

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 *Šhān* 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 such as Focus Phrase (FocP), Topic Phrase (TopP), Tense Phrase (TP) and Verb Phrase (v*P). 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 according to the purposeful sampling. Various data collection instruments are used such as elicitation (i.e., Questionnaire, Interview, Translation, Stimulus Prompt and Data Manipulation), participant observation and oral texts (traditional rules, poems and stories). The process of data collection is based on Bouquiaux and Thomas (1992) and Bower (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.