

Fear-related Words in Mehri Language and their Connection to Standard Arabic: A Comparative Lexical Study

Original Study

Amer Balhaf, Abdulwahid Al Zumor
A'sharqiyah University, Oman, Dhofar University, Oman
amer.balhaf@asu.edu.om, aalzumor@du.edu.om

Submitted: 19.09.2025; Accepted: 10.01.2026.

Abstract: This study examines lexical items denoting fear in the Mehri language and their relationship with Standard Arabic through comparative semantics. Sixteen fear-related Mehri lexemes, compiled from oral and written sources, were classified into three categories: complete formal and semantic congruence with Arabic (*ʔašša*, *xawafa*, *faraka*, *fazaʕa*); semantic proximity without formal correspondence (*baṭara*, *baṭala*, *rakka*, *ṭajafa*, *fagaʕa*, *naṭaṭa*, *haraga*); and no correspondence in either form or meaning (*bahaša*, *ṭajaka*, *faḍaka*, *faḍara*, *nahaša*). Analysis reveals several key findings: certain roots show contextual specialization for fear of predatory animals or elevated terrain; distributional patterns vary across Mehri regions; the lexemes form a semantic continuum from mild apprehension to panic and terror; some items derive verbs restricted to past or present tense while excluding future or imperative forms; and certain roots yield only nominal derivatives. These findings illuminate the semantic structure of fear terminology in Mehri and its broader relationship with Standard Arabic.

Keywords: Mehri language, Arabic language, fear-related words, comparative lexical semantics

INTRODUCTION

Fear is a general natural human condition that has existed since the Earth was created. It usually manifests in the feeling arising from a sudden danger or unexpected threat that causes a person to lose their inner peace and security, and in the reaction that follows.

Al-Askari (1996) extensively discusses fear, its meanings, synonyms, effects, and related discourse. It identifies its various semantic dimensions to include *alfazaʕ* 'alarm', *alrawʕ* 'terror', *alwajal* 'apprehension', *alruʕb* 'dread', *alfaraq* 'anxiety', and *alḍuʕr* 'panic', which also function as synonymous terms. The study describes the consequences arising from fear and documents the poetry, proverbs, aphorisms, and narratives composed about it, given its intrinsic connection to human existence. Even when individuals seek security, fear accompanies them as an unwelcome companion and persists as an undesirable associate. An examination of the Arabic literary

heritage concerning fear reveals a substantial and accumulated corpus that has permeated all branches of language, encompassing poetry, prose, linguistics, and rhetoric.

The Mehri language—one of the surviving Modern South Arabian languages spoken to this day in the Omani governorate of Dhofar and the Yemeni governorate of al-Mahrah—has recognized *fear* as do all world languages, expressing it through various terms and diverse vocabulary governed by contextual usage and semantic evolution. References to fear are prevalent in the discourse of poets and writers, and oral tradition has preserved numerous expressions related to the concept of fear. The present study aims at compiling and classifying these terms, conducting a comparative lexico-semantic study of Mehri and Arabic expressions of fear. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of fear within Mehri language which is under-researched

and continues to require additional scholarly efforts to reveal its essence and clarify many aspects of the ambiguity that has surrounded it for some time. It is hoped that this work will represent a novel linguistic contribution to research on Mehri and benefit those interested in exploring its nuances.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Comparative semantics offers a theoretical framework for the systematic analysis of semantic systems across different languages. The discipline originated in the mid-twentieth century, initially influenced by Lado's (1957) comparative approach with its emphasis on pedagogical implementation. Subsequently, the field has broadened to encompass various methodological approaches, including *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff et al. 2008), *Frame Semantics* (Fillmore 1982), *Cognitive Grammar* (Langacker 1987), the *Natural Semantic Metalanguage* (Wierzbicka 1996), and *Semantic Field Theory* (Nerlich, Clarke 2000). These theoretical frameworks position meaning within the convergence of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions, emphasizing both cross-linguistic universals and language-specific variations.

Through the implementation of a comparative semantic field methodology (Geeraerts 2010), this investigation analyzes the distribution, categorization, and semantic distinctions of fear-related lexical items in Mehri and Standard Arabic as comparative units, thereby illuminating both convergent and divergent lexical configurations across these two linguistic systems.

The primary focus of comparative semantics encompasses the examination of semantic structures within contrasted languages, addressing both the content plane (the designation of concrete entities and abstract concepts) and the expression plane (linguistic manifestation). This methodological orientation acknowledges that meaning extends beyond mere linguistic form, being fundamentally connected to the cognitive and philosophical dimensions of human consciousness (Juodintytė-Kuznetsova 2014).

Consequently, comparative semantics functions as both a theoretical construct and methodological apparatus for investigating the linguistic encoding of concepts across languages. The approach not only reveals universal semantic configurations but also elucidates language-specific characteristics influenced by cultural and cognitive frameworks. In this capacity, it provides a fundamental basis for cross-linguistic semantic research, translation studies, and comparative discourse analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the Mehri language has developed across the core linguistic domains of phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, semantics, and pragmatics. While certain areas, particularly phonetics and morphology, have attracted sustained attention, other dimensions such as comparative semantics with Arabic remain relatively underexplored.

Mehri phonology has received substantial descriptive and instrumental analysis. Acoustic and laryngographic studies document the complex system of laryngeal contrasts, including glottal states, pre-aspiration, and glottalisation (Watson, Heselwood 2016; Watson et al. 2025). Research has highlighted typologically unusual consonantal categories, such as lateral fricatives and emphatics (Watson, al-Azraqi 2011), as well as sibilant contrasts in Omani Mehri (Bellem, Watson 2017). Bendjaballah and Ségéral (2014a) examined "idle glottis" consonants, while Bendjaballah and Ridouane (2015) provided a detailed account of word-final geminates. More recently, Bendjaballah (2017) analysed the effects of gutturals and glides on Mehri verb phonology. Collectively, these studies establish Mehri as a rich site for phonological typology.

Morphological processes in Mehri have attracted significant scholarly attention, with particular emphasis on verbal morphology and plural formation. Castagna (2017) investigated broken plural patterns, while Dufour (2017b, 2021) examined the diachronic development of verbal forms and vowel quality shifts. Bendjaballah and Ségéral (2013) explored verbal gemination, and Bendjaballah and Rubin (2020) analysed the 3fs perfect form in Omani Mehri. Eades (2014) identified syncretism in verbal morphology across the Modern South Arabian languages. These works reveal how Mehri morphology provides insight into both synchronic variation and diachronic renewal processes within Semitic languages.

Mehri syntax has gained prominence in recent years through formal and descriptive analyses. Alrowsa (2014) investigated question formation, while Fakihi (2023) analysed *wh*-questions within unaccusative and ergative structures. Al-Qumairi (2017, 2019) conducted comprehensive studies of clause structure, employing minimalist approaches to morphosyntactic analysis. Shlonsky (2020) provided insights into constituent order in the Mehri noun phrase, and Sima (2002) described the use of the definite article. These studies illustrate the productivity of Mehri data for theoretical debates in syntax.

Lexical documentation has been extensive, though primarily descriptive. Johnstone's (1987) *Mehri Lexicon* remains a foundational resource. Nakano (1986) compiled a comparative vocabulary of Southern Arabic, including Mehri, while Watson et al. (2020) developed pedagogical resources such as *Taḡhamk Āfyat*. Comparative lexical work by Alfadly, Mukashin (2019) addressed cognate identification between Mehri and Hadhrami Arabic. However, these works remain largely etymological, focusing on cognates and surface similarity rather than systematic semantic comparison.

Semantic analyses of Mehri are relatively scarce. Balhaf et al. (2024) explored the tense system, while Watson and Rowlett (2012) examined negation within Jespersen's Cycle. Studies on deixis and definiteness, such as those by Watson (2018), provide important insights into referential semantics. Nonetheless, formal semantic treatments of scope, quantification, and modality remain largely absent. Moreover, while lexical studies

highlight correspondences with Arabic, fine-grained comparative semantic analyses—such as polysemy patterns, semantic shifts, and domain-specific contrasts—have received little scholarly attention.

In contrast, pragmatics and discourse studies are comparatively well developed, often through the documentation of oral literature and fieldwork. Kalshat and Mirgane (2018a) examined language use in media domains. Research on proverbs, oral narratives, and ecological discourse (Al-Qumairi et al. 2024) highlights the cultural embedding of language use and the pragmatics of performance. These materials also serve as a foundation for potential semantic and pragmatic analyses.

While Mehri has been relatively well studied in phonology, morphology, and syntax, two clear gaps emerge. First, formal semantic analysis is underrepresented, with only limited studies of tense, negation, and deixis. Second, and most striking, is the lack of systematic comparative semantics between Mehri and Arabic. Existing works provide lexical correspondences and cognate lists but rarely engage in semantic field analysis or explore shifts in meaning across the two languages. Addressing this gap would enrich our understanding of language contact, semantic change, and the interplay between Arabic and Mehri within the broader Semitic context.

METHOD

DATA COLLECTION

The Mehri linguistic data used in this study were collected from several sources, including the dictionary by Al Mahri (2013) and other relevant linguistic sources, which are relatively scarce. Therefore, reliance was placed primarily on oral tradition and what human memory preserves of lexical items transmitted across generations, as well as on personal interviews, particularly since some of these lexical items are used in one linguistic region but not in another. The result was sixteen roots that express fear in the Mehri language. These roots are: *ṭaṣaṣa*, *baṭara*, *baṭala*, *bahaṣa*, *xawafa*, *rakaka*, *ṭajaka*, *ṭajafa*, *fagṣa*, *faḍaka*, *faḍara*, *faraḳa*, *fazṣa*, *naṭata*, *nahaṣa*, *haraga*. Consequently, the following research questions emerged:

1. Which Mehri fear-related roots correspond to Arabic in both form and meaning?
2. Which Mehri fear-related roots show partial correspondence with Arabic—such as similarity in meaning but not in form, or vice versa?
3. Which Mehri fear-related roots demonstrate no correspondence with Arabic?

This research employed the comparative method to examine fear-related lexicon in the Mehri language and elucidate its relationship with Arabic lexicon of fear. This is the most appropriate approach, as it highlights the similarities and differences between the two languages, thereby facilitating the discovery of linguistic connections and relationships. The comparison in this

work followed a unified methodological framework with consistent steps, as outlined in the following points:

- The examined lexical units are un-contextualized.
- The Mehri linguistic data (root, meaning, derivatives, associated affixes) are presented.
- The Arabic linguistic data (root, various meanings, documented variations) are presented.
- The points of convergence or divergence between the Mehri and Arabic roots are identified and highlighted.

The analysis and comparison revealed that some of these roots correspond with Modern Standard Arabic in both form and meaning; therefore, they were grouped together in the first category. It was observed that there is a group of roots that potentially approximate Arabic in meaning, so they were placed in the second category, with efforts made to establish such kinship relationships. The third group of roots clearly appeared to have no relationship with Arabic, neither in form nor in meaning; consequently, the study placed them in the third category.

I. Roots that Correspond with Modern Standard Arabic in Form and Meaning

The Mehri language encompasses a number of fear expressions; some of them appear only in nominal form, others only in verbal form, and some permit the derivation of both nouns and verbs. Some of these words correspond with those found in Modern Standard Arabic dictionaries, while others differ from them with no kinship relationship. A third category occupies an intermediate position, indirectly or metaphorically denoting meanings of fear, ultimately resulting in some form of relationship. The first section below will be dedicated to discussing Mehri roots denoting fear that correspond with Standard Arabic in both form and meaning.

1. *ṭaṣṣa* Root

The Mehri language employs verbs derived from this root to denote fear, with the /ṣ/ pronounced as an interdental fricative. The following forms are attested: *ṭiṣṣ*, a past tense verb meaning 'he feared', and *jaṭṣūṣ*, a present tense verb meaning 'he fears'. No future or imperative forms have been identified in contemporary Mehri linguistic usage or from the oral memory of native speakers. A number of suffixes may attach to this root yielding: *ṭiṣṣik* 'I feared' or you (m.sg.) feared, *ṭiṣṣif* meaning 'you (f.sg.) feared', *ṭiṣṣim* 'they feared', *ṭiṣṣikum* 'you (pl.) feared', and *ṭiṣṣin* 'we feared' (m. pl). The usage of this verb is not widespread across all Mehri-speaking regions today, but rather remains confined to Bedouin Mehri varieties. Its employment is typically associated with intense terror, such as encounters with hyenas or other predatory animals, suggesting it represents an advanced stage of fear. In other regions, this verb may be realized with initial /j/ rather than /ṭ/, yielding the inflected forms *jiṣṣ*, *jiṣṣik*, *jiṣṣif*, *jiṣṣim*, *jiṣṣikum*, *jiṣṣin*.¹

¹ S. M. Ghafila, personal communication.

Arabic lexicons have documented this triconsonantal root, connecting it with several meanings including: *ta'āssū* 'gather and crowd', *al-ašīṣah* 'proximity', *al-ašīṣ* 'solid construction' or 'broken pottery', and *nāqatun ašūš* 'strong she-camel' (Al-Jawhari 1987; Ibn Manzur 1994; Al-Zabidi 2001). These sources also indicate that it may denote fear or closely related meanings. Ibn 'Abbad (1994) noted that among the meanings of *ašīṣ* are fear and terror, while al-Jawhārī (1987) stated that *al-ašīṣ* refers to trembling. Ibn Sīdah (2000) confirmed all the aforementioned meanings in Al-Muḥkam, as did Ibn Manzur (1994) and Al-Firuzabadi (2005). It is obvious that the MSA and Mehri meanings agree that this root denotes fear.

2. *xawafa* Root

This word appears in the Mehri language in the form of a verbal noun, exactly as it occurs in Standard Arabic *xawf* 'terror or fright' (Ibn Sīdah 2000). No verbal forms are derived from this trilateral root in actual usage—neither past, present, future, nor imperative. Only one derived form has been attested: the passive participle *maxwīf* referring to a person who is apprehensive about enemies lying in wait for them, particularly in contexts of conflict and blood revenge.

3. *faraka* Root

This trilateral root appears in the Mehri language to denote the meaning of fear. The past tense form is *fīrīk*, the present tense is *jifrūk*, and the future tense is *kis jifrūk*. The existence of an imperative form derived from this root has not been proved; it is most likely not in use. The verbal noun from this verb is *fīrḳāt*. Various suffixes attach to this root to indicate person, number, or gender. Examples include: *fīrḳīk* 'I feared' or 'you (masc. sing.) feared', *fīrḳīf* 'you (fem. sing.) feared', *fīrḳīm* 'they feared', *fīrḳīkim* 'you (pl.) feared', and *fīrḳin* 'we feared'.

This trilateral root appears in the Noble Quran in the Almighty's statement: *Wa yahlifoona billaahi innahum laminkum wa maa hum minkum wa laakinnahum ḳawmun yafḳoon* 'They swear by Allah that they are part of you, but they are not. They only say so out of fear,' (Quran 9:56). The word *yafḳoon* means *they fear*. In Arabic lexicons, this root encompasses numerous meanings, including: the parting of the hair on the head, the act of separating between two things, a large flock of sheep, precision and detailed exposition, the big weight measure used by the people of Iraq, among many others. The root also denotes the meaning of fear. Al-Farahidi (1988) considered it synonymous with terror, stating: *fazi'a faza'an* 'He was terrified', *fariḳa* 'he feared'. In another text, he wrote "*rajulun faruḳah* 'a fearful man' and *imra'ah faruḳah* 'a fearful woman'; and *fariḳa farḳan* 'he has feared', so he is afraid, with *fariḳ* derived from fear." Ibn Al-Sikkī mentioned various terms for fear, including *farūḳah* 'coward'. Al-Azhari (2001) explicitly stated in his Tahdhib that *farak* denotes intense terror.

It is evident that the meaning remains consistent across both Standard Arabic and Mehri, although the latter has preserved the pronunciation of the ancient Semitic uvular [q].

4. *fazaṣa* Root

The Mehri language derives various verbs denoting fear from the root *fazaṣa* (Al-Mahri 2013). In the past tense, the form is *fīzaṣ*, and the *ṣayn* may be replaced by the glottal stop [ʔ] in certain linguistic environments as will be discussed. The present tense form is *jufūzaṣ*, while the future tense is *kis jifzāṣ*. This root yields a clear imperative form *fzaṣ* and produces the verbal noun *fizṣāt*. It may also generate an active participle form *fizṣūn*, clearly referring to "the coward." This verb can be considered the primary fear verb in Mehri, as it is the most frequently used in speech and is shared across most Mehri linguistic environments.

Among the suffixes that attach to this root are the *k* as in *fīzṣak* indicating the first- or second-person singular, the *f* as in *fīzṣaf* for the feminine singular addressee, *fīzṣam* for the masculine third person plural, *fīzṣakum* for the masculine second person plural, and *fīzṣan* for the first-person plural.

The verbal noun *fazaṣ* 'fear' has gained prominence in Arabic dictionaries as denoting the meaning of fear and its synonyms. Al-Farahidi (1988) noted that it means *faraka* 'to be afraid' in the past tense, while al-Jawhari (1987) added the meaning of panic to its denotations, noting that context may determine other meanings such as *faziṣtu minhu* 'I was afraid of him' and *faziṣtu i'lajhi* 'I sought refuge in him', whereby it acquires the meaning of sanctuary. Al-'Askari (1996) added the meanings of terror, dread, and fright, while Ibn Faris (1986) supplemented these meanings with 'relief/assistance', citing the Prophet's hadith (peace be upon him) regarding the Anṣar as evidence: *ʔinnakum latakṯurūna ʔindal fazaṣi wa taḳillūna ʔind aṭṭa'maṣi* 'Indeed, you increase in number during times of alarm and decrease during times of greed'. The preposition *ṣan* may be introduced with this verb, resulting in an opposite meaning, as in the Quranic verse *ḥatta: 'iḏa: fuzziṣa ṣan ḳulūbihim* 'until when fear is removed from their hearts', meaning 'fear is expelled from them' (Ibn Faris, 1997). Al-Himiari (1999) compiled these meanings in his dictionary while explicitly stating the meaning of fear: *alfazaṣ* 'panic and fear'. It is said *faziṣtu minhu* 'I was afraid of him', and *rajulun faziṣun* 'a fearful man'. Quraan states *lā yaḥzunuhum al fa'zaṣul ʔakbar* 'the greatest terror will not grieve them'², and *fazaṣa i'layhi* meaning 'he sought refuge in him', and *al-fazaṣ* means 'relief'... (Al-Himiari 1999). These citations demonstrate agreement of denotation between Standard Arabic and Mehri.

Perhaps it is required to record some linguistic observations related to the aforementioned examples for further clarification, and to serve as a basis for analogous cases that will be discussed later. The current spoken

² Qur'ān 21:103.

Mehri language retains some archaic sounds which appeared in the examples: the interdental fricative /s/, and the uvular /k/. The lateral fricative /š/ and the lateral /ś/ will appear later. However, the question that should be posed here is: how can Mehri correspond with Classical Arabic in these lexical items while retaining sounds that are classified today as archaic linguistic sounds?!

Some scholars argue that the Mehri language lacks the pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/ as a distinctive phoneme. This view was articulated by Hijazi (1981) in his work *Arabic Linguistics: A Historical Comparative Introduction in Light of Heritage and Semitic Languages*, where he noted that /ʕ/ is replaced by the glottal stop /ʔ/, such that ʕabd Allah (Abdullah) becomes ʔabd Allah. However, this position requires reconsideration, as the phenomenon appears to be a case of phonetic simplification for articulatory ease rather than complete phonemic loss (Balhaf, 2022a). Evidence for this interpretation lies in the fact that certain Mehri linguistic environments—specifically eastern varieties—continue to preserve this sound, maintaining the pronunciation ʕabd Allah rather than ʔabd Allah. This observation is particularly relevant to our discussion because the past tense form of the verb *fīzaʕ* ‘to be frightened’ and its derivatives are pronounced as *fīzaʕ* or *fīzā* in most Mehri varieties, with the exception of Eastern Yemeni Mehri. This pronunciation pattern extends to other verbs of fear that we will encounter subsequently, which contain the pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/.

A phenomenon that researchers observe specifically in Mehri verbs is vowel lengthening (Balhaf 2016). The verb *fazaʕa* ‘to be frightened’ has become *fīzaʕ*, as if the /f/ is followed by the lengthened vowel /ī/. The same applies to the verb *faraqa* ‘to separate’ which became *fīraq*. Thus, the most prominent phenomenon that can be observed in the pattern of the Mehri past tense verb is vowel lengthening.

There is a second observation related to the present tense pattern, which predominantly follows the pattern *yʕʕūl* with the short vowel /ɪ/ following the /j/ sound, such as *yʕfrūk* ‘to separate’. It may also follow the pattern *yafūʕal* as in *yafūzaʕ*. The origin of these two patterns was perhaps *yafʕalu*, in which the vowel was lengthened. This is supported by what Al-Samarrai (1978, 115) mentioned: “The pattern *yafʕūl* is among the ancient verbal patterns that were utilized in proper nouns for rational beings and non-rational beings, and for inanimate objects such as plants, trees, and other natural entities. Perhaps *yafʕūl* with lengthened /ū/ is the original pattern of *yafʕulu* with /u/.”

The final observation concerns the formation of the future tense verb, which is formed by adding the prefix *kʕs*, corresponding exactly to the future marker *sīn* in Standard Arabic.

A number of functional suffixes are connected to Mehri verbs. The suffix *k* morpheme in forms like *fīzʕak* is a pronoun for the first and second person, meaning “I was frightened” and “you were frightened.” The suffix *f* is for the feminine *fīzʕaf*, and the suffix *n* is a pronoun for first person plural *fīzʕan* ‘we were frightened’. The *m*

morpheme is for third person plural *fīzʕam* ‘they were frightened’, and it also indicates the second person plural by adding the *k* as in *fīzʕakm*.

It is believed that these usages are ancient Semitic. However, “Arabic and Hebrew differ in this respect from the proto-Semitic language. This opinion is based on the premise that the *k* morpheme was the second-person pronoun, and that the *t* morpheme was the first-person pronoun in the proto-Semitic language. Later, Arabic used the suffix *t* for both first and second person and distinguished between the different forms through the vowels *ī*, *ū*, and *ā* after the *t*” (Hijazi 1981, 141). Just as Arabic retains using the morpheme *t* as a pronoun for both first and second person, Mehri apparently retains the morpheme *k* for both, but without a distinguishing marker between them—as is the case in Arabic—except for context, which serves to clarify whether this attached *k* is for first or second person. As for the *m* suffix, it has been established that it was a marker of verbal plurality in proto-Semitic languages such as Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Ethiopic) Moscati et al. 1993) and the same applies to Mehri today.

The Mehri language scarcely distinguishes between the dual and the plural; rather, the dual is typically treated as a plural. Therefore, the preceding examples did not address the verb when it expresses a dual form. However, Eastern Mehri in Yemen recognizes the dual through the addition of a suffix *ki* that attaches to the verb indicating the second person dual, and a suffix *uh* that is attached to the verb—whether past, present, or imperative, whether second person or third person—to change it to a dual form (Balhaf 2016). In light of this rule, *fīzʕaki* ‘you two became frightened’, *fīzʕuh* ‘they two became frightened’, *yafīzʕuh* ‘they two became frightened’, and *fīzʕuh* ‘you two, be frightened!’ are used in Eastern Mehri.

II. Lexical Items Potentially Related to Classical Arabic

The Mehri language has employed certain words denoting fear or one of its meanings; however, these words do not correspond with Standard Arabic in terms of both form and meaning, as mentioned previously in the first section. It is possible that they may correspond with the Arabic trilateral root in terms of semantics, or through the metaphorical use of the lexical item. We will not attempt to force semantic correspondence in this section in pursuit of achieving congruence, but the Mehri data will be presented first, followed by the Standard Arabic root, and subsequently establish a comparison to substantiate the hypothesis this study is investigating.

1. *baṭara* Root

The trilateral root *baṭara* in the Mehri language is associated with the concept of fear following a shocking or astonishing event (Al-Mahri 2013). This fear is typically accompanied by a sudden physical reaction, such as rising abruptly from a seated position or an involuntary bodily movement, such as moving the hand. The verb forms are conjugated as follows: *bītir* for the past tense, *yibtūr* for the present tense, and *ḳis jibtūr* for the

future tense. In all these forms, the meaning remains consistent: experiencing fear due to surprise or shock, being afraid, or will be afraid. This root is further modified by various suffixes, such as *biṭrik* for the first- and second-person singular, *biṭrif* for the second-person feminine, *biṭrim* for the third-person plural masculine, *biṭrkim* for the second-person plural masculine, and *biṭrin* for the first-person plural.

The meaning of the trilateral root *baṭara* in Arabic dictionaries is associated with notions of perplexity and astonishment. The clause *ʔabṭarahū* means “to astonish someone” or “to overwhelm beyond capacity.” Al-Jawhari (1987, 592) explains: “I overwhelmed someone with a task *ʔabṭartu fulānan ʔirṣahu* when I burdened them beyond their ability.” Other meanings include ingratitude for blessings, as in *baṭirat maʔīfataha* ‘her livelihood was marked by ingratitude’, persistence in error, and the treatment of animals *baṭarah*, meaning treating them (Al-Farahidi 1988; Ibn Abbad 1994). Ibn Al-Sikkit (1998) explicitly states that *al-baṭr* also refers to a person remaining in perplexity (Al-Mahri 2013). These meanings partially align with the Mehri language interpretation to some extent. In Mehri, *al-baṭrah* does not denote fear stemming from cowardice or panic, but rather from perplexity and astonishment. It is closer to an instinctive reaction resulting from an impactful stimulus. Thus, in Mehri, *baṭar* and its derivatives are not viewed as negative connotations implying terror, but as fear linked to alertness and attentiveness.

2. *baṭala* Root

The trilateral root *baṭala* in the Mehri language is employed exclusively in nominal forms to denote a semantic field related to fear, specifically cowardice; and it did not appear in verbal forms. This indicates that Mehri derived only nouns from this root and not verbs. The language produced: *bṭūl* ‘cowardice’, *būṭel* ‘coward’, and *bṭālit* ‘cowards’.

The first idea that comes to mind is that this semantic meaning contradicts the Standard Arabic meaning, since *al-baṭal* refers to the brave and valiant warrior. They are referred to as such because they nullify their wounds and pay them no heed, nor do they prevent them from coming to the aid of others (Al-Farahidi 1988), or because they expose themselves to destruction (Al-Razi 1979). It has been said, “because they nullify great matters with their sword, rendering them ineffective. It is argued that the brave is called *baṭal* because the strong become nullified in their presence. They are the ones before whom the blood of peers becomes nullified so that no vengeance can be obtained against them” (Ibn Manzur 1994). However, the Standard Arabic word carries a different meaning i.e., the opposite of truth, falsehood, pretense, and not standing firm. Ibn Faris (1986) stated that in *baṭala*, *b*, *ṭ*, and *l* constitute a single root, which is the disappearance of something and the brevity of its duration and persistence. It is said that a thing *baṭala* ‘nullified’, *jabṭulu* ‘nullifies’, *baṭalan*, *buṭūlan* ‘both express verbal

noun meaning’, and Satan was called *albāṭel* because his actions have no reality, and everything from him has no recourse and cannot be relied upon (Al-Razi 1979).

Isfar al-Fasih states: *wabaṭṭala al shayʾ* ‘to nullify something’ and the conjugations are *yabṭulu* for present, *baṭlan*, *buṭlānan*, and *buṭūlan* [are used as nouns] when something disappears, ceases, becomes corrupted, and does not persist, thus, it is *bāṭel* ‘falsehood’ (Al-Nahwi 2000, 524).

The Mehri usage may derive from this semantic domain, where *būṭel* means the coward who does not stand firm during confrontation, which is a characteristic of *bāṭel* ‘nullified from confronting other brave individuals, thus fears and retreats’. Subsequently, the *ā* was inclined toward *ū*, resulting in the lexeme *būṭel* (Balhaf 2022b). It should be noted that the Sabaean dictionary had documented this lexeme under the root *b-t-l* meanings *buṭl* ‘futility and uselessness’ (Beeston, 1982).

3. *rakka* Root

The Mehri language employs the triconsonantal root *r-k-k* to denote weakness resulting from fear (Al-Mahri 2013), particularly weakness in situations that require the demonstration of courage and strength. This refers to weakness stemming from fear. The following forms are attested: *rīk* a perfective past-tense form of the verb meaning ‘to become weak’, *yrkūk*, an imperfective present-tense verb meaning ‘to become weak’. In contemporary Mehri usage as attested by one of the authors, who is a native Mehri speaker, the verb does not exhibit future or imperative forms, most likely because the verb typically occurs in contexts of censure, where the action is neither commendable nor desirable. Consequently, its occurrence in the future is not anticipated or welcomed, nor is it commanded. From this root, the nominal descriptive form *rīkīk*, ‘weak’ or ‘fearful’ is derived. This triconsonantal root typically takes various suffixes as in *rīkkīk* meaning ‘I became weak’ or ‘you (masculine singular) became weak because of fear’, *rīkkīf* ‘you (feminine singular) became weak’, *rīkkīm* ‘they became weak’, *rīkkīkim* ‘you (plural) became weak’, and *rīkkīn* ‘we became weak’.

This triconsonantal root features in Arabic language dictionaries with the same meaning of weakness. Al-Azdi (1987) states: “A man is *rakīk* with evident *rakākah* when he is weak.” Al-Jawhari (1987, 1587) notes: “*rakka* means it became thin and weak”. Al-Morsi (2000) notes that *ar-rakīk* among men refers to one who is *fasīl* ‘worthless’, weak in his intellect and judgment, one who shows no jealousy and is not feared by his family—all stemming from weakness. Ibn Manzur (1994) adds to the previous meanings the sense of deficiency *rakka faqluhu* ‘his intellect became deficient’ and the meaning of *alṣayy* ‘stammering’ i.e., weakness and inability to articulate speech clearly that afflicts a person when finding himself in dispute with others. It is evident that both the Standard Arabic and Mehri meanings correspond in denoting weakness resulting from fear or confusion.

4. *ṭayaḥa* Root

This root and some of its derived forms occur in the Mehri language to denote intense fear—such as panic or terror—with the phoneme /t/ pronounced laterally as /t/ or more precisely as /ṭ/. Common forms include *ṭīś* and *ṭyūs*, both ‘he panicked’, and *yitjūs* ‘he panics’. No imperative or clear future forms have been identified, likely due to the negative evaluative context in which the verb typically appears—expressing blame or reproach—making it improbable for the action to be commanded or anticipated. Several suffixes are connected to this verb such as *ṭīśik* ‘I panicked’ or ‘you (masc. sg.) panicked’, *ṭīśiś* for ‘you (fem. sg.) panicked’, *ṭīśim* ‘they panicked’, and *ṭīśin* ‘we panicked’. When referring to a group of females, the form *ṭyūs* is used without any suffix, as in *sān ṭyūs* ‘they (fem.) panicked’.

Arabic dictionaries have discussed this triconsonantal root *ṭayās*, restricting its meanings to mental frivolity, impetuosity, loss of reason, deviation from target *ṭāša ssahmu* ‘the arrow missed’), trembling, staggering, swaying, and flying (as if it became light, missed, and flew) (Al-Farahidi 1988; Al-Azhari 2001; Al-Jawhari 1987; Al-Razi 1979; Dozy 2000). Some dictionaries cite as evidence the ḥadīth of ‘Umar ibn Abī Salama, the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) stepson, that when he was eating, his hand would *ṭaṭīś* in the dish, meaning he would eat from every side, whereupon the prophet, peace be upon him, taught him proper dining etiquette (Al-Asbahani 1988). It appears that a simple comparison will reveal that the Mehri meaning is metaphorical, carrying the connotation of fear, for the frightened person who is overcome by intense panic and terror suffers from impulsiveness that renders him impetuous and trembling, unable to collect his wits to behave correctly.

5. *fagaḥa* Root

The Mehri language has employed verbs and nouns from the triconsonantal root *f-g-ḥ* denoting meanings of fear (Al-Mahri 2013), either retaining the /ḥ/ in some of its dialects or converting it to /ʔ/ for ease of pronunciation in others. Thus, the verb used is *fatgaḥa* or *fatgaʔ* ‘he feared’ or ‘he reached an advanced stage of fear’, and *tiftūgaḥ* or *tiftūgaḥ minhu* meaning ‘he becomes frightened by something out of fear’, and *figḥāt* or *figʔāt* ‘fright’, i.e., the verbal noun. The noun *figgāḥ* or *figgāʔ* appears in specific Mehri linguistic regions such as Ḥaṣweini for several renowned families like *Bayt Figgāḥ*, a name that carries the connotation of a brave, bold person who is feared by others. In other regions – particularly in the Mehri of Eastern Yemen – the word *fūgaḥ* is used for the past tense rather than *fatgaḥ*, and for the present, the verb used is *yiftūgaḥ*. A number of suffixes attach to this root following the pattern found in the previously mentioned linguistic roots to indicate different grammatical functions: *fatgaḥak*, *fatgaḥij*, *fatgaḥam*, *fatgaḥan*, *figḥak*, *figḥaj*, *figḥam*, *figḥan*. Remarkably, this linguistic data in its denotation of fear remains present in some Yemeni vernaculars *iftagaḥt* is used to mean ‘I feared’, and *fagaḥni* meaning ‘he frightened me’, and so forth.

Arabic dictionaries have recorded this triconsonantal root with the meaning of what afflicts a person from the calamities of fate regarding wealth, children, and body (Al-Farahidi 1988; Al-Zabidi 2001). Perhaps Ibn Manzur (1994) was the most comprehensive in collecting the meanings of this word under one entry when he said: *alfagiḥah* ‘the painful affliction that affects what is precious’ *fagaḥahu*, *yafgaḥuhu*, *fagḥan*, so he is *mafḡūḥ* and *fagiḥ*, and *fagaḥʔah* which is *alfagiḥah*. Likewise, *al-tafgiḥ*, *fagaḥathu l-muṣibah* ‘the misfortune pained him’; *alfawāḡiḥ* ‘the painful calamities that afflict a person with what is dear to him/her of wealth or loved ones. The singular is *fāḡiḥah*; and in al-Tahdhib: *dahrūn fāḡiḥ* ‘dreadful time’, *nazalat bi-fulān fāḡiḥah* ‘a calamity befell someone’; *altafagūḥ* ‘expressing pain and distress over affliction’; *tafaggaḥtu lahu* ‘I felt pain for him’; *alfāḡiḥ* ‘the raven’, a predominant epithet because it afflicts through its ominous cry of separation, and *rajulūn fāḡiḥūn wa-mutaḡag-giḥūn* ‘grieved and sorrowful’ (Ibn Manzur 1994). There is a proximity in meaning that can be observed between the root *fagḥ* and *xawf*, for affliction often engenders panic and terror. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of the existence of affliction without the existence of fear, and this is what may be inferred from the Mehri usage that made *fagaḥa* mean ‘he feared’.

6. *naṭaṭa* Root

This trilateral root demonstrates semantic connections to meanings of fear in the Mehri language (Al-Mahri 2013), where the past tense verb form *nitta* is employed meaning ‘to tremble’ or ‘to shiver’. The present tense manifests as *yintūt*, the future tense as *kis yintāt*, and the imperative as *nṭāt*. The root yields the verbal noun *nṭyūt*, signifying ‘trembling’ or ‘shivering’, and *nṭṭait*, denoting ‘a tremor’ or ‘a shiver’. This trembling typically results from fear, though it may arise from other causes such as illness, disease, or any circumstance that induces trembling in an individual without necessarily involving fear, for instance, extreme cold. Thus, *naṭaṭa* in Mehri may indicate fear, though its denotation is not invariably fear-related. The root accommodates various pronominal suffixes indicating person, number, and gender distinctions. These include: *nṭṭik* ‘I trembled’ or ‘you (masculine singular) trembled’; *nṭṭif* ‘you (feminine singular) trembled’; *nṭṭim* ‘they trembled’; *nṭṭikim* ‘you (plural) trembled’; and *nṭṭin* ‘we trembled’.

This lexical root appears in Arabic dictionaries with multiple denotations: height *rajulūn naṭnāt* ‘a tall man’, stretching *naṭṭu l-faiʔ* means *madadʔuhu* ‘I extended the thing, I stretched it’ (Al-Razi 1979), distance *ṭardūn naṭṭa* ‘distant land’, and movement *naṭṭa fi l-ṭard* ‘he went forth in the land’ (Al-Morsi 2000). Ibn ‘Abbād (1994) transmitted an interesting meaning for this root *an-naṭṭ* ‘running away’, as did Al-ṣaghani (1978). This latter semantic development may be most proximate to the meanings of fear that constitute our present inquiry, for just as weakness may arise from fear, fleeing may likewise arise from fear following trembling or shaking.

Table 1 Mehri Linguistic Roots Similar to Classical Arabic

No.	Trilateral Root	Meaning in Mehri	Meaning in Arabic
1	baṭara	fear following confusion and astonishment	bewilderment, astonishment, ingratitude, exceeding one's capacity
2	baṭala	cowardice	courage, bravery, falsehood, lack of stability
3	rakka	weakness due to fear	weakness, deficiency, speech impediment
4	tayaḡa	panic – intense fear	light-mindedness, recklessness, deviation from goal, agitation
5	fagaḡa	advanced stage of fear	calamities, misfortunes, tragic events
6	naṭaṭa	trembling or shivering	height, extending, departure, fleeing
7	haraga	fear of ascending or descending	killing, confusion, foolishness, excessive talk, weakness

7. *haraga* Root

The Mehri language employs this triconsonantal root to denote fear of heights or steep slopes, whereby the fear is typically associated with ascent or descent. This represents a state of fear that afflicts an individual when descending from or ascending to a rugged road. Accordingly, the following forms are attested: *hīrīg* – past tense form of the verb ‘feared during ascent or descent’, *yīhrūḡ* – present tense form ‘to fear’, *kīs yīhrūḡ* – future tense form ‘will fear’, and *hīrḡūt* – the verbal noun form. This triconsonantal stem accommodates various suffixes, including *k* to indicate first or second person singular *hīrḡik*, *f* for second person feminine singular *hīrḡif*, *m* for third person masculine plural *hīrḡim*, *kīm* for second person masculine plural *hīrḡkīm*, and *n* for first person plural / *hīrḡin*/. It is noteworthy that certain Mehri dialectal environments (such as the Haswein variety) employ this root with metathesis, yielding the forms *rhīg* – *yīrhūḡ*.³

The lexical root *haraga* appears in Arabic dictionaries with several meanings, none of which encompasses fear. *Alhargu* denotes killing, confusion, folly, and excessive speech, while *alhargah* refers to bows and means ‘pliable’; *alfaras alharārg* describes a horse characterized by frequent running. Some lexicographical sources posit that the etymological root of *harg* signifies abundance in something (Al-Jawhari 1987), while others present this lexical item pronounced as *hīrḡ* rather than *harg*, meaning weakness or that which is weak in all aspects, noting that *rihḡīḡ* denotes ‘the weak’ (Al-Azhari 2001). The latter semantic interpretation may be suitable for explicating the Mehri denotation, given that fear of uplands, lowlands, or other phenomena is fundamentally a manifestation of weakness, or rather a state of weakness that overcomes an individual, causing fear. This interpretation is supported by the observation that those experiencing this condition frequently cease movement out of fear or move with deliberate slowness. This phenomenon is attested in certain Gulf Arabic vernaculars, as observed in Saudi Arabian colloquial Arabic, where it is termed *ʔumm arrukab* ‘mother of the knees’, whereby the legs tremble with fear and a person ceases movement when ascending a precipitous height or descending a steep declivity.

The Table 1 above summarizes the linguistic roots under investigation, along with their meanings in the Mehri language and the corresponding senses attested in Arabic.

A careful examination of the contents of the table above reveals a semantic relationship of some kind between Mehri and Arabic relationship that is not identical, undoubtedly, but rather suggestive, so that it evokes some association between the two meanings. The Mehri *baṭr* denotes ‘fear following astonishment’, while Arabic *baṭr* means ‘astonishment without fear’; both share the semantic components of astonishment and bewilderment. Mehri *baṭl* means ‘cowardice’, and among its Arabic meanings is ‘lack of steadfastness’—fundamentally, the coward does not stand firm but flees in fear. Mehri *rakka* denotes ‘fear resulting from weakness’, while its Arabic meaning also involves weakness, and fear is undoubtedly a state of weakness. Mehri *ṭayf* refers to ‘an advanced state of fear developing into panic and terror’, while in Arabic lexicons, it means ‘lightness, deviation, and agitation’. Among the effects of *ṭayf* is that a person becomes confused, behaves inappropriately, and becomes agitated, particularly when exposed to a frightening situation—this meaning corresponds to what occurs in Mehri and is closer to the metaphorical sense. As for *fagḡ*, which expresses an advanced state of fear as well, it represents an effect resulting from some influence, which may or may not be calamities, misfortunes, and adversities. The meaning of *naṭaṭa* in Mehri refers to trembling or shaking, while its meaning in Arabic indicates various senses including fleeing which typically occurs as result of fear, just as trembling usually stems from fear. The root *harg* denotes ‘fear of heights or depths’ in Mehri, while it means ‘weakness’ in Arabic, and it is evident that this type of fear constitutes a state of weakness.

III. Lexical Items Not Corresponding to Classical Arabic in Form and Meaning

This section addresses the remaining fear-related lexemes in the Mehri language—terms that analysis has revealed bear no connection to Classical Arabic, neither in form nor in meaning, and which did not appear in the

³ A. I. Kalshat, personal communication.

Sabaeen dictionary sources that was consulted in an attempt to trace all or some of them. Therefore, they may require future in-depth research to uncover the historical semantic development of these lexical items within the Arabic language family. These lexical items are:

1. *bahaša* Root

This lexeme occurs in verbs and nouns denoting meanings of fear (Al-Mahri 2013), with /š/ pronounced as a lateral consonant. The sentence *bathiš* is in the past tense and it means 'he was startled' from fear; and *yibthūš* is in the present tense meaning 'he is startled'. The imperative form exists yet in limited contexts, where *ibtīhiš* is used to mean 'be startled'. Verbal nouns can also be derived as in *biḥšāt*, which denotes startling and sudden fright. Various suffixes attach to this lexeme, converting it to first or second person, masculine and feminine, singular and plural forms as in *bathišk* meaning 'I was startled' or 'you (masc.) were startled', *bathšij* meaning 'you (fem.) were startled', *bathšim* meaning 'you (pl.) were startled', *bathšin* 'we were startled'. This verb and some others typically lack a marker indicating feminine plural—as previously noted, for example *san bathiš* is used to mean 'they (fem.) were startled'.

It is useful to note here that the denotative meaning 'to be startled' *fazza* is classical in the sense of alarm and fright (Ibn Abbad 1994), and that the meaning of suddenness in this verb does not carry connotations of astonishment and wonder—it rather refers to fear and unease.⁴

This trilateral root *bahaša* has not achieved widespread recognition across all Arabic lexicons. Some dictionaries have omitted it entirely, while others debate its meaning. Those lexicographers who have documented this root define it as denoting 'that which exceeds one's capacity, burdens excessively, and causes exhaustion'. Al-Jawhari (1987, 66) states "*bahaša* Abu Turab reported: 'I heard a Bedouin from *Ashjaʿ* tribe say: *bahašanī hādhā al-amr wa-bahazanī* 'it overwhelmed me'. He noted no one else corroborated this usage, and Allah knows best (Al-Azhari 2001). Ibn Manẓur (1994) reproduced Al-Jawhari's text and supplemented it by noting that among the meanings of *bahaša* is 'that which causes you difficulty' (Ibn Manẓur 1994). Al-Zabidi (2001) maintained that this verb may be written with either /d/ or /z/, though its pronunciation as /z/ represents a weak variant. He furthermore asserted that it is "unquestionably Arabic". It may be observed here that establishing a correspondence between the Mehri and Standard Arabic meanings might prove somewhat tenuous, notwithstanding that both carry connotations of discomfort. However, the shared semantic component of fear may not be readily available.

2. *ṭayaḳa* Root

This trilateral root appears in Mehri verbs and nouns denoting an advanced state of fear approximating panic, with the /k/ sound pronounced as a uvular stop. The past tense forms include *ṭiyyek* and *ṭyūk*, the present tense *yityūk*, and the future *kis yityīk*. The verbal noun (maṣdar) derived from this trilateral root is *ṭikāt*.⁵ Various suffixes attach to the verbs derived from this root: *ṭīkik* for both first- and second-person masculine singular, *ṭīkij* for second-person feminine singular, *ṭīkim* for third-person masculine plural, *ṭīkikim* for second-person masculine plural, and *ṭīkin* for first-person masculine plural. All these forms convey the meaning of panic or terror, as previously mentioned. It cannot be definitively established whether the /t/ here represents a phonological substitution for /d/, suggesting an original root *ḍayaḳa*. However, this hypothesis remains plausible given that certain Mehri linguistic environments exhibit /d/ to /t/ sound change, as evidenced in forms such as *ṭarab* for standard *ḍaraba* 'he hit'.

Arabic dictionaries have treated this trilateral root under the entries *ṭāka* and *ṭawaḳa* but have not allocated an independent entry for *ṭayaḳa* (Omar 2008). No linguistic relationship can be observed here between the Mehri and Classical Arabic denotations.

3. *faḍaka* Root

This trilateral root appears in several Mehri verbs and nouns to denote the meaning of fear or related contextual concepts.⁶ The past tense form is *fiḍik*, the present tense *yifḍūk*, the future tense *kis yifḍūk*, and the verbal noun *fiḍkīt*. The past tense form typically collocates with another fear-related lexeme, namely *bṭūl* mentioned previously, as in *fiḍik min abṭūl* meaning 'reached an advanced stage of fear'. It may also be said of a child: *fiḍik min abūkī*, meaning 'reached a troubling or frightening stage of crying'. The verb appears to express attainment of an advanced stage of fear or other states; however, when used independently, it conveys only the meaning of fear. Some Mehri regions employ this root with /d/ rather than /ḍ/, producing the forms: *fidik*, *yifūdik* and *fidkīt*. Various suffixes attach to the past tense form of this root, indicating person, gender, and number distinctions: *fiḍkik* meaning 'I was afraid' or 'you (masc. sg.) were afraid', *fiḍkiš* meaning 'you (fem. sg.) were afraid', *fiḍkim* meaning 'they (masc.) were afraid', *fiḍkikim* meaning 'you (masc. pl.) were afraid', and *fiḍkin* meaning 'we were afraid'.

Arabic lexicons do not include the root *faḍaka* in their contents, suggesting that this root is fundamentally unused or represents a lexicographical omission. They do record the root *fadaka*, but with meanings unrelated to fear. *Fadak* is the name of a village in the Hejaz region near Medina, characterized by flowing springs and abundant palm trees (Al-Farahidi 1988; Al-Azhari 2001).

⁴ M. A. Shalyan, personal communication.

⁵ A.I. Kalshāt, and S. M. Ghafila, personal communication.

⁶ M. A. Shalyan, personal communication.

The expression *fadaktu al-quṭn tafḍikan* means 'I carded the cotton', representing an Azdi dialectal usage (Ibn Manzur, 1994). Arabs used the names: *fudaikan*, *fadkiyyan*, and *faddākan* (Al-Azdi 1987). "Al-Fudaikāt: a group among the Khawarij attributed to Abu Fudaik al-Khariji" (Al-Firuzabadi 2005). No semantic correlation in this root can be observed between the Mehri and Classical Arabic meanings.

4. *faḍara* Root

The Mehri language employs this trilateral root in verbs and nouns carrying meanings of fear. The forms include *fiḍir* in the past tense, *yifḍūr* in the present tense and present temporal reference, *kis yifḍūr* indicating future tense, and *fiḍrīt* as a verbal noun derived from the same verb denoting fear, though it may extend to other meanings clarified by context. Various suffixes attach to this root: *fiḍrik*, with the suffix *k*, meaning 'I was afraid' or 'you (masc. sg.) were afraid' (first/second person); *fiḍrif*, with the suffix *f*, meaning 'you (fem. sg.) were afraid' (second person feminine); *fiḍrim*, with the suffix *m*, meaning 'they (masc.) were afraid' (third person masculine plural, becoming second person by adding *k*, *fiḍrkim*; and *fiḍrin*, with the suffix *n*, meaning 'we were afraid' (first person masculine plural, corresponding to the Arabic subject pronoun *n*). This root has not been encountered in Arabic lexicons; in other words, the root *faḍara* does not exist in these dictionaries according to the author's research findings.

5. *nahaša* Root

This triconsonantal root relates in its semantic indication of fear meanings to the previous root *bahaša*. While the latter denotes the meaning of startled *fazza* as previously discussed—meaning that fear occurs to a person through exposure to a particular situation, with its effects manifesting internally. The root *nahaša*, as evidenced by contemporary Mehri linguistic usage, indicates fear with an external causative agent. For instance, when someone frightens another person, causing them to rise up in alarm, this fear is typically accompanied by movement or standing up.⁷ Thus, *nhiš* or *natheš*, is used with the approximate meaning of 'to jump quickly' or 'far away from fear'. In the present tense, it is expressed as *yinhūš*; in the future tense *kis yinhūš*; in the imperative mood *nhūš*; and the verbal noun is *nihša:t*. Various suffixes attach to this root, as previously mentioned, such as: *nathišik* for the first- or second-person singular, *nathišif* for the second-person feminine singular, *nathišm* for the third-person masculine plural, *nathiškim* for the second-person masculine plural, and *nathišin* for the first-person plural.

This triconsonantal root compiled by Al-Azhari (2001) appears in Arabic dictionaries with numerous meanings that bear no relation to fear meanings. He stated, "according to Al-Layth *an-nuhūš* means departing from a place; *an-nāhiš* is the chick whose wings have grown full and risen for flight; *nahšu al-baṭr* refers to what lies

between the shoulder blade and the shoulder joint of a camel, with the plural form *anhūš*. According to Ibn al-Araabi *an-nahš* means injustice and it also means *an-nahš* 'reproach'" (Al-Azhari 2001).

This root bears no relation to the meaning of fear. However, it should be noted that *nahš* in Mehri requires rising due to fear and surprise, while the Classical Arabic root *nahd* indicates—in one of its meanings—rising or departing from a place without fear. Thus, the two meanings share the semantic indication of rising, but not the semantic indication of fear.

Upon careful examination of the trilateral roots of this group of Mehri fear-related lexemes *bahaša*, *ṭayka*, *faḍaka*, *faḍara*, and *nahaša*, one finds that most of these roots are neglected in Arabic dictionaries, perhaps because they are not in use, or perhaps because they represent lexical gaps in those dictionaries. However, this matter raises more than one question, and the answer requires further research.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to study fear-related lexemes in the Mehri language through a comparative lexico-semantic approach. The data were first collected from the limited Mehri sources available and from contemporary Mehri usage, relying primarily on the oral memory of elderly speakers. The study compared them with entries found in Arabic dictionaries, ultimately arriving at the following findings:

The research identified sixteen fear-related lexemes used in Mehri language. Four of these correspond completely with Standard Arabic in both form and meaning, appearing in the roots *ʔašša*, *xawafa*, *faraka*, *fazaʔa*. Seven of them potentially relate to Standard Arabic in meaning but not in form, appearing in the roots *baṭara*, *baṭala*, *rakk*, *ṭayafa*, *fagaʔa*, *naṭaṭa*, *haraga*. Five do not correspond with Standard Arabic in either form or meaning, appearing in the roots *bahaša*, *ṭayaka*, *faḍaka*, *faḍara*, *nahaša*.

The research revealed that some of these roots are specialized in specific contexts. The root *ʔšša* is often associated with fear of predatory animals. The root *baṭara* is frequently linked to fear following a shocking situation or surprise, usually accompanied by sudden rising from a seated position or involuntary bodily movements such as hand gestures. The root *rakka* is specific to fear in situations that call for displaying courage and strength. The root *haraga* - *rahaga* is specific to fear of heights or slopes, meaning that the fear is usually associated with ascending or descending.

The findings also showed that some of these lexemes are prominent in certain Mehri linguistic regions but not others. The aforementioned root *ʔašša* is present today in rural areas rather than urban centers. The root *faḍaka* is used in the Eastern Yemeni region but not in other areas. The root *rahaga* is used specifically in the Haswein area in Al-Mahrah Governorate in the Republic of Yemen, while other regions use the root *haraga*.

⁷ M. A. Shalyan, personal communication.

Fear-related lexemes in the Mehri language range from natural fear to panic and terror. The roots *xawafa*, *fazaḥa*, *faraka*, *faḍaka*, *baṭala*, and *rakka* express ordinary states of fear that humans may experience, while this state increases in intensity with roots such as *ṭaṣṣa*, *baṭara*, *naṭṭa*, *fagaḥa*, *haraga*, *faḍara*, and fear reaches its peak with roots *ṭayaḥa*, *bahaṣa*, *nahaṣa*, *ṭayaḥa*.

The study noted that some of these roots generally derive verbs indicating past or present tense, while they do not derive verbs indicating future tense or imperative mood, perhaps because the verb in these contexts often appears in a context of blame, and commanding, such actions are neither commendable nor desirable, therefore they are not commanded nor hoped for in the future. The study also noted that some of these roots do not form verbs at all, such as the root *xawafa* which appears in the form of a verbal noun, and similarly the trilateral root *baṭala* which occurs in nouns but does not appear in verbs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their expert comments and to the editors for their contribution to the improvement of the article.

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*The authors acknowledge the use of the Claude AI tool for limited language editing purposes only. The responsibility for the content and scholarly integrity of the manuscript rests entirely with the authors.