

# Somali

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## 1. Language description

Somali belongs to the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family. It is the native tongue of 2.5 million people in Somalia and is also spoken by 1.5 million people in Kenya and Ethiopia. There are 3 groups of dialects: Af-Ashraaf, Benaadir, and Northern Somali. The pronunciation can differ per dialect. The Northern Somali dialect is the most prestigious and is spoken by most Somalis (also in other regions than Northern Somalia).

Somalian people may provide incorrect information about the area from which they originate. Certain areas are considered safe by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service. Therefore, residents of these areas are not eligible for a residence permit.

In Somali, you can find loan words from Arabic, Italian, and English.

### Consonant system

**Table 1**

*Consonant system Somali*

	Coronal					Dorsal				
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Faryngal	Glottal
plosive	(p) b			t d		ɕ	k g	q ɢ		ʔ
nasals	m			n		(ɲ)	(ŋ)			
trill				r						
fricatives		f		s	ʃ			x	ħ ʕ	h
affricate										
liquids				l						
semi vowels	w					j				

( ) *allophones*

/ɕ/ is a voiced retroflex. This consonant is being pronounced with the tongue tip curled up and back against the palatum.

In Somali, the b and the p sounds will both occur as allophones of /b/, whereby just as in Dutch, sharpening occurs at the end of a word but not as strongly as in Dutch.

### Syllable structure

Somali has a simple syllable structure. Consonant clusters do not occur at the beginning or end of a word, but only in the middle. Clusters in loan words are broken apart by placing a vowel in between the consonants.

Words have relatively few syllables. Somali has almost no words with more than three syllables.

### Stress and tone

The emphasis is generally on the last or penultimate vowel.

Somali also has three different tones. High tones are often strongly emphasised. Lowering tones have little emphasis and low tones have no emphasis. The different tones have not been included in the study.

## 2. Phonological development

There was no literature to be found about the phonological development of children in Somali. Somali did not become a standardised written language until 1972 and was only given the status of an official language in education a year later. In addition, living conditions in Somalia are difficult due to poverty and constant war. Therefore, it is safe to assume that there has not been any research on phonological development in Somalia.

Because of the war, there is a relatively large number of groups of Somalians who have settled in different parts of the world. There are large groups of Somalians in Sweden and England. Research has been done into the situation of Somalian children/adults who are learning English. The results of this study are not applicable to the Dutch situation. There is no known English research that studies the development of the Somalian native tongue.

## 3. Common phonological processes

Due of the lack of distinction between /p/ and /b/, children whose native tongue is Somali will have difficulty with this distinction in other languages, for instance English.

## 4. Lexical variation

No data available.

## 5. Results of typically developing Somali toddlers

No data available.

## 6. Sources

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