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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC INQUIRY OF THE SOMALI LANGUAGE SHIFT TOWARDS ENGLISH; THE CASE OF SOMALI REFUGEES IN THE COLUMBUS STATE OF OHIO, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

This study is an investigation on the Somali language shift towards English. Four Somali-US born children were selected for the research question one in order to explore the Somali language features that are susceptible to the attrition when they come in contact with English. Their parents were selected as samples for the research question two in the purpose of scrutinising their perceptions on the maintenance of their L1 by their children. The results show that children present 1) lexical and morphological difficulties in retrieving L1 words and 2) difficulties in L1 sentence structure caused by the excessive use of English in everyday life. Moreover, the results illustrate that parents believe L1 could be maintained by providing L1 classes in order to teach the formal structure of L1 to the children. They added bringing back children to their home country during holidays would help to sustain their mother tongue too.

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INTRODUCTION

The last thirty years, since the fragmentation of the Somalia main central government, the number of Somali immigrants has dramatically increased in the United States of America. Ohio State over the last two decades turned out to be the second megalopolis where the largest Somali community lives in. The outbreak of the civil war in 1991 has badly affected in every aspect of their lives including the future of their linguistic survival, whether they will maintain their language or not. Language is not only a cluster of words or a set of grammatical rules but also a part of the culture. Today's modern societies, some languages are endangered. Sociolinguists greatly uphold the fact of maintaining his/her mother tongue means to keep up and nurture his/her identity. To save their lives from the peril of war, thousands of Somalis fled to so many different countries. Since 1995, United States of America have tremendously experienced the succession of very large migratory flows from Somali and therefore give shelter over 40 thousand refugees in Ohio state (excluded the other states like Minnesota, California, Washington and so on), according to the U.S. (Census Bureau of American Community Survey, 2018). The sociolinguistic phenomenon of language shift and maintenance has gained the focus of many authors (Thomson & Kaufmann, 1988). According to Winford (2003: 15), language shift means when a group of people partially or completely shift their native language in favour of another. Other definitions are given by other authors including Jones (2004: 5) who suggests that the process of language shift occurs when a group of people gradually abandon their native language and at the same time adopt the dominant language in both economic and social terms.

Statement of the Problem: Fled from the peril of war, United States of America become the Eldorado of Somalis. Thereafter, many Somali children were born in the USA after the immigration. Surrounded by many challenges, either cultural adaptation and assimilation or loss of relatives, language looks to disappear. When Somalis come in contact with the English and its environment, shifting of language took place slowly either through borrowing of loan words or shift-induced interference (Tse, 2016).

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According to Mansour (2017), of the thousands of Somali children living outside the country, most of them do not speak their mother tongue correctly and confidently. Parents could be the first source of the language teaching to their children in order to master well their language. Because some children did not learn structurally their mother tongue; some features are very non-resistant while they speak in Somali. Borrowing of loan words is a highly very crucial thing to note. Because of no Somali language classes are provided to the diaspora, the mastery of Somali language slowly disappears and English is taking its place.

Significance of The Study: It is very obvious that every time we change the environment in which we used to live, we will have shift in the language. In fact, this present study will bring new insights into the field of “language shift and maintenance”. Many studies (Drake & Mutua-Kombo, 2009; Abikar, 2013; Tse, 2016) have greatly attempted to focus on the manifestation and the extent of the phenomenon of language shift among Somali refugees in so many States in the USA like the Midwest of Minnesota and Washington. However, the study will explore also the case of Somali refugees in Columbus Ohio State and their linguistics situation. With an in-depth investigation, the study investigates what are the Somali language features that are susceptible to attrition when they come into contact with the English language. Doing so, it clarifies the most non-resistant features of the Somali language that are susceptible to the shift when they come in contact with English. Correspondingly, the study exhaustively highlights what are the perceptions of Somali parents on maintaining the Somali language by their off-springs and what should be done or what should be the best way to maintain their language.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are to carry out an in-depth investigation regarding;

- The Somali language features those are susceptible to the attrition when they come in contact with the English language as case of the Somali refugees living in Columbus Ohio State of the USA.
- The perceptions of Somali parents on the maintaining of their mother language by their children.

Research Questions

Based on the above research objectives, the study hopes to answer the following questions;

- What are the Somali language features that are susceptible to the attrition when they come in contact with the English language?
- What are the perceptions of the Somali parents on the maintaining of the Somali language by their children?

Literature Review

Historical Background: Somali language has a unique historical background with some varied linguistic influences, notably including Arabic, English and Italian. The documentation of the Somali language dates before the 1900s which makes one of the best-documented Afro-Asiatic languages, (Drake & Mutua-Kombo, 2009). Classified as a member of the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family languages, the Cushitic comprises roughly 40 distinct languages spoken largely in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Eritrea and Djibouti. Thus, spoken over 10 million people in East Africa, Somali language is one of the widely spoken Cushitic languages. According to Mansur (2017), when the Somali language was transcribed and became the national language in 1972 in Somalia, it was used extensively as the medium of instruction and administration. The way in which all this was realised became a model of imitation and emulation by other countries of the African continent. The national orthography was established, Somali language overtly became the official language of the state. So many important campaigns have given the entire population an access to their national heritage and cultural identity. In the same way, Drake and Mutua-Kombo (2009) report that, between 1972 and 1991, the development of the Somali language was highly interesting. Mansur (2017: 1) stressed, "the launch of the civil war and the fragmentation of the Somali society in 1991 has destroyed almost everything even damaged the path towards the development of the Somali language". As a consequence, the language lost its important rules both at home and abroad. Abikar (2013) extended Mansur's argument regarding the loss of the Somali language both inside and outside the country. On the one hand, when it comes to scrutinising the Somali language inside the country, the schools which have been re-activated after the collapse are teaching only in Arabic or English. So far, English became the vernacular language in administration in all fields. The names of the schools, hotels, various agencies and other activities and the terminology in advertising are foreign names or hybrid ones (Somali-English). On the other hand, outside the country among the Somalis diaspora, children born abroad do not speak Somali. Adults often mix Somali with English, both in formal and informal speeches. The names of the Somali television channels both at home and abroad are in English, some Somalis prefer to write in English rather than Somali. Abikar (2013) and Mansur (2017) agree on these above points that English has gained a lot of prestige among Somali people either inside the country or outside.

Language Attrition and Language Shift: Research on language attrition and language shift in recent times emphasize more on the ‘what’ than on the ‘why’ of the process of change. Several researchers like Yagmur, De Bot and Korzilius (2010) and Tannenbaum and Howie (2010) discuss the concept of language attrition as a process of losing one's language. This process commonly caused by isolation from speakers of the first language and the acquisition and use of a second language. Such interference from a second language is likely experienced to some extent by all bilinguals, but is most evident among speakers for whom a language other than their first has started to play an important, if not dominant, role in everyday life. These speakers are at

a higher risk of experiencing language attrition. Schmid (2009) noted that language attrition refers to the changing of bilingual's language system while acquiring and using a L2. In his study on Spanish children born in the UK, Schmid (2009) found that children had semantic difficulties to retrieve word meanings in Spanish. The study shows that, children use words identically and assuming they underline the same meanings. Researchers like Karidakis and Arunachalam (2016) and Tannenbaum and Howie (2010) explain that the attrition research emphasise in terms of 'what is lost' and "in which environment it is lost"; 1) the loss of L1 in a L2 environment such as the case of a dialect community, 2) the loss of L1 in a L2 environment such as migrants in a L2 country. Abikar (2013) evaluates the Somali features that are very susceptible to attrition on Somali-UK born children when they come in contact with English. The results illustrate that children suffer severe lexical and syntactic difficulties in retrieving L1 sentence structures. It is assumed that, children's deficiencies can be attributed to the fact they had only mastered the verbal domain of the L1. In the same vein, in her study on a minority Latinos children studying in the US, Fillmore (1991) found that the younger the children come into contact with English the greater devastating impact the L2 has on the L1. Karidakis and Arunachalam (2016) explored the trends in the maintenance of migrant community languages on Chinese and Indonesian first generation migrants in Australia and then the socio-economic variation. The results showed that language shift to English among first generation migrants has not been uniform, with some migrant groups adopting English as a home language at a much faster rate than others. Researchers demonstrate that language shift can be caused mainly by several social factors such as lack of use or exposure to the language and as an immigrant moves to an environment where he/s disuses his/her mother tongue (Loewen & Reinders, 2011). According to his study, Tse (2016) explains the language shift by the following two points; maybe a language is under pressure by the dominant language or the native speakers of that endangered language are fewer in number. Based on the two mechanisms; borrowing and interference through shift of Thomason and Kaufman (1988), Tse (2016) found in his study that Somalis Bantu Kizigua experienced some phonological shift where retroflex nasal + consonant instead of alveolar had taken place when Kizigua and Somali languages came in contact. Hence, to be fully integrated into the new society, the new environment and the new cultural atmosphere, Somali refugees are obliged to learn the language of that society. With the current challenges associated with the cultural adaptation, cultural assimilation and language issues, Somali language has slowly been substituted by the acquisition of the English language. Since then, so many attempts were made to better maintain their mother tongue (Drake & Mutua-Kombo, 2009). Schmid and Kopke (2009) reported two preliminary conditions must be fulfilled in order that language attrition occurs; L1 deprivation and cross linguistic influence from another language being acquired. Thus, cause of attrition may be experienced due to the "disuse of a language system that affects accessibility of lexical items most immediately..." (Schmid & Kopke, 2009:211). In his early longitudinal study on Somali parents and their children, Kahin (1997) found that children had tendency on loanwords from English in their daily conversation with parents. Parents were very worrying about the future maintenance of their mother tongue with their children and future generations. Indeed, cautions are extremely needed to be exercised to overcome the process of attrition. It is generally confirmed by many researchers that, cross-linguistic interference is interpreted and seen as the evidence for attrition, especially in the area of the lexicon and syntactic (Schmid, 2011). For example, Schmid explains in a longitudinal study of bilingual Swedes raised outside of Sweden especially in German, who in their late twenties have returned to their home country for schooling purposes, there was noted an attrition of their L1. They demonstrated a complete retention of the underlying syntactic structure of their L1. The Swedes children exhibited the V2, verb second, which requires the tense-marked verb of the main clause to occur in the second position of the sentence. For instance, the speakers' ability to construct sentences with V2 was compared to L2 learners who often produce the rigid SVO word order rather than applying the V2 rule. In somehow, it did not clearly show evidence of attrition for the syntax of the person's L1. There was another evidence for the children's morphological performance, especially in terms of agreements. The children incline to use the unmarked morphemes in place of the marked one when having to differentiate between gender and plurality. However, they also tended to overgeneralize where certain morphemes can be used. The syntax is largely unaffected, and any variability observed is thought to be due to interference from another language, rather than attrition (Schmid, 2011). An advantageous typology for classifying language attrition which he further termed as; 1) the nature of the language being lost whether it is a native language, L1 or even a second language, 2) its environment in which it is lost. The concept of language attrition is considerably explored recently. However, to scrutinise the manifestation of this phenomenon, some researchers have set some boundaries and factors that could be considered correspondingly. What are the language features that are considered and what is regarded as evidence for language attrition should be taken into account for the methodological consideration of language attrition, the analysis of variables that are very susceptible and the variables that can be retained (Schmid, 2011).

Methods and Procedures: This section emphasises an overview detail of the method and procedures that are adopted to answer typically the research questions.

Research Design: The present study has two research questions to answer. This requires the use of qualitative method where firstly, a structured interview is administrated to sort out the language profile of the participants (see Appendix A). According to Mcleod (2014), unlike the unstructured interview, structure one, questions are asked in a set and standardised order so that interviewer will not deviate the interview schedule. Essentially, a structured interview is based on closed-ended questions. As for an approach, we have chosen a case study approach as it is the umbrella term for various research techniques with the aim of reconstructing and analysing a case or cases from the social point of view (Verma, 2017). Two picture stories; one of *Handa's Surprise* by Browne (2006) and *the lion and the mouse* story by Anthony Robinson (2011); were provided and children were asked to choose one picture and retell the story (one minute thirty second for every child). The original texts of these pictures were not included in order to enable the children to retell the stories independently while recording the voices. This is designed for the research question 1. The background and characters in the stories are geographically almost identical to Somalia and their folk tales that is why these materials have been chosen.

All their voices were recorded. Through Skype; the children were interviewed in different weeks. There were unstructured interviews with parents (see Appendix B) to note their perceptions regarding on maintaining of Somali language by their children for the research question 2. Unstructured interview referred to as “discovery interview or informal interview” does not adopt the schedule of formal interview and it is more flexible as questions can be changed depending on the responder’s answers (McLeod 2014: 11). The unstructured interview is chosen because it enables interviewees to avail an opportunity to speak out using their own words which may develop deeper, more complex meaning. It is a way to discover rather than a way of just to check. Besides, it generates rich and valuable data in contrast to a structured interview where ‘researcher is trying to collect a large volume of data from wide range of respondents’ (Denscombe2011:112). During the unstructured interviews, parents were asked the importance of L1 and L2, the possibility of eroding L1 and how this can be challenged.

Sample Selection: The study aims to focus on particular samples; mainly children who were born in the USA after the immigration. Sampling age varies between 4 to 8 years old (both boys and girls) with the same background, in order to examine what are the features that are susceptible to attrition according to them. Parents are the samples of the second research question. The study includes a total number of 4 children and 4 parents as the samples.

Language Profile of the Participants: A structured interview was used to sort out the language profile of the participants. Two boys (Hassan and Ali) and two girls (Fatima and Bilan). These are not their real names but labelled by the researchers. Three of the participants are 8 years old, while Bilan is the youngest one with 7 years old. The questions asked during the structured interview are displayed in Appendix C. Children were born in the USA, especially in Ohio State and just started their schooling period after the kindergarten. Table 1 shows the language profile of these children drawn after the interview.

Table Participants ‘language profile

Participant		Language used		Participant		Language used	
		Somali	English			Somali	English
Hassan Age: 8 Male	TV	NO	YES	Ali Age: 8 Male	TV	YES	YES
	Radio	NO	YES		Radio	YES	NO
	Teachers	NO	YES		Teachers	NO	YES
	Friends	NO	YES		Friends	YES	YES
	Parents	YES	YES		Parents	YES	YES
Fatima Age: 8 Female	TV	YES	YES	Bilan Age: 7 Male	TV	YES	YES
	Radio	NO	NO		Radio	NO	NO
	Teachers	NO	YES		Teachers	YES	NO
	Friends	NO	YES		Friends	NO	YES
	Parents	YES	NO		Parents	YES	YES

Having more clarifications about the children’ language performance, we have chosen their parents as the samples for research question 2 to note their perceptions about their children whether they will be able to sustain their mother tongue or not. Because of their family ties, parents would provide further information. Hassan’s father, Ali’s mother, Fatima’s mother and Bilan’s father.

Data Analysis: Several cases are found after analysing the data. In this section, we present the results, the features that are susceptible to the attrition when L1 users come in contact with L2 and its environment. Children are more exposed to English language and its environment, the more they look to forget unconsciously some features of their L1. The study inspects some features that are susceptible to the attrition as shown below.


Challenge of Lexical Retrieval

HASSAN (8 year old Male)

[Een] ... (unclear) [waxay sidada]... (long pause) [canbo iyo tufaax iyo moos]
 [Een]... (unclear) [she is carrying] ... (long pause) [mango and apple and banana]

The above sentence by Hassan seems to show an ability to retrieve back L1 words.

b. Morphological Influence

<p>[dayeer geedka sarna wuxu ka xaday gabadha yar bananaski] [The monkey on the tree has stolen a banana from the girl]. In this case, Hassan presents a challenge in morphology where English noun like “banana” is typically used as Somali by changing its terminology.</p>	
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Transfer (CLI) Sentence Structure

[iyo, iyo, iyo waxay wadata kanna] (*long pause*)

[and, and, and this she is carrying] (*long pause*)

In this sentence, it may be noted that there is a deviation of how L1 is normally used. Although the object is explicitly mentioning, it should have been like;

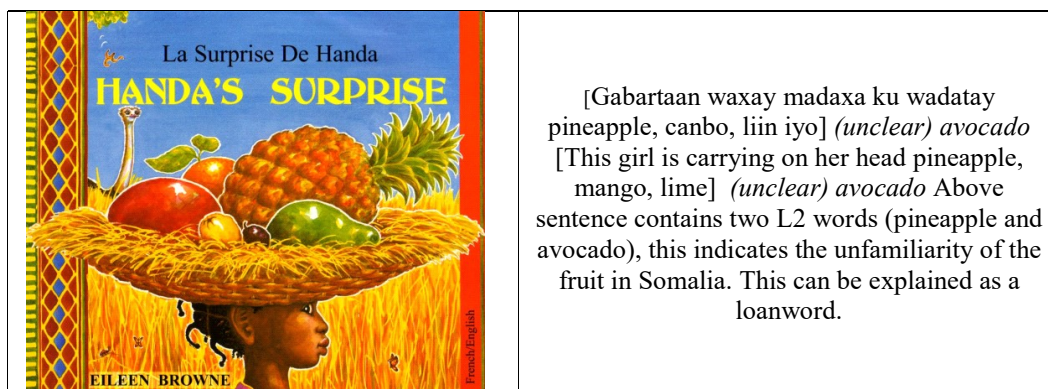
[Waxay wadata kan]

[She is carrying this]

The object of the verb is put in front of the sentence as if the sentence was in a passive voice.

Challenge of Lexical Retrieval

ALI (8 years old male)



... [een] (*unclear*), [haramacad aya joogay meel]

...[ehh] (*unclear*) [a panther was standing there]

In the above sentence, Ali presents difficulties to recall or retrieve the exact L1 words. Instead of tiger, the child uses “panther”. Again, the tiger was sitting and not standing.

Deviation of L1 Sentence Structure

FATIMA (8 Years old female)

[waxay dhigtay baaldi]

[She put down a bucket]

The above L1 structure contradicts the L1 correct pattern as the object of the sentence is omitted (where the bucket was put).

[Waxay saray u qaday baldigi]

[She pulled up the basket]

Again the object of the sentence is omitted.

[Baldiga waxay kor saartay cananaas iyo oranjiga iyo canbaha iyo muuska]

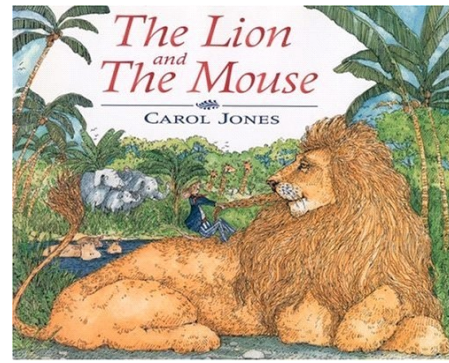
[And the basket she put on pineapple and the orange and the mango]

The above sentence demonstrates a L1 deviation in terms of the use of preposition. The pineapple was put in the basket not the basket on the pineapple. Also, there is a L1 deviation in terms of how the article *the* orange = *oranjiga* is used. It was rather to use an article in front of the pineapple which could have made the sentence correct in terms of L1.

Challenge of Lexical Retrieval

BILAN (Age 7, Male)

[Shabeel ayaa meel fadhiyey]
 [A tiger was sitting somewhere]
 The above sentence demonstrates that there is a confusion over the animal's name; tiger when in fact it was a lion. It is maybe quite difficult for Bilan to differentiate both animals.



Deviation from L1 sentence structure



[Doolligaa uu xoog u qabtay]. [The mouse caught and squeezed]. Here, the mouse did not catch the lion, rather the lion caught the mouse. There is a confusion who did what. Moreover, the sentence is not acceptable both in L1 and L2

[Libaaxaa waxaa ku jira shabaka]. [In the lion there is a net]. The above sentence should be like "the lion is in the cage" while she expressed that the cage is in the lion. The sentence is semantically unacceptable in L1 as well as in L2.



DISCUSSION

The data collected from the participants seem to strongly show that their L1 mastery is damagingly affected in terms of; 1) lexical retrieval and 2) sentence structure of L1. Their L1 lexical retrieval and sentence structures are heavily supported by their L2. Particularly, Hassan and Bilan display two cases seriously influenced by their L2. Deviation from L1 sentence structure is also noted where children either consciously or unconsciously omit some words that should be explicitly mentioned. Moreover, Hassan shows another case; influence in word morphology by changing words terminology. The confusion of the animals' name can be also explained due to the extreme exposure of the L2. The reason for this can be assumed as Winford (2003) claimed that the more children are into contact with English the greater devastating impact the L2 has on the L1. Moreover, the other reason for the challenge of L1 can be due to infrequent L1 disuse. In general, both lexical retrieval and sentence structures deficiencies can be attributed to the fact that the pupils have had only mastered the verbal domain of the L1 as they are inexperienced in L1 literature.

Analysing Parents' Views

After the unstructured interview, parents' views were analysed, while two emerging factors were noticed through. First, the maintenance of the L1 is very important for one's identity as Ali's mother highlighted.

"Waa muhiim sababta waxaa waaye qofka luqadda uu u dhashay waa inuu haaystaa taasoo asalka ahayd." *"It (L1) is important the reason for that is the person must maintain his first language which is the origin."*

Second, to maintain the L1, language classes should be provided both in formal and informal language. Visiting the L1 country during holidays with children is another solution as believed by Bilan's father.

"Always you have to take them (children) to their home country in order to maintain the L1 for example during the holidays if you take them to Somalia it is possible that they may not lose it."

However, apart from these two factors, Fatima's mother also argued that using L1 at home with their immediate relatives would greatly enable the maintenance of the L1;

"...So that child can maintain his/her L1, it must be used at home with family: the mother and the father should speak it..."

The same, Hassan's father has also suggested that children must speak in their L1 when they are at home with their family. Simultaneously, he underlined that children must visit community venues where L1 is extensively used and provision of L1 classes.

"It can be prevented that they visit community venues where L1 is spoken and provision of L1 lessons."

All in all, parents have commonly underlined that if you bring back children to their home country during holidays, this could be a suitable solution to maintain the L1 and the provision of mother tongue classes for Somali pupils is viewed by both schools & community as a fundamental element in maintaining the cultural integrity of Somali pupils. Compared to a study conducted by Drake et al (2009), it was found that based on the perceptions of some Somali parents, offering L1 classes and teaching the formal structures of Somali language would greatly help the children to regain their L1's knowledge and mastery.

CONCLUSION

The post-conflict life in Somalia is marked by a tremendous and myriad number of challenges for Somali refugees in abroad. Among the variety of problems associated with their daily lives, the linguistic problem is the main daunting one. Somali parents are worrying whether their children will be able and ensure to maintain their mother tongue or not. Last, as the study shows, it reviews the Somali Language features that are susceptible to attrition when they come in contact with the English language. The results have identically agreed with previous study done by Abikar (2013) where children suffered lexical and L1 sentence structure difficulties. However, as most of the parents stressed, maintaining L1 is really important for one's identity. Later, some parents agreed on that provision of L1 classes should desperately help the children to master well their mother tongue. For its implications in the future times, after examining some features, the study provided valuable insight into what levels and how the Somali-to-English language shift phenomenon occurred among immigrants in USA.

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Appendix A

Interview Structure on language profile

- Do you often watch to an English-speaking TV?
- Do you often listen to an English-speaking radio?
- Which language do you speak to your; Friends?
- Which language do you speak to your teachers?

Which language do you speak to your Parents?

Appendix B

Parents' interview structure

Do you think mastery of Somali language by your children is important? Why?

Do you think mastery of English language by your children is important? Why?

Do you feel that mastery of Somali language by your children is diminishing?

If so what do you think can be done to encounter it?

Appendix C

Questionnaire administrated for the Pilot Study

The pilot study aimed to investigate the perceptions of the Somali parents on the maintaining of the Somali language by their children. Five parents were the samples of the study.

1. Are your children fluent in Somali language?

Yes	No	Quite fluent
-----	----	--------------

2. Do they speak frequently in Somali language?

Yes	No	So much
-----	----	---------

3. Do you think that they will be able to sustain their mother tongue?

Yes	No
-----	----

4. Do you think that Somali language is important for your children? If yes, for what?

Yes	No
-----	----

5. Do you believe that Somali language will be sustained in the future time?

Yes	No
-----	----

6. Do you think that providing Somali language classes for children will help them?

Yes	No
-----	----

7. Is English language harmful for their mother tongue?

Yes	No
-----	----

8. When children are at home, they should speak in Somali. Do you think that it is the only solution to maintain Somali language?

Yes	No
-----	----

9. Providing Somali books for children. Do you believe there is another solution?

Yes	No
-----	----

10. Do you think that Somali cultural meeting and community events help children to better improve their Somali language proficiency?

Yes	No
-----	----

11. Visiting relatives during holidays would it be another way of maintaining Somali language?

Yes	No
-----	----

12. Do you believe bringing back children to their homeland during holidays would help them to improve their Somali language proficiency?

Yes	No
-----	----
