



## Somalia - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Friday 12 August 2016

### Information on language analysis and development of accents/dialects

In December 2014 the *UNHCR* notes:

“The use of language analysis as a means of checking the credibility of an asylum-seeker’s claim to come from a particular country of origin is widespread, although experts have warned that it is not always reliable...” (UNHCR (December 2014) *The Heart of the Matter - Assessing Credibility when Children Apply for Asylum in the European Union*, p.111).

In August 2014 a paper issued by the *United Kingdom Home Office* includes noting:

“Examples of when an applicant’s claimed nationality or national origin might provoke strong suspicions are:

- Where the applicant is unable to speak to an adequate level the primary language expected of their claimed country or region of origin;
- Where there is a strong indication that the applicant’s dialect or accent is inconsistent with their claimed country or region of origin...” (United Kingdom Home Office (19 August 2014) *Language Analysis*, p.4).

A document issued in August 2014 by the *European Asylum Support Office* points out that:

“Unlike many other African countries, the linguistic situation of Somalia is relatively homogeneous. Somalia’s official language is Somali and it is the unchallenged medium all over the country...For most speakers in Somalia, Somali is the native and only language. Somali is also spoken as a native language and as a second language by millions of people in eastern Ethiopia (Ogaden region), north-eastern Kenya and south-eastern Djibouti, i.e. in areas bordering Somalia...In 1972, the Somali language was standardised...A variety of north-eastern Somali is promoted as the standard variety. However, speaking the standard (north-eastern) variety is not the norm throughout the country. Most of those who speak Somali do so in their regional dialect, or will at least have a regional slant in their Somali. There is a broad distinction between northern and southern varieties, with the border running roughly across the Mudug region...Somali is one of the best documented African languages...The broad distinction between northern and southern Somali is well documented and can generally be established through language analysis. Finer distinctions within this broad distinction are possible...” (European Asylum Support Office (August 2014) *EASO Country of Origin Information report. South and Central Somalia Country overview*, p.21).

Commenting on language analysis in the Netherlands, a report released in May 2013 by the *UNHCR* notes that:

“In the Netherlands, the determining authority may gather evidence in the form of a language analysis, age assessment, or DNA test to verify family ties, or by requesting an individual report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but this is not

obligatory...The guidance states that, in principle, evidence obtained during the interviews with the applicant should be sufficient information upon which to base a decision and that additional research should be reduced to a minimum, being required only when really necessary in order to decide on an application...Despite this guidance, from the cases reviewed across the three Member States, it appeared evident that more documentation verification procedures and language analyses were conducted in the Netherlands than in the other two Member States of focus... In reviewing case files in the Netherlands, UNHCR noted that in some cases decision-makers took steps to obtain evidence that supported the application, but in other apparently similar cases they did not on the grounds that it was the duty of the applicant to adduce the evidence. For instance, in cases where the applicant had not submitted documentary evidence supporting their asserted country of origin or place of habitual residence, and therefore there was an element of doubt regarding their origin, some applicants were offered a language analysis...whereas others were not...Indeed, in one case it was explicitly stated that a language analysis was not offered because it is the applicant's duty to adduce evidence of his country of origin...In three cases reviewed...the applicants submitted evidence that could have been verified by requesting an individual report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but such a request was not made and in one of those cases the decision-maker explicitly stated that it was the duty of the applicant to adduce further evidence" (UNHCR (May 2013) *Beyond Proof, Credibility Assessment in EU Asylum Systems : Full Report*, p.127).

An undated document released by the *Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Netherlands* notes:

"The language analysis not only focuses on the question as to how a person speaks a certain language, but also on the question as to which languages he speaks. The question as to how a person speaks a language mostly relates to the dialect of the foreign national. Here, 'dialect' is understood to be a regional language variety (that can therefore be located geographically). An analysis of the way in which a person speaks a language can also give a definite answer about the extent to which a person has a command of the language or dialect in question (at native speaker level, limited command, for example). In some cases, foreign nationals stated that they speak language X, but the language analysis interview shows that the foreign nationals only know a few separate words and therefore have no active knowledge of language X. The question as to which language(s) a person speaks first of all concerns the identification of the language(s) in question. It could be that a person says that he speaks language X, but that the language analysis shows that the foreign national actually speaks language Y, which is not common in the asserted area of origin. In other cases, there is no knowledge of a language of which the foreign national should have command, based on his asserted origin and/or ethnicity. Finally, it is assessed whether all language skills demonstrated by the foreign national correspond with the asserted origin. Incidentally, in many language areas for which the IND conducts language analyses, multilingualism is a rule rather than an exception. For instance, apart from the language spoken by their own population group (the 'tribal language'), many Africans also speak a regional or national official language. Sometimes, speaking one particular tribal language or determining the variety of one particular official language is enough in order to trace a person back to a certain country or area. In other cases, it is the combination of a tribal language and an official language that can be used to trace a person back to a certain country or area. It is therefore of key importance that, during the language analysis interview, the foreign national is explicitly given the opportunity to speak all languages of which, according to him, he has a command (with the exception of Dutch)" (Immigration and

Naturalization Service of the Netherlands (Undated) *Language analysis, What is being tested*).

In November 2010 John Brick produced a paper on language analysis for *The Refugee Documentation Centre* (The Refugee Documentation Centre (November 2010) *The Researcher*, pp. 4-10).

A paper issued in 2004 by the *International Journal of Speech Language and the Law* states:

“...that language analysis should be used with considerable caution in addressing questions of national origin, nationality or citizenship” (International Journal of Speech Language and the Law (2004) *Guidelines for the use of language analysis in relation to questions of national origin in refugee cases*, p.4).

## References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

### **Sources Consulted**

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