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**SOMALI BROTHER AND SISTER IN LAW:
A COMPARISON AMONG
SOME LINGUISTIC VARIETIES OF SOMALI**

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SOMALI BROTHER- AND SISTER-IN-LAW:
A COMPARISON AMONG SOME LINGUISTIC VARIETIES OF SOMALI*

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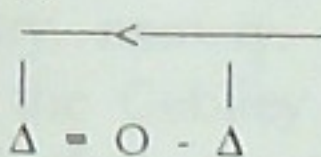
	Ex Benaadir	Maay area
1) $\begin{array}{c} \text{---} < \text{---} \\ \quad \quad \\ \Delta = O - \Delta \text{ (ZH for m.E.)} \end{array}$	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>
2) $\begin{array}{c} \text{---} < \text{---} \\ \quad \quad \\ \Delta - O = \Delta \text{ (WB)} \end{array}$	<i>abti (-geen)</i> <i>(seeddi (-ga))</i>	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>
3) $\begin{array}{c} \text{---} > \text{---} \\ \quad \quad \\ \Delta = O - O \text{ (WZ)} \end{array}$	<i>aayo (-deen)</i> <i>(seeddi(-da))</i>	<i>dumaalō (-da)</i>
4) $\begin{array}{c} \text{---} < \text{---} \\ \quad \quad \\ \Delta = O - O \text{ (ZH for f.E.)} \end{array}$	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>	<i>dumaalō (-ga)</i>
5) $\begin{array}{c} \text{---} > \text{---} \\ \quad \quad \\ \Delta - \Delta = O \text{ (BW for m.E.)} \end{array}$	<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>	<i>dumaalō (-da)</i>
6) $\begin{array}{c} \text{---} < \text{---} \\ \quad \quad \\ \Delta - \Delta = O \text{ (HB)} \end{array}$	<i>adeer (-keen)</i> <i>(seeddi (-ga))</i>	<i>dumaalō (-ga)</i>
7) $\begin{array}{c} \text{---} > \text{---} \\ \quad \quad \\ O = \Delta - O \text{ (HZ)} \end{array}$	<i>eeddo (-deen)</i> <i>(seeddi (-da))</i>	<i>dumaalō (-da)</i>
8) $\begin{array}{c} \text{---} < \text{---} \\ \quad \quad \\ O = \Delta - O \text{ (BW for f.E.)} \end{array}$	<i>seeddi (-da)</i>	<i>dumaalō (-da)</i>

SS	Gebiley	Jibuti area
<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>
<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>
<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>	<i>not-seeddi (gabadbda aan seeddiga u ahay)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>
<i>dumaasbi (-ga)</i>	<i>seeddi (-ga)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-ga)</i>
<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>
<i>dumaasbi (-ga)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-ga)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-ga)</i>
<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>
<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>	<i>dumaasbi (-da)</i>

The system of brother/sister-in-lawness as it appears in Standard Somali (SS) presents incomprehensible asymmetries. As is well known, in SS there are 2 terms indicating the relationship of brother/sister-in-lawness: *seeddi*, which appears only in the masculine gender and can only indicate a male, and *dumaashi*, which may receive both masculine and feminine determinants and may refer to both males and females.

Of the two terms, *seeddi* indicates a much more limited range of positions, being restricted namely to the following 2 cases:

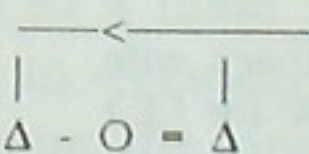
1)



(one's own sister's husband in relation to a male
Ego = ZH for m.E.¹)

and the reciprocal position:

2)

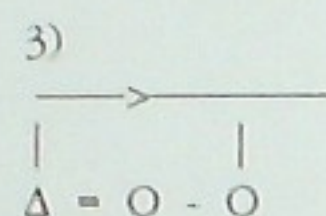


(one's own wife's brother, obviously in relation
to a male Ego = WB)

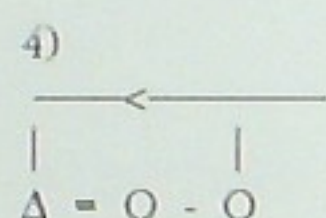
¹ We adopt, when necessary, the abbreviations which are traditionally used in anthropological literature. These are the symbols useful for the present purpose with their legend: Z = Sister; B = Brother; W = Wife; H = Husband; M = Mother; F = Father. The order of symbols depends on the English syntax: thus, the above example ZH is to be understood as: (one's own) sister's husband, etc.

Notice that the orientation of the relationship has Ego as a starting point and is directed towards the individual in the position designated by the kinship term.

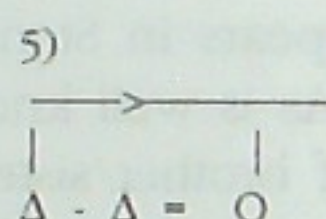
Dumaasbi, either masculine or feminine, fills all the other possible positions, namely:



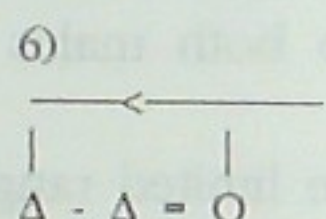
(*Dumaasbi* (-da) : one's own wife's sister, obviously in relation to a male Ego = WZ)



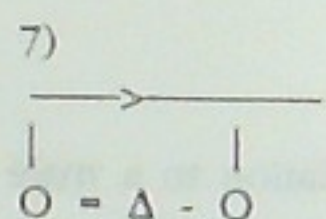
(*Dumaasbi* (-ga) : one's own sister's husband, in relation to a female Ego = ZH for f.E.)



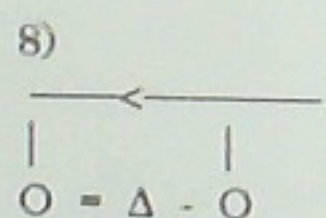
(*Dumaasbi* (-da) : one's own brother's wife, in relation to a male Ego = BW for m.E.)



(*Dumaasbi* (-ga) : one's own husband's brother, obviously in relation to a female Ego = HB)

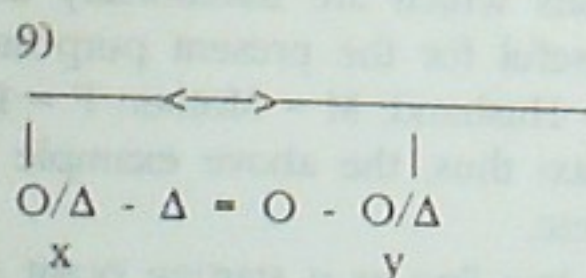


(*Dumaasbi* (-da) : one's own husband's sister, obviously in relation to a female Ego = HZ)



(*Dumaasbi* (-da) : one's own brother's wife, in relation to a female Ego = BW for f.E.)

The system of brother/sister-in-lawness in SS does not involve other individuals beyond this restricted nucleus of relationships: between individuals in positions x and y (see scheme n. 9), the above mentioned terms (*seeddi* and *dumaasbi*) may be used only out of a deferential attitude, but not as denotative terms:



As we have shown elsewhere², although brothers and sisters in SS are structurally identified in many instances, a brother (or a sister) of my brother's wife (or of my sister's husband) is - strictly speaking - no relative to me (i.e., speaking in terms of scheme n. 9, x is no relative to the Ego who is in position y and viceversa).

The immediate impression we get from the above illustrated sketch is that the two-term system of brother/sister-in-lawness in SS presents a noteworthy asymmetry: the more restricted term is thus expected to function as the marked item, and, consequently, to preserve a higher semantic and positional (i.e. syntactic) specificity than the more widely used and consequently less specific term, which is likely to have extended its use beyond its original semantic and syntactic boundaries.

The system of SS thus looks the resultant of analogical extensions due to which *dumaasbi* lost most of its logically and perhaps historically primary values, while *seeddi* still preserves much of the original situation.

In order to find out the semiotically primary orientations of the above illustrated system of relationships, it may turn out useful to draw a comparison among a set of varieties of Somali. We thus sketched a scheme of confrontations among different systems of brother/sister-in-lawness as they appear in some regions of the country, namely: the so called ex-Benaadir, the maay-maay speaking area, the Gebiley region and the area that includes Jibuti, Diriddawe and Seyla.

As the comparative sketch on pages 6 and 7³ clearly points out, the different regions only agree in the designation of two positions, namely 1 (*seeddi* (-ga) = one's own sister's husband in relation to a male Ego) and 5 (*dumaasbi* (-da) = one's own brother's wife, in relation to a male Ego), which are then very likely to represent the primary values, but for the rest they present different systems.

The most divergent system is the one of the ex-Benaadir which presents the following characteristics:

² See R. AJELLO, *Logica categoriale di un settore del lessico somalo*, Atti del Congresso su: *Lingua, pensiero scientifico e interculturalità: l'esperienza dell'interazione universitaria in Somalia*. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei; Roma 1994.

³ See the general scheme on pages 6-7.

a) an overextension of the term *seeddi* which covers three positions (1 and 4 as masculine, and position 8 as feminine) compared to the other systems (all other systems have *dumaasbi* (-da)⁴ in position 8 and Gebiley only has *seeddi*(-gey) in position 4.

b) Positions 2, 3, 6 and 7 may be designated by the term *seeddi* (-gey/ -dey), but are more frequently designated through terms which, in the kinship system of ex-Benaadir, primarily indicate the positions of brother/sister of Ego's father or mother. The terms: *abti* (= MB), *aayo* (= MZ), *adeer* (= FB), *eeddo* (= FZ) are affixed the 1st person plural possessive pronoun when they indicate respectively: WB (position 2 = *abtigeen*); WZ (position 3 = *aayadeen*); HB (position 6 = *adeerkeen*); HZ (position 7 = *eeddadeen*).

The use of the possessive pronoun in the plural form seems to indicate that the positions are those of brother/sister of one's spouse seen in the perspective that Ego shares with his/her own sons/daughters. Thus e.g. a term like *abtigeen* is likely to mean "that individual who in our family, for my sons/daughters, is the maternal uncle, i.e. my wife's brother". This mechanism which might be interpreted as an impersonating device in relation to the descending generation shows some sort of analogy with a similar phenomenon which has already been recognized and analyzed in Somali: the so called "inverse allocution"⁵, by which a representant of the upper generations addresses someone of the descending generations using the kinship term that designates himself, as though there were an exchange of Ego as a starting point.

In the case of the inverse allocution, e.g. a mother addressing her son/daughter with the term *booyo* (properly "mother"), the impersonating device entails a sort of identification of the two relationship poles, such that the speaker uses the term that the addressee should use when invoking the so called "figure of attachment".

In the 4 cases presented by the ex Benaadir system, the identification doesn't involve the two relationship poles but it takes place between Ego and an unexpressed element presupposed by the plural form of the possessive adjective, namely Ego's son/daughter. The identification of the speaker and the presupposed element is so complete that Ego shares with his son/daughter the relationship with the third element as if it were the very same relationship.

c) The term *dumaasbi* is restricted to a single position (n. 5 = BW for m.E.) and can only refer to a woman. This restricted usage

⁴ Or some phonological equivalents of it.

⁵ See R. AJELLO, *Sull'allocuzione inversa in somalo standard e in Af Asbraaf*, in: *Cristi e costruzione delle conoscenze*, Massa-Carrara 1989.

of the term makes it automatically the marked element of the lexical opposition inside this particular system attested in the ex Benaadir area and perfectly in line with the etymological meaning of the term, which represents a derivation in -ti of the verbal noun *dumaaf*⁶.

The evidence of the Benaadir system is particularly important then for the reconstruction of the original value of the term *dumaasbi*. As the syntagm *naag dumaal ab* "a woman liable to be married by her dead husband's brother" (possibly "a woman whose house has crumbled down") shows, in SS *dumaal* can only be said of a woman and not of a man: **nin dumaal ab* is not possible. The fact then that in SS *dumaasbi* may also be masculine and may refer to a man clearly shows that the original situation, attested in the Benaadir system, has been overextended in SS as well as in all the other systems considered here.

The semiotic orientation of *dumaal*, and consequently of *dumaasbi* and its positional and semantic values, in which all the regional varieties agree without exception, indicate at the origin "the woman who enters the family of a male Ego, through a marriage with Ego's brother". She is designated then by the peculiarity of her liability to be married by her brother-in-law in case of her husband's death, in accordance with the institute of levirate(*dumaasbi* (-da)).

The use of *dumaasbi*(-ga) to indicate a male individual in position 6, which is common to almost all the varieties taken into consideration (with the exception of ex Benaadir, where *adeerkeen* is preferred), is simply the resultant of an extension of reciprocity, a return relationship which is structurally secondary compared to the preceding one.

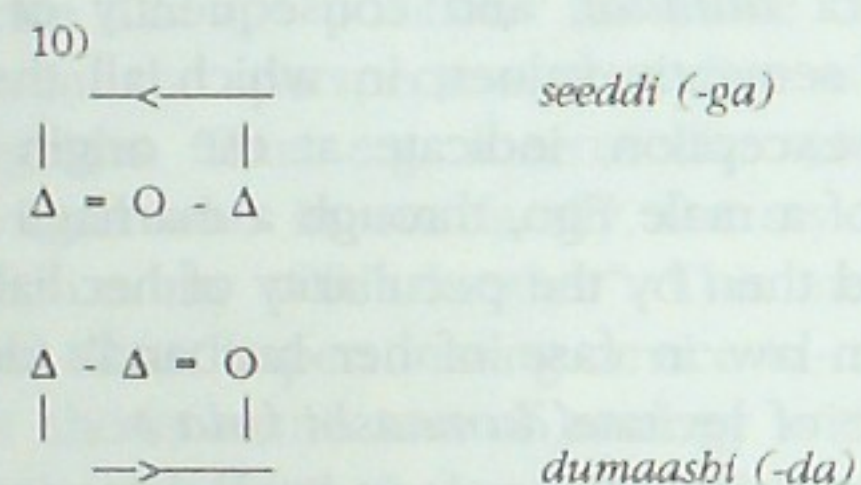
The fact that position n.6 is designated as *dumaasbi*(-ga) in most of the varieties considered here shows that the reciprocity mechanism is the most frequent logical device. By reciprocity we mean that an individual who is the subject of a relationship in which the other individual is the object, is also the object of the very same relationship that involves the other individual with the role of subject.

Nonetheless inside the reciprocity relationship we may distinguish an oriented reciprocity, in case one of the two poles be structurally, logically and sometimes also semantically primary in respect to the inverse direction.

In the case of *dumaasbi* the change in the orientation, which takes place in most of the varieties analyzed has given rise to a complete reciprocity, inside which it is now hard to detect the primary direction.

⁶ Also *dumaal* might possibly be a derivation in -aal of the verbal root *dum*- "to crumble down (said of a house)", similar to the derivation of a word like *jilaal* "the dry season" from the verbal root *jilil*- "to muzzle young camels (in order to prevent them from exhausting their mothers in the dry season)".

The original value of the two terms may be represented in the following diagram:



While reversing the orientation is a logical device that maintains inalterate the syntactic ordering of the positions and the semantic features of the term, the use of *dumaashi* (*da*) in position 8, which again is common to all the varieties considered with the exception of ex Benaadir, means starting with the same syntactic order but with a change in the semantics of one position (the Ego who gives the orientation is a woman and not a man as in position n. 5).

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In SS the term that tends to be generalized is *dumaashi* which consequently loses its specific relational semantic features. As a matter of fact, in the SS system a woman is *dumaashi* not only in relationship to her husband's brother but also to her husband's sister and they are in their turn *dumaashi* in relationship to her (reciprocity and symmetry). Moreover even a man is *dumaashi* in relationship to his

wife's sister, who in her turn will be *dumaashi* in relationship to this man (reciprocity and symmetry).

The relationships indicated by the term *seeddi* are restricted to a very particular and limited usage, namely the one concerning a man in relationship to his wife's brother, who in his turn will be *seeddi* for him (reciprocity and symmetry).

The space of denomination that remains identical in all the regional varieties considered should plausibly be the marked and logically (if not even historically) primary space: namely the space that analogical extension processes cannot cancel. The relevant features of the relationship indicated by *seeddi* are to be searched for in this space.

From the examination of the data we get that the basic polarity of the term *seeddi* indicates a husband in relationship to his wife's brother. SS excludes the possibility of categorizing under the same label the relationship that intervenes between a husband and his wife's sister (position 4): from the point of view of a woman, her sister's husband is in SS classified as *dumaashi* (-ga) and not as *seeddi* (-ga): the criterion that prevailed in this latter case seems to be the virtual possibility of a marriage between the husband and his wife's sister, thus homologating the institute of sororate to the model offered by the institute of levirate.

The only analogical extension the term *seeddi*(-ga) undergoes in SS is the reciprocity extension to position n. 1: this allows to classify under the same term on one side the man who enters a family nucleus by marrying the sister of another man and, on the other side, the brother of one's own wife, seen from the perspective of the husband. The logical mechanism that underlies such an extension is a mechanism of syntactic specularity that doesn't change anything in the sexual semantics of the term.

The basic polarity of the term *dumaashi* seems to be the one exemplified by position 5 in the general scheme, since again (as happened for the term *seeddi* (-ga) in position 1) this is the only case in which all the areal varieties considered agree in classifying this position as *dumaashi* (-da). All the other cases seem to be due to analogical extensions.

The lines of analogical extension for the relationship *dumaashi* seem to be of two kinds:

a) one pertaining only to syntax allows extensions that leave aside sexual and consequently matrimonial semantics: the relevant feature in these cases is the syntactic position, the slot that is liable to be filled by an individual independently by his sexual semantic characterization: this allows to consider *dumaashi* (-da) a woman in rela-

tionship to her husband's sister and viceversa one's own brother's wife in relationship to a woman (positions 8 and 7).

b) the other one presupposes the prevailing of the semantic value, considered as generic, categorial, and not specific. In this case the term *dumaashi* will indicate any potential marriage between a woman and her brother-in-law of whatever kind, not only her husband's brother (primary value), but also her sister's husband (potential sororate relationship).

In other words when the syntactic mechanism prevails, it allows an extension that leaves aside the sexual and consequently matrimonial semantics, such that a woman may be *dumaashi* in relationship to her husband's sister and viceversa. What becomes relevant in such cases is the particular position of the items, which exactly parallels that of the primary situation, according to which *dumaashi* is a woman in relationship to her husband's brother who can marry her in case she becomes a widow.

When the semantic mechanism prevails, one relevant semantic feature of generic-categorial kind allows a syntactic extension in the direction of sororate, namely a situation in which the sexual semantic feature of all the individuals involved is opposite in comparison to that of the primary situation, of the *dumaashi* as the potential object of levirate. What gets emphasized in the case of sororate is the liability to marriage of a man and his wife's sister that specularly matches with the institute of levirate.

We can conclude with a last consideration concerning the semiotic rules involved in the analogical processes examined: from the semiotic point of view we can say that the syntactic extension entails the curtailment of the specific semantic feature, and conversely the semantic extension entails the curtailment of the specific syntactic feature.