

## A New Perspective on Mehri Diminutives

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### 0. Introduction

*Goal:*

Propose a morphophonological analysis of Mehri diminutives independent of CV templates

*Roadmap*

§1 Previous (templatic) analyses of the Mehri diminutive

§2 Data from Rood (2017) and a novel analysis

§3 Conclusion: A better model of the grammar

*Mehri*

- Modern South Arabian (Semitic); spoken in Yemen and Oman

### 1. Previous analyses of the Mehri diminutive

Johnstone (1973)

- First comprehensive description of diminutives in Modern South Arabian languages
- Organized his analysis into three traditional Semitic CV templates:

**Table 1: Patterns for Mehri diminutive formation** (Johnstone 1973)

Type	Pattern	Example	Gloss
Triliteral – Type 1	CewēCēC	ḥarf → ḥewērēf (√ḥrf)	gold amulet → little gold amulet
Triliteral – Type 2	CeCēCēn	ketōb → ketēbēn (√ktb)	Leather amulet → little leather amulet
Quadriliteral	CeCēCēC	'ākermōt → 'ākēremōt (√'krm)	Pelvis → poor little pelvis <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From a poem in which a man falls and breaks all his bones.

- Johnstone also notes that most Mehri diminutive nouns pluralize using conventional sound plural strategies, although a select few utilize reduplication and an additional few appear to have no plurals
- Rubin (2010) adopted similar analysis in his grammar

Watson (2012)

- Outlines a more complex system of eleven CV templates:

**Table 2: Patterns for Mehri diminutive formation (Watson 2012)**

Type	Pattern(s)	Example	Gloss <sup>2</sup>
Triliteral – masculine singular	C(a)CāCān / CwāCēC	šabb → šwābēb (√šbb)	youth
Triliteral – feminine singular	CaCCānōt / CūCāCōt	jaḥlēt → jaḥlānōt (√jḥl)	pot
Triliteral – plural	CaCCānūtan / CūCāCūtan	ḵlūb → ḵulābūtan (√ḵlb)	hearts
Quadriliteral – masculine singular	C(a)CāCēC	kabkīb → kabākēb (√kbb)	star
Quadriliteral – feminine singular	C(a)CāCāCōt / CaCCāCōt	ʕarḵayb → ʕarḵabānōt (√ʕrḵb)	mouse
Quadriliteral - plural	CaCCāCūtan / CūCāCūtan	funxār → funxārūtan (√fnxr)	nostrils

- Largely the same generalizations as Johnstone (1973) with regular feminine and plural morphology (as well as variable vowel qualities) taken into account

Are these traditional CV templates the best analysis for the diminutive data?

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<sup>2</sup> Watson (2012) does not give individual translations for diminutive nouns, but rather generalizes that “diminutives of count nouns can give the sense of smallness in size or importance, or affection or depreciation” (62).

## 2. Data from Rood (2017)

### Singular nouns

- Additional data presents a more complete picture of the Mehri diminutives
- Minimally, diminutive singular is formed with infixation of  $-\bar{a}$ :

(1)	a.	ḵabšiš insect/cockroach.M.DIM	b.	ḵab < $\bar{a}$ > šiš insect/cockroach.M < DIM >
(2)	a.	masxān fireplace.M	b.	ms < $\bar{a}$ > xān fireplace.M < DIM >
(3)	a.	ḵōfl lock.M	b.	ḵaw < $\bar{a}$ > fil lock.M < DIM >
(4)	a.	mḵrāḷ scissors.M	b.	mḵ < $\bar{a}$ > rāḷ scissors.M < DIM >

- In (1)-(4), the diminutive infix  $-\bar{a}$  appears in the penultimate syllable in masculine nouns
- The same is true for feminine nouns that take the  $-Vt$  suffix:

(5)	a.	tamr-ūt date-F	b.	tam < $\bar{a}$ > r-ūt date < DIM > -F
(6)	a.	θḥm-ōt cinder/ash-F	b.	θḥ < $\bar{a}$ > m-ōt cinder/ash < DIM > -F
(7)	a.	twḥal-ūt worm-F	b.	twḥ < $\bar{a}$ > l-ūt worm < DIM > -F
(8)	a.	ṭaršam-ōt tip of the nose-F	b.	ṭarš < $\bar{a}$ > m-ōt tip of the nose < DIM > -F

- Note that the diminutive infix is the penultimate syllable regardless of whether there is a feminine suffix on the word and is therefore not consistently located in a CV template. The diminutive infix

either occurs between the second and third radical or following the third radical, depending on the absence or presence of a feminine suffix.

- If the insertion of  $-\bar{a}-$  would result in an illicit V.V sequence, an epenthetic  $-n-$  is inserted to avoid hiatus:<sup>3</sup>

- |      |    |                         |    |  |
|------|----|-------------------------|----|--|
| (9)  | a. | ðb-ūt<br>fly-F          | b. | ðb < ān > -ūt<br>fly < DIM > -F          |
| (10) | a. | mḷḡ-ōt<br>bite/morsel-F | b. | mḷḡ < ān > -ōt<br>bite/morsel < DIM > -F |
| (11) | a. | nīšḥ-ōt<br>bat-F        | b. | nīšḥ < ān > -ōt<br>bat < DIM > -F        |

- If the vowel in the feminine  $-Vt$  suffix is a front or central vowel, the presence of the  $-\bar{a}n-$  infix will make the feminine suffix a back vowel:

- |      |    |                      |    |                                       |
|------|----|----------------------|----|---------------------------------------|
| (12) | a. | raḥb-ēt<br>city-F    | b. | raḥb < ān > -ēt<br>city < DIM > -F    |
| (13) | a. | jarʕ-āt<br>gulp-F    | b. | jarʕ < ān > -āt<br>gulp < DIM > -F    |
| (14) | a. | ḥf-īt<br>hair-F      | b. | ḥf < ān > -īt<br>hair < DIM > -F      |
| (15) | a. | bīḷ-ayt<br>egg-F     | b. | bīḷ < ān > -ayt<br>egg < DIM > -F     |
| (16) | a. | baṣl-āt<br>onion-F   | b. | baṣl < ān > -āt<br>onion < DIM > -F   |
| (17) | a. | fḷaḥ-āt<br>scandal-F | b. | fḷaḥ < ān > -āt<br>scandal < DIM > -F |

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<sup>3</sup> Consistent with Mehri phonology. Mehri employs several strategies to avoid hiatus (Watson 2012).



### Plural nouns

- Diminutive plurals are also formed with an infix  $-\bar{a}-$ , except the infix is found in the antepenultimate syllable:

(27)	a.	kabkīb star.M	b.	kab < $\bar{a}$ > kēb star.M < DIM >	c.	kabk < $\bar{a}$ > b-ūtan star < DIM > -PL.DIM
(28)	a.	ḵōfl lock.M	b.	ḵaw < $\bar{a}$ > fil lock.M < DIM >	c.	ḵf < $\bar{a}$ > l-ūtan lock < DIM > -PL.DIM
(29)	a.	twḵal-ūt worm-F	b.	twḵ < $\bar{a}$ > l-ūt worm < DIM > -F	c.	tūḵ < $\bar{a}$ > l-ūtan worm < DIM > -PL.DIM

- For plural quadriliteral nouns, the diminutive  $-\bar{a}-$  is located between the third and fourth radical ((27)c) rather than between the second and third radical (as it is in the singular, (27)b).
- Similarly, in the case of plural trilateral nouns, the diminutive  $-\bar{a}-$  is located between the second and third radical ((28)c) rather than between the first and second radical (as it is in the singular, (28)b).
- If the trilateral noun has a feminine suffix in the singular, the diminutive  $-\bar{a}-$  remains between the second and third radical ((29)b and c).
- If the diminutive singular has a feminine suffix, the feminine suffix is absent when the plural is formed:

(30)	a.	bīḷ-ayt egg-F	b.	bīḷ < $\bar{a}n$ > -ōt egg < DIM > -F	c.	bīḷ < $\bar{a}n$ > -ūtan egg < DIM > -PL.DIM
(31)	a.	raḥb-ēt city-F	b.	raḥb < $\bar{a}n$ > -ōt city < DIM > -F	c.	raḥb < $\bar{a}n$ > -ūtan city < DIM > -PL.DIM
(32)	a.	jarḵ-āt gulp-F	b.	jarḵ < $\bar{a}n$ > -ōt gulp < DIM > -F	c.	jarḵ < $\bar{a}n$ > -ūtan gulp < DIM > -PL.DIM

- This fact could either be the result of contextual allomorphy ([F] is spelled-out as  $\emptyset$  in the context of [DIM][PL]), or a result of haplology (*bīḷānōtūtan* → *bīḷānūtan*)
- If the diminutive singular has the  $-\bar{a}n$  suffix, the suffix is absent when the diminutive is pluralized:

(33)	a.	jūfn eyelid.M	b.	jf < ā > n-ān eyelid.M < DIM > -DIM	c.	jif < ā > n-ūtan eyelid < DIM > -PL.DIM
(34)	a.	naxrīr nose.M	b.	nx < ā > r-ān nose.M < DIM > -DIM	c.	nx < ā > r-ūtan nose < DIM > -PL.DIM
(35)	a.	ṣarēd light.M	b.	ṣar < ā > d-ān light.M < DIM > -DIM	c.	ṣar < ā > d-ūtan light < DIM > -PL.DIM
(36)	a.	ḵabīn scorpion.M	b.	ḵab < ā > n-ān scorpion.M < DIM > -DIM	c.	ḵab < ā > n-ūtan scorpion < DIM > -PL.DIM

- The absence of *-ān* in these cases supports the claim that *-ān* is a last resort phonological insertion (= it isn't needed in the plural)

**Conclusion:**

Insertion of infix *-ā-* coupled with predictable morphophonological processing can account for all diminutive forms in Mehri

**Table 3: Summary table of Mehri diminutive nouns**

Present Analysis	Template from Johnstone (1973)	Template from Watson (2012)	Example from new data
Insertion of <i>-ā-</i> in penultimate syllable	CewēCēC; CeCēCēC	CwāCēC; CūCāCōt; C(a)CāCēC; CaCCāCōt; C(a)CāCāCōt;	hw < ā > laʃ θḥ < ā > m-ōt ḵab < ā > šiš ṭarš < ā > m-ōt
Insertion of <i>-ān-</i> in penultimate syllable		CaCCānōt	mḡ < ān > -ōt
Insertion of <i>-ā-</i> + suffixed <i>-ān</i>	CeCēCēn	C(a)CāCān	ḥm < ā > h-ān

Insertion of $-\bar{a}-$ + plural suffix $-\bar{u}tan$		CaCCāCūtan; CūCāCūtan; CūCāCūtan;	kabk < ā > b-ūtan tūf < ā > l-ūtan
Insertion of $-\bar{a}n-$ + plural suffix $-\bar{u}tan$		CaCCānūtan	raḥb < ān > -ūtan

### 3. Conclusion: Why is the present analysis useful?

- A simpler description is able to account for a larger data set
- In a non-lexicalist, realizational model of morphology, paradigms are epiphenomenal
- While the CV templates remain a useful descriptive tool, the analysis presented here may more closely model a speaker's grammar

### Bibliography

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