

# METRE AND SYNTAX IN SOMALI POETRY

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# Gaarriye 1976

Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' in *Xiddigta Oktoobar*  
7 February 1976, p.3 Gaarriye's *Geeraar* metrical pattern

11		0
12	2112	1
21		2
111		

- Invariable part to the line: 2 1 1 2 in the middle which gives the *geeraar* its particular pattern.
- He mentions also that some lines might look as if they are broken, given the template he presents, but that it is possible to add to the end of the *geeraar* line certain grammatical particles which link that line to the next but which are 'not needed' for the metre.
- He gives the following list of such particles: oo, ee, eey, baa, buu, baan and bay and says there are many more.

Two main points here:

- ‘Poetic license’: extrametricality of grammatical particles, specifically conjunctions and the focus marker **baa**
- Relationship between line edges and syntax

Giorgio Banti ‘Internally-headed relative clauses in literary Somali’ in *Studi Somali 14: A Country Called Somalia: Culture, Language and Society of a Vanishing State*, ed. Mara Frascarelli. Torino: L’Harmattan Italia, 2011, pp. 32-47

More prevalent in poetry: ‘this syntactic possibility is exploited for introducing a succession of new images to the listener’s attention’

Example lines are conditionals:

- [Aminkhayrka galabtii] **hadduu**, aaran soo didiyo
- [Usha] [kol iyo laba jeer] **haddaad**, yara ogeysiiso
- [Umalkii uu qabay] [doob] **hadduu**, awda ka siiyo

Two main points here:

- ‘Poetic license’: use of marked syntactic constructions: here internally-headed subordinate constructions
- Parallelism in syntax and how this relates to metre: *haddii* is in the same metrical position
  - Simplified matrix for the *gabay* metre:  
(◡) ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ **hāddū** | ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡
  - [Āmīnkhāyrkǎ gǎlǎbtī] **hāddū**, āārǎn sōō dīdīyō
  - [Ūshǎ] [kōl iyō lǎbǎ jēer] **hāddāad**, yǎrǎ ōgēysīsō

Francesco Antinucci 'Notes on the linguistic structure of Somali poetry' in *Somalia and the World: Proceedings of the International Symposium held in Mogadishu, October 15-21, 1979*, ed. Hussein M. Adam. Mogadishu: State Printing Press, 1980, pp. 141-153.

Parallelism in two *gabays*

Text as written on p.143

Rugta Ceelcad nimankii degey ee ruugga Cayr jebiyey  
Iyo gaalka soo rogey rasaas iima kala roona  
Riyo guray garoor iiga keen iyo rug oonleeya  
Iyo maansadii rogan ahayd iima kala roona  
Sayidkii adduunkii rogey ee reero baabbi'iyey  
Iyo haatan rawlahakan yimid iima kala roona  
Gabadhii aan reerayn tegay ee raalli noqon weysey  
Iyo bahalka raarkayga ruday iima kala roona  
Nin rujaala oo boqorku rabo iyo raxan ulaaleyda  
Raqda kii dhigay iyo kii la yiri reerka orod caymi  
Afartaasnimoo igu rigtamay iima kala roona

- |                                   |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 1. (NP ((RC) c (RC)))             | a     |
| 2. C (NP (RC)) V                  | b     |
| 3. NP                             | a     |
| 4. C (NP (RC)) V                  | b     |
| 5. (NP ((RC) c (RC)))             | a     |
| 6. C (NP (RC)) V                  | b     |
| 7. (NP ((RC) c (RC)))             | a     |
| 8. C (NP (RC)) V                  | b     |
| 9. (NP ((RC) c (RC))) C (NP (RC)) | a + a |
| 10. (NP (RC)) C (NP (RC))         | a + a |
| 11. (NP (RC)) V                   | b     |



First line of the poem altered in parsing to the non-metrical line analysed on p.144:

1. NP(nimankii ( RC(rugta Ceelcad degey) ee RC(ruugga Cayr jebiyey)))

The original on p.143 is:

Rugta Ceelcad nimankii degey ee ruugga Cayr jebiyey

As written this looks unmetrical but **degey + ee** is written as **degee** in other versions I have seen of this poem. (I have also seen the variation **nimankaa** for **nimankii**, but this makes no difference metrically.)

Mistake or expression of underlying structure?

This is not clear in the article.

Emended text which is metrical:

Rugta Ceelcad nimankii degee ruugga Cayr jebiyey

This line must be internally-headed, i.e. we can't analyse it with *rugta Ceelcad* as the head noun since this would alter the verb and would render the interpretation of the second relative clause nonsensical as well as making the whole line unmetrical: ! *Rugta Ceelcad nimankii ay degeen ee ruugga*

*Cayr jebiyey*

From previous work we can see three ways of considering syntax in poetry:

- ‘Poetic license’ and marked syntactic constructions (Banti and implied by Antinucci)
- Parallelism (Antinucci and implied by Gaarriye)
- Extrametricality of certain grammatical particles in *geeraar* (Gaarriye)

Other aspects we might consider both in terms purely of form but also in relation to the aesthetics of Somali poetry:

- Different metrical lines force different relationships between the line and syntax
- Relationship to performance
- Enjambement, end-stopping
- Tension across lines driven by syntax

Dhanka bari magaalada  
sow BOQORAD joogtoo  
biyo dahab la moodoo  
bilicdii haweenkiyo  
bili loo dhammeeyoo  
TIMO boqonta joogoo  
baal gorey la moodoo  
baarkana casaankii  
bidix midig is gaadhoo  
bul-cad lagu xiddeeyoo  
badh ku seexanaysoo  
barkanaysa qaaroo  
huwanaysa baaloo  
igu beertay lahashoon  
u buseelay maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> RC<sub>i1</sub> [dhanka bari magaalada joogta] maan baran? (internally-headed relative clause in the original).

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo RC<sub>i2</sub> [biyo dahab la moodo] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo RC<sub>i3</sub> [bilicdii haweenka iyo bili loo dhammeeyay] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub>...] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub> RC<sub>j1</sub> [boqonta jooga]...] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub> [RC<sub>j1</sub>]...] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub> [RC<sub>j1</sub>] oo RC<sub>j2</sub> [baal gorey la moodo]...] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub>  
[RC<sub>j1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j2</sub>]. . . ] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub>  
[RC<sub>j1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j2</sub>] oo RC<sub>j3</sub> [baarkana casaankii bidix midig is  
gaadha]. . . ] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub>  
[RC<sub>j1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j3</sub>]. . . ] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub>  
[RC<sub>j1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j3</sub>] oo RC<sub>j4</sub> [bul-cad lagu  
xiddeeyay]. . . ] maan baran?



Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub>  
[RC<sub>j1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j3</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j4</sub>]....] maan baran?

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo RC<sub>i4</sub> [TIMO<sub>j</sub>  
[RC<sub>j1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j3</sub>] oo [RC<sub>j4</sub>] oo badh ku seexanaysa]  
maan baran?

Where, though, is the end of RC<sub>i4</sub>? The oo before badh is odd here, we would expect, in a simplified version something along the lines of Sow boqorad [biyo dahab la moodo] oo [timo [baal gorey la moodo oo bul-cad lagu xiddeeyay] badh ku seexanaysa] maan baran? We can remove badh and still have the same basic interpretation: Sow boqorad [biyo dahab la moodo] oo [timo [baal gorey la moodo oo bul-cad lagu xiddeeyay] ku seexanaysa] maan baran?

This can be simplified further to:

Sow boqorad [biyo dahab la moodo] oo [timo ku seexanaysa] maan baran?

If we then reintroduce the **oo** we removed we get:

Sow boqorad [biyo dahab la moodo] oo [timo oo ku seexanaysa] maan baran?

This forces us to interpret what follows this **oo** as another relative clause with **timo** as the head noun which would lead to us requiring some reflection of the subject of the verb **seexanaysa**: **timo oo ay** ku seexanaysa.

One way we might understand what is happening here is that the **oo** at the end of the line **bul-cad lagu xiddeeyoo** is that the metre and the parallelistic structure have taken on some of the burden of structuring the lines to the extent that ‘correct’ syntax is ‘overridden’. In other words we have another instance of poetic license. This leads us to a sense in which the language is ‘flowing’ as poetry rather than a strictly syntactically correct sequence. There is no problem with correct interpretation given the inflection on each verb. In other words, the precise place where  $RC_{i4}$  ends is not actually clear and ultimately in this case could be said not to matter. Though I shall place it somewhere as we shall see below.

This approach seems to be supported when we consider the two relative clauses which follow. These are in a parallelistic relationship to each other and have (aside from the order of the words) the same basic syntactic structure as *badh ku seexanaysa*. If we add these we see the following:

Sow  $BOQORAD_i$   $[RC_{i1}]$  oo  $[RC_{i2}]$  oo  $[RC_{i3}]$  oo  $RC_{i4}$   $[TIMO_j$   
 $[RC_{j1}]$  oo  $[RC_{j2}]$  oo  $[RC_{j3}]$  oo  $[RC_{j4}]$  oo  $RC_{i5}$   $[badh ku$   
 $seexanaysa]$  oo  $RC_{i6}$   $[barkanaysa qaar]$  oo  $RC_{i7}$   $[huwanaysa baal]$   
maan baran?

The verbs in  $RC_{i5}$ ,  $RC_{i6}$  and  $RC_{i7}$  all require **timo** in order to be successfully interpreted although the word is not itself an argument of any of the verbs. Rather we have ‘substitutes’ for **timo**: **badh**, **qaar** and **baal**. Since these clauses all relate semantically to the **timo** sequence of relative clauses I shall, place the end of  $RC_{i4}$  after these. We have a case then of there being some discrepancy between the interpretation of this sequence and the precise grammatical structure, i.e. the head noun of these three relative clauses. This all hinges on the **oo** which is required metrically (or at least something to fill the     position).

This gives us the following:

Sow  $BOQORAD_i [RC_{i1}] oo [RC_{i2}] oo [RC_{i3}] oo_{RC_{i4}} [TIMO_j$   
 $[RC_{j1}] oo [RC_{j2}] oo [RC_{j3}] oo [RC_{j4}] oo_{RC_{i5}} [badh ku$   
 $seexanaysa] oo_{RC_{i6}} [barkanaysa qaar] oo_{RC_{i7}} [huwanaysa baal]$   
maan baran?

And then simplifying further

Sow  $BOQORAD_i [RC_{i1}] \circ \circ [RC_{i2}] \circ \circ [RC_{i3}] \circ \circ [RC_{i4-7}]$  maan  
baran?



Moving to the two relatives which follow. The head noun for these is **boqorad**. In the first, this is also the subject of the relative verb: **igu beertay lahasho**.

In the whole this fits in as follows: **Sow boqorad igu beertay lahasho maan baran?** We can therefore add it to our simplified version of the structure as follows:

**Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i4-7</sub>] oo RC<sub>i8</sub>[igu beertay lahasho] maan baran?**

In the final relative clause, the head noun remains **boqorad**, but the subject is the poet. This is apparent at the end of the previous line in that we hear **-oon** from **oo aan**. What is more, the relative clause ends in the middle of the final line of this verse paragraph:

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i4-7</sub>] oo  
[RC<sub>i8</sub>] oo RC<sub>i9</sub>[aan u buseelay] maan baran?

Giving:

Sow BOQORAD<sub>i</sub> [RC<sub>i1</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i2</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i3</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i4-7</sub>] oo  
[RC<sub>i8</sub>] oo [RC<sub>i9</sub>] maan baran?

What do we learn from this?

- The *jiifto* metre allows for this structure to be used.
  - Contrast with *maqalay warlay* metre:  
Sumalow darbane / Naylaha duduuc / Oo dooxa gee /  
Oo damal hadh geli (Oh able ram / Herd the lambs /  
To the river beds / To the shade of the *damal*) (from  
'Sumalow darbane' by Axmed Aw Geeddi)
- We have lines coinciding with clauses.
- There are a great number of lines in the poem with conjunctions at the end, but only two with conjunctions at the beginning (*iyo bedashadeedii* and *iyo laba bogleyntii*). This reflects a general trend, although we do find the final  $\simeq$  of the *maqalay warlay* metre realized with clausal conjunctions. (See for example 'Geeridii Ina Boqor' by Gaarriye).



## *Geeraar*

- Turning to the *geeraar* we can see in the Faarax Nuur example the use of conjunctions in the way which was suggested by Gaarriye.
- Unlike *jiifto* lines can genuinely and correctly differ as to whether they have an ‘extra’  $\underline{\quad}$  at the end or not, and it seems that Gaarriye was correct to relate this to the syntax.
- More work needs to be done on this to ascertain if this practice is generally used or whether it is restricted to a certain period or certain poets.
- Returning to the *jiifto*, there are examples of poems in which the that metre and the *maqalay warlay* metre are both used. (‘Axaddii’ by Hadraawi for example). In other words there is a hint there that the relationship between the different lines found in *geeraar* is also present, but to a much more limited extent, between the *jiifto* and *maqalay warlay*.

Finally, there is a poem by Jaamac Kediye Cilmi,  
'Dan-ka-hadal', which begins in *jiifto* and then goes into  
*geeraar*.

Contrast with *gabay* long line:

Nin kastow halkii kuu macaan oo, ay muhato laabtaadu  
Ama aadan madaddaaladayda, igala maarmaynin  
Iska soo mar waa kuu bannaan, marinkaad doontaaye.

Every man! the place which is sweet to you and where your  
chest desires

Or the place in which you cannot do without my  
entertainment

Just pass to it, it is open to you, the path you wish.