

Arabic Influence in Somali

Arabic Influence in Somali : It is no secret that Arabic language has significant influence on Somali language. Large portion of the Somali vocabulary comes from Arabic language. The reason why the Somali language has so many Arabic origin words is that most Somalis are Muslims and Muslims study the Qur'an and other Islamic text written in Arabic.

Another reason is that many Somalis live in Arabic speaking countries such as Yemen, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Some of these people conduct businesses between Somalia and those countries. Some live there to study in universities others simply moved there for work. The two Arab countries that have a lot of similarities with the Somali culture are said to be Yemen and Sudan.

The Arabic Influence in Somali is not only linguistic but also cultural. Many of the Somali names are driven from Arabic and has Somali spin to it. There are still Somali origin names but the Arabic names greatly outnumber the Somali names. The Somali alphabets are written in Latin while Arabic has its own unique alphabet written from right to left but alphabetically, both languages have similar order and pronunciation of for their alphabets. Once you master the alphabet of either of these languages, you can easily read words even when you don't know the meaning.

Before the official Somali alphabets were created in 1972, there used to be a script called, Wadaad script, where Somali language pronunciation is written in Arabic. Here is an example of Wadaad script: (Waxaan fiirinaynaa arintaan - ????? ????????? ?????????) which means (We are looking at this situation). If an Arab speaking person reads the above sentence, they would be confused because it looks very Arabic but it is not Arabic. An English language example of this would be (Aay niid sam fayvor tudheey)- (I need some favor today) this would be the case if English did not have alphabet and Somali writing is used, the Somali speaking person would be confused. Remember in Somali language, pronunciations is written, meaning words that rhyme are written similarly . If you look at early Somali writings, you will find many poems written in this kind of Arabicized Somali. Wadaad script, though obsolete, is an easy thing to read and understand for someone who can read Arabic and speak Somali. There were other scripts used before the Latin, and one of the famous ones is Osmanyaa of the great poet Osman Kenadiid. The Osmanyaa script is neither Latin nor Arabic, but has unique characters.

These are the Somali/Arabic letters that correspond and they have different sounds in English.

Somali	Arabic	Pronunciation
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Help

C - Cayn

? - ????

A -Ayn

X - Xalaal

? - ?????

H - Halaal

Kh - Khayr

? - ????

K - Kayr

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The loanwords from Arabic can fall into either of those categories:

- The Arabic word has Somali synonym: for example, Asbuuc (?????) and Todobaad (Week). In this category, the usage of either Asbuuc or todobaad is personal preference and most people use them interchangeably.
- The Arabic word is mostly used instead of the Somali word: This means the Arabic word is more popular: For example – Isticmaal (???????) and "Adeesgi" (Use). The word "isticmaal" is more popular. Also, Albaab – (?????) irid/ilin means door.
- The Arabic word is the only word that is used and the equivalent Somali word is extinct, and if you are lucky, you will find those words in poetry and other forms of literature. You will see examples of these in the table below: I will have question marks in the (Somali/Somali) table when I don't know or remember the original Somali word. Here is the list of the words I could think of.

English	Borrowed Somali	Somali Somali	Arabic
Time	Mar	Jeer/Goor	???
Dough	Cajiin	?	????
Half	Nus	bar	???
easy	Sahal	Fudady	???
Salt	Milix	Cusbo	???
Problem	Mushkilad	Dhibaato	?????
Bad	Kharaab	Halaysa	????
Important	Muhiim	?	???
Danger	Khatar	Halis	???
Self	Nafsad	?	?????

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Topic	Mawduuc	Arrin*	?????
Yeast	Qamiir	?	?????
Sugar	Sokor	?	???
Situation	Xaalad	Arrin	????
Question	Su'aal	Waydiin	????
Answer	Jawaab	War celin	????
Memorize	Xifdin	?	???
Opinion	Ra'yi	Aragti	???
Idea	Fikrad		????
Of course	Dabcan	?	????
Market	Suuq	?	???
All	Kulli	Dhamaan	??
Busy	Mashquul	Hawlan*	?????
Drink	Cab	?	??
Rent	Kiro	?	????
Foreign	Ajnabi	Shisheeye *	?????
Original	Asli	?	???
Language	Luqad	Af	???
Even	Xatta	?	???
Face	Waji	Fool	???
Beer	Khamro	?	????

Words with star(*) are feedback from readers. Big Thanks.

Note: Many of the vocabularies are from the Islamic books and may not be spoken Arabic or a specific dialect, some may even be obsolete in the Arabic language.

This list is the tip of the iceberg. I am sure there are thousands of words like these but I didn't have the time to compile all the words. I have a list somewhere and will add more words as I remember them. In the future, this post will be updated with words.

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Somalia is on the east of Africa and Somali people are not Arabs but black people. they have facial structures and ways of dressing that makes them unique.

If you know any original Somali word for the column where I have the question marks, please let me know.

Thanks for reading Arabic Influence in Somali article, if you have any suggestions/feedback please [contact us](#) or leave a comment below .

Maryan Osman

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