration has requested information on the condition of languages and dialects in Somalia. Landinfo has no linguistic expertise in Somali, and there are currently no experts on Somali in the linguistic academic community in Norway. Landinfo has referenced existing academic literature on the subject, and has consulted foreign expertise.

According to Martin Orwin, a linguist specialising in Somali and Amharic at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, there are also few written sources on the various Somali dialects that are comprehensive and accessible. The most relevant publication on the subject is *Die Somali-Dialekte* by Marcello Lamberti (1986a), a comparative study of the various dialects. There are also a number of articles on various linguistic factors such as grammar, phonetics and comparative studies of individual dialects. This source material is currently highly specialised and less accessible to the layperson.

Lamberti surveyed Somali dialects during a field study in Somalia in 1981. He completed his studies in Mogadishu, Bardheere and Luuq in the Gedo region; Saakow, Jilib and Bu'aale in Middle Juba; Merka and Qoryoley in Lower Shebelle; Qansax Dheere, Baidoa, Dinsor, Yaaq Baraaway and Bur Hakaba in the Bay Region; Jamaame and Kismayo in Lower Juba, as well as Adalar in Middle Shebelle (1986a, p. 15). Martin Orwin stresses that no systematic field studies of the Somali dialects have been carried out since the 1980's.

In total, Lamberti studied 52 different dialect variants,¹ basing his investigations on a list of approximately 600 words and 500 standard phrases which were presented to 78 respondents. The list of concepts being processed consisted of words related to body parts and their functions, family life and social relationships, descriptions of animals, foods, natural processes and emotions. These words were also adapted to a Somali context. The 500 standard phrases were intended to provide a basis for studying the morphological² structures of the various dialects, and thus make it possible to compare them. Lamberti also ensured that the respondents were native speakers of the appropriate dialects, and that they were minimally influenced by other dialects.

The first scientific categorisation of Somali dialects was carried out by Enrico Cerrulli in 1919 (Lamberti 1986a, p. 25). He categorised Somali into four dialect groups:

¹ Ogaden (from Kebredehar in Ogaden), Wardey (from Kismayo), Marehan (from Luuq and Jamaame), Majerteen (from Bosasso, Qardho and Jamaame), Degodiya (from Bardheere and Kismayo), Abgal (from Adale), Ajuraan (from Bu'aale), Galjaal (from Saakow and Bu'aale), Shabelle (from Bu'aale), Awramale (from Saakow), Hamari (from Mogadishu), Bimaal (from Merka and Jamaame), Af-Shingani (from Mogadishu), Af-Merca (from Merca) Af-Gendershe (from Gendershe), Af-May variants (including Af-Elaay and Af-Helleedi from Bur Hakaba, as well as variations of May from Baidoa, Luuq, Qansax Dheere, Uffurow, Korombod, Dinsor, Bardheere, Saakow, Bu'aale, Jilib, Jamaame and Qoryooley), Tunni (from Dinsoor, Jilib and Jamaame), Dabarre (from Qansax Dheere, Dinsoor and Bu'aale), Ormale (from Yaaq Baraaway and Jilib), Garre (from Bur Hakaba, Baidoa, Yaaq Baraaway, Kanaana and Qoryooley), Jiddu (from Yaq Baraway, Jilib and Oorryooley).

² Morphology is the study of the form and structure of words, and of patterns of conjugation.

1. The Issaq group, which is found in north-western Somalia (Somaliland), and includes Issa and Gadabursi.
2. The Darood group – the largest dialect group – which is found in Ogaden in Ethiopia, and in the Bari, Nugaal and Mudug regions of Somalia.
3. The Hawiye group, which is found along the coast from Hobbio and approximately 150 km south of Mogadishu, as well as in the Shebelle Valley.
4. The Sab group, which is found in the Upper Juba region and Lower Shebelle.

This categorisation has largely served as a basis for later research on Somali dialects.

Three other key Somali linguists – Martino M. Moreno, B. W. Andrzejewski and John Ibrahim Saeed – have all used this categorisation, albeit with some modifications (Lamberti 1986a, p. 25). According to Lamberti (1986a, p. 25), Moreno slightly rearranges Cerulli's categories by placing the Hawiye within a Benadir group and the Sab within a Digil group. Both Andrzejewski and Saeed separate Somali dialects into three main groups (Lamberti 1986a, p. 25-26):

1. Common Somali.
2. Coastal Dialect (Andrzejewski) / Benadir Dialect (Saeed).
3. Central Somali.

Central Somali is roughly equivalent to Cerulli's Sab and Moreno's Digil. Common Somali includes Cerulli's Issaq and Darood groups. Lamberti (1986a, p. 25) believes that the merger of these two dialect groups can be justified on the basis that they share far more characteristics than two different Benadir dialects.

Lamberti notes that more recent Somali experts separate the dialects into only two groups. One is called Max-Aad-Tiri,³ and includes both Andrzejewski's Common Somali and Coastal Dialect. The other is called Max-Aa-Rabtaa⁴ or Max-Aa-Jira, and includes Cerulli's Sab group, Moreno's Digil group and Andrzejewski's Central Somali. Lamberti notes that there is a remarkable distinction between these two main groups: Phonologically, all MAT dialects have the voiced pharyngeal⁵ fricative phoneme /c/⁶ and the voiceless /x/, which is absent from the May dialects.⁷ However, the May dialects have the phoneme /ɟ/ (a voiced palatal plosive), which is absent from the MAT dialects. Syntactically, the two dialect groups differ in the usage of articles. In MAT dialects, independent sentences without definite articles are grammatically incorrect, while definite articles can be omitted in the May dialects.

Lamberti (1986a, p. 26-30) also puts forth other categorisations, including those concerning the historical development of the Somali language. Applicable on all accounts, however, are the basic features of Cerulli's categorisation. Lamberti

³ “What have you said?” Abbreviated to MAT.

⁴ “What do you want / desire?”, “What is it?”

⁵ Pharyngeal sounds are articulated with the tongue root against the pharynx.

⁶ The transcription follows the general orthography in standard Somali, apart from the examples describing phonological structures that are not present in Somali orthography – in which cases, symbols from the international phonetic alphabet are used, known as IPA transcription.

⁷ I.e. the Max-Aa-Rabtaa group, also known as Max-Aa-Jira.

himself chooses a five-way categorisation of Somali that is not dependent on lexical differences, but mainly on phonological,⁸ syntactic⁹ and morphological traits. He emphasises that these morphological traits of the various dialects are the most resilient to influences of other dialects, unlike the lexical traits – which are dispersed relatively easily through loan words. The five dialect groups form, according to Lamberti's understanding, a chain with two opposite extremes, where the transition from one component to the other is fluid. He also claims that the fluid transition within each component forms various continuums. In light of these circumstances, Lamberti categorises Somali into the five dialect groups discussed in Chapter 3, i.e. the northern Somali group, the Benadir group, the Ashraf dialects, the May dialects and the Digil group.

2. THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN SOMALIA

2.1 THE DISTRIBUTION OF SOMALI¹⁰

Unlike most other African countries, Somalia is linguistically quite homogeneous. There are few linguistic minorities in Somalia, and these groups' expansion is very limited (see section 2.4). Besides being the dominant language amongst the entire population of Somalia, Somali is also the native language of the Somali population residing in the neighbouring countries of Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya.¹¹ For example, in Djibouti 40% of the population speak Somali.

In Djibouti and the Zeylac district in north-western Somalia, the Issa dialect is used. In the north-eastern part of the Harar region of Ethiopia, the Af-Gadabursi¹² dialect is used (it is also spoken in areas around Boram in the Galbeed district in north-western Somalia). Towards the south of Jijiga in Ogaden in Ethiopia, one can find the Ogaden and Wardey dialects, while in the eastern part of Ogaden, one can find the Af-Dhulbahante, Af-Majerteen and Af-Marehan dialects. In the Bale region of southern Ethiopia, the Af-Ogaden as well as the Af-Degodiya and Af-Ajuran dialects are found. In Kenya, it is primarily the Darood dialects Af-Aulihaan and Af-Harti that are the most widespread, while the Af-Degodiya, Af-Ajuran and Af-Garre dialects are also used in the north-eastern parts of Kenya. While Somali dialects in Ethiopia and Djibouti have, according to Lamberti (1986a, p.5), evolved in line with the dialects of northern Somalia, there are several deviations from the original forms of northern Somali found in Somali dialects in Kenya.

⁸ Involves sonic differences.

⁹ Relating to the structure of sentences.

¹⁰ A collection of maps of the distribution of Somali and various Somali dialects is featured in Chapter 5.

¹¹ All three countries have relatively large Somali minority communities in the areas bordering Somalia. In addition to these, there are significant numbers of Somalis who have left Somalia since 1991 due to war, famine or other causes – both permanently and temporarily.

¹² Af means tongue / language / syllabary / dialect in Somali.

2.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DIALECT SITUATION

Lamberti (1986a, p. 9) points out that the Somali dialect situation is quite complicated as a single dialect usually has several varieties. Moreover, several different dialects are often used in the same geographical area. Additionally, nomadism, clan relationships, and migration are important factors that have contributed to influencing and changing the dialect situation in Somalia.

2.2.1 Nomadism as an influencing factor

The majority of Somalia's population are nomadic or have nomadic backgrounds, and Lamberti (1986a, p. 11) believes that one should therefore assume that the nomads' migration has contributed to the scattering of several dialect forms, and that this would lead to a convergence of dialects or significant mutual influencing. Lamberti specifically notes that the part of Somalia where nomadism has its strongest roots, namely in northern Somalia, features a far more unified and homogeneous dialect situation than in southern Somalia, where the majority of the population is settled.

2.2.2 The clan system and regional mobility

Clan affiliation includes an association of dialect, and despite mass displacement gathering many different clans together within a certain geographical area, the clans have still largely retained their dialectical characteristics because of strong clan roots. At the same time, no dialects have been completely unaffected by their linguistic environment, and we have consequently seen a diversity of local varieties develop within the same dialect. The dialect situation in Somalia is therefore quite complex, and can in no way be compared to conditions in Europe, where there are fewer dialect variations (Lamberti 1986, p. 11-12¹³).

2.2.3 Migration

Somalia has experienced numerous migrations. There was significant migration of primarily Darood clan members from northern Somalia to Lower Juba and Kenya, and from central Somalia to the Middle Juba region in the 1900's. In the 1970's, an estimated 300,000 nomads from central Somalia were relocated to settlements along the lower parts of the Shebelle River at Jalalaqsi and Kurtun Waarey, as well as Dujuma in Middle Juba due to extensive drought that affected the nomads in 1973-1974 (Cassanelli 2003, p. 17). As a result of these migrations, the Majerteen dialect is also prevalent towards the south of the country and into parts of Kenya, while the May dialect from Baidoa is present in a slightly altered form in Kismayo (Lamberti 1986a, p. 12-13).

2.2.4 Language convergence

Lamberti (1986a, p.13) draws attention to the fact that, as a result of Somali nationalism, a strong tendency for language convergence among the Somali dialects

¹³ Here Lamberti is most likely referring to the conditions in continental Europe (as in Norway, the variation of dialects is wider), and the conditions mentioned here are perhaps more suggestive of Somalia.

has developed, and that the 1980's typically featured support for the elimination or reduction of the diversity of dialects. Many dialects are in any case very similar, as the greater the similarity, the greater the degree of mutual influence. The Jiddu dialect is considered, in turn, to be the most distinctive dialect, and is simultaneously the dialect that is least influenced by other dialects.

2.3 STANDARD SOMALI¹⁴

Somalia has never been standardised in the sense that there would be general agreement on one common form of language, which most Somalis would agree to be the norm for all written purposes, and for spoken purposes in broadcasting and other formal occasions.

The language debate in Somalia in the 1900's was concerned first and foremost with the choice of writing system.¹⁵ The regime under Siyad Barre introduced a variation of the Latin alphabet in October 1972, followed by an extensive campaign from 1973 to 1975 to teach the population to read and write (Warsame 2001, p. 351). During this period, the entire school curriculum in the country was Somaliised (up to then, the teaching languages in schools were English, Italian and Arabic), which encouraged a number of textbooks to be written in Somali.

Lamberti (1986, p. 31) states that the Darood dialects from the Mudug region and the western parts of the Somali areas, i.e. Ogaden in Ethiopia, became the benchmark for the form of language in school textbooks and broadcasting. These dialects are spoken by a large number of Somalis, and are understood and spoken by other Somalis, even though their own dialect belongs to a different dialect group.

Dr. Martin Orwin at SOAS points out that standard Somali is not a single established, official standard, but in practice consists of a range of different dialects and forms of expression, from which different users will form different understandings of what is deemed to be correct Somali. There is therefore, according to Orwin, no point in using standard Somali as a point of reference – for example, in connection with the analysis of dialects.

Orwin further believes that standard Somali has only been used as a term on the local language version of the BBC's broadcasts in Somali and on Radio Mogadishu before the civil war, and which otherwise has not been associated with or used by specific groups within the population. Nonetheless, there is still relatively wide variation within written Somali, which is highlighted in the preface to R. David Zorc's Somali – English dictionary:

¹⁴ A standard language is a form of language that is used as a unified, national language of people who usually use different dialects. The standard language of a country (which most countries have) will primarily be the written language. The standard language is a “created” form of language, and can be built upon one or more dialects. Thus, dialects are the original languages. The standard language is used as a written language, which is usually not the case with dialects. Moreover, the standard language is often used as a spoken language of people with a formal education, such as officials, residents of cities, etc. Anyone who speaks in dialect is, in principle, bilingual – with one spoken language and one written language.

¹⁵ Variations of the Arabic alphabet have been used in Somali spelling since the 1200's. Christian missionaries introduced the Latin alphabet in the late 1800's, and in the early 1920's the Somali nationalist Osman Yusuf Kenadid developed a writing system called Cusmaaniya (Warsame 2001, p. 343-344).

Since Somali spelling is not yet fully standardized, most people write as they pronounce, and consequently you may encounter a word in a rather different form from that which is given here (Zorc, Osman & Luling 1991, p. xii).

This is not only reflected in pronunciation and orthography, but also in, for example, vocabulary and conjugation.

2.4 LINGUISTIC MINORITIES¹⁶

Lamberti points out that the linguistic minorities in Somalia are small and that members of minority groups are generally well integrated into the Somali community. The majority of members of minority groups are, according to Lamberti, fluent in Somali, and he believes that it is primarily older individuals with little or no formal education, and women with little social contact with other Somali-speakers, who struggle with Somali.¹⁷ The linguistic minorities Lamberti surveyed during his stay in Somalia were Oromo-, Boon-, Mushungulu- and Swahili-speakers. Landinfo believes it to be highly likely that the number of member of these groups currently in Somalia is low, as a result of the turmoil during the civil war.

2.4.1 Oromo

Members of the Oromo ethnic group¹⁸ are scattered around the Gedo region bordering Ethiopia. According to Lamberti, they have fully settled in with Somali culture and the Somali language (Oromo is closely related to Somali). However, this minority group is not linguistically homogeneous, and based on material collected by Lamberti; he distinguishes between the Af-Arussi, Af-Qotto, and Af-Boraan and Af-Garre dialects. All these dialects are in particular lexically influenced by Somali. Apart from Gedo, there are Oromo groups in Lower Juba as well. In Kismayo and the Badhaade district in Lower Juba, according to Lamberti's respondents, the Oromo dialects Af-Garre and Af-Wardey are especially prevalent.

2.4.2 Boon

According to Lamberti, any people who engaged in hunting and leather craft in the past, were referred to as Boon. The term has, the author claims, since been used as a description of all people in various low-status trades, such as as cobblers, hunters, etc. However, Lamberti does not describe the so-called Midgan, but rather a very specific group who, in the 1980's, were mainly settled in the Jilib district – approximately 30 km outside the town of Jilib. It was only Boon members over the age of 60 who had retained their own native language,¹⁹ while all others in contact with Lamberti used the May dialect of the Jilib district.

¹⁶ Based on Lamberti 1986a, p. 5-9 and 1984, p. 155-162.

¹⁷ One must be aware that this information relates to the situation in the 1980's.

¹⁸ The Oromo people are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, with 25 million people.

¹⁹ This language is also closely related to Somali.

2.4.3 Mushungulu

The Mushungulu population live in the Jamaame district in Lower Juba along the banks of the Juba River. This population group is considered to be descendent of slaves who were taken from, amongst other places, Tanzania between 200 and 300 years ago. Mushungulu women had little contact with the Somali population and subsequently had a poor grasp of Somali, while men had more contact with their Somali neighbours and therefore had much better knowledge of Somali. The Mushungulu population's native language is a Bantu language most similar to Shamba from Tanzania.

2.4.4 Swahili

Lamberti discusses two Swahili-speaking minorities in Somalia. One is the Bajuni in Kismayo and on the islands off the coast of Kismayo, and the other is the oldest population group in the town of Brava, who speak the Swahili dialect Somalis call Af-Chimwiini. The Bajuni population's native language is called, according to Lamberti, Af-Bajuni by Somalis and Kibajuni²⁰ by the Bajunis themselves. Despite some distinctive sound variations, Kibajuni²⁰ is a Swahili dialect which Lamberti claims is the oldest dialect in Kismayo.

3. CATEGORISATION OF SOMALI DIALECTS²¹

3.1 THE NORTHERN SOMALI DIALECT GROUP

By northern Somali, Lamberti refers not only to the dialect group found in northern Somalia itself, but also the dialects used in the far south of Somalia, as well as amongst Somali groups in Kenya. This dialect group consists of three subgroups:

1. Northern Somali, in the true sense of the word, as found in the Galbeed region, Togdheer and Sanaag in north-western Somalia. This subgroup consists of Issa, Gadabursi and the Issaq dialects.²²
2. The Darood group, found in Bari, Nugaal and Mudug in north-eastern Somalia, in the Ogaden province in Ethiopia, in the northern part of the Bakool region and in Gedo. The Majerteen, Dhulbahante, Marehan, Degodiya, Warsangeli and Ogaden dialects belong to this dialect group.
3. The Lower Juba group consists of dialect users who emigrated from the northern part of Somalia to Lower Juba in the 1800's. This dialect group includes Af-Majerteen, Af-Marehan, Af-Degodiya and Af-Ogaden. Because the area along the Lower Juba coast, where these clan members originally settled, was a Benadir-speaking area, the influence of the Benadir dialects is quite noticeable.

²⁰ The prefix *ki-* means tongue / language in Swahili and several other related languages.

²¹ The chapter is based on Lamberti 1986a, p. 30 – 49 and 1984, p. 162 – 189.

²² Dialect terms coincide with clan names.

Lamberti believes one can classify an additional fourth northern Somali dialect subgroup, found in northern Kenya. It includes the Ogaden dialects Af-Abudwaq and Afabdallah, the Harti dialect (which is a Majerteen dialect) and the Degodiya dialect. The first two subgroups, i.e. the true northern Somali and the Darood group, are very homogeneous despite being the native language of more than half the population of Somalia, as well as dominate a large geographical area. The third group (Lower Juba), however, has been under the influence of the Benadir dialects, and features specific characteristics because of this.

It is the dialects belonging to the northern Somali group that have been most widely studied, and this applies especially to the Issaq dialect. The other dialects have been the subject of less interest, despite – as one of several noted by Lamberti – the launch of a grammatical study of the Majerteen dialect in 1955, as well as dictionaries in 1962 and 1976.

3.1.1 Characteristics of the Northern Somali dialects

Some of the most distinctive features of the northern Somali dialects are the following:

- The pharyngeal phonemes (/c/ and /x/).
- The phonemic distinction between /q/ and /kh/, cf. /qal/ (the imperative "slaughter!") vs. /khal/ (an alcoholic beverage).
- The absence of nasals such as [ɲ] and [ŋ].
- The progressive suffixes /-ayaa~-aysaa/ can not be combined (for example, to /aa/ or /ee/).
- Masculine monosyllables form the majority of partial duplication, cf. the singular /san/ ("nose") → the majority /sanan/.
- The absence of singular suffixes.
- The definite article /-ku~-tu/ is postfixed (as in Norwegian), cf. /ninku halkanuu imaanayaa/ ("the man is coming here").

One of many characteristic features of the northern Somali dialects Issa, Gadabursi and Issaq is:

- The phoneme /dh/ is realised as [d], even in intervocalic position, in contrast to the other northern Somali dialects, where it is realised as [ɽ] and [r] – e.g. [wuu yidɽi] ("he said"), in contrast to [wuu~waa yiri], respectively.

The Darood group is characterised by one particular feature:

- The realisation of the phoneme /j/ as [č], as in [čoog] (the imperative "be!") and [waa~wuu čabay] ("it/that broke") – in contrast to [joog] and [waa~wuu jabay] in the northern Somali dialects Issaq, Issa and Gadabursi.

The Lower Juba group is especially characterised by the following feature:

- The suffix of the first person singular in negated present tense /-i/; /ma keeni/ ("I am not bringing it") – in contrast to /ma (an) keeno/ in the other northern Somali dialects.

3.2 THE BENADIR GROUP

According to Lamberti's (1986) categorisation, the Benadir group consists of five subgroups:

1. Abgal in Galgadud and the Middle Shebelle region all the way to Mogadishu.
2. Galjeel in the southern part of the Hiraan region all the way to the Jowhar district and in the northern parts of the Lower Shebelle region. One can also find Galjeel-speakers in the Saakow and Bu'aale districts in Middle Juba, as a result of migrations within the period 1900 – 1980.
3. Ajuran in the Hiraan region and in the Dhinsor, Saakow and Bu'aale districts. Also here, the geographical dialect areas are ascribed to migrations that took place at the beginning of the 20th century.
4. Hamar in Hamar Weyne – the oldest district in Mogadishu.
5. Biimal in Mogadishu to the most southern part of the Afgoye and Qoryoley districts, as well as in the Merka and Jamaame districts.

In addition to these, a Benadir variation developed north and south of Mogadishu. Granted, this variant has no native speakers and is only used as a language of communication between the various Benadir-speakers. This dialect variation is, according to Lamberti, a mixture of the Abgal, Hamar and Biimal dialects.

The Hamar dialect in Hamar Weyne can, according to Martin Orwin, also be grasped by others than members of the Rer Hamar – for example, a Marehan or Abgal who has grown up with a Rer Hamar can be fluent in this dialect. Orwin justifies this by referencing the general phenomenon that children and young people are more easily influenced than adults with regards to changes in language and dialect (telephone conversation with Landinfo, November 2006).

The Benadir dialects are otherwise minimally consistent, according to Lamberti – even within one dialect there are often different forms, cf. for example, Af-Hamar: /waa~niraahdaa~niraadaa~niraa/ (“we say”). There is also meant to be far greater freedom and grammatical leeway with the Benadir dialects, than with northern Somali. The Abgal and Biimal dialects are the two Benadir dialects with the highest numbers of users. The Biimal dialect consists of two variations, namely Biimal from Lower Shebelle and Biimal from Lower Juba, which does not drastically differ from each other.

3.3 THE ASHRAF GROUP

The Ashraf dialects are, according to Lamberti, used exclusively along parts of southern Somalia's coast by Somalis who belong to the Ashraf clan.²³ This dialect group consists of two subgroups:

1. Ashraf in the Shangani district in Mogadishu called Af-Shingani.
2. Ashraf in Lower Shebelle, specifically the Merka district. This dialect group has the subcategories Af-Merka, Af-Gendershe and Af-Jilib.

²³ Lamberti refers to “the very fair-skinned Somalis of Arabic origin” (1986a, p. 37).

The Ashraf dialects have, in spite of significant influence from the Benadir dialects, still not undergone many changes. For example, the difference between the intervocal /t/, cf. (“I stand up”) in Shingani, /an joogsati/ and /waa(n) joogsadey/ in MAT, or the shifting of the intervocal /sh/ to /y/, cf. (“she”) /isha/ in Shingani, while it is /iyad/ in MAT, as well as (“I gave”) /an siishi/ in Shingani and /waa(n) siiyey/ in MAT.

According to Lamberti, there have been only two minor research projects on Af-Shingani.

3.4 THE MAY DIALECTS

Lamberti only discusses Rahanweyn and Rahanweyn-esque May-dialects. As with the other dialects and dialect names in Somalia, the Rahanweyn dialect terms also coincide with the various Rahanweyn clans, such as Af-Elay. However, it is not just Rahanweyn clan members who speak Af-Rahanweyn – for example, in Jilib, according to Lamberti, the Ooji²⁴ use the current Rahanweyn dialect of the area. Although the May dialects are relatively homogeneous, they are still not as uniform as the northern Somali dialects. The boundaries between the different May dialects are fluid, and even though there is the same case of factors influencing and changing dialects, this has happened to a lesser extent than in other parts of Somalia.

The May dialects are used in the Bakool region, in the south-western part of the Hiraan region and in the Jowhar district in the Middle Shebelle region, in the entire Bay region, Gedo, Middle Juba and Lower Shebelle, as well as in the eastern part of Lower Juba. However, the Merka district in Lower Shebelle does not belong to the May dialect area, even though it also features May-speakers. Granted, these have moved in from other areas. Moreover, Lamberti explains how within the May areas, there are places where other dialects are used as well. In the Dhinsor district in the Bay region, for instance, the May-speakers are in the minority.²⁵ They are also in the minority in the Qoryoley districts in Lower Shebelle and in Jilib in Middle Juba. These three districts, along with the Bur Hakaba district, make up the heartland of the Digil dialects.

In the Gedo region, the May dialect competes with the various Darood dialects (Af-Ogaden, Af-Degodiya and Af-Marehan), while in Saakow and Bu'aale in Middle Juba, some dialects from central Somalia are used in addition to May, such as Af-Ajuran, Af-Garre, Af-Awramale²⁶ and Af-Shabelle.²⁷

It is, according to Lamberti, difficult to separate the May dialects into different categories, because the differences between them are small and the transitions gradual, yet he has regardless categorised five variants:

²⁴ Another term for *Jareer* (Bantu).

²⁵ Referring to Lamberti's surveys at the beginning of the 1980's.

²⁶ Darood.

²⁷ Rer Shebelle consists of various *Jareer* groups that mainly inhabit areas along the Shebelle River in Hiraan and Middle Shebelle.

1. The northern May dialect, i.e. May from northern Gedo and Bakool, as characterised by a certain influence from northern Somali.
2. The western May dialect, which is used in Bardheere (Gedo) and Dhinsor (Bay).
3. The eastern May dialect, which consists of Af-Elay and Af-Begedi (Begeda).
4. The May dialect used in the areas between Qoryoley and Jilib.
5. The southern May dialect (or Lower Juba dialect), which is used in the Jamaame and Afmadow district.

Lamberti notes that there are very few scientifically based surveys and research projects on these dialects, and existing knowledge on them is therefore limited. Martin Orwin believes that most individuals in the May-speaking areas comprehend the respective May dialect, yet that many also comprehend MAT. He also points out that the usage of May will vary, depending on whether one lives in a city or the countryside – for example, in Afgoye, located within very close proximity to Mogadishu, most will fully master both dialects (telephone conversation with Landinfo, November 2006).

3.4.1 Characteristics of May Dialects

Lamberti otherwise refers to the following characteristics of the May dialects:

- The vowel phoneme /ə/, which does not exist in the northern Somali dialects or Ashraf dialects, and which is not featured in Somali orthography as its own character.
- The pharyngeal phonemes /c/ and /x/ do not exist.
- Certain combinations of consonants become assimilated:
 - /l/ + /t/ becomes /ll/ in May, as in /weelli/ (“you did it”) or /wellti/ otherwise.
 - /h/ + /t/ becomes /tt/ in May, as in /batti/ (“you went”), or /bahti/ otherwise (/baxti/ in Ashraf and /waa(d) bax (a)day/ (“you came out”) in northern Somali).
 - /h/ + /n/ becomes /nn/ in May, as in /banni / (“we went”), or /bahni/ otherwise (/baxni/ in Ashraf and /waa(n) baxney/ (“we came out”) in northern Somali).
- Plurals are grammatically masculine.
- The majority of possessive and indicative pronouns are formed with the prefix /haan(i)-/, as in /haanaas/ (“they/them there”) and /haankey~haankey/ (“my”).

3.5 THE DIGIL DIALECTS

The Digil dialects make up the most heterogeneous of Somali dialect groups. Lamberti separates them into the following categories:

1. The Tunni dialect, spoken in the Dhinsor, Brava and Jilib districts.²⁸ Of all the Digil dialects, this dialect is most heavily influenced by the May dialects. There are two variations of the Tunni dialect; Af-Tunni Defaraat and Af-Tunni Torre.
2. The Dabarre dialect, spoken primarily in the Dhinsor and Qansax Dheere districts, and along the Juba River in Middle Shebelle. The presence of the Dabarre dialect in Middle Juba is due to migration during the 1970's and 1980's. The Dabarre dialect consists of two variations – the first regarded to be the original Af-Dabarre of the Dabarre clan members,²⁹ and Af-Oroole, spoken by Oroole clan members closely affiliated with the Dabarre clan.
3. The Garre dialect, spoken in the Baidoa, Dhinsor, Bur Hakaba and Qoryoley districts, is one of the most heterogeneous dialects in Somalia. Native speakers themselves divide the dialect into two different variations, which they call Tuuf and Quranow, yet Lamberti (1986) believes that the Garre dialect varies from area to area. He illustrates this by referring to the dialect spoken in Bur Hakaba, which has preserved conjugation through the use of prefixes relatively well, while Garre in Baidoa no longer uses these forms. In Baidoa, the pluralisation /-te/ is replaced with /-yaal/, unlike the other Garre dialects.

The Garre variants can, according to Lamberti (1986), be divided into the following categories:

- 3.1. Garre in the Bur Hakaba district.
- 3.2. Garre in the Baidoa district.
- 3.3. Af-Aarma³⁰ in the Dhinsor district.
- 3.4. Af-Rer Amiir³¹ in the Dhinsor district.
- 3.5. Garre in the Qoryoley district.
4. The Jiddu dialect consists of different variations, and is otherwise unique both within the Digil group and amongst all other Somali dialects. Jiddu-speakers are in found in the Qoryoley, Dhinsor, and Jilib districts. According to Lamberti, all users of the Digil dialects belong to the Digil clan.

3.6 CONCURRENCE OF DIALECT PHENOMENA WITHIN THE VARIOUS DIALECT GROUPS

Lamberti (1986a, p. 89-101) has accounted for 67 dialect phenomena,³² mainly concerned with the formulation and structure of words. Using the northern Somali dialects as a starting point, he puts forward phonological,³³ morphological³⁴ and

²⁸ The users are nomads who herd cattle, sheep and goats, but no camels.

²⁹ The Dabarre clan is regarded by some Somalia-experts to be a Rahanweyn clan, while others consider it to be a Digil clan.

³⁰ Lamberti believes Af-Aarma may be related to Orma, which is an Oromo group.

³¹ It is unclear which clan / sub-clan this is.

³² Isoglosses, i.e. geographical boundaries of dialect phenomena. A phonological isogloss can, for example, be the geographic boundary between the prevalence of the “French” R versus the rolled R in Norwegian.

³³ Involves phonological, i.e. sonic, differences.

³⁴ Involves the structure of word formulation and conjugation.

syntactic³⁵ features of these dialects, and compares them to equivalent features within other dialect groups.

The Benadir dialects share 40 of the northern Somali features, the Ashraf dialects share 14 of the northern Somali features, as well as 14 features shared with the Benadir dialect, yet not with northern Somali. The May dialects equate to a very small degree with the northern Somali dialects, yet they share far more similarities with the Benadir and Ashraf dialects.

4. THE CURRENT LANGUAGE SITUATION

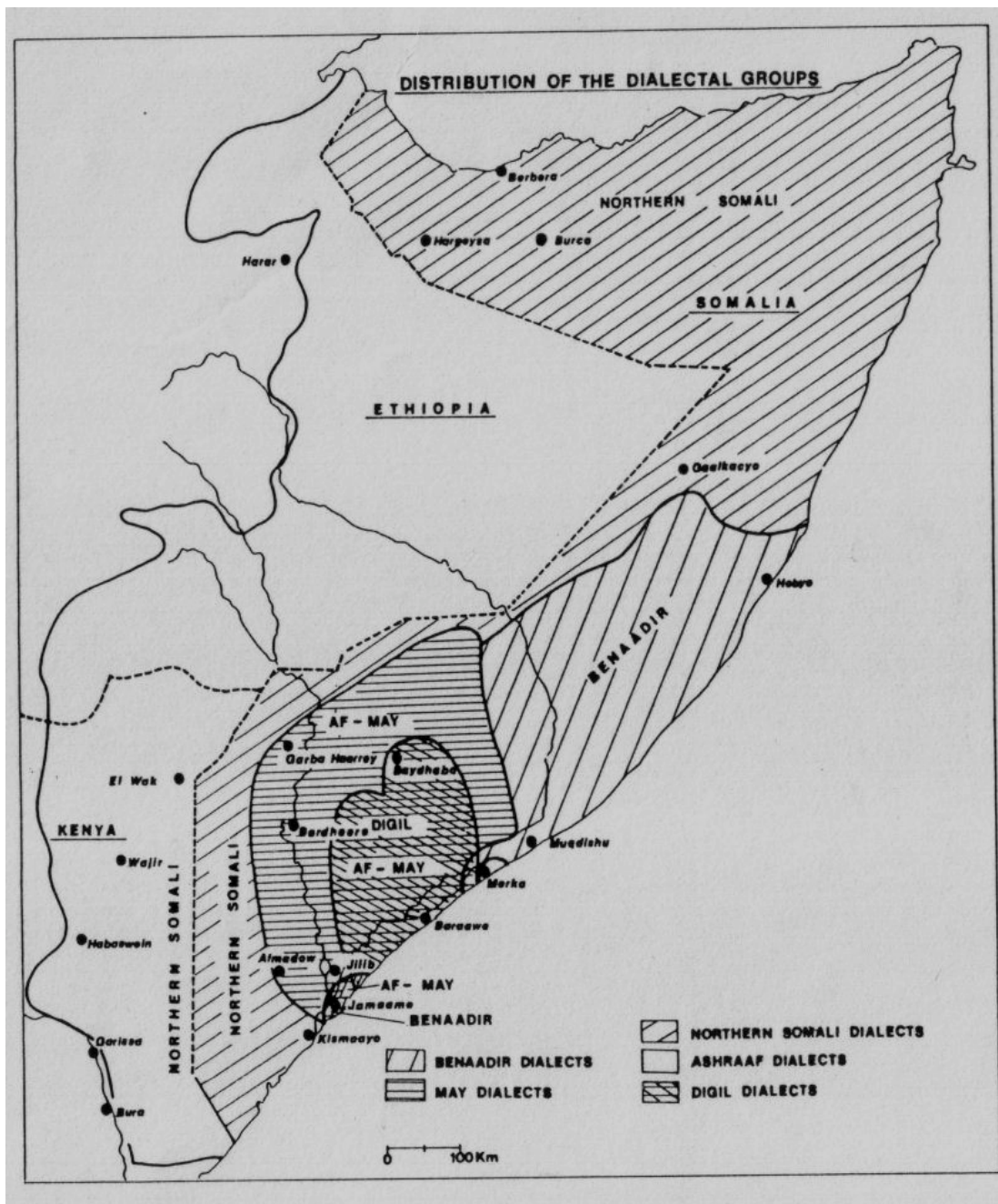
The Somali language and dialects evolve over time, similarly to other languages and dialects. The language development is an ongoing process, and outer influences, such as migration, lifestyles, conflict and population changes, have clearly had an impact on Somali dialects (as Lamberti described in the 1980's).

Even though Somali dialects have not been the subject of systematic investigation after the 1980's, one must, according to Martin Orwin, be allowed to assume that the civil war of 1991-1992 and the conflicts raging since then, have contributed to linguistic changes – yet how extensive these changes are and how easily newcomers in an area pick up dialects, can be difficult to know (telephone conversation with Landinfo, November 2006).

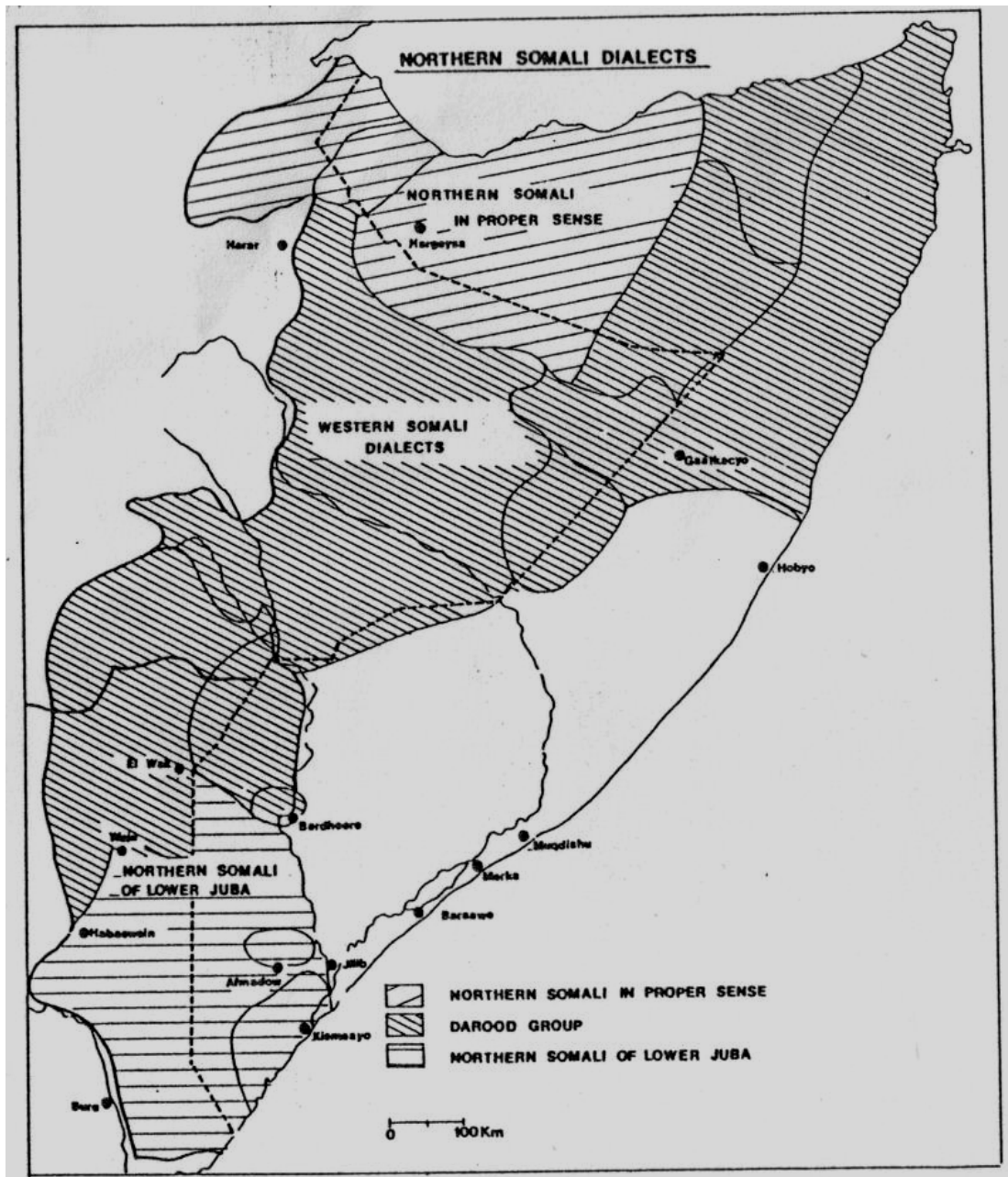
Several hundred thousands of internally displaced persons and new patterns of settlement amongst certain clans, the collapse of the education system and lack of basic education amongst a generation may have influenced the language in different ways. Thousands of young men (and some young women) have been affiliated with militias, both in the capital Mogadishu and in other towns and areas. Several members of such groups are said to have their own jargon, which developed into a dialect that is practically incomprehensible to outsiders (CRD 2004, p. 29).

³⁵ Involves the arrangement and function of words within a sentence.

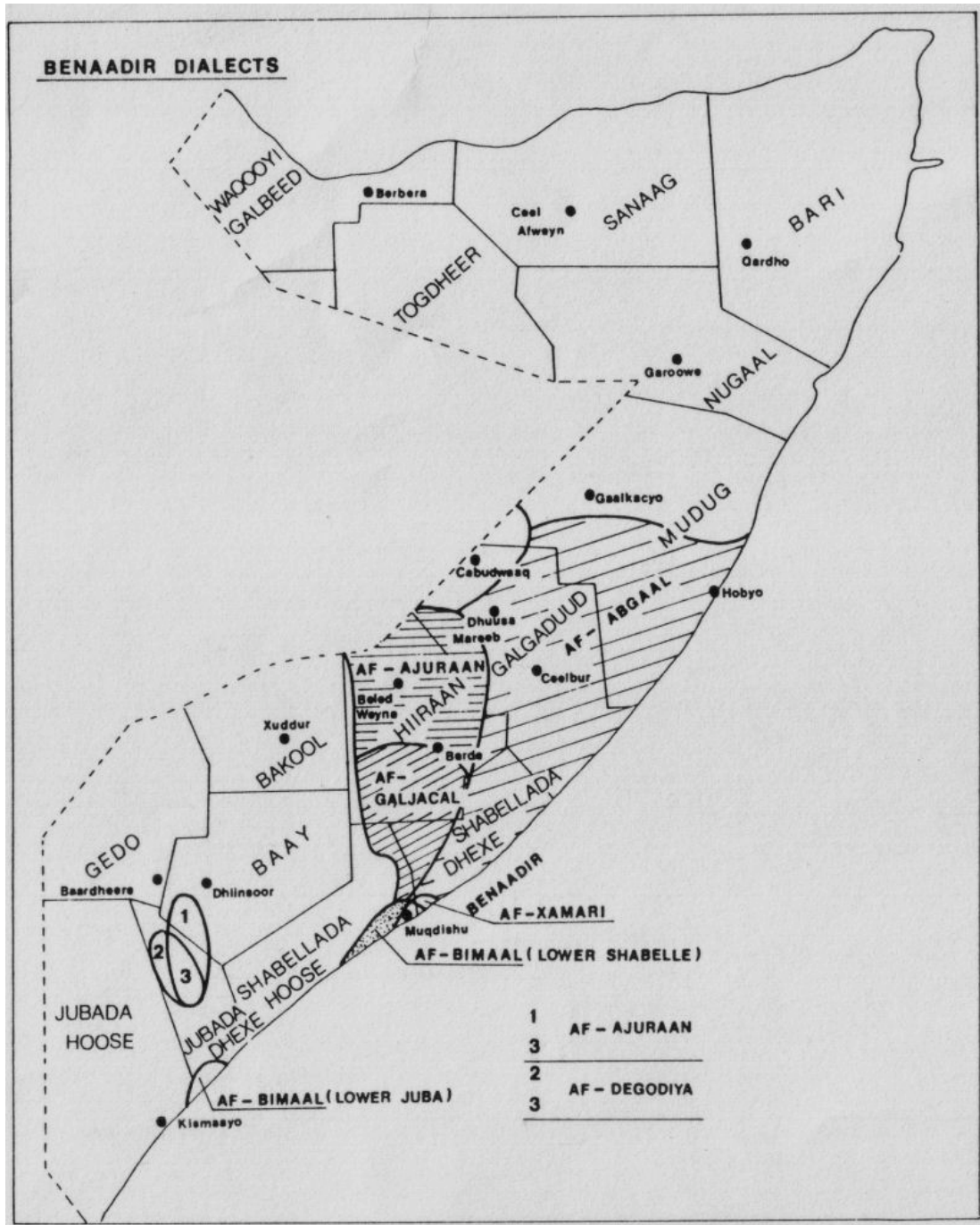
5. MAPS



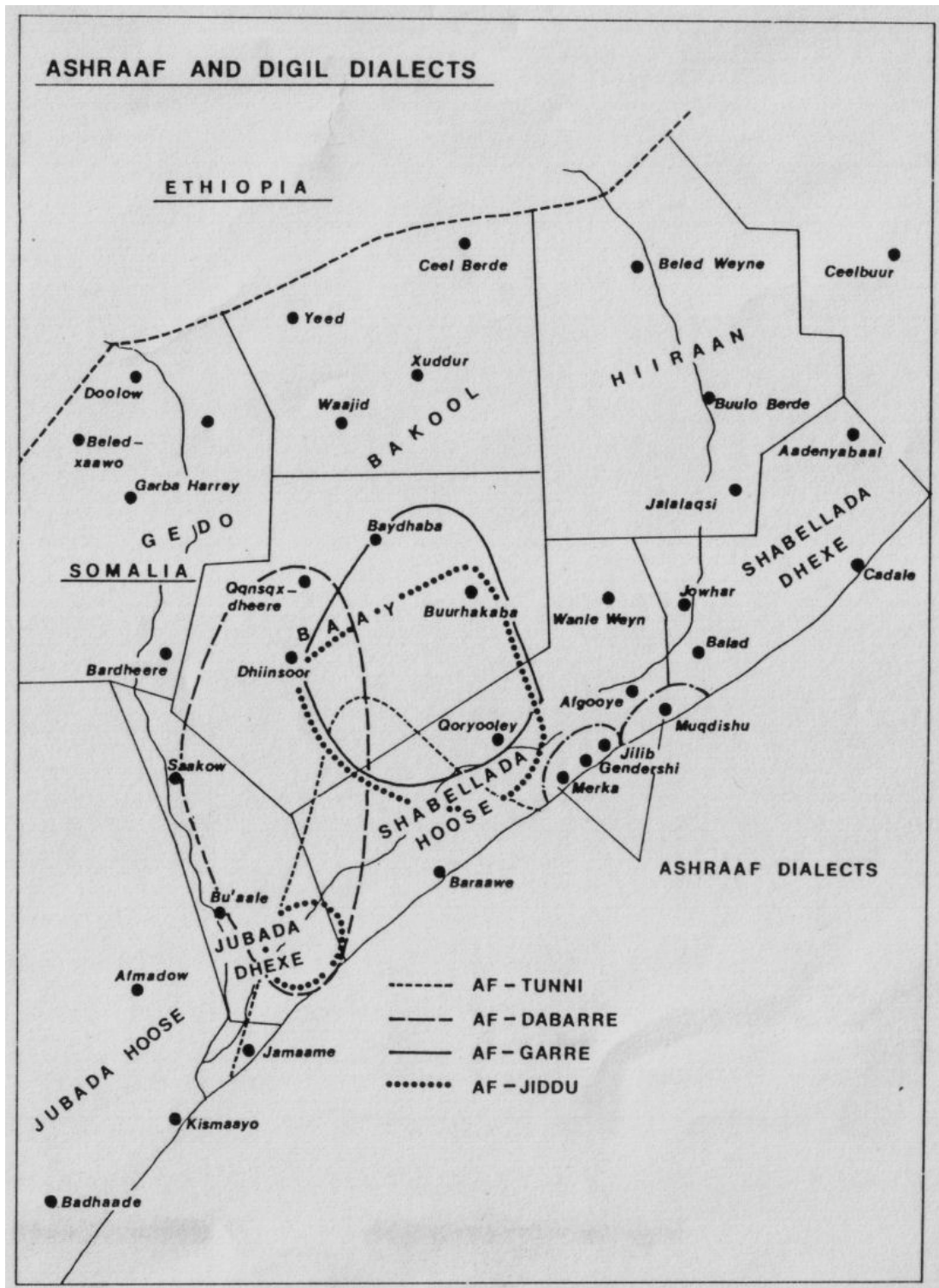
Dispersal of the various dialect groups (Lamberti 1986b, p. 51).



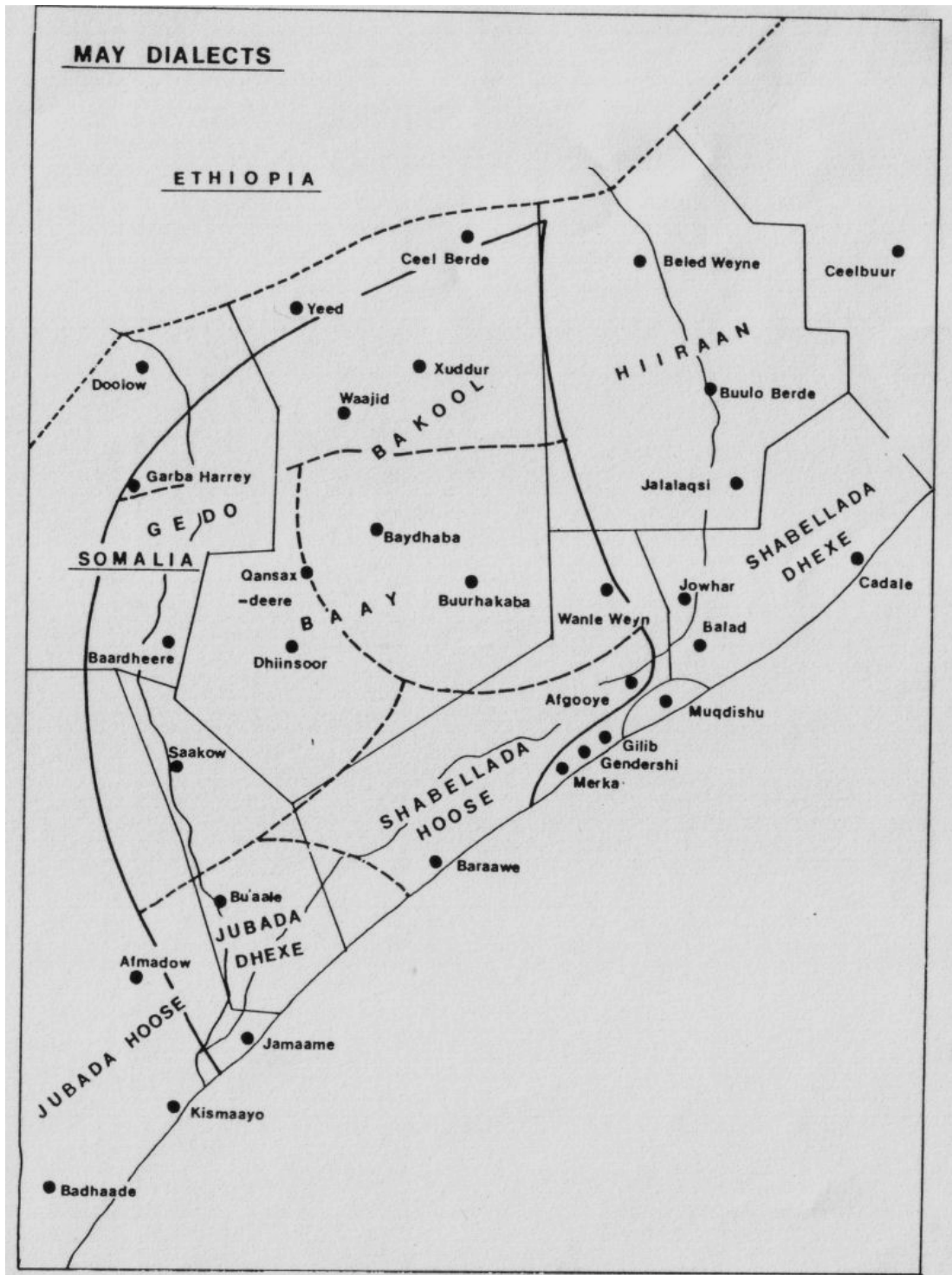
Northern Somali dialects (Lamberti 1986b, p. 52).



Benadir dialects (Lamberti 1986b, p. 53).



Ashraf and Digil dialects (Lamberti 1986b, p. 55).



May dialects (Lamberti 1986b, p. 54).

6. REFERENCES

Written sources

- Cassanelli, L.V. (2003). Explaining the Somali crisis. In: Besteman, Catherine & Cassanelli, Lee V. (Eds.), *The struggle for land in Southern Somalia – The war behind the war*. London: HAAN, 13-26.
- CRD, i.e. Centre for Research and Dialogue (2004, 19 July). *Somalia: Path to recovery building a sustainable peace*. Mogadishu: CRD. Available from <http://www.somali-jna.org/downloads/Somalia%20-%20Path%20to%20Recovery%20-%20final.pdf> [downloaded 19 July, 2011]
- Lamberti, Marcello (1984). The linguistic situation in the Somali Democratic Republic. In: Labahn, Thomas (Ed.), *Proceedings of the second international congress of Somali studies. Volume I: Linguistics and literature*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Publishing, 155-200.
- Lamberti, Marcello (1986a). *Die Somali-Dialekte*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Publishing
- Lamberti, Marcello (1986b). *Map of Somali dialects in the Somali Democratic Republic*.
- Warsame, Ali A. (2001). How a strong government backed an African language: The lessons of Somalia. *International Review of Education*, 47(3-4), 341-360.
- Zorc, R. David, Osman, Madina M. & Luling, Virginia (1991). *Somali-English dictionary (2nd revised and expanded edition)*. Kensington, MD.: Dunwoody Press.

Verbal sources

- Dr. Martin Orwin, senior lecturer in Somali and Amharic at The School of Oriental and African Studies, London. E-mail and telephone contact, September-November 2006.