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SOME COMMENTS ON BRAHUI KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

This article discusses the significance of kin terms in the Dravidian language Brahui from an anthropological point of view. Terminologies in this language family have been of theoretical importance to the subject ever since Morgan discovered that the Tamil one had a similar pattern to that of the Iroquois; and however desirable or otherwise it may be to attach a specific ethnic label to a phenomenon that occurs in so many other parts of the world, it is nonetheless a fact that the word ‘Dravidian’ has become virtually synonymous in many circles with the particular pattern of kin classification also known as bifurcate merging (Lowie), Iroquois or Dakota (Murdock), restricted exchange (Lévi-Strauss) and symmetric or two-line prescriptive (Needham).

Terminologies in most Dravidian languages observe this same basic pattern, though the North Dravidian branch has evidently moved away from it to some extent, and there are also two clear exceptions (see Trautmann 1981). One is the Nayar terminology, used in Kerala by a group who are well known for their extreme traditional emphasis on matrilineal institutions and their peculiar system of affinal alliance. The other is that of the Brahui, who are geographically isolated from even the nearest of the other Dravidian-speaking populations by about 1500 km of territory.

Although Brahui is spoken chiefly in Pakistani Baluchistan, other communities live in Sind and other parts of Pakistan and in southern Afghanistan; however, many of these only speak Balochi today, like other groups in the Sistan area of Iran who call themselves Brahui (Bray 1909: 6; Elfenbein 1983: 103, 132 n. 2). Estimates of the number of Brahui speakers vary from around 200,000 (Emeneau 1962a: 1) to about twice that figure (Elfenbein ibid.: 103), though most are bilingual in Brahui and Balochi. The language has long been recognised as Dravidian, despite its geographical location and its speakers’ claims to have come from Aleppo in Syria (Bray 1909: 3). The presence of a Dravidian language in this area remains a mystery, though it has given rise to persistent but as yet unresolved speculation that the undeciphered Indus valley script may hide a Dravidian language, and it has also lent support to McAlpin’s Elamite-Dravidian hypothesis (e.g. 1979).
is not even certain exactly where Brahui belongs within Dravidian: the older view that it should be grouped with Malto and Kurukh in North Dravidian has recently been questioned (see McAlpin ibid.: 181 & n. 5).

Brahui has been considerably influenced by Balochi, with which it has been in contact since about A.D. 900, taking loans from at least two different dialects of it (Elfenbein 1982: 80; Rossi 1979); Persian, Arabic, Sindhi, Punjabi etc. loans are also present. Much less has been borrowed by the surrounding IE languages from Brahui, which today has a lower status in the area. This, perhaps, was not always the case, since Brah political power, in the Khanate of Kalat, was once considerable, drawing members of many alien tribes, including the Balochi, into confederation with it. In this way many Balochi became Brahui-speaking, and the present-day speakers of the language must be regarded as a group of mixed origin. Today, however, it is the Balochi who are superior in status, and marriage between the two groups takes place hypergamingously, if at all (Bray 1909: 3–7; Emeneau 1962a: 1; Elfenbein 1982: 77–8). The Brahui are traditionally semi-nomadic pastoralists and have long been Muslims, a circumstance reflected, amongst other things, in their preference for marriages into families already connected by marriage (shalvar), and especially between patrilateral parallel cousins (Bray ibid.; 1913: 34–5). Elfenbein (1983: 194) gives a term for 'sister-exchange' (cărpaçarî), but it is not clear what status this has as a form of marriage.

The 'purest' Brahui is said to be spoken in the Kalat area, and it was this that Bray concentrated on in his three-part study published in two volumes (1909, 1934). This is still the standard work: virtually all writers since have based their studies on him (see Emeneau 1962a: 4–5), and only Emeneau and Elfenbein seem to have carried out any original fieldwork on the language since he wrote. There is little ethnography apart from Bray's Preface (1909) and Life-History (1913) and sundry comments in the other articles cited, most of which concentrate on the language. It is these works (especially Bray and Rossi) which have provided the basic data for the present article, since no one has as yet published a Brahui kinship terminology collected with anthropological research specifically in mind. My remarks are limited to the historical question and I will not offer a full analysis of the present-day terminology here. A list of the terms discussed is given in Table I.

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In fact, as Trautmann points out (1981: 147), not even this new material shows any of the prescriptive character well known among the cognates of