

**MORPHOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTIC ASPECTS OF THE SOQOTRI  
DIALECT OF GALANSIYAH**

**By**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	II
<b>Table of Contents</b>	IV
<b>List of Tables</b>	XVI
<b>List of Figures</b>	XV111
<b>List of Symbols</b>	XX
<b>List of Abbreviations</b>	XX1
<b>List of Publications and Seminars</b>	XXIV
<b>Abstrak</b>	XXV
<b>Abstract</b>	XXVII

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Background of the Study	1
1.1.1	Genetic Affiliation of Soqotri and the other MSAL	1
1.1.1.1	Semitic Languages	2
1.1.2	History and Geographical Position of Soqotri and Other MSAL	7
1.1.3	Overview of MSAL	9
1.1.3.1	Mehri	9
1.1.3.2	Jibbali	10
1.1.3.3	Bathari	11
1.1.3.4	Harsusi	11
1.1.3.5	Hobjot	12
1.1.3.6	Soqotri	12
1.1.3.6.1	Soqotri Dialects	13
1.2	Statement of the Problem	16

1.3	Objectives of the Study	22
1.4	Research Questions	22
1.5	Significance of the Study	23
1.6	Limitation of the Study	25
1.7	Definition of Terms	25
1.8	Summary	27

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.0	Introduction	28
2.1	Overview of Descriptive Linguistic Theories	28
2.2	Morphological Theories and Models	29
2.2.1	Structural Approaches to Morphological Description	29
2.2.1.1	Hockett's Item and Arrangement Model	30
2.2.1.2	Item and Process Model	30
2.2.1.3	Word and Paradigm Model	31
2.2.2	Generative Approaches to Morphological Description	31
2.2.2.1	Morphology in the Standard Theory	32
2.2.2.2	Halle's (1973) Model	32
2.2.3	Non-linear Morphological Approaches	33
2.2.3.1	McCarthy's Nonconcatenative Theory	33
2.3	Development of Current Syntax and Grammar Theories	35
2.3.1	Harris's (1946) Bottom Up, Morpheme to Utterance Analysis	36
2.3.2	Wells's (1947) Top Down, Immediate Constituent Analysis	37
2.3.3	Gazder's (1970s) Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar	37
2.3.4	Perlmutter's and Postall (1970s) Relational Grammar.	38
2.3.5	Chomsky's (1981) Government and Binding Theory	39
2.3.6	Bersnan's (1982) Lexical Functional Grammar	40
2.3.7	M.A.K.Halliday's Systemic Grammar	41
2.3.8	Functional Typology	41
2.3.9	Roles and Reference Grammar	43

2.3.10	Dixon’s Basic Linguistic Theory	43
2.3.10.1	Studies Related to the Basic Linguistic Theory	46
2.4	Related Research on Soqotri	47
2.4.1	Studies Related to Phonology	47
2.4.2	Studies Related to Text Collection	51
2.4.3	Studies Related to Lexicon	52
2.4.4	Studies Related to Morphology	55
2.4.5	Studies Related to Syntax	60
2.5	Conceptual Framework of the Current Study	63
2.6	Summary	68

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

3.0	Introduction	69
3.1	Research Design	69
3.2	Data Sources	74
3.3	Sampling and Samples selection	75
3.4	Data Collection Methods	80
3.5	Instrumentation of Data Collection	81
3.5.1	Elicitation	82
3.5.1.1	Questionnaire	82
3.5.1.2	Translation	85
3.5.1.3	Stimulus Prompt	86
3.5.1.4	Data Manipulation	86
3.5.1.5	Controlled Tasks	86
3.5.1.6	Native Speaker Judgments	87
3.5.1.7	Interviews	87
3.5.1.8	Procedures of Data Elicitation	89
3.5.2	Participant Observation	90
3.5.2.1	Procedures of Participant Observation	92
3.5.3	Oral Text Collection	93

3.5.3.1	Procedures of Oral Text Collection	94
3.6	Sound Recording Technique	94
3.7	Research Ethics	95
3.8	Research Validity	95
3.9	Research Reliability	97
3.10	Procedures of Data Analysis	99
3.10.1	Transcription, Translation and Gloss	99
3.10.2	Familiarity with Data	100
3.10.3	Data Coding	100
3.10.4	Morpheme- Level Analysis	100
3.10.5	Stem -Level Analysis	101
3.10.6	Word-Level Analysis	101
3.10.7	Phrase-Level Analysis	101
3.10.8	Clause-Level Analysis	101
3.10.9	Sentence-Level Analysis	102
3.11	Summary	102

#### **CHAPTER 4: ASPECTS OF THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE SDG**

4.0	Introduction	104
4.1	Types and Functions of Morpheme in the SDG	105
4.1.1	Templatic Morphemes	106
4.1.1.1	The Root Morphemes	106
4.1.1.2	Pattern Morphemes	107
4.1.1.3	Vocalic Melody Morphemes	108
4.1.2	Affixational Morphemes	111
4.1.2.1	Inflectional Prefix Morphemes	111
4.1.2.2	Derivational Prefix Morphemes	111
4.1.2.3	Derivational Infix Morphemes	112
4.1.2.4	Inflectional Suffix Morphemes	112
4.1.2.5	Derivational Suffix Morphemes	113

4.1.3	Non-Templatic Word-Stem Morphemes	113
4.1.3.1	Independent Personal Pronouns	114
4.1.3.2	Dependent (Suffixed) Personal Pronouns	116
4.1.3.3	Possessive Pronouns	118
4.1.3.4	Reflexive Pronouns	119
4.1.3.5	Reciprocal Pronouns	121
4.1.3.6	Demonstrative Pronouns	122
4.1.3.7	Relative Pronouns	123
4.1.3.8	Interrogative	124
4.2	Inflectional and Derivational Morphology of the SDG	125
4.3	Inflectional Morphology of the Nouns	126
4.3.1	Singular Nouns	126
4.3.2	Dual Nouns	127
4.3.3	Internal Plural of Nouns	128
4.3.4	External Plural of Nouns	135
4.3.5	Gender of Nouns	136
4.4	Derivational Morphology of Nouns	138
4.4.1	Verb to Noun Derivation (Nominalization)	138
4.4.1.1	Action Nominalization	139
4.4.1.2	Agent Nominalization	140
4.4.1.3	Patient Nominalization	141
4.4.1.4	Instrument Nominalization	142
4.4.1.5	Location Nominalization	143
4.4.2	Adjective to Noun Derivation	144
4.4.3	Derivation of Diminutive Forms of Nouns	145
4.4.4	Compound Nouns	148
4.5	Inflectional Morphology of Adjectives	149
4.5.1	Singular Adjectives	149
4.5.2	Dual Adjectives	150
4.5.3	Plural Adjectives	151



4.5.4	Gender of Adjectives	153
4.6	Inflectional Morphology of the Verb	155
4.6.1	Perfect and Imperfect verbal Forms	156
4.6.2	Subjunctive Verbal Form	162
4.6.3	Passive Forms	163
4.7	Derivational Morphology of the Verb	165
4.7.1	The First Derived Verb	166
4.7.2	The Second Derived Verb	167
4.7.3	The Third Derived Verb	168
4.7.4	Derivation of Verbs from Adjectives	169
4.7.5	Verbs Derived by Reduplication	170
4.8	Adverbs in the SDG	171
4.9	Summary	172

## **CHAPTER 5: THE PHRASE IN THE SDG**

5.0	Introduction	182
5.1	Noun Phrase in the SDG	182
5.1.1	Types of Noun Phrase	182
5.1.1.1	Simple Noun Phrase	183
5.1.1.2	Cojoined Noun Phrase	183
5.1.1.3	Complex Noun Phrase	185
5.1.1.4	Elliptic Noun Phrase	185
5.1.2	Noun Phrase Structure	186
5.1.2.1	Head of the Noun Phrase	187
5.1.2.1.1	Proper Nouns as NP Heads	187
5.1.2.1.2	Common Noun as NP Heads	187
5.1.2.1.3	Personal Pronouns as NP Heads	188
5.1.2.1.4	Possessive Pronoun as NP heads	189
5.1.2.1.5	Demonstrative Pronouns as NP Heads	189
5.1.2.1.6	Numerals as NP heads	190

5.1.2.1.7	Adjectives as NP Heads	190
5.1.2.2	Modifiers of the Noun Phrase	191
5.1.2.2.1	Determiners as NP Modifiers	191
5.1.2.2.1.1	Articles	191
5.1.2.2.1.2	Possessive Pronouns	193
5.1.2.2.1.3	Demonstratives	194
5.1.2.2.1.4	Cardinal Numerals	196
5.1.2.2.1.5	Ordinal Numerals	199
5.1.2.2.1.6	Quantifiers	200
5.1.2.2.2	Interrogatives as NP Modifiers	202
5.1.2.2.3	Nouns as NP Modifiers	203
5.1.2.2.4	Adjectives as NP Modifiers	207
5.1.2.2.4.1	Combination of Adjectives	208
5.1.2.2.5	Adverbs as NP Modifiers	209
5.1.2.2.6	Prepositional Phrases as NP Modifiers	210
5.1.2.2.7	Participle Clauses as NP Modifiers	210
5.1.2.2.8	Subjunctive Clauses as NP Modifiers	211
5.1.2.2.9	Relative clauses as NP Modifiers	211
5.1.2.2.10	Restrictors as NP Modifiers	212
5.1.2.3	Constituents Order within the NP	212
5.1.2.3.1	Order of Premodifiers	212
5.1.2.3.2	Order of PostModifiers	214
5.1.3	Unification of the Noun Phrase	216
5.1.4	The Function of the Noun Phrase	217
5.2	Verb Phrase in the SDG	218
5.2.1	Verb Phrases with Main Verbs	219
5.2.2	Verb Phrases with Main Verbs and Auxiliaries	220
5.2.3	Tense and Aspect	221
5.2.3.1	Function of the Perfect Verbal Form	222
5.2.3.2	Function of the Imperfect Verbal Form	225
5.2.3.3	Aspectual Temporal Adverbs	227

5.2.3.4	Aspectual Auxiliaries	229
5.2.3.5	Idiomatic Auxiliary Verbs	234
5.2.4	Passive Verb Phrases	239
5.2.4.1	Basic Morphological Passive	239
5.2.4.2	Periphrastic Passive	242
5.3	Prepositional Phrase in the SDG	243
5.3.1	Prepositional Phrase Structure	243
5.3.2	Prepositional Phrase Function	247
5.4	Adjective Phrase in the SDG	249
5.4.1	Adjective Phrase Structure	249
5.4.2	Adjective Phrase Function	250
5.5	Adverb Phrase in the SDG	251
5.5.1	Adverb Phrase Structure	251
5.5.2	Adverb Phrase Function	252
5.6	Summary	253

## **CHAPTER 6: THE CLAUSE IN THE SDG**

6.0	Introduction	259
6.1	Main Clauses in the SDG	260
6.1.1	Nominal Clause in the SDG	260
6.1.1.1	Structure of the Nominal Clause	261
6.1.1.2	Types of Nominal Clause	264
6.1.1.2.1	Main Nominal Clauses with Nominal Predicate	265
6.1.1.2.2	Main Nominal Clauses with Adjectival Predicate	265
6.1.1.2.3	Main Nominal Clauses with Locative Predicates	266
6.1.1.2.4	Existential Clauses	266
6.1.1.2.5	Minor Nominal Clause with Genitive Predicate	268
6.1.1.2.6	Minor Nominal Clause with Benefactive Predicate	269
6.1.1.2.7	Minor Nominal Clauses indicating Origin	269
6.1.1.2.8	Minor Nominal Clause with Associative Predicate	269

6.1.1.2.9	Minor Nominal Clause with Referential Predicate	270
6.1.1.3	Temporal Aspect of the Nominal Clauses	270
6.1.1.4	Nominal Clauses with Pro-Copula	271
6.1.1.5	Agreement in Nominal Clauses	272
6.1.1.6	Nominal Clause Function	273
6.1.2	Verbal Clauses in the SDG	274
6.1.2.1	Verbal Clause Structure	274
6.1.2.2	Types of Verbal Clause	278
6.1.2.2.1	Intransitive Verbal Clauses	279
6.1.2.2.2	Transitive Verbal Clauses	280
6.1.2.2.3	Extended Transitive Clauses	283
6.1.2.2.4	Zero-Transitive (Ambient) Clauses	285
6.1.2.2.5	Copula Clauses	287
6.1.2.3	Syntactic Pivot	290
6.1.2.4	Grammatical Relations within the Verbal Clause	290
6.1.2.5	Verbal Clause Function	293
6.2	Subordinate Clauses in the SDG	293
6.2.1	Complement Clauses	294
6.2.1.1	Indicative Complement Clauses	295
6.2.1.1.1	Interrogative Complement Clause	295
6.2.1.1.1.1	<i>Whether / if</i> Clause	295
6.2.1.1.1.2	<i>Wh-Complement</i> Clause	296
6.2.1.1.2	<i>That-</i> Clause	297
6.2.1.2	Subjunctive Complement Clause	299
6.2.1.3	Nominalized Complement Clause	301
6.2.1.4	Participle Complement Clause	302
6.2.1.5	Equi-deletion in the Complement Clauses	303
6.2.1.6	Sequence of Tense in Complement Clauses	304
6.2.1.7	Negative Raising in the Complement Clauses	305

6.2.2	Adverbial Clauses in the SDG	305
6.2.2.1	Clause of Time	306
6.2.2.2	Clause of Place	310
6.2.2.3	Clause of Manner	311
6.2.2.4	Clause of Purpose	313
6.2.2.4.1	Finite Clause of Purpose	313
6.2.2.4.2	Subjunctive Clause of Purpose	314
6.2.2.5	Clause of Reason	315
6.2.2.6	Conditional Clause	316
6.2.2.6.1	Real Conditional Clauses	316
6.2.2.6.2	Unreal Conditional Clauses	317
6.2.2.6.3	Negative Conditional Clauses	318
6.2.2.6.4	Concessive Conditional Clauses	319
6.2.2.7	Clause of Concession	320
6.2.2.8	Substitutive Clauses	320
6.2.2.9	Absolutive Clauses	322
6.2.3	Relative Clauses in the SDG	322
6.2.3.1	Attributive Relative Clause	323
6.2.3.2	Non-attributive Relative Clause	326
6.2.3.3	Restrictive and Nonrestrictive relative clauses	328
6.3	Summary	328

## **CHAPTER 7: THE SENTENCE IN THE SDG**

7.0	Introduction	333
7.1	Sentence Structure in the SDG	333
7.1.1	Simple Sentence	334
7.1.2	Compound Sentence	335
7.1.2.1	Notions Encoded within Compound Sentence Structures	336
7.1.2.2	Coordination Reduction	337
7.1.2.3	Directionality Constraint of Reduction	339

7.1.3	Complex Sentence	340
7.1.4	Compound Complex Sentence	341
7.2	Sentence Function in the SDG	342
7.2.1	Basic Types of Sentences	343
7.2.1.1	Declarative Sentences	343
7.2.1.2	Imperative Sentences	345
7.2.1.2.1	Basic Second Person Imperative Sentences	346
7.2.1.2.2	Subtypes of the Imperative Sentences	347
7.2.1.2.2.1	Prohibitive Sentences	347
7.2.1.2.2.2	Hortative Sentences	349
7.2.1.3	Interrogative Sentences	356
7.2.1.3.1	Polar Question	357
7.2.1.3.1.1	Affirmative Polar Questions	358
7.2.1.3.1.2	Negative Polar Questions	359
7.2.1.3.1.3	Tag Questions	360
7.2.1.3.2	Alternative Questions	361
7.2.1.3.3	Content Questions	362
7.2.2	Minor Types of Sentences	367
7.2.2.1	Exclamatory Sentences	367
7.2.2.2	Imprecatives	369
7.2.2.3	Optatives	370
7.3	Basic Word Orders in the SDG	371
7.4	Summary	374

## **CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.0	Introduction	377
8.1	Overview of Purpose, Design, Informants, Research Questions and Data Collection	377

8.2	Summary	378
8.3	Conclusion	384
8.3.1	Types and Functions of the Morpheme in the SDG	384
8.3.2	Inflectional and Derivational Operations of Stem	386
8.3.3	Types, Structures and Functions of the Phrase in the SDG	389
8.3.4	Types, Structures and Functions of the Clause in the SDG	391
8.3.5	Types, Structures, Functions and Word order of the Sentence in the SDG	393
8.4	Contributions of the Study	396
8.5	Typological and Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations	398
8.6	Suggestions for Further Researches	400
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	401
	<b>APPENDIX</b>	
	Appendix A: Swadesh List	422
	Appendix B: Questionnaire of Morphology	425
	Appendix C: Verb Phrase Questionnaire	428
	Appendix D: Noun Phrase Questionnaires	433
	Appendix E: Sentence Type Questionnaire	437
	Appendix F: Text about Soqotri Marriage Tradition	438
	Appendix G: Soqotri Poem	439

## LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 2.1	Pulmonary Consonants in Soqotri	49
Table 2.2	Non Pulmonary Ejective Consonants in Soqotri	49
Table 2.3	Soqotri Vowels	50
Table 3.1	Informants Numbers and Ages	78
Table 4.1	Independent Personal Pronouns in SDG	115
Table 4.2	Dependent Suffix Personal Pronouns in the SDG	117
Table 4.3	Independent Possessive Pronouns in the SDG	118
Table 4.4	Dependent Possessive Pronouns in SDG	119
Table 4.5	Reflexive Pronouns in SDG	120
Table 4.6	Reciprocal Pronouns in the SDG	121
Table 4.7	Demonstratives of Proximity in the SDG	122
Table 4.8	Demonstratives of Distance in the SDG	122
Table 4.9	Relative Pronouns in the SDG	123
Table 4.10	Patterns of the Singular Nouns in the SDG	127
Table 4.11	External Dual Nouns in SDG	127
Table 4.12	Internal Dual Nouns with Affixation in SDG	128
Table 4.13	Noun Internal Plural Patterns SDG	130
Table 4.14	Internal Plural Patterns with the Glides /j,w /and Parasite/ h/ in SDG	130
Table 4.15	Prefixed Internal Plural Patterns in SDG	131
Table 4.16	Suppletive Plural Forms of Nouns in SDG	133
Table 4.17	Subtractive Plural Forms of Noun in SDG	134
Table 4.18	Replacive plural Forms of Noun in the SDG	134
Table 4.19	External Plural of Noun in SDG	136
Table 4.20	Feminine Nouns with Feminine Suffixes in SDG	137
Table 4.21	Internally-marked Feminine Nouns in SDG	137
Table 4.22	Unmarked Feminine Nouns in SDG	138
Table 4.23	Internal Diminutive Patterns in SDG	146
Table 4.24	Diminutive Forms with Affixation in SDG	147



Table 4.25	Pattern of Singular Adjectives in SDG	149
Table 4.26	Internal Dual Adjectives with Affixation in SDG	150
Table 4.27	Patterns of Masculine Adjectival Internal Plural with Affixation in SDG	152
Table 4.28	Feminine Adjectives with Feminine Suffixes	153
Table 4.29	Internally-Marked Feminine Adjectives in SDG	154
Table 4.30	Inflection of Person, Number, and Gender of the Perfective Verb ɸɛrɔ:b ‘understood’ Type A in SDG	156
Table 4.31:	Inflection of Person, Number, and Gender of the Perfective Verb hɛ:rɛ k’ ‘stole’ in the SDG	157
Table 4.32	Inflection of Person, Number, and Gender of the Imperfective Verb jət’ɔ:hɛr ‘he goes’ Type A. in the SDG	157
Table 4.33	Inflection of Person, Number, and Gender of the Imperfective Verb jə-hɔ:rɛ k’ ‘he steals’ Type B	158
Table 4.34	Inflection of the Subjunctive Form of the Verb jət’ɔ:hɛr ‘he goes’	162
Table 4.35	Paradigms of the Imperfective, Perfective and Subjunctive Passive Forms of the verb lɔ:tɛɸ ‘killed’ in the SDG	164
Table 4.36	Reduplicative Verbs in SDG	170
Table 5.1	Inflectional Perfect Paradigm of ʔəd and bɛr in the SDG	232

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1.1 Afro-Asiatic Language Family	2
Figure 1.2 Semitic Language Family	5
Figure 1.3 Map of Semitic languages	6
Figure 1.4 Map of Modern South Arabian Languages	16
Figure 2.1 Multi-Linear Representation of the Form $l\alpha : t\theta\beta$ ‘killed’	35
Figure 2.2 I C Analysis	37
Figure 2.3 Relational Structure of the Clause	39
Figure 2.4 Conceptual Framework of the Study	67
Figure 3.1 Research Design	73
Figure 3.2 Method of Data Collection without Interpreter	80
Figure 3.3 Method of Data Collection with Interpreter	81
Figure 3.4: Instrument of Data Collection	81
Figure 4.1 Types of the Morpheme in the SDG	105
Figure 4.2 Nonlinear Representation of Morphemes in the Verb Stem $h\epsilon m\theta\zeta$ ‘heard’	110
Figure 4.3 Internal Plural Pattern of Nouns with Tri-consonantal Root	129
Figure 4.4 Nonlinear Representation of Action Nominalization in SDG	140
Figure.4.5 Nonlinear Representation of Agent Nominalization in SDG	140
Figure 4.6 Non-linear Representation of prefixed and non- prefixed Patient Nominalization in SDG.	142
Figure 4.7 Nonlinear Representation of Instrument nominalization in SDG	143
Figure 4.8 Nonlinear Representation of Location Nominalization in SDG	144

Figure 4.9	Nonlinear Representation of the Diminutive Noun Form in SDG	146
Figure 4.10	Nonlinear Representation of Adjective internal Plural in SDG	152
Figure 4.11	Nonlinear Representation of Adjective Feminine Gender in SDG	154
Figure 4.12	Nonlinear Representation of Imperfective Passive Verb <i>ku : t ε b</i> 'is written'	165
Figure 4.13	Nonlinear Representation of Perfective Passive of the Verb <i>ki : t ε b</i> 'was written'.	165
Figure 4.14	Nonlinear Representation of Infixation in SDG	167
Figure 6.1	Types of Nominal Clause in the SDG	265
Figure 6.2	Types of Verbal Clause in the SDG	278
Figure 6.3	Nominative /Accusative System in the SDG	291
Figure 6.4	Types of Subordinate Clause in the SDG	294
Figure 7.1	Structural Classification of the Sentence in the SDG	334
Figure 7.2	Functional Classification of the Sentence in the SDG	343

## LIST OF SYMBOLS

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
[ ]	phrase, clause or sentences Boundary
( )	optional constituent
‘ ‘	translation from Soqotri into English
-	morpheme boundary within a word
√	root morpheme
<>	infix morpheme boundary
→	becomes, change to
∅	null, zero
{ }	Series of equal constituents
\	formed internally
>	sequence of constituents
↑	rising tone
'	stress
X	Stem
μ	morpheme tier

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A	transitive verb subject
ACC	accusative
ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverb
ADV.CL	adverbial clause
AUX.	auxiliary
BLT	Basic Linguistic Theory
C	complement
CC	copula complement
CCL	copula clause
CL	clause
COM	complementizer
COMP.CL	complement clause
COP	copula verb
CS	copula subject
DEM	demonstrative
DIM	diminutive
DU	dual
E	extended argument (indirect object)
ESAL	Epigraphic South Arabian Languages
EV	extended verb (ditransitive)
F	feminine
GBT	Government and Binding Theory
GEN	genitive
GG	Generative Grammar
GPSG	Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar
H	head of a phrase
H N	head noun in the noun phrase
IA	Item and Arrangement model

IC	immediate constituents
IMP	imperfect
IND	indicative
INTER.	interrogative
INTERJ	interjection
INT.V	intransitive verb
IP	Item and Process Model
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabets
IPMPs	Initial phrase markers
LF	logical form
LFG	lexical functional grammar
M	masculine
MCL	main clause
MO	modifier
MSAL	Modern South Arabian Languages
N	noun
NC	nominal clause complement
NCL	nominal clause
NP	noun phrase
NS	nominal clause subject
NUM	numeral / Number
NZR	nominalization marker
O	object
OSAL	Old South Arabian Languages
PAR	particle
PAR.CL	participle clause
PASS	passive
PBUH	peace be upon him
PER	perfect / person
PF	phonetic form
PL	plural

POSS	possessive
PP	Prepositional phrase
PRE	preposition
PRED	predicate
PRO	pronoun
QUAN	quantifier
REC.PRO	reciprocal pronoun
REF	reflexive
REL.	relative
RCL	relative clause
RLG	Relational Grammar
RRG	Role and Reference Grammar
S	intransitive verb subject
SC	subject complement
SCL	subordinate clause
SE	sentence
SDG	Soqotri Dialect of Galansiyah
SG	Singular
SP	Subject particle
SUB	subjunctive
SUB.CL	subjunctive clause
SUF	suffix
TG	Transformational Grammar
TNS	tense
TRA.V	transitive verb
V	verb
VCL	verbal clause
VP	verb phrase
WFRS	word formation roles
WP	Word and Paradigm model

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Makhashen, K.A., Shuib, M. & Che Lah, S., 2008. Tense and aspects in Soqotri. In *GLOSSA*, 3(2), pp.511-527
- Makhashen, K.A., Shuib, M. & Che Lah, S. 2008. Non-concatenative morphological Operations in the Soqotri Dialect of Galansiyah. Paper presented at the International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities (ICOSSH'08), 18-20 June 2008. Penang, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Makhashen, K. A., Shuib, M. & Che Lah, S., 2008. The noun phrase structure in Soqotri. Paper presented at the International Conference on Moribund Languages and Cultures, 14-16 October 2008. Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya
- Shibatani, M., Makhashen, K., Shuib, M. & Che Lah, S. In press. Nominalization in Soqotri, a South Arabian Language in Yemen. In : W. Leo Wetzels, ed. *The linguistics of endangered languages: contributions to morphology and morpho-Syntax*. Leiden: Brill, pp.9-31



## **ASPEK MORFOLOGI DAN SINTAKTIS DIALEK SOQOTRI DI GALANSIYAH.**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini memerihalkan secara sinkronik (synchronically) fitur / ciri (feature) utama morfologi dan sintaktik yang terdapat dalam dialek Soqotri Galansiyah (.Soqotri Dialect of Galansiyah, SDG) di Pulau Soqotra, Yemen. SDG merupakan satu daripada rumpun bahasa Soqotri yang terkandung dalam Bahasa Arab Utara Modern (Modern South Arabian Languages, MSAL). Kumpulan ini merupakan rumpun bahasa Semitik, yang termasuk dalam enam (6) bahasa sebelum Islam yang tidak tersurat (unwritten language), yang masih dipertuturkan dalam kalangan negara di utara Arab terutamanya Yemen dan Oman. Walaupun Soqotri begitu berpengaruh dalam kalangan orang Arab, namun ia masih belum diperjelaskan atau didokumenkan sebaiknya. Kajian deskriptif ini memberi tumpuan khusus pada SDG, yang berbeza dengan dialek Soqotri lain kerana ia masih mengekalkan kebanyakan fitur linguistik asalnya. Kajian ini bertujuan memerihalkan jenis morfem yang terdapat dalam dialek ini dan cara ia digabungkan tanpa perangkaian (combine nonconcatenatively) untuk membentuk dasar (stem), fleksi dalam (internal inflectional) dan fleksi luar (external inflectional) serta operasi terbitan (derivational operation) daripada kata nama adjektif, jenis, struktur dan fungsi daripada frasa dialek, klausa dan ayat sebagai tambahan kepada urutan kata dasar (basic word order).

Reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif etnografi digunakan dalam kajian ini, dan sepuluh penutur asli dipilih sebagai informan (pilihan dibuat secara tentu bukannya rawak). Pelbagai instrumen pengumpulan data digunakan, contohnya beberapa jenis pencungkilan (elicitation) data [terjemahan langsung, temu duga, soal selidik, keputusan penutur asli, dll], pemerhatian peserta dan koleksi teks (sastera lisan). Secara teori, kajian ini berdasarkan Teori Linguistik Dasar Dixon (Dixon's Basic Linguistic Theory, BLT) dan tipologi fungsian. Teori tanpa perangkaian, model paradigma kata (WP) dan Model unsur terdekat (IC) juga digunakan sebagai suplemen BLT.

Kajian menunjukkan bahawa SDG mempunyai tiga jenis morfologi iaitu morfem templat, morfem imbuhan (affixional morpheme) dan (non-temolatic word stem) Morfem templat merupakan morfem terbahagi abstrak (abstract discontinuous morpheme) yang bergabung secara tidak linear untuk membentuk dasar. Proses fleksi dan terbitan kata nama, kata kerja, adjektif dan beberapa kata ganti diperoleh sama ada secara luaran (linear) dengan menambah morfen imbuhan pada dasar, atau secara dalaman (tidak linear) melalui mengubah suai vokal dasar. Dalam sesetengah kes, proses ini melibatkan kedua-duanya sekali gus. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa operasi ini yang dikenali sebagai akar (root) dan morfologi pola telah digunakan secara meluas dalam SDG. Secara sintaktik, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa terdapat struktur dan fungsi daripada jenis frasa kata nama, frasa kata kerja, frasa adjektif, frasa adverba dan frasa kata depan yang berbeza, di dalam dialek ini. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa SDG mempunyai dua klausa utama iaitu klausa namaan (nominal clause) dan klausa karyaan (verbal clause), dan tiga klausa subordinat iaitu klausa pelengkap (complement clause), klausa relatif dan klausa adverbaan (adverbial clause). Kajian memerihalkan SDG dalam struktur ayat selapis (simple), ayat majmuk (compound), ayat kompleks dan ayat kompleks majmuk (compound complex). Diperihalkan juga fungsinya sebagai ayat penyata (declarative), ayat perintah / imperatif, ayat tanya (interrogative), ayat seru (exclamatory), ayat optatif dan ayat imprekatif. Sebagai kesimpulan, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa SDG mempunyai dua urutan kata asas iaitu S/AV O dan VS/AO.

## **Morphological and Syntactic Aspects of the Soqotri Dialect of Galansiyah**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study describes synchronically the major morphological and syntactic features of the Soqotri Dialect of Galansiyah (henceforth, SDG) in Soqatra Island, Yemen. The SDG is a variety of Soqotri which belongs to the Modern South Arabian Languages (henceforth, MSAL). This group which descends from the south branch of the western Semitic languages includes six pre-Islamic unwritten languages still spoken in South Arabia particularly in Yemen and Oman. Though Soqotri has become an endangered language due to the great influence of Arabic, it has not yet been described or documented properly. This descriptive study concentrates on the SDG which unlike the other Soqotri varieties, still possesses most of its original linguistic features. The study aims at describing the types and functions of the morpheme in the SDG, the way these morphemes combine nonconcatenatively to form stems and the inflectional and derivational operations the stems of its nouns, verbs and adjectives may undergo internally or externally. It also aims at describing the types, structures and functions of the phrase, clause and sentence in this dialect in addition to its basic word orders.

An ethnographic qualitative field research design was employed for this study in which 10 native speakers were chosen as informants according to the non-probability judgment sampling. Various data collection instruments were employed such as the different types of elicitation (direct translation, interviews questionnaires, native speaker's judgment, etc.), participant observation and collection of oral texts (oral literature). Theoretically, the study is based on Dixon's Basic Linguistic Theory

(henceforth BLT) and functional typology. The nonconcatenative Theory, Word and Paradigm Model (WP) and the Immediate Constituent Model (IC) were also used to supplement the BLT.

The study reveals that the SDG has three types of morphemes: templatic morphemes, affixional morphemes and non-templatic word-stem morphemes. The templatic morphemes, which are abstract discontinuous morphemes, combine together nonlinearly to form stems. The inflectional and derivational processes of nouns, verbs and adjectives are achieved either externally (linearly) through adding an affixational morpheme to the stem or internally (nonlinearly) through modifying the vowels of that stem and in some cases this nonlinear process involves both vocalic modification and the addition of an affix. The study indicates that this operation which is called root and pattern morphology is widely employed in the SDG. Syntactically, the study shows the structures and functions of the different types of noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, adverb phrases and prepositional phrases in this dialect. The structural and functional description of the clause in this dialect, the SDG, reveals that it has two main clauses and three subordinate clauses. The main clauses are the nominal clause and verbal clause and the subordinate clauses are the complement clause, the relative clause and the adverbial clause. The study describes the sentence in the SDG structurally as simple, compound, complex or compound complex and it describes it functionally as declarative, imperative, interrogative, exclamatory, optative or imprecative. Finally, the study reveals that the SDG has two basic word orders: VS / SV and VAO / AVO.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This introductory chapter provides the background to the current study. The background introduces the topic of the study and gives information about the genetic affiliation of Soqotri and the other five Modern South Arabian languages, their history, geographical positions, discovery, current state, speakers and dialects. This chapter sets out the research problem and the associated research questions the thesis seeks to address. It also provides the research objectives, significance and limitation.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The current study aims at describing synchronically the major morphological and syntactic features of one of the varieties of the Soqotri language particularly the Soqotri dialect of Galansiyah SDG. Soqotri is an old unwritten pre-Islamic language spoken in the Yemeni archipelago of Soqotra which is situated in the Arabian Sea 300 Kilometres south of the Arabian Peninsula. This under-documented language has become an endangered language due to the great influence of Arabic on its speakers.

##### **1.1.1 Genetic Affiliation of Soqotri and the other MSAL**

Soqotri belongs to a language group called Modern South Arabian Languages MSAL. In addition to Soqotri, this group includes the Mehri language, the Jibbali language, the Bathari language, the Harsusi language and the Hobyot language. Modern South Arabian Languages are affiliated to a larger language family called Semitic which itself is a part of the wider Afro-Asiatic family that includes ancient Egyptian, Coptic,

Cushitic, Berber languages Chadic languages, Bja languages and Omotic language as shown in the following figure:

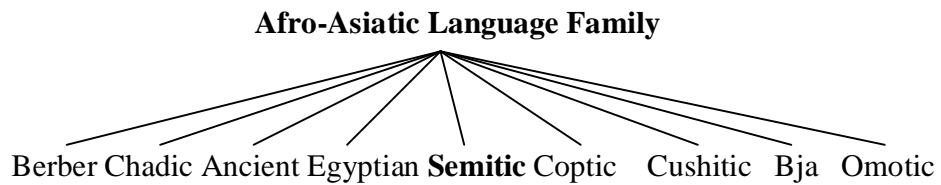


Figure 1.1 Afro-Asiatic Language Family.

### 1.1.1.1 Semitic Languages

The Semitic languages form a separate family within the Afro-Asiatic language group. They are usually classified into East Semitic and West Semitic (Versteegh, 1997; Gray, 2006).

East Semitic is represented by Akkadian, which is also called Assyrian, Babylonian or Assyro-Babylonian. This group has a rich inscriptional literature from the first half of the 3rd millennium to the closing centuries BC. It departed from the Proto-Semitic homeland and made its permanent home among non-Semitic Sumerians, consequently it underwent changes which made it by no means the most representative of the Proto-Semitic speech despite its antiquity (ibid). Bromiley (1995) states that this language group which is spoken only by the Semitic population of Mesopotamia is subdivided into Old Akkadian (2500-1950 BC), Old Babylonian (1950-1530 BC), Middle Babylonian (1530-1000 BC) and Neo-Babylonian (1000-625 BC).

The West Semitic is subdivided into North-West Semitic and South-West Semitic. North-West Semitic is usually represented by Canaanite and Aramaic. The Canaanite group includes Old Canaanite, Phoenician, Moabite and Hebrew which is the

most important language in this group and the only one that has survived as a spoken language up to now. Old Hebrew was vernacular from the 2nd Millennium BC until about the 4th century BC. Old Hebrew did not die entirely but it survived in the form of Talmudic Hebrew till the 7th century AD when it became a learned religious language (Mediaeval Hebrew) and recently it has been revived as Modern Hebrew (Gray, 2006). Aramaic is divided into Western Aramaic and Eastern Aramaic. The Western Aramaic comprises Old Aramaic or Hama and Zingirli ( 8th century BC), Nabataean (from the 1st century BC. to 1st century AD), Palmyrene (from the 1st century BC. to 3rd century AD), Sinaitic (from the 1st to 4th century A.D), Biblical Aramaic or the so called Chaldaean, Christian Palestinian Aramaic ( from the 5th to 6th century AD) and Samaritan (3rd to 4th century AD). The Eastern Aramaic includes Judaeo-Aramaic ( from the 4th to the 6th century A.D), Mandaean (from the 7th to the 9th century), Syriac which spread from Edessa up to Persia (from the 3rd to the 14th century) and finally Harranian spoken in Mesopotammia (Musel) and in the Persian area of Urmi (ibid).

South-West Semitic includes North Arabic, South Arabic and Ethiopic. The chief member of North Arabic is the Arabic language, the language of the Holy Quran and the vehicle of one of the greatest literature of all the Orient. In some references Arabic and Aramaic are classified as South-West Central Semitic (Watson , 2002). South Arabic is represented by Old South Arabian Languages OSAL and Modern South Arabian Languages MASL. Old South Arabia Languages or Epigraphic South Arabian Languages ESAL include Minaean, Sabean, Qatabanian Hadramitic. They ranged from the 8th century BC to the 6th century AD.(Gray, 2006).Regarding the mainland of these languages, Kogan and Korotyev (1997) state that Sabean mainland was Mareb; the

Minaean mainland was Wadi Madhab; the Qatabanian mainland was the area of Wadi Bayhan and Hareeb at the edge of the inner Sayhad Desert and the Hadramitic mainland was Wadi Hadhramout. All these areas are in Yemen. These languages are now dead.

The Modern South Arabian Languages include Soqotri, Mehri, Jibbali, Bathari, Hursusi and Hobyot. Though all these six languages are still Spoken in parts of Yemen and Oman, they are considered as endangered languages. More information about this particular group will be given in the coming sections.

The Ethiopic group represents the last Semitic immigration which took place some centuries before the Christian era. The Ethiopic Semitic languages have a close affinity to MSAL. They are divided into Ethiopic Proper (Ge'ez), Tigrina, Tigre, Amharic, Gafat, Argobba, Harari and Gurage (Porkhomovsky, 1997; Gray, 2006).

These two branches of the Semitic Language Family and the different Semitic languages that descend from them in addition to their areas are shown in the figures 1.2 and 1.3.



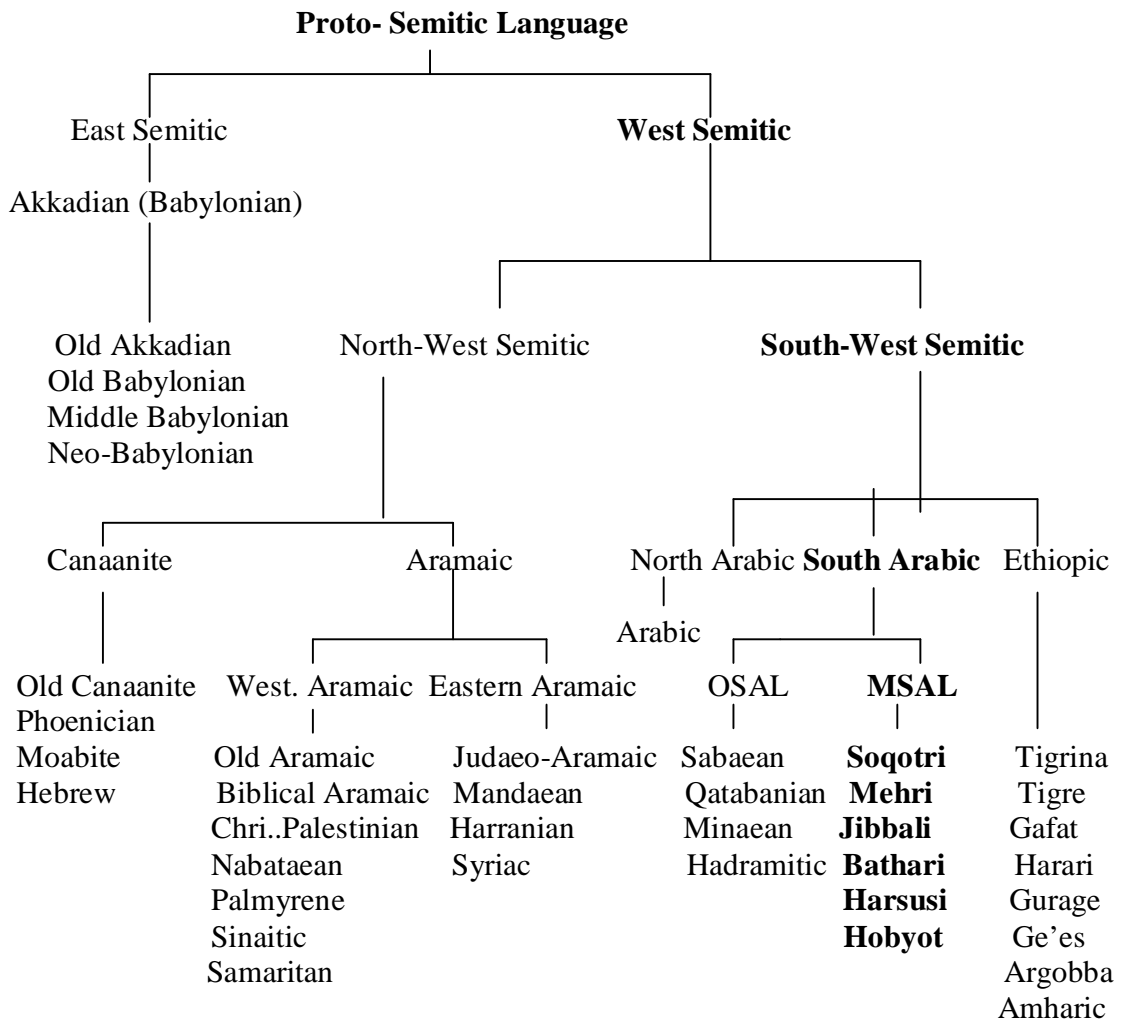


Figure 1.2: Semitic Language Family

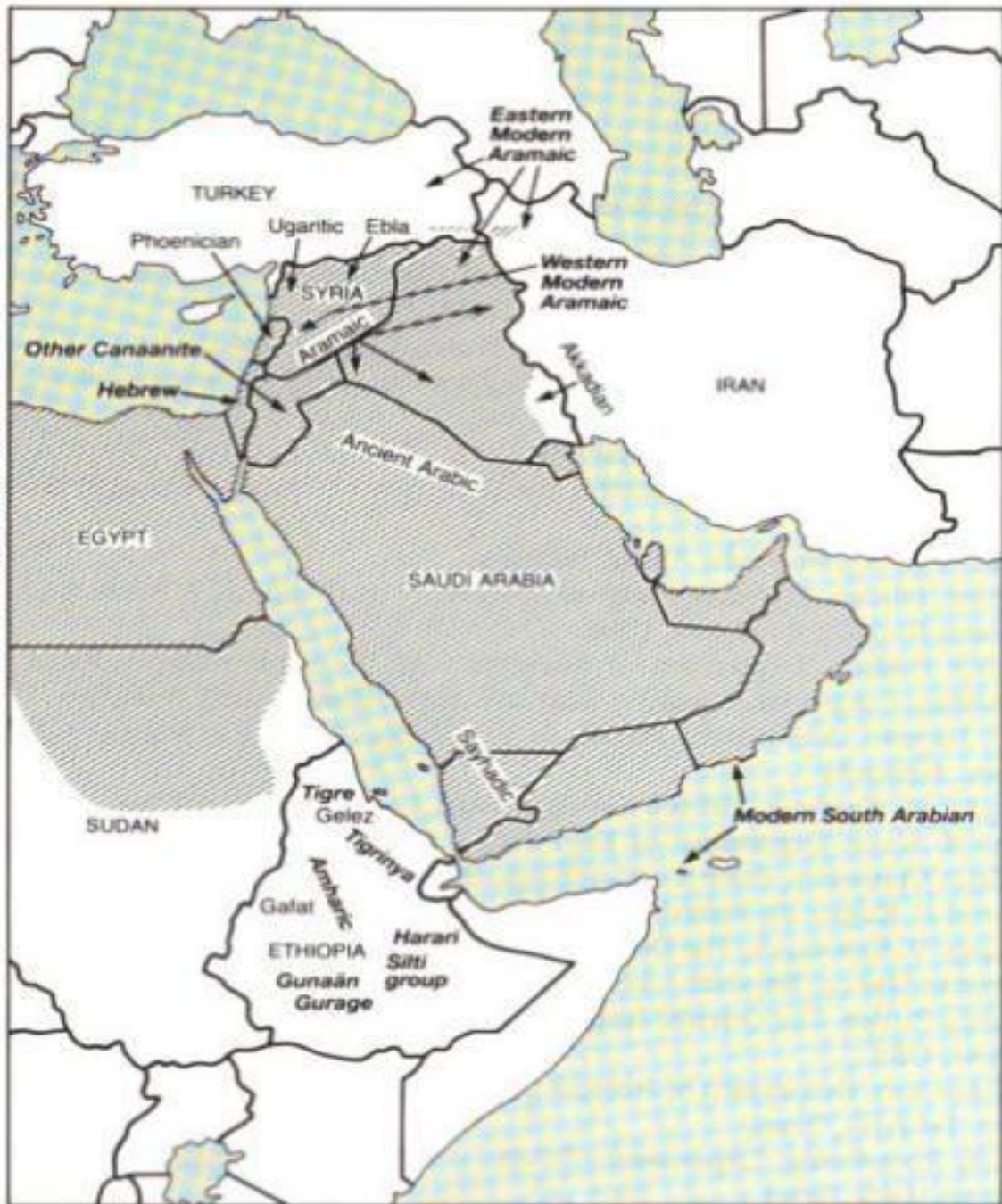


Figure 1.3 Map of Semitic languages  
 Source: Hetzron (1997, p.XIV).

### 1.1.2 History and Geographical Position of Soqotri and Other MSAL

Modern South Arabian Languages MSAL are the remnant of a pre-Arabic linguistic substrate that once expanded from Oman in the east to the high lands of Yemen in the west that included the already dead Old South Arabian Languages OSAL: Sabaeen, Minaean, Gatabanian and Hadramic. These south Semitic languages extended across the Red Sea to the highlands and coastal area of East Africa creating the Ethiosemitic languages such as Ge'ez, Amharic and Tigrina (Leibhaber, 2007).

The famous classical Arab geographers and historians such as Al-Hamadani, Ibn Battuta and Al-Idrisi were aware of the existence of pre-Arabic languages spoken east of Hadramout and in Soqatra Island but they had no interest in collecting any philological or lexical data on them. They either ignored these languages in their books or referred to them briefly as non-Arabic dialects. For example, Al-Hamadani (1983) states that the inhabitants of Al-sher, an old name of the area of MSAL, are unable to speak Arabic regarding them as (*ajam*) non-Arabic speakers. Ibn Battuta (1971) never mentioned these languages in his famous book. Al-Idrisi (1970) points out that people in this area speak old Yemeni languages no longer intelligible to the contemporary Arabs.

The first Soqotri lexical data was collected in 1835 by Lieutenant James Renold Wellsted, a British army officer, who surveyed the island from the 10th of January to the 7th of March 1834. During this period he collected a list containing 195 Soqotri words and expressions and published them in March 1835. That list was enlarged to include 236 Soqotri words and then published in May 1835 in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London (Wellsted,

1835a, b). These words were written in Arabic alphabets and Latin transliteration with both Arabic and English translation. He later published 37 words of Mehri. The linguistic information provided by Wellsted is regarded as preliminary information of a non-linguist. Despite all that, this information introduced this unknown language group, the MSAL, to the world (Simeone-Senelle, 2003 ; Liebhaber 2007).

Fulgence Fresnel, the French consul in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, discovered the third MSAL, Jibbali in 1838. He recorded some basic grammatical information about this language including information about the inventory of sibilants and their allophones (Liebhaber, 2007). In 1898 the Viennese Imperial Academy in Austria sent the Sudarabische Expedition to study the MSAL. Among the linguists of this expedition is David-Heinrich Muller, who recorded some Soqotri texts (Simeone-Senelle, 2003). Bathari and Harsusi were discovered much later when they were announced to the world by Thomas in 1939 in his "Four Strange Tongues from South Arabia" in which he regards Bathari, Harsusi and Mehri as one group and regards Jibbali as belonging to another group (ibid). The last discovered language in this group is Hobyot. Johnstone was the first who referred to this language in 1981 but he regarded it as a mixed dialect of Mehri and Jibbali. Hobyot was shown as a separate language not a dialect of Mehri only in 1985 when the French Mission under Antoine Lonnet and Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle collected enough data proving that Hobyot is an independent language (ibid).

The South Semitic language branch to which Soqotri and the other MSAL belong is the only Semitic sub-group that has a naturally defined territory . The Empty Quarter, a very vast sand desert separating Saudi Arabia from Yemen and Oman, and the

high mountains and the plateaus along the north eastern and north western rims of this language group territory hindered the advance of Arabic. *Jabal Al-Gamar* and *Jabal Al-Garah*, two mountain chains in the Omani district *Dhofar* protected its eastern borders against any Arabic linguistic infiltration. The good agricultural land in this area helped agriculturalists to be socially and linguistically independent from their northerly neighbours in the Arabian area *Hijaz*. The Red Sea also helped the Ethiosemitic languages to develop in the East African highland with out any worth mentioning influence from the other Semitic language. The southern borders of this language group are protected by the Arabian Sea. 300 Kilometres away from the Arabian main land, the indigenous language spoken in Soqotra Island has evolved in a complete isolation. The so many efforts of the mainland to colonize or corporate the island lasted only for short times and were limited to the coasts (Simeone-Senelle, 1997; Liebhaber, 2007). So these naturally defined and protected borders of the South Semitic languages are what enabled Soqotri and the other MSAL to evolve and survive though Arabic surrounds them from three directions (ibid).

### **1.1.3 Overview of MSAL**

This overview provides more information about the geographical areas, speakers, dialects and the current endangered state of MSAL in general and Soqotri in particular.

#### **1.1.3.1 Mehri**

Mehri is considered to be the most widespread MSAL. It is the language of the tribes of AL-Mahrah Governorate, south-east of Yemen, whose population is estimated to be 100 000. It is also spoken by an Omani tribe called Bet Kathir in the mountain of Dhofar in Oman (Simeone-Senelle, 1997). Mehri has two dialects. The first dialect is

called *məhrijəʔ* and it is spoken west of *Ras- Fartak* Cape. The second dialect is spoken in the eastern area of Al-Mahrah including the Mehri of Dhofar in Oman. This dialect is called *məhrijəʔ*. The Mehri speakers both who live in the coasts and desert of Yemen and those who live in the mountains of Oman are semi-nomads breeding camels, cows and goats. Some Mehris especially men like emigrating to the neighboring rich Arab Gulf States such as The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia searching for work but they never settle there for ever as they return home after spending a year or so in these countries (ibid). Mehri is considered as an endangered language due to the increasing influence of Arabic (Siemone-Senelle, 1997 ; Alfadly, 2007).

#### **1.1.2.2 Jibbali**

During his fieldwork, Johnstone (1981) noticed that the speakers of this language use many names for it such as *jəbleʔ* , *ʃhərəʔ*, *ʔəhkili* , and *k'ərəwi*. He chose Jibbali as he thought that it is not pejorative for all its speakers. Johnstone (1975) estimated the number of the Jibbali speakers to be 5000, but Simeone-Senelle (1997) states that their number varies from 30000 to 50000. The Jibbali speakers live in the mountains of *Dhofar* in Oman. They are semi-nomadic pastoralists breeding camel, cows and goats. Some of them collect frankincense. Along the coast they also fish. Like Hobyot, Jibbali is not a language of a specific community or tribal confederation. It is a language of a geographical area (Morris, 2007). Jibbali has three dialect groups; the dialect of the Hallaniyyat Islands, the central dialect and the western dialect (Johnston, 1981). In 1981 Johnstone published a dictionary of the central dialect entitled 'Jibbali Lexicon'. Two books were also written about the Jibbali poetry, one by Johnston in

1972 and the other one by Morris in 1985. Hofstede wrote a Ph.D. thesis on the syntax of Jibbali in 1998.

### **1.1.3.3 Bathari**

This language is spoken by the *bət'ɑ:hreħ* tribe who live in *Dhofar* in Oman along a strip of coast opposite the al-Hallaniyah islands (where Jibbali is spoken). Bathari is also known as *bət'hərjəħ* by its speakers who are called *bət'ɑ:hreħ* (Dimmendaal & Voeltz, 2007). It is closely-related to the Mehri language and according to Morris (1983, 2007) it has only 300 speakers left and not all of them speak Bathari, some of them speak Mehri. They are principally cave-dweller fishermen. Researches on this language are still very limited. Morris wrote some articles about Bathari poetry and Johnstone included some Bathari words in his Mehri Lexicon and Jibbali Lexicon. Morris (2007) expressed her pessimism regarding Bathari future, saying that it could be said to be dead.

### **1.1.3.4 Harsusi**

Harsusi which is called Harsiyyat by its speakers is the language of the Harasis tribe. Members of that tribe live in an area named after them in central Oman called Jiddat Al-Harasis. It has 700 speakers left in 1970 (Johnstone, 1977). Simeone-Senelle (1997) attributed this small number of Harsusi speakers to the fact that when Johnstone was there in the field, young Harsusi speakers left the area to work in oil wells which started working in Oman at that time. Like Bathari, Harsusi is closely related to Mehri and its speakers are semi-nomadic rearing camels and goats though nowadays some of them are wage-earners and many are employed in the oil industry (Morris, 2007).

Johnstone (1977) compiled a dictionary of Harsusi entitled “Harsusi Lexicon and English-Harsusi. Morris (2007) states that Harsusi has become a moribund language.

#### **1.1.3.5 Hobjot**

Hobjot is spoken by a few hundred people living in the mountains on the borders between Yemen and Oman. It is also called *kələ:m rifi* (Dimmendaal & Voeltz, 2007). It is spoken by people of different origins in both sides of the Yemeni and Omani borders. According to Simeone-Senelle (1997). Hobjot is related to Mehri, and it has less than 100 speakers. They live in border areas such as Jathib, Hoof and Habrut. They spend the rainy seasons in caves up the mountains and then go down to their houses which are covered with palm dates branches. Despite its few speakers, Hobjot combines elements of both Mehri and Jibbali, thus it stands in a class of its own (Arnold, 1993; Morris, 2007).

#### **1.1.3.6 Soqotri**

Soqotri is called *sək'ət'əri* or *sək'ət'ərijəh* by its speakers and it is written either as Soqotri or Socotri. It is spoken only in the islands of Soqotra archipelago in Yemen and by the Soqotri immigrants in the Arabian Gulf States mainly in Ajman in the United Arab Emirates. Soqotra archipelago consists of Soqotra, the main and largest island, the island of Abd al-Kuri, Samha Island and Darsa Island. Soqotra archipelago is located in the Arabian Sea around 300 kilometres south of the Arabian Peninsula and 240 kilometres from the coasts of Africa. It is between the latitudes 12, 8 -12, 42 north of the equator and the longitudes 53, 19 -54, 33 east of Greenwich (Zorman, 2006). The three small islands are located towards the west of the largest island, Soqotra. Soqotra



Island is 3650 square kilometres . It has about 500 kilometres of coastal line. It is 130 kilometres long from east to west and 40 kilometres from north to south. The largest town and the capital of Soqotra Island is Hadibo. It is in the mid of the northern coast of the island. The second largest town in the island is Galansiyah which is situated in the far western coast of the island. Abdal Kuri is 125 square kilometres and Samha Island is 50 square Kilometres (ibid). The islanders are fishermen and pastoralists who raise sheep, goats, camels and cows. In some places of the island they cultivate date palms (Morris, 2007). The population of the Soqotrans in the main island, Soqotra, is estimated to be 50000 (Naumkin, 1993; Simeone-Senelle, 1997). Under 400 inhabitants live in the small island of Abd al-Kuri and 150 inhabitants live in the other small island Samha. The fourth small island, Darsa, is not inhabited. The inhabitants of Samha island speak the dialect of the western coast of Soqotra island and the Soqotrans in Abd al-Kuri used to speak a Soqotri variety not understood by many Soqotrans but now they mainly speak the Arabic dialect spoken in the opposite Yemeni coast particularly the dialect of Gosajar in Hadhramout. (Morris, 2007).

#### **1.1.3.6.1 Soqotri Dialects**

The diversity of the Soqotri language is very high when compared with the number of the speakers and the surface of the island which is (3650 square kilometres ). Simeone-Senelle (2003) surveyed the different Soqotri dialects and finds out that there are six dialects. The dialect of Hadibo, the dialect of the northern coast villages, the dialect of Haghier, rural dialect of the eastern region in Momi, the dialect of the Western Coast in Galansiyah and the southern dialect of Noged.

#### 1-The Urban Dialect of the Capital Hadibo:

The speakers of this dialect have an increasing contact with people whose mother tongue is Arabic such as the Arabs from Hadhramout and the other governorates of Yemen and Arabs from Oman and Saudi Arabia. Arabic in this town is the language of trading and to some extent the language of communication. Villagers from the coastal area and Bedouins from Haghier mountainous area come to Hadibo regularly selling their cattle, aloe, etc. This dialect is not stable due to the continuous contact between the speakers of the different Soqotri dialects and Arabic ( Simeone-Senelle, 2003).

#### 2- The Dialect of the Villages Scattered along the Northern Plain

The inhabitants of these villages are either fishermen as in Holaf or palm date farmers as in Gadhub and Elha. The dialect of Gadhub has many lexical archaisms, and old people there still recite some pieces of traditional and ancient literature (ibid).

#### 3- The Dialect of Haghier:

It is spoken in Haghier, the mountainous area of the island. People there are Bedouins living in villages and caves but they always move from place to another within the same area searching for water and pastures for their camels, cows, goats and sheep. The effect of Arabic upon this dialect is still relatively little due to its isolated geographical position (ibid).

#### 4- The Rural Dialect of the Eastern Region in Momi:

The speakers of this dialect live on date palms and they breed some cattle, and some of them produce lime. The linguistic features of this dialect are still partially known since no detailed studies have been conducted on it (ibid).

#### 5-The Dialect of the Western Coast in Galansiyah:

This dialect is spoken In Galansiyah town and the rural western area. Simeone-Senelle (1997) conducted a research on this dialect focusing only on its phonological system and recommended conducting further researches on its morphology and syntax. The current study describes the main morphological and syntactic features of this dialect. It has been chosen since the influence of Arabic on it is still weak if compared with that Arabic has on the other Soqotri dialects. This may be attributed to its far isolated geographic position. Galansiya is situated in the isolated western part of the island far from Hadibo, the capital and commercial centre where there are a lot of non-Soqotri speakers. This dialect may be regarded as the Soqotri norm because it still possesses some Proto-Semitic linguistic features that have already disappeared from the other dialects of Soqotri such as having the voiceless and voiced uvular fricatives /χ / and /ʁ/ which are no longer used in the other dialects (Simeone-Senelle,1997, 2003).

The dialect spoken in Samha Island is linguistically similar to that of the western coast dialect. The dialect spoken in the island of Abd-al-Kuri used to be different from all the other Soqotri dialects. It was not understood by all the speakers of the other dialects. Unfortunately, it has already been replaced by an Arabic dialect as mentioned earlier (Muller, 1907; Naumkin, 1988).

#### 6- The Southern Dialects of Noged:

This dialect is spoken in the isolated villages of the southern barren plain of the island especially in Noged. Most of its speakers are fishermen. Simeone-Senelle (2003) states that the few linguistic data collected from this dialect indicate that it differs from

the other Soqotri dialects in many features. The following map shows the distribution and geographical positions of Soqotri and the other five MSAL.



Figure 1.4: Map of Modern South Arabian Languages  
Source: Simeone-Senelle (1997, p.381)

## 1.2 The Statement of the Problem

There are 6,000 languages in the world today. Half of them may be lost within this century. From the remaining 3,000 languages only 600 have a good chance of survival. These frightening numbers and facts given by Krauss (1992) indicate clearly that languages are dying at an alarming rate all over the world. Crowley (2007, p.IX) expresses similar views:

A huge number of the world languages remain poorly described, or even completely undescribed. Many may have disappeared altogether by the end of the twenty-first century and only a small number of people are doing anything about this. Even among linguists – who we might expect to be among the most concerned – there are surprisingly many who are doing surprisingly little.

A lot of conferences were held in America and in Europe and a number of publications have appeared to tackle this problem, for example in 1992 linguists from all over the world held an international linguistic congress in Quebec. The permanent committee of that congress put language endangerment on the top of agenda and its General Assembly issued the following resolution cited in Crystal (2000, p.VII ) and in Janse (2003, p.XIV).

As the disappearance of any one language constitutes an irretrievable loss to mankind, it is for UNESCO a task of great urgency to respond to this situation by promoting and if possible sponsoring programs of linguistic organizations for the description in the form of grammar, dictionaries and texts including the recording of oral literatures, of these unstudied or inadequately documented endangered and dying languages.

A year later in 1993 the UNESCO responded when the General Assembly adopted the " Endangered languages Project " and issued a report revealing the organization great concern :

It is certain that the extinction of languages is progressing rapidly in many parts of the world, and it is of the highest importance that the linguistic profession realize that it has to step up descriptive efforts.  
( cited in Crystal ,2000, p.VII).

The year 1995 witnessed the establishment of three organizations that aim at protecting endangered languages; the International Clearing House for Endangered Languages at Tokyo University, the Endangered Languages Fund in the USA and the Foundation for Endangered Languages in the UK. The second newsletter of the Foundation for Endangered Languages gives an estimation of the problem:

There is agreement among linguists who have consider the situation that half of the world's languages are moribund, i.e. not effectively being passed on to the next generation. We and our children, then, are living at the point in human history where within perhaps two generation most languages in the world will die out. ( ibid, p.VIII ).

Newman (2003) refers to this problem and states that the disappearance of a language without being documented is a huge scientific loss because the whole linguistic enterprise depends on language multiplicity and diversity so he urges PhD students from Africa and Asia to write descriptive dissertations on these endangered languages. Dixon (1997, p.144) goes further in his views regarding language endangerment and death problem when he states that:

The most important task in linguistics today, indeed, the only really important task- is to get out in the field and describe languages while this still can be done. Self- admiration in the looking glass of the formalist theory can wait; that will be possible. Linguistic description must be undertaken now.

Soqotri and the other MSAL are really endangered languages. This fact has been referred to and confirmed by a lot of linguists and researchers such as Lonnet (1996), Al-Aidaros (1999), Hofstede (1998a,b), Naumkin (1998), Simeone-Senelle (2003), Al-Fadly (2007), Liebhaber (2007) and Morris (1983, 1985 & 2007). All those linguists and researchers confirmed the endangerment of these languages and the urgent need for describing and documenting them before it becomes too late to do so.

The Soqotri culture as well as the Soqotri language is under a huge influence of the dominant Arabic culture and language which infiltrate in everything in the archipelago of Soqatra, while Soqotri, the indigenous language of that archipelago has actually started its decline journey. The archipelago of Soqatra has been subjected to demographic and political submersion. Large numbers of Yemenis whose mother tongue is Arabic have been brought to Soqatra Island and they have settled there permanently especially in the capital Hadibo. The numbers of these new comers are frighteningly

increasing. With the development of transportation means, the remote and isolated geographical position of Soqotra which protected Soqotri and helped it to survive for centuries ceased to be so. The Yemeni Airliner, Al-Yamaniyh, has two flights a week to the island making it easy for the Arabic-speaking Yemenis to reach this island in less than one hour. In addition to this factor, there are other factors that have caused the exodus of the Arabic-speaking Yemenis to the island such as the beautiful nature of the island and the fact that the island is still virgin. It is easy for any one who comes to it to start any work or investment there either in tourism, animals and bees breeding, medical herbs, etc.

For certain military and commercial reasons, new roads have been established recently to connect the different towns and villages of the island together. It is quite easy now for Arab traders, teachers, etc. to reach any remote Soqotri village and to be in contact with the native speakers. This contact has its effects which are always not in favour of Soqotri. Arabic has become the official language in the island and the medium of instruction in schools. It is taught to the Soqotri students who are not allowed to learn or to use their native language while they are in schools. Most of the teachers in these schools are non-Soqotrans. Arabic has become a must for Soqotrans who want to go to school or to have a job. The Arabic-language Yemeni TV plays a vital role in spreading Arabic at the cost of Soqotri. The impact of that TV is evident on the Soqotri children who spend hours watching and listening to children cartoon films in Arabic especially in the big towns of the island where there is electricity. Nowadays a lot of Soqotrans have satellite dishes that allow them to watch and listen to many Arabic-language satellite channels.

Soqotri has experienced the first stage of what Crystal (2000) called cultural submersion that leads to language endangerment and death. It is the stage in which the aboriginal Soqotrans are put under huge economic and governmental pressure to speak Arabic, the dominant culture language. Soqotri has been under this pressure since the independence of South Yemen in 1967. Soqotri has also entered the second stage of the cultural submission, which witnesses the appearance of bilingualism (ibid). Nowadays, any one who visits the island hardly meets a monolingual Soqotran who never speaks Arabic especially in the main towns. Even in the villages, the young Soqotrans who attend school are fluent in Arabic. The number of monolingual Soqotrans, usually old men and women living in the mountains and remote areas, is decreasing.

Naumkin (1998, p.229) makes it clear that:

Whatever the present degree of the Socotrans' competence in Arabic is, two things are obvious. Firstly, the progress of Arabic in the island is irreversible and gaining momentum. Secondly, Arabic is as fully integrated into the Soqotri- socio-cultural situation.

Similarly, Simeone-Senelle (2003, p 1) states that:

Even though Soqotri people still speak Soqotri to each other, the language is affected by contact with Arabic. Only some of their women and old men in remote settlements, keep the use of their original dialectal variety. Because this process speeded up during the last ten years, Soqotri must be considered as an endangered language. It is a matter of urgency to go on collecting more linguistic data concerning Soqotri in order to save a part of the human patrimony in Southern Arabia.

Soqotri has already entered the third stage of cultural submersion which Crystal (2000) describes as a stage in which the young generation becomes increasingly proficient in their new language and start learning the grammar of their old language wrongly. They start feeling that their first language is no longer relevant to their new



needs. Simeone-Senelle (2003) states that the Soqotri young generation started using the syntax of their mother tongue wrongly, borrowing from Arabic and code switch with it, they cannot even count from one to ten in Soqotri. So the Soqotri language is not effectively passed on to the next generation. It is entering a very serious stage described by Lonnet (1996, p.297) as dangerous:

This language is in danger of dying out unless an effort to think about its future is made by the community, supported by the scientific arguments and understood by the authorities.

The worse thing is that some Soqotri speakers have reached a state in which they start preferring Arabic to their language and start feeling that their language is no longer suitable for their needs and religion.

Some Soqotrans, including a few of the poets whose poetry is more influenced by Arabic, feel that the Soqotri language and culture are embarrassingly primitive and backward. Worse, they believe both to be un-Islamic. They think that it is important for Soqotrans to strive to join the wider, modern Arab and their Muslim community, and that all Soqotrans should be glad to turn back on their dubious past (Morris, 2007,p.11).

So the endangerment of Soqotri is caused by socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors as explained above (Swadesh,1948). This endangerment will undoubtedly lead to the eventual extinction and disappearance of the Soqotri language (Wurm ,2003). In addition to this the MSAL including Soqotri have not been studied in details. So many linguistic features of these languages are still unknown. Lonnet (1996, p.297) states that “Soqotri was discovered about 160 years ago, but a few studies have been devoted to it so far”. Rubin (2004, p.16) states that “ Modern South Arabian Languages including Soqotri are the least well-understood branch of Semitic”. Up to now no detailed synchronic study has ever been made on the Soqotri language. The current study will

be the first PhD thesis on Soqotri. The previous studies are brief diachronic comparative studies (Shlomo, 2002). They have failed to study the morphology and syntax of the Soqotri systematically and comprehensively. They just tackled a few morphological and syntactic aspects briefly ignoring major morphological and syntactic features as it will be shown in the literature review. So the problem in this study is the endangerment of Soqotri and all its dialects including the SDG and the lack of synchronic morphological and syntactic studies on that threatened endangered language.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to describe the major morphological and syntactic features of the SDG. Specifically, the study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- 1-To describe the types and functions of the morpheme in SDG and the way they combine nonconcatenatively to form stems.
- 2- To describe the inflectional and derivational operations that the stem in SDG may undergo .
- 3- To describe the types, structures and functions of the phrase in the SDG.
- 4-To describe the types, structures and functions of the clause in the SDG.
- 5- To describe the types, structures, functions and basic word orders of the sentence in the SDG.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The data collection process of this study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1-What are the types and functions of the morpheme in the SDG and how are they combined nonconcatenatively to form stems?

- 2 -What inflectional and derivational operations the stem in SDG may undergo ?
- 3- What are the types, structures and functions of the phrase in the SDG?
- 4- What are the types, structures and functions of the clause in the SDG?
- 5- What are the types, structures, functions and basic word orders of the sentence in the SDG?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study arises from the fact that it describes one of the six endangered unwritten pre-Islamic languages which still possesses some proto-Semitic linguistic features that have already disappeared from some other Semitic languages. This fact was confirmed by Morris (2007, p.14) who states that:

From a rather more, academic point of view, this group of languages is of great interest. They are important for the study of the Semitic language: phonetically and phonologically, in syntax morphology and lexicon, they have preserved elements which have disappeared from other Semitic languages. Further research will contribute to a better understanding of the relation between the South Semitic languages and the historical development of the Semitic languages.

The previous studies on Soqotri are philological comparative brief studies done by authors some of whom did not ever visit Soqotra or meet a Soqotran and were published in some journals here and there. This study, which is based on authentic data collected from the field, is the first detailed and systematic study on this threatened unwritten language which is considered to be a reservoir of linguistic and cultural heritage of South Arabia.

The significance of this study can be summed up as follows:

1- Soqotri is an endangered unwritten language and perhaps after two generations it may become totally dead. This study will contribute a lot to the efforts aiming at documenting and preserving this language, therefore, it will contribute to the preservation of the world's linguistic and cultural diversity. Every language expresses thoughts and ideas both grammatically and semantically in unique and particular ways, therefore, studying endangered languages is very important for Universal Grammar which aims at understanding all the possibilities of the formal and semantic expression of human thought (Janse, 2003). Describing these languages protect them from oblivion, after the last speakers die, so this description is useful not only for future linguists but also for the descendants of the last speakers to learn their ancestral language (ibid). Every language is considered to be the protector of its speakers' history and culture and its death means the irretrievable loss of a part of our humanity (Campbell, 1994 cited in Janse, 2003). Describing and preserving endangered languages facilitates better understanding for human verbal art and oral literature.

2- The study may also serve as an introductory reference for those who want to write text books for teaching Soqotri. Such text books will be an effective factor in preserving and protecting this endangered language. Up to now no Soqotri text book has been written yet, despite the fact that it is sorely needed by the young Soqotrans.

3- This study is the first synchronic descriptive morphological and syntactic study on Soqotri, thus its findings are hoped to contribute to the existing knowledge of MSAL in general and Soqotri in particular. It is hoped to provide enormous recent authentic data for further research in this area (MSAL).