A MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF THE CLAUSE STRUCTURE OF THE ENDANGERED MEHRI LANGUAGE IN YEMEN

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A/AP	Adjective/ Adjective Phrase
Acc/Dat./Gen./Nom.	Accusative/ Dative/Genitive/Nominative Cases
Adv/AdvP	Adverb/Adverb Phrase
Agr/AgrP	Agreement/Agreement Phrase
Asp/AspP	Aspect/Aspect Phrase
C/CP	Complementizer/ Complementary Phrase (Clause Force)
CFC	Core Functional Categories (C, T & v)
Caus.	Causative
Card/CardP	Cardinal/Cardinal Phrase
CLLD	Clitic-left dislocation
D/DP	Determiner/ Determiner Phrase
Def./Indef.	Definite/ Indefinite
Deg/DegP	Degree/Degree Phrase
dua./p./s.	Dual/Plural/Singular
EF	Edge Feature
EPP	Extended Projection Principle
f./m.	Feminine/Masculine
Foc/FocP	Focus/ Focused Phrase
Fut.	Future
Fin./Inf.	Finite / Infinite
GB	Government and Binding
GC	Grammatical Categories
Infl.	Inflection
Imperf./Perf.	Imperfective/ Perfective
Ind.	Indicative
LF	Logical Form (Semantic Level – narraw syntax)
Mo/MoP	Mood/Mood Phrase
MP	Minimalist Program
MSAL	Modern South Arabian Languages
N/NP	Noun/Noun Phrase
Neg.	Negative
Num/NumP	Numeral/Numeral Phrase

P/PP	Preposition/Prepositional Phrase
P&P	Principles and Parameters
Pass/PassP	Passive/Passive Phrase
PF	Phonological Form (Sounds – Phonetic Level)
Poss/PossP	Possessive/Possessive Phrase
Prog.	Progressive
PRN	Pronoun
Q/QP	Quantifier/ Quantifier Phrase
Subj.	Subjunctive
Spec	Specifier (Subject/left edge element)
SS	Sentence Skeletal
T/TP	Tense/Tensed Phrase
Top/TopP	Topic/Topicalized Phrase
Tr.	Translation
TS	Thematic Structur
V/VP	Verb/Verb Phrase
v/ v*P	Light v / v*P phase

LIST OF SYMBOLES

1	First person
2	Second person
3	Third person
(1), (2), etc.	Numeric Phrase and clause boundary used in Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6.
[*u*f, Case, etc.]	Feature labels boundary
(5.2a)	Computational analysis boundery of the Figures used in Chapter 5
(A) to (MM)	Alphabetical label boundary of Principlas and Assumptions used in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.
<θ.θ>	Theta Role <agent. Theme>
√	Root in Semitic tradition
	Agree (abstractly drawn)
	Move
asterisk (*)	*ill*-formed structure
~~strikethrough~~	Copy and delete operation in geometric trees (instead of trace (***t***) in GB)
*u*F	Uninterpretable (Unvalued) Feature
*u*Case	Unvalued Case: nominative, accusative and genitive
Φ-Feature [**Φ-F]**	Agreement/Phi-Features (number, gender and person)
Ø/ Pro	Null Feature
X	Terminal head (N, V, A, P, T, & etc.)
X'/X''	X-bar/X-double bar (Intermediate Projection)
±EF	Strong or weak (occurrence or non-occurrence) features

ANALISIS MORFOSINTAKSIS STRUKTUR KLAUSA BAHASA MEHRI YANG TERANCAM DI YAMAN

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji secara sinkronik ciri-ciri morfologi dan sintaks bahasa Mehri yang ditutur oleh orang Mehri yang asalnya menetap di wilayah Al-Mahrah di bahagian timur Yaman. Ia menjurus kepada pelbagai kawasan di *Šḥān* yang tidak dipengaruhi oleh Bahasa Arab. Amnya, Mehri adalah milik Bahasa Arab Selatan Moden [atau dipanggil MSAL]. Kumpulan ni berasal dari keluarga Semitik yang dikaitkan dengan satu lagi kumpulan lebih besar dipanggil keluarga Afro-Asiatik. Walaupun Mehri dianggap sebagai satu bahasa yang terancam berikutan pengaruh Bahasa Arab, ia belum lagi dikaji dan didokumentasikan dengan baik. Kajian ini mencadangkan satu analisis Minimal dengan objektif untuk mengenalpasti ciri-ciri morfosintastis leksikon Mehri, untuk menjelaskan lapisan F-kerja VP dan jenis-jenis Kata Kerja, dan menjelaskan CP pelengkap yang mendominasi paparan lebih rendah. Oleh kerana Universal Grammar (UG) mengubah aspek linguistik dari sains tingkahlaku kepada sains kognitif dan menjadikan linguistik satu aspek penting pengkajian kognisi, kajian ini menggunakan Program Minimal (MP) untuk menghuraikan kompetensi linguistik penutur-penutur natif Mehri. Rekabentuk lapangan kualitatif etnografi digunakan dalam kajian ini dimana 20 orang penutur natif dipilih sebagai peserta. Pelbagai instrumen pengumpulan data digunakan seperti pemerolehan, pemantauan peserta dan teks lisan. Proses pengumpulan data adalah berdasarkan Bouquiaux dan Thomas (1992) dan Bowern (2008). Kajian menunjukkan bahawa kategori substantif dalam Mehri diklasifikasikan

kepada tiga jenis morfem: morfem templat, morfem afiksasi dan morfem bukan-templat. Walaupun kategori preposisi tiada ciri yang boleh diinterpretasi, dan berfungsi sebagai pemberi kasus genitive/oblik ke atas komplemen Kata Nama, kategori lain seperti N, V dan A adalah sumber ciri-ciri yang boleh diinterpretasi dan tidak boleh diinterpretasi, ia kaya morfologi lengkap dengan ciri-ciri persetujuan (agreement), aspek, masa (tense) dan mood. Sebaliknya, kategori kefungsian hanyalah morfem-morfem bukan-templat yang terdiri dari ciri-ciri tidak ada nilai. Di samping itu, kata kerja bukan akusatif/ergatif tidak boleh membentuk fasa v*P kerana subjek luarannya tidak logik dimana ia bergerak dari kedudukan komplemen kata kerja akusatif, sementara kata kerja-kata kerja lain memperolehi fasa v*P kerana ia memilih satu pelaku logikal atau subjek agen. Tambahan pula, kajian menjurus kepada kategori C fasa CP dan ia menjadi sumber semua pengkajian. Ia mengambil ciri-ciri T, Top dan Foc untuk mendapatkan struktur sintaktik yang baru. Sebagai contoh, susunan VSO dibentuk kerana kategori T tidak ada ciri-ciri pangkal yang diwarisi dari C, sementara susunan SVO dibentuk kerana T mewarisi ciri pangkal dari C yang membolehkannya menarik kata khas (specifier) dari v*P kepada periferi kiri TP, dan satu fenomena yang hampir sama juga diaplikasi kepada pemerolehan ekspresi-wh Mehri dan struktur dislokasinya.

A MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF THE CLAUSE STRUCTURE OF THE ENDANGERED MEHRI LANGUAGE IN YEMEN

ABSTRACT

This study investigates synchronically the morphological and syntactic features of the Mehri language that is spoken by Mehri people who originally live in Al-Mahrah governorate at the eastern part of Yemen. It focuses on the variety of *Šḥān* territory as the one which is not influenced by Arabic. Generally, Mehri belongs to the Modern South Arabian Languages [henceforth, MSAL]. This group descends from Semitic family that itself is affiliated to a wider group called Afro-Asiatic family. Though Mehri is considered to be an endangered language due to the influence of Arabic, it has yet been studied or documented properly. This study proposes a Minimalist analysis with the objectives to determine the morphosyntactic features of the Mehri lexicon, to explain the VP shell structures and the types of Mehri verbs, and to examine the complementary CPs which dominates lower projections. Since the Universal Grammar (UG) changes linguistics from behavioural to cognitive science making linguistics an integral part of the study of cognition, this study employs Minimalist Program (MP) in order to describe the linguistic competence of the Mehri native speakers. The ethnographic qualitative field design is adopted for the study in which 20 native speakers are selected as participants. Various data collection instruments are used such as elicitation, participant observation and oral texts. The process of data collection is based on Bouquiaux and Thomas (1992) and Bowern (2008). The study reveals that the substantive categories in Mehri are classified into three morpheme types: templatic morphemes, affixational

morphemes and non-templatic morphemes. While preposition category lacks interpretable features and acts as the genitive/oblique case assigners on nominal complements, the rest categories such as N, V and A are the source of interpretable and uninterpretable features, they are morphologically rich which are drawn with agreement, aspectual, tense and mood features. On the contrary, the functional categories are only non-templatic morphemes which comprise unvalued features. Besides these, the unaccusative/ergative verbs are incapable to form v*P phase because their external subject is illogical that overtly moves from the complement position of the accusative verbs, while the rest verbs derive v*P phase because they select logical experiencer or agent subject. Furthermore, the study investigates that the C category of the CP phase is the source of all probes. It inherits features to T, Top and Foc in order to derive new syntactic structures. For example, the VSO order is formed because T category lacks an edge features inherited from C, whereas the SVO order is formed because T inherits edge feature from C that enables it to attract the specifier from v*P to the left periphery of TP. A similar phenomenon is also applied to the derivation of Mehri wh-expressions and dislocation constructions. .

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter provides the background information to the current thesis. It introduces the topic of the study and presents information about the genetic affiliation of Mehri as well as its counterparts in Modern South Arabic Languages (henceforth MSAL). This chapter provides an overview of Mehri, its location, people and their life. Moreover, it sets out the problem statement, the objectives, the research questions, the significance of conducting this research and its limitations. At the end of this chapter, the researcher defines the key terms of the current research and summarises the chapter.

1.2 Background of the Study

As it is well known, minority languages are currently endangered. The term endangerment refers to "the type of rapid linguistic evolution or "decay" (such as loss of inflection, incorporation of loan words)" (Krauss, 2007, p. 1). Increasingly, endangered language societies are strongly fighting for language documentation and linguistic justice. According to Oberly et al. (2015), the indigenous community-member activism for linguistic sovereignly can be noticed in the growth of language revitalization efforts by the Maori (King, 2001), Hawaiian (Warner, 2001) and Blackfeet (Kipp, 2009).

As for Mehri, the native speakers eagerly require researchers to document and analyze the linguistic features of their language. They have a rich tradition of oral folklore. This linguistic heritage is increasingly under threat from the dominant national language, Arabic, and from increased urbanisation and contact with Arabic speakers.

Therefore, a poor documentation of Mehri language becomes the real problem. Newman (2003) attributed the problem of language disappearance to the poor documentation of its properties. He considered this as the huge scientific loss of languages, because he assumed that the whole linguistic enterprise mostly depends on the multiplicity and diversity of the specific contributions. Harrison (2007) proposed that if the scholars and the linguists do not plan well to document the properties of the oral languages, the unwritten languages indeed may become endangered:

> "For many endangered languages that have never been put down in writing, entire domains of knowledge are likely to be lost when the language ceases to be spoken. If you speak an unwritten language, one that your children or grandchildren have abandoned in favor of another tongue, you may indeed take your unsticky genius with you to the grave", (Harrison, 2007, p. 23).).

Considering the claim that says world languages are in crisis, Krauss (2007) and Simons and Lewis (2013) estimated that only 10% of languages are considered safe, up to 50% may already be moribund, while the rest are in danger. They presented actual phenomena from Australia, Canada, and United States where more than 75% of those countries' languages are now extinct or moribund. On this basis, the Mehri may not be safe with regard to several factors, which are discussed in this section. A similar view is also expressed by Crowley (2007):

> "A huge number of the world languages remain poorly described, or 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", (Crowley, 2007, p. IX).

In 1992, the International Linguistic Congress in Quebec has issued the following statement, as cited in Crystal (2000):

> "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", (Crystal, 2000, p. vii).

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:

> "Although its exact scope is not known, 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 realizes that it has to step up descriptive efforts". (cited in Crystal, 2000, p. VII)

The year 1995 witnessed the establishment of three organizations which aim to protect 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 considered 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).

Phillipson (2008) assumed the "linguistic imperialism". It is the imposition of one's cultural, economic, and political factors which triggers to eradicate the use of another's language. Given this, Mehri language is dramatically threatened by the powerful influence of the dominant globalization and the convergence with other languages. In order to explore further on the endangerment of Mehri, the immediate question: 'What causes a language to die?' must be examined. It is observed that the threat of the natural ecology around humans is similar to the threat of people's cultural and linguistic diversity. There are many threats leading to the loss of minority heritage in

Mehri society. These threats are Physical threat, Cultural threat, and Political threat.

Physical threat refers to the decline of language speakers. Hannan (2007, p. 148) stated that “languages die, not from the loss of rules but from the loss of speakers”. Likewise, Crawford (1995) attributed the endangerment of languages to the perishing of speakers through disease or genocide. Apart from these studies, the population of Mehri seems slightly enough to maintain their language. They are about 100,000 speakers. As opposed to this, few of them are monolingual speakers, (i.e., the elder members), while recent generations are bilingual. They lack many linguistic rules and shift their language to the Arabic or other varieties. This fact is attested by Simeone-Senelle (2011, 2013) who showed that Mehri is endangered because many elder generations complain about the indifference of their younger generations to their mother tongues. Actually, these young generations ignore much about the classic vocabularies as well as other oral traditions of their original language.

In terms of the cultural threat, it refers to this fact; the situations of Mehri language is not dying because of the loss of its speakers or because of children are not fluently speaking in their mother tongue. Rather, the language itself has syntactically and lexically changed. Most of the lexical items in several traditional domains are no longer interpreted by the youngest speakers. There are thousands of linguistic terms which are used in the old heritage becoming extinct today, except in the memories of the elder speakers. These terms are represented by terminology of animals, plants as well as personal names. The younger Mehri speakers today suffer from the lack of the cultural linguistic knowledge in their language. In a similar vein, Headland (2003) was right in saying that the way of discovering the Agta language in the Philippines is to know

further about its folk science and natural spiritual life. He thus considered that each language is the real evidence of the speakers' culture. Accordingly, the researcher of this study is motivated to write this thesis in order to revitalize the endangered folk literature (i.e., myths, legends, riddles, and parables) and folk poetry (chants or epics), which are rarely used in the field of Mehri domain. All such cultural themes have replaced in the community context of Mehri. This problem crucially demoralizes the speakers to enrich the vitality of their language. Most importantly, this oral heritage has been a little attention on linguistic studies in the literature. In addition, the existing works are purely descriptive rather than theoretical contributions.

The political threat is noticeably seen by the poor interface between the language policy and language planning in the linguistic domains. Considering the study of Romaine (2007), the Native American Languages Act (NALA) is issued by Congress in 1990. This Act forces the government of the United States to work with native speakers to ensure the survival of the unique cultures and languages in the country. The government has a great responsibility of protecting and promoting the rights of using minority linguistic and cultural heritage. On the contrary, the problem is distinctly observed by some obstacles which prevent the evolution of minority languages in Yemen. Mehri and other minority languages are not issued in the state constitution of the country as an endangered heritage. The language does not have a formal script, and are threatened by the majority language, Arabic. It is banned from use in government agendas such as education, media, and in any other cultural festivals. The ministry of culture and the educational institutes do not promote any projects, workshops or programs, which encourage writers to document the linguistic properties of the minority

languages. Elayah (2015) explored that the political situation in Yemen have a great effect on the quality of education in Yemeni universities. His study found the extent the political parties and regional discrimination have negatively influenced the educational processes in Yemen. Definitely, Yemen, nowadays, witnessed the worst time in its history. Many challenges currently come together such as the prolonged power cuts, the shortages, lack of security, poverty, etc. All these problems are the result of the political conflicts between Yemeni armed constituents, and between the foreign interventions occurred in Yemen. These political conflicts have greatly influenced Yemeni universities, where all rights of academic studies regularly have stopped working. The educational institutions now in Yemen are struggling to produce future plans, which financially cannot be able to arrange workshops, programs, and seminars in applied linguistics or any other field.

In order to maintain endangered languages such as Mehri, fieldwork studies are vital. Fieldwork plays a significant role to revitalize, document and analyze the properties of these languages. Moreover, these studies need a great deal of effort and an inclusive knowledge to establish them. In view of this, the fieldworker must be patient. He or she should be socialized with the examined community, having adequate information in his or her particular field. Accordingly, Dixon (2007, p. 13) noted that the term “analysis” in the discipline of fieldwork studies depends on the researcher’s tendency, that is, whether the researcher is a formal or structural scholar. In the case of a formal scholar, Dixon suggested that the fieldworker must apply reasonable theories which are closely related to the same area of interest. For example, the researcher should use formal syntax as part of generative linguistics. In this sense, he must use particular

principles and specific parameters to analyze and describe the objectives. Formally, this study attempts to focus on the generative grammar. It aims at identifying the categories and formal features synchronically, analyzing the VP shell structures and discovering the syntactic word order of Mehri language. Mehri is an old oral language spoken in a Yemeni governorate called Mahrah, which is situated in the easternmost of Yemen and in the southern Arabian Peninsula. (cf. subsection 1.2.2 below). This governorate was the area of the former Mahrah Sultanate – its capital was *Qāśan*, which is now replaced by *Ġāyṣat***.** Currently, Mehri is an under-documented language that has become endangered because the native speakers are heavily influenced by a dominant Arabic language (Almakrami, 2015; Simeone-Senelle, 2013).

1.2.1 The Genetic Affiliation of Mehri

Mehri belongs to a language group called Modern South Arabian Languages. In addition to Mehri, this group includes Soqoṭri, Šeḥri (Jibbali), Baṭḥari, Ḥarsusi and Hobyot. The MSAL is affiliated to a larger language family called Semitic. The Semitic itself is a branch of the wider Afro-Asiatic family (Hamito-Semitic (Lipiński, 2001)), which includes the following languages: Ancient Egyptian, Berber, Chadic, Coptic, Cushitic, Omotic and Semitic, as illustrated in Figure 1.1:

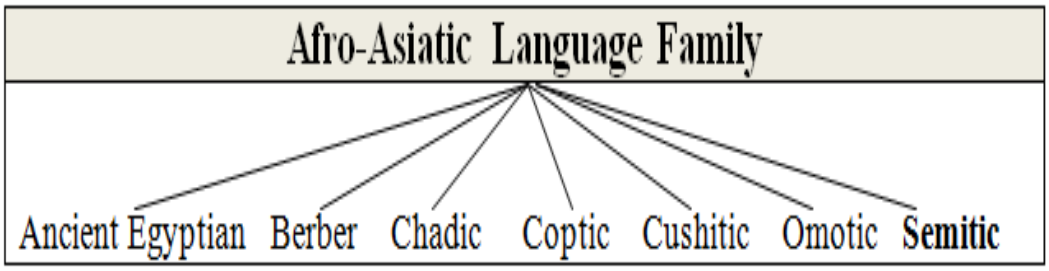

Figure 1.1: Afro-Asiatic Semitic Family

1.2.1(a) Semitic Languages

In relation to Figure 1.1 above, the Semitic group forms a separate family within the Afro-Asiatic languages. Semitic comprises one of the most studied languages in the world. It is the source of the major religious traditions (i.e., Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and literary works (e.g., the Akkadian poems: the epic of Gilgamesh) (Kitchen, Ehret, Assefa, & Mulligan, 2009). According to Versteegh (2014), Semitic branch is classified into East Semitic and West Semitic. He assumed that East Semitic is represented by Akkadian, which is also called Assyrian Babylonian or Assyro-Babylonian. The ancient history of Akkadian started from the 3rd millennium to the closing centuries BC (cf. George, 2007). This language is subdivided into Old Akkadian (2500 - 2000 BC), Middle Babylonian (1500-1000 BC), Neo-Babylonian (1000-500 BC) and Late Babylonian (500 BC to AD). The Akkadian language became the prominent language among the non-Semitic Sumerians. It was the language of Akkadian civilisation that was established by the king Sargon, who made extensive use of written Akkadian (ibid).

The West Semitic languages are classified into North-West Semitic and South-West Semitic (Versteegh, 2014). The North-West Semitic includes Canaanite and Aramaic. Canaanite (1200-200 BC) is a collective term for Hebrew, Phoenician and few other languages. Aramaic, on the other hand, is divided into Old Aramaic (1st millennium BC) and the Recent Aramaic. While the Old Aramaic was spoken in Syria and became the Lingua Franca in the Babylonian empire, the Recent Aramaic was divided into two; Western and Eastern Aramaic. The Western Aramaic (1st to the fifth century AD) was the language of Palestine whereas the Eastern Aramaic (3rd to the eighth century AD) was the spoken language of Syrian Christians (ibid).

While Versteegh (2014) classified South-West Semitic into Arabic, South Arabian and Ethiopian, Watson (2007, p. 1) excluded Arabic and positioned it within the "Central Semitic". Faber (2013) also assumed that South-West Semitic includes North Arabic, South Arabic and Ethiopic. The North Arabic is the prominent member of Semitic. It is selected to be the language of the holy Quran. North Arabic becomes the vehicle of one of the greatest literature of all the Orient. Besides, South Arabic includes the Old South Arabian languages (OSAL) and MSAL (see also Watson, 2007). The OSA languages were the spoken language of Yemen. They are Minaean, Sabean, Qatabanian and Hadramitic languages. These languages ranged from the 1st millennium BC to the 6th century AD (Stein, 2013). These languages are now dead. The MSALs are Mehri, Soqoṭri, Šeḥri (Jibbali), Baṭḥari, Ḥarsusi and Hobyot. All these languages are spoken in Yemen and Oman (Watson, 2012). The Ethiopic group that includes Amharic, Ge'ez, Gafat, and Argobba represents the last Semitic immigration at the end of the 1st millennium BC by crossing the Red Sea and inhabiting some countries like Eritrea and Ethiopia (Crass & Meyer, 2011). This division is shown in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Semitic Language Family (Versteegh, 2014)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="8">Proto-Semitic Language</th></tr>
<tr><th>East Semitic</th><th colspan="7">West Semitic</th></tr>
<tr><td>Akkadian</td><th colspan="3">North-West Semitic</th><th colspan="3">South-West Semitic</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Old Akkadian
Old Babylonian
Middle Babylonian
Neo-Babylonian
Late Babylonian</td><td>Canaanite</td><td colspan="3">Aramaic</td><td>North Arabic</td><td>South Arabic</td><td>Ethiopic</td></tr>
<tr><td>Old Canaanite
Phoenician
Moabite
Hebrew</td><td>Old A.
Spoken in Syria</td><td>Recent A.
Western
Spoken in Palestine</td><td>Recent A.
Eastern
Spoken in Syrian Christians</td><td>Arabic</td><td>1- OSAL
Minaean
Sabean
Qatabanian
Hadramitic
2- MSAL
Mehri
Soqoṭri
Šeḥri (Jibbali)
Baṭḥari
Ḥarsusi
Hobyot</td><td>Amharic
Ge'ez
Gafat
Argobba</td></tr>
</table>

1.2.1(b) The Proto-Semitic Features in Mehri

Although there is a strong debate about the history and origin of Mehri language, Mehri displays a bundle of *Proto*-Semitic features and characteristics. These features should be considered as clues to relate Mehri with other counterparts in Semitic, particularly the extinct Semitic (Akkadian, Aramaic and Old Arabic). The Semitic features also provide a summary of historical linguistics in relation with other languages in a Semitic family. This subsection, therefore, shows some *Proto*-Semitic features attested in Mehri based on previous literature, as presented in what follows.

In Semitic, the morpheme-based lexicon is a string of radical roots, as it is noted in Hebrew (Shimron, 2003) and Arabic (Al-Sughaiyer & Al-Kharashi, 2004). These roots are semantically abstract and are supported by vocalic sounds and patterns to give grammatical information. In Mehri, word formation is derived from radical consonants to form verbs, nouns and adjectives. Mehri is an agglutinative language wherein affixes play a significant role to determine semantic and grammatical themes to the lexical item. Weninger (2011) revealed various *Proto*-features in Semitic languages, such as weak verbal root, geminate root, N-stem, T-stem, internal passive, definite articles and interrogatives, among many. All these features exist in Mehri and become the focal topics of the present thesis. Kogan (2011), on the other hand, pointed out that the frequent *Proto*-consonants used in Semitic are the emphatic [ṭ, ṣ, ż, ṣ, and ḳ], and literal [ṡ and ṣ] sounds. Lipiński (2001) dated back the use of feminine marker *-ta* and the literal sounds [ṡ and ṣ] to the pre-Islamic Arabic era (2nd century BC to 3rd century AD), which are out of use now in the current Arabic. All mentioned *Proto*-Semitic features

and many others are active in Mehri. They are fairly preserved in daily conversations of this language.

The accessibility to the *Proto*-Semitic features in Mehri made Kitchen et al. (2009) to postulate a hypothesis that the MSALs in general and particularly Mehri is a deep branch of Semitic and that ‘‘the emergence of MSAL lineage between 3300 and 6250 YBP may reflect an Early Age Bronze expansion of Semitic from the Levant southward to the Arabian desert’’. Likewise, Rubin (2008b, 2010) assumed that due to the *Proto*-Semitic features which are attested in Akkadian and preserved in MSAL, the latter should be considered a single branch of the West Semitic, as seen in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2: The Subgrouping of the Semitic Language Family (Rubin, 2008b)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="8">Proto-Semitic</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">East Semitic</th><th colspan="6">West Semitic</th></tr>
<tr><td>Eblaite</td><td>Akkadian</td><th>MSAL</th><th>Ethiopian</th><th colspan="3">Central Semitic</th></tr>
<tr><td>Nil</td><td>Babylonian
Assyrian</td><td>Mehri
Soqoṭri
Šeḥri (Jibbali)
Baṭḥari
Ḥarsusi
Hobyot</td><td>Amharic
Ge‘ez
Gafat
Argobba</td><td>North Arabic
Arabic
Maltese</td><td>OSAL
Minaean
Sabean
Qatabanian
Hadramitic</td><td>Northwest Semitic
Canaanite
Hebrew
Phoenician
Moabite
Aramaic
Ugaritic
Sama’alian
Deir ‘Alla</td></tr>
</table>

1.2.2 Overview of Mehri: Place, People and Life

Mehri is spoken within the far eastern governorate of al-Mahrah. This language is the most widespread language in MSAL group. It is the language of all tribes and families that inhabit Mahrah governorate, south-west of Yemen, whose population is estimated to be 100,000 based on the latest estimation in 2009 conducted by the General Statistic Organization in Al-Mahrah Governorate (Suhail et al., 2010). This recent estimation is

illustrated in Table 1.3 below that shows the overall numbers of Mehri districts, villages, houses, families and type of residents in Yemen, particularly in the Mahrah governorate.

Table 1.3: Statistical Estimation of Mahrah Governorate based on Suhail et al. (2010, p. 14)

NO.	Districts	Villages	Houses	Families	Residents			Distance by Sq km.
					Male	Female	Total	
1	***Ġayṣat***	45	3648	3833	18872	14692	33564	7159
2	***Ḥāwf***	71	932	925	3411	2887	6298	1531
3	***Ḳāśan***	60	1737	2079	7706	6310	14016	3485
4	***Ṣayḥāwt***	62	1753	1653	7538	6853	14391	2667
5	***Masīlat***	87	1642	1585	6306	6443	12749	6806
6	***Ḥaṣwayn***	33	1399	2085	7402	6233	13635	1843
7	***Šḥān***	29	550	450	2304	1558	3862	8778
8	***Ḥāt***	41	435	432	1870	1546	3416	19303
9	***Mnār***	102	766	783	3531	3072	6604	7279
Total	**9**	530	12862	13933	**58940**	**49594**	**108534**	58851

Further Information: Yemen has been launched the general census of population and houses counting on 2004. This Census shows that Yemen's population is 19,685,161 (Central-Statistical-Organization, 2004). Among this, Mahrah considers as the smallest governorate of **0.5%** populations.

Mehri language is also spoken by Mehri tribes (around 50000 speakers) in the Nagd (i.e., north) of Ḍofār in Oman (Simeone-Senelle, 2013). Almakrami (2015) reported that Mehri language is spoken by 30 thousand of Mehri people who live in the southern region of Saudi Arabia such as Alxarxīr and Šarōrah. In addition to this, there are many Mehri families who migrate to different countries. They got appropriate jobs to work in countries like Gulf Arabian States and the East of Africa (Tanzania and Kenya). Observe Figure 1.2 that shows the distribution of Mehri language in three countries, Yemen, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Figure 1.2**:** Map of MSAL Group Adopted
from Simeone-Senelle (2011)

Specifically, Mehri speakers live on the coast between the border of Oman and the eastern bank of Masīlah Valley near Ḥaḍramōt, the Yemeni governorate neighbouring al-Mahrah. They are also distributed in the North-West of Yemen, as far as *Ṯamōd*, on the border of the Empty Quarter. In these areas, some Mehri people cultivate palm trees and engage in other agricultural activities. The majority of Mehri speakers today live in small villages by the coast and in the towns around al-Ghaydhah. Some remain semi-nomadic. Mehri community members have traditionally been involved in agriculture, fishing and livestock husbandry. The speakers of this language have a rich tradition of folklore. This linguistic heritage is increasingly under threat from the dominant national language, Arabic. Many people in Mehri community prefer Arabic proverbs and some take pride in no longer having command of their mother tongue. The language is also under threat from increasingly sedentarisation and urbanisation of the population.

1.3 Problem Statement

The research problem is represented by the following three factors. Firstly, due to the impact of urbanization, the spread of global communications, migration, government policies, speaker's negative evaluations of their language, and the convergence with other languages and cultures, the Mehri language is threatened by extinction. Secondly, the previous studies in Semitic family have always been associated with philology rather than linguistics, decipherment of the dead languages rather than the study of indigenous languages (cf. Stein, 2013), and with the diachronic comparative linguistics rather than the synchronic analysis of the syntactic features of the languages (cf. Henry, 2013). Thirdly, there has been little work in Mehri. This work ignores syntax and does not have a unified data. Alfadly (2007), for instance, assumed that Mehri is a synthetic language without presenting the impact of using features to build up syntax. He and other scholars such as Alrowsa (2014) and Almakrami (2015) were banned to collect unified data in Mehri. Based on the social restriction that women in Mehri society are not allowed to meet or tab-record their voice to the strangers, these researchers had restricted their data. There data collections are very basic, which do not reflect traditions or social life of Mehri speakers.

A series studies on Mehri such as Rubin (2010) and Watson (2012) used a descriptive analysis. They focused on the comparative description between Mehri dialects, i.e., Mehri of Oman and Mehri of Yemen. They provided sketch analysis to the language components, phonology, lexicon, and syntax. In terms of syntactic notions, they only focused on the linear structure of the sentence. In their studies, verbs are strictly categorized into intransitive and transitive types, while the sub-type verbs, i.e., ergative, unergative, unaccusative, ditransitive and applicative verbs, are ignored. These

studies are only concentrated on the lexical categories whereas the abstract functional categories such as T, light v and C, are excluded from their descriptive analysis.

Similar to Rubin (2008a, 2010), Alrowsa (2014) used a linear analysis on the discussion of interrogative clause in Mehri. He argued that interrogative clause in Mehri is an optional construction, either to be fronting wh-questions or in-situ wh-questions. On the other hand, the do-version and auxiliary questions are not included in Alrowsa's study. His study lacks to present a unified analysis for the informational clauses in Mehri, i.e., declarative, interrogative, and imperative clause. It does not provide reasonable assumptions about the derivation of wh-interrogative clause.

Rubin (2007) and Almakrami (2015) asserted that Mehri has morphosyntactic features such as agreement features and tense features. There is a limitation in their study, which is only investigated the processes of word-formation in Mehri, i.e., nouns and verbs. In terms of nouns, all previous studies emphasize that Mehri nouns can be inflected for gender and number. In a similar way, verbs in Mehri are very complex items. These verbs are drawn with some grammatical features, i.e., agreement and temporal features. The question that arises is if substantive Mehri categories are composed of different grammatical features, how much more serious are these grammatical features for building up syntax in a language? Their answer to this question is not very clear. That is because the previous studies are dealt with Mehri categories, separately. They do not focus on the correlation between the incomplete functional categories, i.e., T and light v, and substantive categories which contain intrinsic features.

Summing it up, it can be claimed that the moribund languages in Semitic family, as for Mehri, do not receive more attention. They have been ignored from many theoretical studies in syntax. The application of the Chomsky's (1995) Minimalist

Program is not employed to investigate the cognitive competence of Mehri, while all previous studies are used to focus on the lexical and structural performance of the language. They have only established a linear analysis rather than the bottom-up analysis, i.e., architecture, of the informational clauses in a language.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the major syntactic and morphological themes of Mehri, specifically by employing the Minimalist Program as expounded in the light of the current development of generative linguistics. This thesis attempts to achieve the following objectives:

(1) To determine the morphosyntactic properties of the Mehri categories.

(2) To explicate the relations, processes, and constituencies of the VP shell.

(3) To examine the left periphery and movement of the clause structure in Mehri.

1.5 Research Questions

The data collection process of this thesis was guided by three research questions. In elaboration, each question is given an extensive discussion in a single chapter:

(1) What are the morphosyntactic features of the categories in Mehri?

(2) What are the syntactic relations, processes, and constituencies of VP in Mehri?

(3) How are the left periphery and movement constructed in Mehri?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research arises from the assumption that it describes the unwritten language which still preserves the majority of pre-Islamic linguistic features that have disappeared from many Semitic languages. This assumption was confirmed by Morris (2007) who stated:

> "From a rather, academic point of view, this group of languages (i.e., MSAL; Mehri and other counterparts) 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 earliest Semitic languages" (2007: online database).

In the pursuit of academic wisdom, this study is done for the advancement and contribution to the study of Semitic linguistics. Particularly, this analysis of Mehri syntax provides an overview of the main syntactic constructions in Mehri that have been featured in the recent linguistic debates, Chomsky's generative-grammar, which was recently represented by Minimalist perspectives. Since Mehri is poorly studied, this thesis serves as one of the references for this under-documented language. It disseminates information to scholars who are interested in Mehri and its counterparts within the MSAL group. With the analysis of typical constructions of clauses in Mehri, the predictable findings of this study are hoped to provide adequate knowledge about this oppressed language. It is also considered as the fundamental block for presenting many linguistic contributions in the same minority language, which is still spoken in Arab countries. In brief, the significance of this syntactic research can be reported as follows:

- This research is the original discovery of the clausal structures of Mehri that has been lacking or noting in previous studies.
- The provision of data collection is natural and comprehensive, which have been collected during the fieldwork in the natural setting of 'Northern of the Mahrah'. With regard to the social restriction, many pervious researchers are not allowed

to use female samples in Mehri community. However, the native speaker researcher has an admission to speak freely with females and males, using both as the purposeful samples for the study.

- Studying Mehri provides fruitful and important information, which enrich Yemeni, Arabic, and Semitic study of historical linguistics (i.e., diachronic).
- The present work of Mehri is the first contribution in syntax that establishes the latest version of Chomsky's syntactic theories (the Minimalist Program: *phase-based* and *feature-inheritance* approaches). In addition to few theses in Arabic syntax such as 'Arabic Noun Phrases' (see Kremers, 2003), 'formal features' (see Soltan, 2007), 'case, agreement and movement in Arabic' (see Musabhien, 2009) and '*wh*-movements in Egyptian Arabic' (see Gad, 2011), the current thesis provides evidence and empirical support for the universality of Chomsky's Minimalist assumptions. It shows the flexibility of the target oral language in adopting any syntactic theories.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The current thesis mainly focuses on the pastoral variety in Mehri language. It is the variety of *Šḥān* territory in which the people are not influenced by outside dialects – Arabic dialects and MSAL dialects. The data collection of this study would be taken from both male and female participants. To do this, the researcher had to break up social restriction faced by many non-native researchers to adopt only men informants for their studies (cf. Alfadly, 2007; Alrowsa, 2014). Employing Chomsky's (1995, 2000, 2008) views in MP, the current study is geared towards the morphosyntactic analysis of the nature of Mehri language. It goes by three stages: the analysis of Mehri categories, the

analysis of VP structures and the typical types of Mehri verbs, and the analysis of structures of clausal constructions.

Dealing with the Mehri categories, this thesis assumes that the categories in Mehri are classified into substantive and functional categories. These categories are wired with a mental state of human mind in which the lexical and functional item is drawn with formal features either interpretable or uninterpretable features. For the stage of VP structures, this study is limited to analyze the verb types in Mehri, namely, accusatives, unergatives, unaccusatives/ergatives, ditransitives and applicatives. By considering this aspect, it is indispensable to analyze and establish the structural relations governing the constituents in the sentential structure. Finally, the current thesis shows the default and the alternative word orders of clausal structures in Mehri. Particularly, this study establishes the analysis of movement and left peripheries in a language, aiming to focus on declarative, interrogative clauses as well as dislocated constructions.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

This section gives the definitions and explanations of some terms used in this thesis.

- **Afro-Asiatic language:**

The Afro-Asiatic language, formally known as Hamito-Semitic, is a family of genetically related languages, which are used in Africa and composed of seven main branches: Ancient Egyptian, Berber, Chadic, Coptic, Cushitic, Omotic and Semitic. Semitic group is the essential language family of Northern Africa and Southern Asia and includes languages like Arabic, Amharic, Akkadian, etc. (Lipiński, 2001; Sands, 2009).

- **Proto-Semitic Features:**

This term refers to the larger layer of the common characteristics (i.e., old original Semitic features) in phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon, which are existed in Semitic languages (Lipiński, 2001). The majority of these features are maintained in Mehri such as the glottal sounds, broken plurals, consonantal roots and many others (cf. subsection 1.2.1(a) above).

- **Generative Grammar:**

It is a linguistic theory that assumes grammar to be as a set of rules which are employed to generate a combination of lexical items forming a meaningful syntactic structure. The term is initially originated by Chomsky that starts with transformational grammar and ends with recent views of Minimalist Program.

- **Minimalist Program (MP)**

It is a developed version of Principle and Parameter approach. The major publications of Chomsky that dealt with MP are the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995), the Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework (Chomsky, 2000), the Derivation by Phase (Chomsky, 2001), the Beyond Explanatory Adequacy (Chomsky, 2004) and On Phases (Chomsky, 2008). The MP assumes the ideas of two principles, the economy of derivation and the economy of representation. The former states that the movement is only established to match the intrinsic (i.e., interpretable) features with uninterpretable features, whereas the latter seeks to form an optimal design of the syntactic structure of the given sentence (Radford, 2009b).

- **Labelled Tree Diagram:**

It is a constituency-based parse tree which is used to draw the hierarchical structure of a syntactic projection. In this study, the Tree Drawing Software is used to represent the phrasal and clausal structures in Mehri.

- **Features in Minimalist Syntax:**

Features are the properties which are embedded within substantive or functional categories. Chomsky (1995) distinguished between semantic features, phonological features and formal features of the lexical item. He assumed that the formal features are accessible in the course of computation wherein these features are interpretable such as nominal and plural features of a noun while others are uninterpretable features such as verbal (-V) and case features. The uninterpretable features require a valuation and feature checking by matching with interpretable features in a closest element. Besides, Chomsky (2000) assumed that the functional categories such as C, T and v possess uninterpretable ϕ-features (gender, number and person); therefore, they probe down searching for a nominal category that contains interpretable corresponding features.

- **Computational Operations:**

The operations of the *C*omputational System always set the optimal and legitimate expressions. In Minimalist notions, these operations are purely syntactic which are represented by Merge, Agree, and Move operations. They are frequently mentioned in Chomsky (1995) and (2000), Zwart (1998) Lasnik (2002), and (Adger, 2003):

- **Merge:** Is the operation that merges the selected constituents, forming a new syntactic object, such as merging α with β and getting K. K is the representation of both α and β.

- **Agree:** Is a concord operation that realizes the syntactic relations between constituents. In Agree, the agreement is restricted between the active probe and the local goal. The whole uninterpretable features must be valued and then eliminated from the interface levels (sound and meaning). For example, the ϕ-features on T are valued by agreeing T with the closest DP. This DP has corresponding interpretable ϕ-features, which work as the operator that values the uninterpretable features on T. Besides, the uninterpretable case on DP is valued by the T, where T is the case-assigner that assigns nominative case on DP.

- **Move:** This operation always occurs after Merge and Agree. It is the operation that generates new syntactic clauses from base-form structure. For example, the TP is derived by moving DP from the [Spec-vP] to the [Spec-TP]. The CP (interrogatives) is also formed by moving the verbal complement to the [Spec-CP]. Hence, moving any element should be the result of edge feature inherited from C. This feature often triggers to attract an appropriate constituent to the last landing site.

➢ **Phases in Minimalist Syntax:**

The notion phase is the most frequent term that comes to the fore of modern generative syntax. A plethora of studies deduced that the derivations of syntactic objects are expanded by phase. This jargon is generated by Chomsky (2001) ‘derivation by phase’

and (2008) 'on phases'. He proposed that the phase is propositional in nature, which includes CP and transitive v*P:

- **Transitive v*P Phase;** represents a complete thematic/argument structure (including an external argument, as it is illustrated in the above mentioned structure [$_{vP}$ ***they*** [v roll [$_{VP}$ the ball ~~roll~~ down the hill).

  V: roll: <agent (*they*), theme (*the ball*), locative goal (*down the hill*)>

- **Clause CP Phase:** Is the last version phase that represents a complete clausal complex. This phase denotes the specification of force such as, the declarative, interrogative. In the above illustrative structure, the CP phase reveals the declarative force, where the CP dominates TP, and the preceding phases semantically made transfer to CP: [$_{\mathbf{CP}}$ [$_{TP}$ they [T will [$_{\mathbf{vP}}$ ~~they~~ [v roll/cause [$_{\mathbf{VP}}$ the ball [V ~~roll~~ PP down the hill]]]].

➢ **Peripheral Positions:**

The left periphery in syntactic structures is broadly mentioned in Kayne (1994), Chomsky (1995) and Rizzi (1997). In X-bar schema, the left peripheral position (left edge) of the three layers [vP/TP/CP] is overtly or covertly occupied by typical elements. In v*P layer, the left edge is licensed by agent/experiencer argument. In TP, the Spec position is occupied by the moved element. Recently Chomsky (2008) has originated a feature-inheritance approach. He assumed that there is a parallelism between C and v where both elements are feature providers. The heads of CP and v*P (C and v) transmit Agree, Case and Edge features to T and V respectively. Therefore, the edge feature triggers the movement to the Spec position of the phase head.

1.9 Chapter Summary and Thesis Organization

This chapter provides the background to the current study which introduces the topic of the research to analyze the categories, the VP structures and the word order of the sentential clauses in Mehri language. The background also provides information about Semitic languages which Mehri is related to. It shows the *Proto*-Semitic features which are still preserved in Mehri. These features are assumed to be the clues of the origin and the history of Mehri. The background also highlights the overview of Mehri, its geographical position and its people and their life. This chapter sets out the problem of conducting this research. It presents the objectives, the research questions, the significance and the limitations of the study. Finally, this chapter defines some of the terms used in the present research.

The overall components of this thesis are organized as follows: Chapter One gives the introduction of this research. Chapter Two presents a review of relevant past studies and discusses the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter Three shows the research design and methodology. Chapter Four presents the analysis of illustrative data; it starts with the determination of categories and features in Mehri. Chapter Five provides the analysis of VP structures and the types of Verbs in Mehri. Chapter Six establishes the movement and the left peripheries in Mehri clausal constructions. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes the study with a summary, the results and the recommendations.