

# Analyzing the Tense System in Mehri Language: Unveiling Temporal Structures

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## Abstract

Based on Rubin's (2018) book entitled "Omani Mehri: A New Grammar with Texts", this analysis tries to analyze the tense system in Mehri language to unveil the temporal structure in this language. In addition, the analysis illustrates the main tenses in Mehri in relation to their usage, forms, and functions with detailed explanations and examples. The approach of Rubin (2018) of analyzing the verb tense system in Mehri was adopted as a method of carrying out this analysis. Moreover, additional data were gathered from two native and specialized persons in Mehri language. The analysis revealed that the present tense appears in Mehri in the form of a present verb with a form close to the Arabic form (yafa'ul) with kasra on the /yā/. Some present tense verbs may be preceded by a prefix /əl/ to carry out the function of transferring the verb from the present to the future with the meaning of negation, as if it corresponds to the article of negation of the future in Arabic (lan), such as /l-ād ədūbəh zōyəd/. On the other hand, the past tense in Mehri signifies the conclusion of an event when it lacks any precedence. The form of the end of the event also appears in the emergence of the article /ber/ to a meaning that is the meaning of verification, meaning (qad) in Arabic. In specific contexts that depend on the context of the situation, the past tense may refer to the near future, and this meaning is understood from the sentence (səyūr səyūr). When a prefix, such as the subjunctive, precedes the verb, the past tense can signify the immediate present occurring at the moment of speaking, bringing the meaning closer to the condition. Finally, a prefix /qis/ usually precedes the future tense in Mehri, indicating the action that will occur in the future, depending on the context.

**Keywords:** analysis of tenses, Mehri language, tenses, tenses in Mehri.

## 1. Introduction

Mehri is a Modern South Arabian language spoken by approximately 130,000 people in Yemen, Oman, and parts of Saudi Arabia (Rubin, 2019). It is an unwritten language with no literary tradition, known to scholars only since the 1840s (Rubin, 2019). Mehri has several dialects, broadly categorized into Yemeni and Omani varieties (Rubin, 2019; Al-Azraqi, 2022). Recent

efforts have been made to compose and circulate texts in Mehri (Liebhaber, 2021). The language exhibits unique phonological and grammatical features, including ejective fricatives (Ridouane et al., 2015) and a complex pronoun system (Al-Azraqi, 2022). Comprehensive grammatical descriptions and lexicons have been published (Rubin, 2010, 2018; Johnstone & Pinter, 1987), contributing significantly to Semitic studies. Mehri is classified as "definitely endangered" by UNESCO (Moseley, 2010), highlighting the importance of ongoing research and documentation efforts to preserve this linguistically significant language.

In addition, Mehri exhibits a complex tense-aspect system. The active participle functions primarily as a future tense (Rubin, 2007). The language preserves feature of ancient Semitic languages and employs affixes and particles to express tense and aspect (Eades & Watson, 2013). Mehri's verbal system includes perfective, imperfective, and progressive aspects (Rubin, 2010, 2018). The language's vocalic system does not have phonological quantity opposition; long vowels result from stress-induced lengthening in open syllables or compensatory lengthening after consonant deletion (Bendjaballah & Ségéral, 2017). It features perfect tense forms with various suffixes (Rubin, 2014), including a unique 3fs perfect with allomorphs -ōt, -ūt, or -ēt in Omani Mehri (Bendjaballah & Rubin, 2020). The language employs auxiliary verbs like *ber* and *ʿod* (Rubin, 2014), and uses specific affixes for gender and tense marking (Almakrami, 2015). Mehri distinguishes dual forms in pronouns and verb inflections in some dialects (Al-Azraqi, 2022; Johnstone, 1970). The vocalic system of Omani Mehri lacks phonological quantity opposition, with long vowels resulting from stress-induced lengthening in open syllables or compensatory lengthening (Bendjaballah & Ségéral, 2017). Recent studies have employed minimalist approaches to analyze Mehri's clause structure (Al-Qumairi, 2017) and explored the active participle's role in the verbal system (Rubin, 2007). As an endangered language, Mehri requires further research to document its linguistic features and preserve its unique characteristics (Simeone-Senelle, 1997).

Based on the above research directions to document Mehri linguistic features and preserve its unique characteristics, this study attempts to analyze the tense system of the Mehri language in order to elucidate its temporal structure. The analysis delineates the primary tenses in Mehri concerning their usage, forms, and functions, accompanied by comprehensive explanations and examples. Rubin's (2018) methodology for analyzing the verb tense system in Mehri was utilized for this analysis. Furthermore, further data were collected from two native and specialized individuals proficient in the Mehri language.

## 2. Literature review

This literature review explores various aspects of tense systems in Semitic languages, with a focus on Mehri. The Mehri active participle functions primarily as a future tense (Rubin, 2007). Mehri verbs follow specific patterns for past, present, and future tenses (Almakrami, 2015). The language preserves feature of ancient Semitic languages, making it valuable for comparative studies (Eades & Watson, 2013). Rubin (2018) provides a comprehensive grammar of Omani Mehri, including phonology, morphology, and syntax. Tense choice is crucial in academic

writing, particularly in literature reviews (Chen, 2009). While not specific to Mehri, studies on verb tense morphology in aphasia (Valinejad et al., 2022) and Persian tense-aspect systems (Khomeijani Farahani & Ali Akbar, 1990) offer insights into tense analysis methodologies. These studies collectively contribute to our understanding of Semitic tense systems and provide a foundation for further research in this field.

Eades & Watson (2013) analyzed the verbal systems, including tense and aspect, in the Sarqiyya Arabic dialect and the Mehri language. They found that the Modern South Arabian languages (MSAL), including Sarqiyya Arabic and Mehri, are the most conservative extant Semitic languages, preserving features of ancient Semitic languages that are lacking in other modern Semitic languages. The study analyzed and compared the tense and aspect systems of Sarqiyya Arabic, Mehri, Classical Arabic, and other modern Arabic dialects. In addition, the study examined how tense and aspect are expressed through verbal morphology (affixes and particles) in Sarqiyya Arabic and Mehri.

Rubin (2007) examined the form, function, and evolution of the Mehri active participle, which serves as a future tense in the language. The study revealed that the Mehri participle is an integral part of the Mehri verbal system, functioning primarily as a future tense. Despite the importance of the Mehri participle, it has received limited attention in recent descriptions of the Mehri language. Previous works on Mehri have only briefly discussed the Mehri participle, with some giving it less than a sentence of coverage.

In his book titled “Omani Mehri: A New Grammar with Texts” Rubin (2018) provided a corpus of over one hundred texts, as well as a comprehensive grammatical description of Mehri, an unwritten Semitic language spoken in the Dhofar region of Oman. All aspects of morphology, phonology, and a diverse array of syntactic features are addressed. The texts were compiled by the late T.M. Johnstone and are accompanied by a wealth of commentary. Some of the text is being published for the first time, while the remaining texts have been newly edited and translated, with reference to the original manuscripts. Semitists, linguists, and individuals with an interest in the folklore of southern Arabia will discover a wealth of valuable data and analysis in this volume, which is the most comprehensive grammatical study of a Modern South Arabian language that has so far been published. Simeone-Senelle (2013) provided an overview of the Modern South Arabian Languages, including details on the Mehri language, but does not specifically discuss previous studies on Mehri language tense.

Finally, the language has been the subject of various lexicographical works, including Johnstone's Mehri Lexicon (Mehri Lexicon & Pinter, 1987). While not directly related to Mehri, studies on verb tense morphology in agrammatic aphasia highlight the importance of tense marking in language rehabilitation (Valinejad et al., 2022).

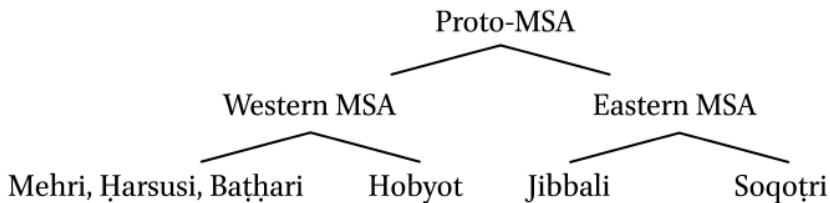
### A Systematic analysis of Tense in Mehri Language

This section provides a detailed analysis of tense in the Mehri language. In the analysis, only the three main tenses, which are (Imperfective, Perfective, and Future) have been analyzed. Moreover, the researchers relied on Rubin's (2018) book titled “Omani Mehri: A New Grammar with Texts” in analyzing the three main tenses. This book provided a comprehensive

grammatical description of Mehri and served as a roadmap for understanding Mehri language grammar. Additionally, the researcher enhanced their analysis by incorporating the perspectives of a PhD-specialized Mehri language researcher who is a native speaker, as well as data gathered from native speakers.

As Stated by Rubin (2018) Mehri can be categorized into two fundamental dialect groups. A western group, referred to as Yemeni Mehri, is spoken in Yemen, while an eastern group, known as Omani Mehri or Dhofari Mehri, is found in Oman. In Omani Mehri, the language is referred to natively as məhráyyət, whereas in the local Arabic, it is termed mahríyya. Some researchers divide the Eastern Mahri into two parts, as the French researcher Marie-Claude Simone Senel. She called one of them: Meheriot (the dialect of eastern Mahri) and Mahriyet (the dialect of all Mahri, excluding the East).

Scheme of classification of the Mahri language among the languages of the group (Rubin, 2018, p. 12)



### 1. The Imperfective

Rubin (2018) stated that in Mehri language the imperfective can be used in different contexts to refer to any time or aspect (perfect or continuous). It is used in the following contexts (Rubin, 2018, p. 166):

- “As a general present tense, it indicates performing the present action without any distinction of the duration of time or the completion and continuation of the action”.
- “As a habitual present tense, meaning that the subject usually performs the action without specific reference to time”.
- “As immediate present, meaning that the subject is now performing the action at a time equal to the moment of speech”.
- “In addition to its use as a habitual past, meaning that the subject usually performed the action in the past or future”.
- “The continuous and progressive in the past and present, i.e. an action performed by the subject for a certain period and not yet finished in the past or present”.

The following examples illustrate the use of perfective in Mehri language given by (Rubin, 2018, p. 166-167):

1. “mōn yəsūkən bərk abáyť dīməh”.  
“who lives in this house?”
2. “dīməh əl yəhūrək lā”  
“this (guy) doesn’t steal”.
3. “əl əḵáwdər əl-ttəḵḵ zōyəd lā”  
‘I can’t drink any more”.
4. “aḡərōyən yəxtəlūf “.  
‘our language differs”.
5. “hōh āḡōb bə-ttēṭi, wə-sē tāḡōb bay”.  
“I love my wife, and she loves me”.
6. “kāl šīyən yətmōm wə-yəxlōf”.  
““everything gets finished and is replaced”.

All of the above verbs are used with the same meaning and the same tense in Jibbali (Shehri) language. If we take the example No. 1 and translate it into Jibbali language, the translation will be ‘ləḡōrb axér ‘āk’ (see for instance, Alkathiri & Mudhsh, 2024).

In addition, the above examples show a variety of uses of the present tense related to time, and the Rubin succeeded in showing the diversity in use. The note here is that the present tense in Mahri has a prefix usually attached to it, which is the hamza, the yā’, the tā’, or the nūn, and the researcher represented them with the exception of the present tense that begins with the prefix nūn. Which usually refers to the verb as indicating a plural, such as: nisiyur, meaning we walk, and nujuzum, meaning we swear or swear.

The following are examples of the present tense used as regular past, past continuous, or present tense (Rubin, 2018, p.167):

7. “xəṭərāt ṭayť sēkən yəsūkən bə-wōdi”.  
“once a community was living in a valley”.
8. “sənnáwrəť ṭəbūb aḡáyḡ. yəwəzməs əsxōf wə-yəlṭōf bīs”.  
“the cat loved the man. He would give her milk and was kind to her”.
9. “fənōhən nātəḵáyḡən b-amśənyūtən”.  
‘we used to believe in medicine men’

10. “kāl sənēt tfayd yəbīti trayt aw šhālīt”.  
‘every year she would redeem two or three camels’

11. “həmbəráwtən sōbər yəntáwhən”.  
“the boys would always fight”.

12. “hōh əl əḳáwdər l-əḡtáyr ənglīzīyət lā”.  
“I couldn’t speak English”.

13. “kādet l-ād yəšēnūs yəḳfēd arhəbēt lā”.  
“Kadet didn’t yet dare to go down to town”.

14. “kāl āšər yənōka bə-ṭāṭ”.  
“every night he would bring one in”.

In example No. 13 kādēt refers to a traditional story circulated by Mahris about a real person called kādēt, and how he committed a foolishness that prevented him from meeting people, talking, or sitting with them.

The following are examples of the present tense used as regular past, past continuous, or present tense (Rubin, 2018, p.167):

15. “əl ənḳálak lā”.  
“we won’t let you”.

16. “mḡōrən hōh əṣátš šay w-əhārūs bays”.  
“then I will take you with me and marry you”.

17. “əl ərdūd lā”.  
“I won’t go back”.

18. “šār, w-aḡāk yəḡárbək”.  
“stand (there), and your brother will know you”.

19. “mət shēk ḏōməh, əwázmək amšēḡər”.  
“when you have finished with this, I will give you the other”.

20. “l-ād ədübəh zōyəd”.  
“I won’t collect honey ever again”.

21. “yəktəlīt bay aḳəbōyəl, hām fəlótḳ”.  
“the tribes will talk (badly) about me if I run away”.

22. “hēt ʔənnáwn, w-əl əḥād yəsényək lā ... əl əḥād yənūkəd lūk lā”.

“you are small, and no one”.

Some of these verbs are preceded by the prefix əl, and it seems that they perform some function to transfer the verb from the present to the future with the meaning of negation, as if it corresponds to the article of negation of the future in Arabic (lan). Some of these examples are conditional, as is the case in the 19 and 21 examples, and naturally the condition moves the verb from the present to the future.

The present tense can “also be used to refer to the relative future, which is equivalent to 'would' in English” (Rubin, 2018, p.168) as in the following examples:

23. “ʔərōh təwyəh bərk dəhlīl mən hāl əḥād yəsényəh lā”.

“he hid his meat in a cave where no one would see it”.

24. “gəzəmk l-ād əṣḥōt hītār zōyəd”.

“I swore I would not slaughter kids anymore”.

All of these examples are used in the same sense and tense in Jibbali language. See, for example, the translation of example into Jibbali (see for instance, Alkathiri & Mudhsh, 2024):

ʔeré tīš ‘aʔ daḥlél mən tal dē ʔ yəsúnš.

The future can be expressed in the present tense, and the future tense can also be used without preferring one form over another, and all of them convey the meaning clearly in our saying:

ʔlaʕš ešerók ‘āʔ tōš.

Leave it... I will do it for you.

It is also permissible to say in the future tense to express this sentence:

ʔlaʕš ḥal-šārək ‘āʔ tōš.

Leave it... I will do it for you.

In narrative contexts, the present tense can sometimes be used as a simple past tense. There are many examples in Johnston's texts (Rubin, 2018). These are some examples (Rubin, 2018, p.168):

25. “yənōka yədbīr, yəʔbāši, wə-bākək”.

“a hornet came and stung me, and I cried”.

26. “te bə-ḥəlláy aḡəyūg bər əḏ-šəwkīf, thūrək məndáwʔ wə-təlūtəḡ aḡās”.

“then at night, when the men had fallen asleep, she stole a rifle and killed her brother”.

27. “thháyw bə-kábs mən ḡār saṭḥ, wə-bəkūt”.

“she let the lamb fall from the roof, and she cried”.

It seems that this use has semantic reasons related to the context of the situation. When the speaker uses the present tense in the sense of the past, he/she conjures up the past form of the action, or he/she expresses the past in the present tense, according to the story of the situation.

In Mehri language, the past or present continuous, as well as the present tense, are usually indicated in the present tense in conjunction with the verbal prefix: /ð-/ , however, since the verbal prefix: /ð-/ does not usually appear before the prefix: /t-/ in the present tense for the addressees. For the third person feminine, what looks like the present tense can sometimes refer to the continuous or the immediate (Rubin, 2018).

In Mehri language, “a past or present progressive, as well as a circumstantial, is usually indicated by the imperfect in combination with the verbal prefix ð-. However, because the verbal prefix ð- does not normally occur before the prefix t- (i.e., the prefix of all second person and third feminine imperfects), what looks like a bare imperfect can sometimes serve to indicate a progressive or circumstantial. In reality, however, these are underlyingly imperfects with the prefix ð- (Rubin, 2018, p. 169)”.

28. “kō hēt tábáyk ‘why are you crying?’ (tábáyk < \*ð-tábáyk)”.

## 2. The Perfective

Rubin (2018) stated that “all perfects are formed by attaching the following suffixes to the appropriate verbal base” (162).

	sing.	dual	plural
1c	-k	-ki	-ən
2m	-k	-ki	-kəm
2f	-š		-kən
3m	—	-ōh / -áh	-əm / —
3f	-ūt / -ōt / -ēt	-tōh / -táh	—

Rubin (2018) stated that the essential use of the perfect is the past tense. He provided the following examples as illustration in (p. 169):

29. “səyáwr təwōli aǵáyǵ”.

“they went to the man”.



30. “hámakən”.

“did you hear?”.

31. “hēt əl matk lā”.

“didn’t you die?”.

32. “bərwōt tēt”.

“the woman gave birth”.

33. “mōn āmūr hūk”.

“who told you?”.

34. “šxəwlīl, wə-šəmrūš”.

“they stayed, and he fell ill”.

35. “kəśś bīn šətəh w-abārka”.

“he flashed his buttocks to us and ran”.

36. “wə-kōh əl səyərš lā”.

“why didn’t you go?”.

37. “kəşşəm hərōhs”.

“they cut off her head”.

In example 29, it should be noted that the verb (səyáwr) here refers to the singular, not the plural, and the translation of the sentence as: (they went to the man) needs revision, as the plural form of it is: səyōrm/ with the addition of the suffix m, just as the verb itself (siyur) It can be used to indicate the plural of females (san syor = they went). The example no.30 /hámakən/ means (did you (feminine) hear?), and it appears in the context of both news and information.

It can also be noted that the past perfect - at least with the verb "səyūr" meaning "gone" - used as an immediate future (Rubin, 2018). The following examples illustrate this (Rubin, 2018, p. 169):

38. “hōh səyərək”.

“I’m off!”.

39. “hōh gəhémk”.

“I’m off!”.

“The perfect can also have a performative function, usually with verbs of swearing, but also with verbs that have a legal implication” (Rubin, 2018, p. 169) as in the examples below:

40. “hārmək l-ād ədübəh zōyəd tē əl-mēt”.

“I swear I won’t collect honey ever again until I die”.

41. “həlēk lūk tšémni”.

“I swear you will obey me”.

42. “wə-hōh šamk aməndāwḵ w-amḥəzēm. wə-hōh šətmək”.

“I (hereby) sell you the rifle and the cartridge-belt. And I (hereby) buy (it)”.

43. “əlhān fəšāwl əm-mənwīn hōh ḵəblək”.

“whatever they decide between us I will accept”.

The verb in example no. 41 carries the meaning of a promise mixed with a complaint. Example no 41. indicates the meaning of a request and perhaps an invitation, whereas in the example no. 42 signifies the meaning of a response in most cases, and in the example, no. 43 carries the meaning of acceptance.

Moreover, the perfective can be used as potential oaths, as in the following example (Rubin, 2018, p. 169):

44. “xályək tēti, əl (t)ṭaym mən hənīn šxōf”.

“may I divorce my wife [= I swear], you won’t taste any milk from us”.

It seems that the past here carries the meaning of the future, meaning that if you divorce your wife, we will not give you milk.

Rubin (2018) stated that “the perfect also appears regularly after a variety of particles, including the conditional particles hām, əḏə, and lū, the temporal particles mət, tē, and hīs, and the subordinating conjunction ar wə- ‘unless’. The combination of the particle ber plus the perfect can sometimes be translated with a pluperfect. On the perfect combined with the verbal prefix ḏ- (p. 169)”.

If a sentence begins with the condition: hām, the verb or verbs in this sentence are almost always in the past tense; there are about ten exceptions in Johnston's texts. If the answer to the conditional apodosis of the hām conditional sentence is a verb sentence (and this is the case in all cases except about eight cases in the texts), then the verb in the answer to the conditional apodosis can be:

- Present (most common)
- Or in the future
- Or an order
- Or present in the accusative case (less common), corresponding to the Arabic present tense in the accusative case (Rubin, 2018, p. 370).

45. “hām rəšāwt, xtyēna tīk”.

“if she consents, we’ll circumcize you”.

46. “hām səyǝrk, l-ād rəddōna līn lā”.

“if you go, you won’t come back to us again”.

47. “hām həṣbāḥ ṣaḥḥ, həh məlyōn ǧarš”. ‘

“if he makes it to morning alive, he’ll get [lit. for him is] a million dollars”.

48. “hām hādǝǧəṣ təh wə-hēt dənyīt, yəmut”.

“if you suckle him and you are pregnant, he will die”.

49. “hām əlnākak tīk ṣərōməḥ lā,əl (t)šəš i lā”

“if I don’t come back to you now, don’t think I’m late”.

It is noted that in example no. 47 (hām həṣbāḥ ṣaḥḥ, həh məlyōn ǧarš) the answer to the condition was not originally stated as a verb, but rather came in the form of the nominal sentence as it is well-known in the Arabic language. In the example no. 49: Meaning: If I do not come to you now, do not worry about me. This means that Robin’s translation was not accurate in this example.

Rubin (2018) mentioned “seven cases in the texts in which hām is directly followed by an imperfect, instead of by a perfect; in each case the reference is to an event taking place at the moment of speech. There are also five cases in which hām is followed by a future. When the hām-clause has an imperfect, the apodosis can have an imperative, non-verbal clause, imperfect, or subjunctive. When the hām-clause has a future, the apodosis usually has a future or, in one case, an imperative” (p. 370). Below are some of these relevant examples mentioned by Rubin:

50. “hām thámay, ǧəfəd līn əw-bōh”

“if you hear me, come down here to us”.

51. “hām təǧtūri k-agənnáwnse, təšōš lā”.

“if she is conversing with her jinns, she won’t wake up”.

52. “hām thámay, hōh arībək, w-ənkéəw-bōh”.

“if you hear me, I am your friend, so come here!”.

53. “hām əl ətēm wəzyēma tī tētī lā, ṣḥāyī”.

“if you won’t give me my wife, kill me!”.

54. “hōh šēmōna lūk, hām hēt məḥáwf tī ḥázye h-aṣáyṛəb”.

“I’ll sell it to you if you pay me my goats in the autumn”.

55. “hām əl hēt sīrōna lā, sīrīta təwōli ḥəddōd”.

“if you won’t go, I’ll go to the blacksmith”.

In example no. 50: “hām thámay, hōh arībēk, w-ənkéəw-bōh”, it seems that the Rubin made the nominal sentence hōh arībēk the answer to the condition, and we see that here it does not serve as an answer. Rather, the answer is the following sentence: “w-ənkéəw-bōh”, as the coming will not be achieved until after hearing the sound. In example no. 54, the word ašáyrəb refers locally to the Serb season that follows the fall season, not the fall itself.

### 3. Future

Rubin (2018) stated that the future is “an integral part of the Mehri verbal system, functioning mainly—but not exclusively—as a simple future tense. It has been called the active participle in most previous literature on Mehri, but this designation is not very useful. It is true that the future can be traced to a historical active participle, and that it still declines as a noun, but it functions very much like a verb” (p. 178).

Moreover, the future verb in Mahri cannot be viewed as being the same as the active participle. There is a difference in the form and in the indication of time, and the future verb sometimes needs linguistic affixes.

Plural forms in Mahri (Rubin, 2018, p. 178).

ms	<i>CəCCōna</i>	md	<i>CəCCōni</i>	mp	<i>CəCyēCa</i>
fs	<i>CəCCīta</i>	fd	<i>CəCCáwti</i>	fp	<i>CəCCūtən</i>

As it is clear that the masculine plural form (mp) has an internal plural pattern. It is found that a number of differences in the Mahri-Yemeni dialects: the form (mp) has an external plural suffix (CəCCēya) (Rubin, 2018).

“Of the approximately 350 attestations of the future in the texts (from about 125 different roots), nearly all are used with a straightforward future-tense function. A few representative examples are” (Rubin, 2018, p. 179).

56. “l-ād hōh dəbhōna zōyəd lā”.

“I will not collect honey ever again”.

57. “agənnáy ḥsərōna arḥəbēt”.

“the jinn will wipe out the town”.

58. “ḥābū ənkiyē ...wə-skyēna bāwməh”.

“people will come ... and they will settle here”.

59. “wəzmūtən tīk əlhān tḥōm”.

‘we’ll give you all that you want”.

60. “hēt kənnáwn w-ādək əl hēt məhārəs lā”.

“you are a child and you won’t marry yet”.

61. “şākōna hōkəm wə-mšāxbər təh”.

“I’ll call the ruler and ask him”.

62. “məhawşəl tīk tət̤k”.

“it will lead you to your wife”.

It should be noted here that relying on a specific form for the future may not be sufficient for the purpose. Rather, the context has a role in knowing that this verb indicates the future, for clarification: Example: l-ād hōh dəbhōna zōyəd lā indicates that honey will never be harvested (i.e., present and future). And the one who says it can say: Dibhuna Insrumah, meaning I will reap honey now. What it means that the formula may indicate the present and the future, but the context is the key factor in knowing the intended time. The example no. 62 seems to need the article “twal” meaning (to) in order for the meaning to be complete.

In rare cases, it is better to translate the future tense into the present tense (Rubin, 2018) as in the below example:

63. “məwşəyēta šūk b-anḳāt əlyōməh”.

“I advise you on these points”.

Rubin (2018) mentions that “given the basic future-tense meaning of the future, it is not at all surprising to find it used in the apodosis of real conditional sentences, though more often an imperfect is used in this context” (p. 180). Examples with the future are (Rubin, 2018, p. 180):

64. “t̤ōm xədmēt, āmlōna hūk”.

“(if) you want work, I will make (it) for you”.

65. “hām əl nākak bīhəm lā, kəşşōna hərəhk”.

“if you don’t bring them, I will cut off your head”.

66. “hām əl nākak bīs lā, şəṭōna tīk”.

“if you don’t bring her, I will kill you”.

67. “əḏ hē ḳáybəl ...bəgdōna tīhəm”.

“if he accepts ... I’ll chase them out”.

It seems that the example no. 64, t̤ōm xədmēt, āmlōna hūk, does not carry the meaning of the real condition. It does not carry the meaning of the answer that requires action before it. The style is closer to a denying question: Don’t you want to work?!

Rubin (2018) adds that “in some cases, a future in the apodosis corresponds to an English future perfect, as in” (p. 180):

68. “əðə hē səyūr šay, hē šənyōna təh”.

“if he slept with me, he will have seen it”.

“One example is not technically part of a conditional, but can be considered the equivalent of an unreal conditional. It serves as the answer to an interrogative conditional sentence with a conditional form in the apodosis (yāmērən)” (Rubin, 2018, p. 180):

69. “lū hōh kōrək aḳāwt...hībōh yāmērən ḥābū? āmyēra, ‘gayg bəxáył wə-kāwb”.

“if I had hidden the food ... what would the people say? They would say”, “A mean man and a dog!”.

We can divide this example into three pillars: The subjunctive article is lū, the conditional verb is kōrək aḳāwt, and the subjunctive answer is hībōh yāmērən ḥābū, which means (what will people say?). It appears to that the conditional style here is a complete style, but his answer sentence was interrogative (and this is the source of disagreement). But looking at yāmērən as a conditional form, we believe it needs revision. The word is a normal part of an interrogative sentence.

“In a few places, we also find the future in the protasis of a real conditional sentence. One example is” (Rubin, 2018, p. 180):

70. “hām əl sēn wərdūtən lā, ḥōm əl-háwrəd həbérye”.

“if they aren’t going to go down to the water, I want to take my camels down to the water”.

Perhaps it is not understood to us exactly what was meant in the above example, but this is the general rule, which is the answer to the condition usually indicates the future. We say: whoever works hard will succeed, and if he does not go, I will go. This meaning is fulfilled in the sentence above: If the women do not bring the water, I will bring water for my camels.

### The Verbal Prefix ḏ-

“Perfect, imperfect, and subjunctive verbs can all be preceded by the particle ḏ-.” (Rubin, 2018, p. 187).

### ḏ- + Imperfect

Rubin (2018) stated that “the combination of ḏ- plus the imperfect can indicate a past or present progressive, or a circumstantial clause. The verbal prefix ḏ- must have its origins in the relative pronoun ḏ-. In fact, there are numerous passages in which ḏ- plus an imperfect verb can be interpreted as indicating either a relative clause or a circumstantial progressive. Consider the following examples, each with two possible translations” (Rubin, 2018, p. 187):

71. “ḳāwla aḡāh ḏə-yəšəwkūf”.

“he left his brother who was sleeping” or “he left his brother sleeping”.

The meaning of the above sentence is: he left his brother while he was about to sleep, which means that he was not asleep when the sentence was uttered.

72. “nūka ġayg ðə-yəsyūr bə-ħáyk”.

“a man came who was walking on the shore” or “a man came walking on the shore”.

73. “ād fətnək hēxər ðə-nkáyñ ðə-yəbáyk”.

“do you still remember the old man who came to us who was crying?” or “do you still remember the old man who came to us crying”.

74. “hūma şayh əð-yōmər”.

“he heard a voice that was saying” or “he heard a voice saying”.

75. “hōh ġayg ð-əğáwləḵ mən yəbīt”.

“I’m a man who is looking for a camel” or “I’m a man looking for a camel”.

76. “šīni bū mēkən ðə-yəwəkbəm bayt ðə-tōgər”.

“he saw many people who were going into a rich man’s house” or “he saw many people going into a rich man’s house”.

The previous examples show that the adjective has more than one grammatical function, including connectivity. ðə-yəsyūr means the one who walks, and ðə-nkáyñ means the one who came, but this adjective did not perform the same function and in the same sentence in ðə-yəbáyk if it’s meaning here comes (crying). The meaning does not have a specific function in example no. 74, əð-yōmər, and it may be an indication of the action of the universe. It is noted that this adjective in example no. 76 was mentioned twice. Once with the verb meaning connection ðə-yəwəkbəm, and once with the noun ðə-tōgər, and we think it here corresponds to the definition.

Now consider the following example, in which ð- plus an imperfect can be parsed as a relative clause, a circumstantial, or simply a main verb:

The below example, where ð- is followed by an imperfect, might be interpreted as a primary verb, a circumstantial, or a relative sentence (Rubin, 2018).

77. “xəṭərāt ġayg ðə-yəghōm bə-ħōrəm”.

“once there was a man who was walking on the road” or “once there was a man walking on the road” or “once a man was walking on the road”.

It appears that the suffix ð- here came as a main verb, which is the verb of the universe.

Rubin (2018) added that “most likely from contexts like the last example, the prefix ð- plus an imperfect came to indicate simply a progressive action, whether past or present. There are indeed many examples of this in the texts. Some of examples of ð- plus the imperfect indicating a present progressive are” (p. 188):

78. “ənhāh ḏə-nhəwrūd”.

“we are taking (our) animals to the water”.

79. “hēxər ḥsaym, wəlākan ḏə-yəbāyk”.

“the man is respectable, but he’s crying”.

80. “bə-xáyɾ hē, wə-ḏə-yəxáwdəm”.

“he is fine, and is working”.

81. “ḥābū ḏə-yəṭáwf ləh. wə-ḥəbbhe ḏə-yəšxəbīr”.

“the people are visiting him. And his parents are asking”.

82. “ḥəbūr ḏə-yəzyūd”.

“the cold is increasing”.

83. “ādəh ḏə-yáwdəg”.

“is he still breast-feeding?”

The previous examples refer to a number of verbs indicating a present continuous tense, as if this suffix performs the function of the present continuous tense, while interfering with other functions in other contexts. This is one matter, and another matter is that the word *wəlākan* appeared in example no. 79, and it seems that it is not a purely Mahri word, rather it is a relic of the colloquialism that was introduced into it.

Also, “even more common in the texts are examples of *ḏ-* plus the imperfect indicating a past progressive, some of which are” (Rubin, 2018, p. 188-189):

84. “ḡəsūməṇ, wə-hōh ḏ-əsłōl”.

“we set off at dawn, and I was being carried”.

85. “hōh ḏ-əbāyk, w-ənk ‘áy āskəráy”.

“I was crying, and a policeman came to me”.

86. “ḥābū ḏə-yəṣ ḥáyk mənəh”.

“the people were laughing at him”.

87. “nəḥāh ḏə-nəsyūr bə-ḥōrəm”.

“we were going on the road”.

88. “hōh ḏ-əghōm bə-ḥārmī”.

“I was going on my way”.

89. “hīs əlyēk ḏə-yəntáwhən, həwrūd ḥázhe”.



“when [or: while] those guys fought, he brought his goats to the water”.

90. “háybi ðə-yəbáyð bük”.

“father was lying to you”.

91. “hīs ðə-yəhawfər, yəháyw ðáyrəh baṭṭ”.

“when he was digging, dirt would fall on him”.

It seems that Rubin based his idea on the fact that these verbs are present tense, indicating the continuous past. The question is: why are some of them not present tense, indicating continuity? The sentence 85. “hōh ðə-báyk, w-ənk ‘áy āskəráy”. (I am crying and the policeman came to me) does not indicate any progress, rather it indicates the situation. Likewise, the sentence that follows it, “hābū ðə-yəṣ háyk mənəh” (people laugh at him), has a clear indication of the situation (an immediate sentence).

In addition, Rubin (2018) stated that “the particle ð- normally does not occur before the prefix t-, i.e., before all second person and third feminine forms of the imperfect. It actually assimilates, but an initial geminate tt is usually simplified to t. This means that what looks like a bare imperfect can indicate a circumstantial, or a present or past progressive. Really these are cases of ð- plus the imperfect, in which the prefix ð- is suppressed” (p. 189). Examples are:

92. “mən hēsən təṣḥōk”.

“what are you laughing at?”.

93. “hīs sēn təgtáryən, hənīsən sənnáwrət”.

“when they were talking, the cat was by them”.

94. “kō tēm tháfrəm nəxāli abáyti”.

“why are you digging under my house?”.

95. “hōh bər hámak tīk nəhōr ṭayt tōmər”.

“I heard you one day singing”.

96. “sīrūt ḥāgərīt təbáyk”.

“the slave-girl left crying”.

97. “sē təṣḥōk”.

“she was laughing”.

98. “ksūt ḥābū ðə-yəftərīgən wə-ḥaynīt tənáhḡən”.

“she found the men watching and the women dancing”.

In this last example, the phrases “ḥābū ðə-yəftərīgən and ḥaynīt tənáhḡən” should have exactly the same structure, showing that the prefix ð- should essentially be present (Rubin, 2018).

Some of these verbs indicate the present tense and do not indicate the continuous past. When someone asks, he says: *mən hēšən təšhōk* (Why are you laughing?) The question here is immediate and has nothing to do with the past. Then there is no evidence that time is continuous, as we find in the sentence *hīs sēn təgtáryən, hənīsən sənnáwrət* (simply: they are talking with a cat next to them). In the example: *hōh ber hámak tīk nəhōr țayt tōmər*. The verb *tōmər* is translated as singing, and the correct meaning is that it means singing (specifically singing poetry not songs). In the example '*sē təšhōk*' the translation was: 'she was laughing', and we think the exact translation is: she is laughing (present tense).

#### Ǿ- + Perfect

Rubin (2018) stated that “when used with a verb in the perfect tense, the prefix Ǿ- has a variety of related functions. One use of the perfect with Ǿ- is to indicate a circumstantial. While an imperfect with Ǿ- can indicate a circumstantial referring to simultaneous action, the perfect with Ǿ- indicates a circumstantial referring to an action that has taken place, or it indicates a circumstantial stative. Often such a circumstantial can be translated with an English perfect participle (‘having done X ...’ or ‘having become X ...’), even if this is somewhat awkward. This is illustrated in the following examples” (p. 190):

99. “*kūsa háybəh Ǿ-áywər*”.

“he found his father blind [lit. having gone blind]”

100. “*kūsəm həbrīt Ǿ-ħōkəm Ǿ-ršənēt*”.

“they found the daughter of the ruler tied up [lit. having been tied up]”.

101. “*wátxfək Ǿđ-gáyak*”.

“I’ve come back hungry [lit. I came having become hungry]”.

102. “*ǵálak tīs sār abyūt əlyĕk Ǿ-šəwķfūt*”.

“I left her behind those houses sleeping [lit. having fallen asleep]”.

103. “*róddəm Ǿ-šənšáyř*”.

“they came back having been victorious”.

104. “*hātīm Ǿ-ħəzīn*”.

“they spent the evening sad [lit. having become sad]”.

105. “*kəsk tīs bərk dəhlīl ber Ǿ-ātmēt*”.

“I found it in a cave already bandaged up [lit. having been bandaged]”.

106. “*sīrūt Ǿār həməh Ǿ-fərħōt*”.

“she went to the water happy [lit. having become happy]”.

Although Rubin began this section with the title “ð- + Perfect”, he preferred to talk about this ð- that occurs in a sentence containing two verbs. It was expecting the conversation to begin with a simple sentence like (Ghaikh dha siwar), and what meaning does this ð- convey if it is connected to such a verb. We are not certain whether this ð- is in the meaning of (may) found in the Arabic language, but this meaning is the closest, and in light of it, the past sentence means: The man walked, and perhaps this reasoning is valid for interpreting the past examples as well. There is something else in the example no 100, the ð- was called the active participle ðə-ḥōkəm, and Rubin did not comment on such use.

### 3. Conclusion

The current study attempted to analyze the verb system in Mehri language to reveal the temporal structure in this language based on Rubin’s (2018) book entitled “Omani Mehri: A New Grammar with Texts”. The analysis provided detailed explanations and examples of the main tenses in Mehri, along with their usage, forms, and functions. The researchers looked at Rubin’s (2018) book and talked about how to use the past tense in some situations. The study showed that the present tense in Mahri looks like the Arabic form (yafa’ul) with a kasra on the /yā/. Certain present tense verbs may be prefixed with /əl/ to facilitate the transition of the verb from the present to the future, conveying a sense of negativity, akin to the future negation particle in Arabic (lan), exemplified by /l-ād ədūbəh zōyəd/. In Mehri, the past tense indicates an event’s completion when it has no precedence. The conclusion of the event is also reflected in the formation of the article /bər/, which signifies verification, corresponding to the Arabic term (qad). In particular settings contingent upon the situation, the past tense may denote the imminent future, and this interpretation is derived from the sentence (səyūr səyūr). When a prefix, such as the subjunctive, precedes the verb, the past tense may denote the immediate present at the moment of articulation, so aligning the meaning more closely with the circumstance. A prefix /qis/ typically precedes the future tense in Mahri, signifying the action that will transpire in the future, contingent upon the circumstances. In addition, researchers have found that the verb may not convey the actual condition or the answer that requires the verb before it. Rather, the style may be closer to a negative interrogative. Moreover, when Rubin says that the future is historically due to the active participle, this seems clear for most of the forms, but this is not clear for the abstract form (g-stem/grundstamm), i.e. he did/ does, nor is it clear where the affixes come from here. It is definitely not derived from the historical participle, which is similar to the Arabic participle. In Rubin’s (2018) analysis of the present tense form, the given examples demonstrate a variety of uses. He succeeded in showing this diversity, and he also used the traditional stories circulated by the Mahri people. However, some of the translations were inaccurate. For example, “the young ones” in some places means the sheep baby, not the human baby.

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