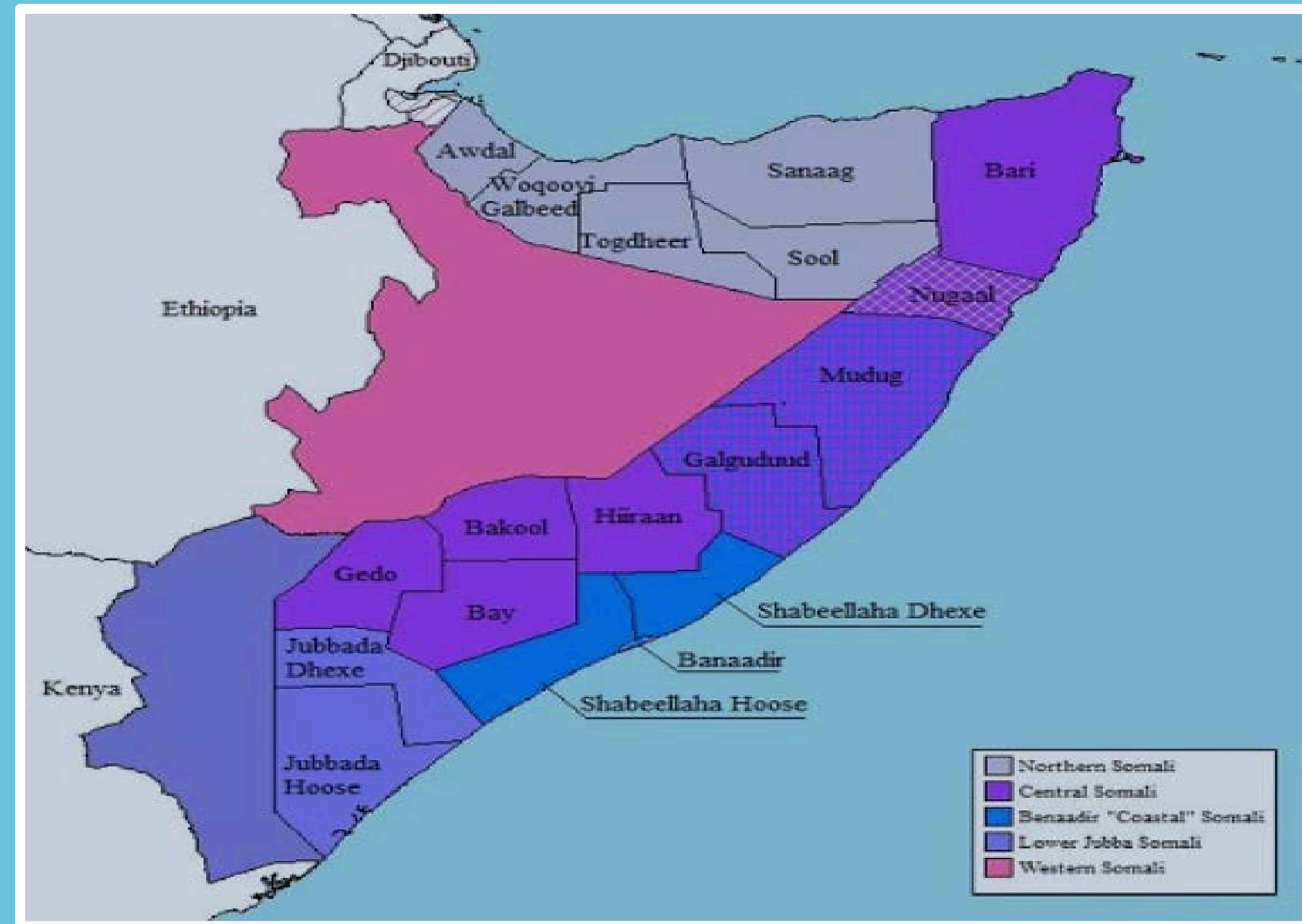


# Focusing on the Somali Predication Head: What is *waa*?

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## Background:

Somali is a Lowland East Cushitic language belonging to the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family. Somali is a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) language.



## What is *waa*?

- *Waa* shows up in most declarative sentences:
  - (1) Salma bariiska **way** cunoosaa  
Salma rice.DET waa.Clitic eat.Pres.F.3SG  
“Salma is eating the rice”
  - (2) **Way** cunoosaa bariiska  
waa.Clitic eat.Pres.F.3SG rice.DET  
“She is eating the rice”
- *Waa* is a verbal focus marker. (Andrzejewski 1995, Puglielli, Svolacchia, and Mereu 1975).
- *Waa* is a declarative marker when it is in the beginning of a sentence (Saeed 1984).
- Function of *waa* changes depending on dialect (Tosco 2002).
- There are two different *waa*, sentence particle *waa* and copula *waa* (Zholkovsky 1971)

### My claim:

- In all instances: *waa* is a predication head
- Material preceding *waa* is interpreted as background, while material following is interpreted as non-presuppositional (Kiss, 2009)

## *Waa* in Different Positions:

- With a verbal predicate, *waa* must immediately precede the verb:
  - (3) Salma bariiska **way** cuntay  
Salma rice.DET waa.Clitic eat.F.3SG.Past  
“Salma ate the rice”
- In a nominal predicate, *waa* must precede the predicate and follow the subject:
  - (4) Salma **waa** arday  
Salma waa student  
“Salma is a student”
- In an identificational clause/truncated cleft, *waa* is initial:
  - (5) **Waa** cuntadi aad jecleed  
Waa food.DET you.Clitic like.2SG  
“It is the food you liked”
- *Waaye* (*weeye*) is the sentence-final copula in nominal predicates:
  - (6) **Waa** Salma (7) Salma waaye  
“It is Salma” “It is Salma”
- *Waa* and *waaye* cannot co-appear in a sentence together due to the doubling of copulas:
  - (8) \***Waa** Salma waaye  
Waa Salma Copula  
“It is Salma”
- The *-ye* (*ay*) morpheme attaches to verbs to denote both past tense or something that already exists

## *Waa* and Questions

- *Waa* is a declarative maker which is why you cannot have question words in sentences with *waa* (Saeed 1984):
  - (9) \***Waa maad** Salma aragtay?  
Waa QM.Clitic Salma see.2SG.Past  
“Did you see Salma?”
- **My claim:** the entire predicate following *waa* must be in focus which is incompatible with the question word having its own focus. In this above example, *maad* puts focus only on Salma, whereas *waa* would put focus on the whole predicate
- However, the predicate following *waa* can be a question word:
  - (10) **Waa** ayo  
waa who  
“who is it?”
  - (11) **waa** gabadhee  
waa girl.which  
“Which girl is it?”

## *Waa* and Focus Markers

- Only one constituent in a sentence can receive focus.
- The nominal focus makers, *baa* and *ayaa*, follow the NP (Standard/Northern Somali) or cliticize with the last member of the NP (Central)(Tosco 2002)
- *Waa* and focus markers cannot co-appear in a sentence:
  - (12) Salma-**aa** gaariga dhaqday  
Salma-FM car.DET wash.F.3SG  
“Salma washed the car”
  - (13) Salma gaariga **way** dhaqday  
Salma car.DET waa.Clitic wash.F.3SG  
“Salma washed the car”
  - (14) \*Salma-**aa** gaariga **way** dhaqday  
Salma-FM car.DET waa.Clitic wash.F.3SG
- Focus view: *waa* is in complementary distribution with the focus markers
- My view: Focus markers put focus on preceding material where as *waa* puts focus on following material

## Conclusions:

- *Waa* is a predication head that can appear in the beginning of a sentence or preceding a predicate
- *Waa* and focus markers cannot co-appear in a sentence because both want to put focus on a predicate and only one predicate can receive focus
- All of the behaviors of *waa* in verbal predicates can be explained with the predication analysis.
- The declarative and verbal focus theories of *waa* can be disproven with the behaviors of *waa* in questions and its incompatibility with focus markers
- My theory gives a unified analysis of *waa* in both nominal and verbal predicates.

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