

# Lexical Resemblance among Modern South Arabian Languages in Oman

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## Abstract

Modern South Arabian (MSA) languages make one central group of three distinct language groups that comprise minority languages in Oman. Contrary to their counterparts spoken in the north of Oman, MSA languages are spoken in the southern part of the country with some spoken in neighboring Yemen. Due to both geographical and linguistic proximity among these languages, they are often viewed even by some of their speakers as dialects of one another rather than languages of their own. Accordingly, the improper term 'dialects' is often used to refer to these languages in reference to other languages within the group. Chiefly based on common lexical items, this view, however, is unsubstantiated on research basis. This paper, hence, is an attempt to vindicate such view by measuring the extent of lexical resemblance among these languages using the Swadesh's one hundred word list as its framework. To this effect, speakers were asked to report word recognition of lexical items under investigation as well as mutual intelligibility to sentences in which recognized lexical items were used. Findings show that although there is a huge lexical resemblance among these languages exhibited by the fact that speakers could recognize numerous words from these languages, native speakers reported minimal mutual intelligibility to these languages.

**Keywords:** Modern South Arabian Languages, Oman, Hobyot, Harsusi, Bathari, Jabbali, Mehri

## 1. Introduction

An extraordinary mélange of ethnic-group languages exist in the Sultanate of Oman hand in hand with Arabic language spoken all over the country. Such mélange of minority languages is traced back to three distinct language families: Modern South Arabian languages, Indo-Iranian languages and Bantu Language. Five different languages make the first group; these are: Bathari, Harsusi, Hobyot, Mehri and Jabbali which is alternatively named Shehri. The second group includes Kumzari, Lawati, Balushi, and Zadjali whereas Sawahili is the only language that belongs to the Bantu language family (Al Jahdhami, 2015; Al Jahdhami, 2018). Owing to common linguistic affiliation that triggers an inevitable lexical resemblance, languages belonging to the same language group are often viewed by some of their speakers and non-speakers alike as dialects of one another rather than fully fledged languages of their own. Thus they are often referred to as 'dialects' rather than 'languages' assuming that they branch from some mother language, and accordingly exhibit some phonemic and lexical variance. Zadjali, for instance, is largely considered as a dialect of Baluchi and/or Sindhi; it appeared, however, to be unintelligible to speakers of both languages despite the common lexical items they share with Zadjali. Although speakers of Baluchi and Sindhi reported recognition of Zadjali lexical items shared with their languages, their mutual intelligibility to sentences in which these recognized lexical items were used was very minimal (Al Jahdhami, 2017). Other cases confirmed utter unintelligibility to Zadjali sentences. MSA languages are not an exception as they are often considered as dialects of one another rather than distinct languages. This view, however, is unsubstantiated and thus warrants reexamination. On this ground, the paper aims to investigate the extent of lexical resemblance among MSA languages as well mutual intelligibility among their speakers in the hope that it substantiates the uncommon view that they are fully fledged languages of their own rather than dialects of one another despite their common genetic affiliation and vast lexical resemblance.

## 2. Genetic Affiliation

Modern South Arabian languages branch from the West Semitic languages that include, besides MSA languages, Ethiopian and Central Semitic languages as opposed to the East Semitic languages that include Eblaite and Akkadian (Hetzron, 1997; Owens, 2007, Simeome-senelle, 2010). The underneath figure shows their genetic affiliation traced back to the Pro-Semitic language family. Speakers of Modern South Arabian languages are mainly found in the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Yemen in the Southern part of Arabia. Due to the nomadic life style of Mehri, smaller number of Mehri speakers can be found in other nearby zones in Somalia and Saudi Arabia. The total number of Arabs speaking MSA languages is estimated to be 200,000 speakers in both Oman and Yemen (Simeome-senelle, 1998; Simeome-senelle 2010). Three of these languages, namely Jabbali, Harsusi, and Bathari, are spoken peculiarly in Oman. Mehri and Hobyot have speakers in both countries whereas Suqatri is spoken only in Yemen, precisely in the Island of Suqatra and its neighboring islands (Simeome-senelle, 1997). Although their linguistic affiliation is traced back to the Western Semitic group to which Arabic belongs alongside several shared linguistic features with Arabic, intelligibility of Arabic speakers to these languages is impossible (Rubin, 2008). MSA languages also share some common features with Ancient

South Arabian/ Epigraphic South Arabian languages as well as with Afro-Semitic languages spoken in both Ethiopia and Eretria though the exact relationship between these sub-groups remains unclear. Rubin divided MSA languages into two main groups: Western MSA which includes Bathari, Harsusi, Mehri and Hobyot; and Eastern MSA which includes Jabbali and Suqatri. Contrary to Rubin's view, Simeome-senelle (2010) highlights that MSA languages belong to three sub-groups: Bathari, Hobyot, Mehri and Harsusi belong to one subgroup; Shehri and its related dialects belong to another subgroup; and Suqatri belongs to a third subgroup.

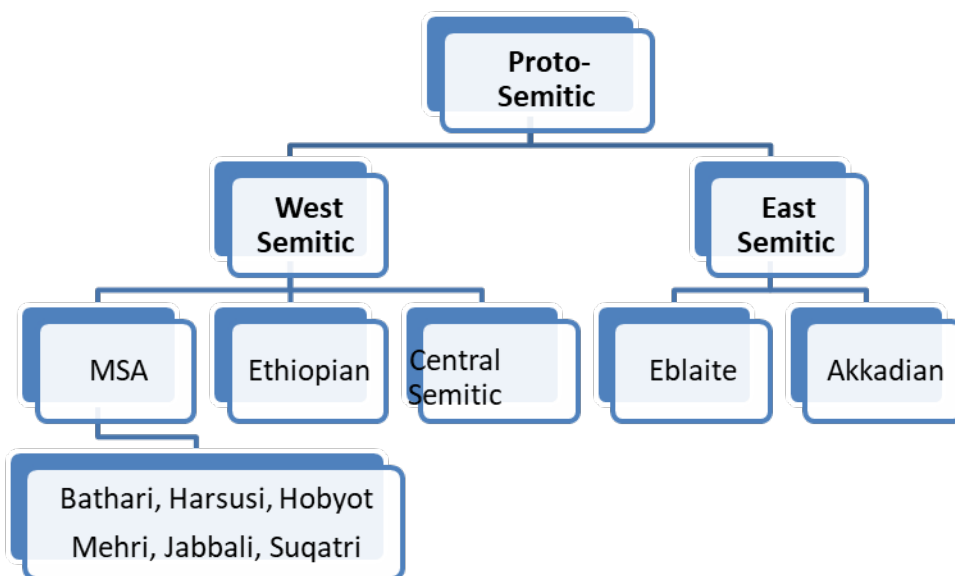


Figure 1. Genetic affiliation of MSA languages

Reliable statistics on the exact numbers of speakers for each single language do not exist up to date. Several factors such as decrease in the numbers of native speakers due to death of elderly speakers as well as language shift to other nearby languages make it even more intricate to pinpoint the precise numbers of speakers for each language. Estimated numbers however vary from hundreds of speakers in some cases like Bathari and Hobyot to thousands of speakers in Harsusi, Mehri and Jabbali (Al Jahdhami, 2015). Suqatri is the only MSA language that has no speakers in Oman; it is spoken by around 50,000 speakers in Suqatra Island and Abdul Kuri and Samha Islands in Yemen (Simeone-Senelle, 1991b). The following map adapted from Simeome-senelle (2010) shows the rough distribution of MSA languages in both Oman and Yemen with Mehri spoken in a small zone of Saudi Arabia.

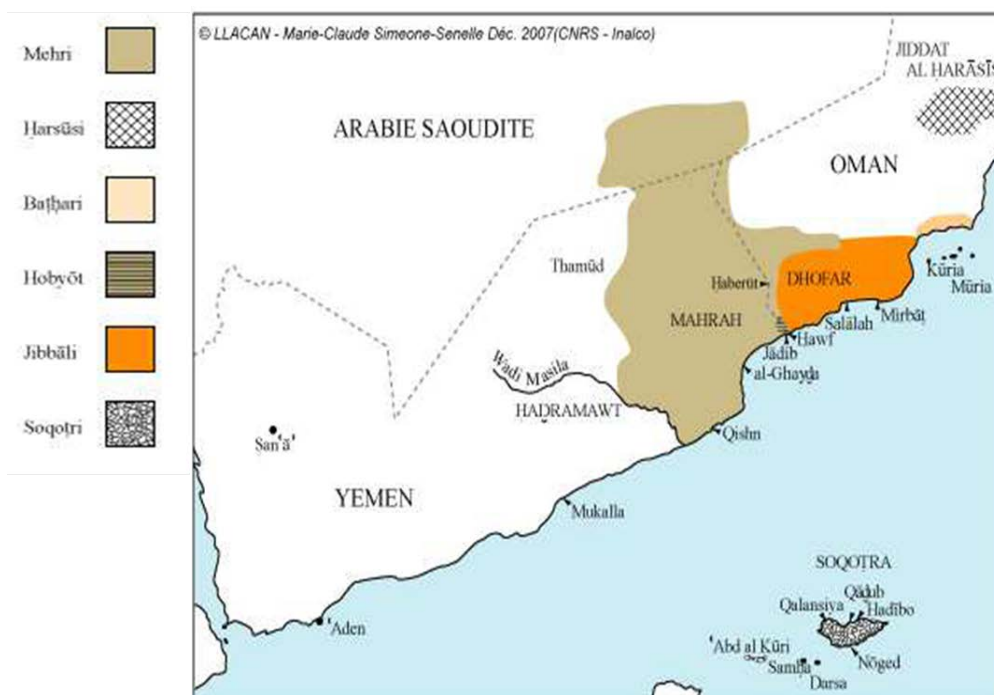


Figure 2. The distribution of MSA languages in Arabia (Simeome-Senelle, 2010)

The level of endangerment for all MSA languages grows very fast at an alarming level. Minority languages in Oman, including MSA languages, fall into three main levels: critically endangered, severely endangered and definitely endangered mainly based on the numbers of their speakers and the extend of inter-generational transmission (Al Jahdhami, 2015). As a matter of fact, the ongoing decrease in the small numbers of native speakers as opposed to those of safe languages, the unconcern of parents and speakers in general shown towards intergenerational transmission, and the restricted domain of use augment the endangered level of these languages which warrants an urgent need for data collection that evades the danger to the existence of these languages (Al Jahdhami, 2015; Simeome-senelle, 2010). Lack or unavailability of written literature of MSA languages such as poetry, folklore, tales, and proverbs exacerbates the situation which calls for an urgent need to draw attention to the endangerment of these languages and thus spur further research on them.

### 2.1 Mehri

The speakers of Mehri are semi-nomads involved mainly in breeding cattle, camels and goats as well as in some sea-oriented jobs such as fishing and trading. Their number is around 140,000 speakers in both Oman and Yemen (Simeome-senelle, 1998; Simeome-senelle, 2010). Due to her focus on Mehri spoken in Yemen as opposed to the one spoken in Oman, Simeome-senelle highlights the fact of children's unconcern of learning their ethnic group language which somewhat holds true for its speakers in Oman. According to Johnstone (1975) Mehri has two main varieties: Southern Mehri spoken in Yemen and Nagd Mehri spoken in Oman which seems to be more conservative than its counterpart variety spoken in Yemen. Native speakers of Yemeni Mehri refer to two varieties of Mehri based on geographical reasons: Mehriyet and Mehriyot. The former is spoken in the Western part of the Mahra

whereas the latter is spoken in the Eastern part adjacent to the borders with Oman. Both Mehriyet and Mehriyot further branch into coastal and Bedouin dialects. Mehri spoken in Oman, on the other hand, is referred to as Mehriyyet. Simeone-senelle (2010), however, disagrees with such distinction of the two main varieties made by Johnstone as she claims that both varieties, including their sub-dialects, largely share the same common features phonetically, phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, and lexically.

### 2.2 Bathari

Bathari or Bathri as named by some people is one of the lesser known languages among its MSA counterparts. It is named after the tribe of its speakers 'Albatahirah' (Batharis) dispersed over several cities in the provinces of Dhufar and Alwusta in the southern part of Oman. It is namely spoken in the coastal towns of Al-Shwaimia, Shalim, Alakbi, Sharbathat, Azakhar, Suqrah, and Alhalanyat Islands (The Omani Encyclopedia, 2013). It is often depicted as a dialect mixture of both Harsusi and Mehri due to the lexical items they share though it also has various lexical items from Arabic. The first mention of Bathari can be traced back to Betram Thomas's work on Bathari based on his fieldwork's notes (The Omani Encyclopedia, 2013). Just like most if not all of MSA languages, a considerable number of young Batharis do not speak their ethnic group language or have a passive knowledge of it as they do not foresee an intrinsic appealing goal for learning Bathari.

### 2.3 Harsusi

The stronghold of Harsusi is Jiddat Al-Harasis in Alwusta province in addition to some other nearby areas such as Alagayz and Alghubrah. A very small number of speakers is also found in Alghudranah and Adam (The Omani Encyclopedia, 2013). The first ancient work done on Harsusi was by Betram Thomas followed by Johnstone's fieldwork resulting in compiling a Harsusi English mini dictionary (Stoomer & Johnstone, 2004), a copy of which is still retained in Jiddat Alharasis Nature Reserve. According to Johnstone (1981) there was around 600 speakers of Harsusi in 1977. The nowadays number of Harsusi speakers, however, is estimated to be around few thousand speakers. Though it is believed that it has lexical resemblance with some neighboring MSA languages such as Mehri and Bathari, its speakers largely consider it a language of its own distinct from other MSA languages.

### 2.4 Hobyot

The term Hobyot is used to refer to the language and its speakers alike. The geographical zone in which Hobyot language is spoken seems to straddle the line between the Omani-Yemeni borders as it is spoken in small restricted areas near the borders shared by both countries (Simeone-senelle, 2010; The Omani Encyclopedia, 2013). Though it has some contact with Jabbali spoken in the same proximity, Hobyot is differentiated from "əḥkīli" or "əḥkelyōt", the variety of Jabbali spoken in that area. Due to both linguistic and geographical proximity, it is often viewed as a dialect of Jabbali or Mehri. Johnstone (1975) made a reference to what he called 'Whebyot' which he defined as a variety of Hobyot spoken in Oman. Simeone-senelle (2010), however, does not acknowledge such division asserting that

it is not possible to recognize two possible varieties of Hobyot neither in Oman nor in Yemen.

Hobyot has a very small number of speakers in both countries. Simeome-senelle (2010) cites around 400 Hobyot speakers in Yemen. Reliable number of Hobyot speakers in Oman is not available, but it is estimated to be very few hundred, a very scanty sum that sends a red flag regarding its language vitality in the course of the coming tens of years or so (Al Jahdhami, 2015). Noteworthy is that the scanty remaining speakers of Hobyot are speakers of other MSA languages such as Mehri or Jabbali besides Arabic. Due to having more speakers of Mehri and Jabbali in the vicinity as opposed to those of Hobyot, Mehri and Jabbali are often preferred to Hobyot. Such fact has also accelerated the rate of language shift to these languages. These factors have collectively played a key role in its level of endangerment, especially that Hobyot is indeed under-documented and one of the least known among other languages within the group.

### *2.5 Jabbali*

Literally signifying 'the language of the mountain', Jabbali has a concurrent name 'Shehri' interchangeably used with the former, both of which are derived from the Arabic word 'Jabal'; and the Jabbali word 'Jher' respectively. Contrary to its other MSA counterparts spoken by specific ethnic groups, it is spoken by speakers of different tribes and clans in the province of Dhufar (The Omani Encyclopedia, 2013). It has thousands of speakers in several dialects that exhibit some phonemic and lexical variances, distinctively between those residing in mountainous areas as opposed to those in sedentary ones. The French Consul in Jeddah (KSA) is cited to have done the first scholarly work on Jabbali based on data collected from speakers who were on pilgrimage journey to Mecca in late 19th century. His work was followed by a more elaborate work done by a group of Austrian researchers (The Omani Encyclopedia, 2013). Though it has thousands of speakers, a considerable number of the younger generation has a passive knowledge of their ethnic group language let alone those who do not speak it in the first place.

## **3. Methodology**

Native speakers of Bathari, Harsusi, Hobyot, Mehri and Jabbali were recorded providing the equivalents to the Swadesh's one hundred word list in their native languages. Lexical items were phonemically transcribed as shown in the underneath table. Participants were asked to identify common lexical items shared between their ethnic language and the other languages within the group. Speakers of each language were asked to use those identified lexical items in sentences of their own so that mutual intelligibility of other speakers to these languages is measured.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

A comparison of the Swadesh's one hundred word list in the five languages beforehand shows that lexical resemblance among them is significantly huge. Speakers involved in the study emphasized their capability to spot and recognize similar lexical items from these languages. All investigated lexical items are shared by at least two languages under

investigation. Other cases revealed shared lexical items among the majority of languages in addition to unanimously shared lexical items that form cognate groups with some minor differences in the consonantal and/ or vocalic segments. Lexical items forming cognate groups are represented in the underneath table that shows the equivalents to the Swadesh's word list in Bathari, Harsusi, Hobyot, Mehri and Jabbali, respectively. Lexical items making one cognate group are shown in bold whereas those forming a second cognate group are shown in italics. Lexical items that do not belong to any cognate group are kept in normal typeface. Syllabic boundaries and stress assignment are represented in the data via the two symbols (.) and (') respectively. Noteworthy is that lexical items presented in the data may exhibit some phonemic and/ or lexical discrepancies from those used by some native speakers of other varieties of some of these languages. Exotic sounds in the data are described underneath in terms of glottal state, place and manner of articulation.

<u>s</u> voiceless emphatic alveolar fricative	ħ voiceless pharyngeal fricative
ʃ voiceless alveolar lateral fricative	ʁ voiced uvular fricative
<u>ts</u> voiceless emphatic alveolar affricate	ʕ voiced pharyngeal fricative
tʃ voiceless alveolar lateral affricate	q voiceless uvular plosive
<u>d</u> voiced emphatic alveolar plosive	ð voiced emphatic interdental fricative
<u>dz</u> voiced emphatic alveolar affricate	t̪ voiceless emphatic alveolar plosive
χ voiceless uvular fricative	ʒ voiced alveolar lateral fricative
<u>z</u> voiced emphatic alveolar fricative	t' voiceless glottalized (ejective) alveolar plosive
k' voiceless glottalized (ejective) velar plosive	

Table 1. The equivalents to the Swadesh's one hundred word list in Bathari, Harsusi, Hobyot, Mehri and Jabbali respectively

S. No.	Swadesh	Bathari	Harsusi	Hobyot	Mehri	Jabbali
1	I	<b>huh</b>	<b>hɔ:h</b>	<b>hoh</b>	<b>hoh</b>	<b>hɛ</b>
2	you	<b>het</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> SG) <b>ten</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> PL)	<b>hit</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> SG) <b>ʔa.'tɔ:m</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> PL)	<b>hat</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> SG) <b>tuh</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> PL)	<b>het</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> SG) <b>ten</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> PL)	<b>hat</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> SG)- <b>tom</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> PL)
3	we	<b>nhah</b>	<b>nhah</b>	<b>na:.'hah</b>	<b>nhah</b>	<b>nhah</b>
4	this	<b>ðah/</b> <b>ða.'heh</b>	<b>ðah</b>	<b>ðah</b>	<b>'ðɔ:.mah</b>	<b>ðah/ða.'noh</b>
5	that	<b>ðak</b>	<b>ðak</b>	<b>ðek</b>	<b>'ðɛk.mah-ðek</b>	<b>ðɔ.'nah</b>
6	who	<b>ma:n</b>	<b>mɔ:n</b>	<b>moh</b>	<b>mɔ:n</b>	<b>moh</b>
7	what	<b>ha.'nih</b>	<b>'ħa.ʔan</b>	<i>ʒnɪh</i>	<b>ha:h</b>	<i>ʔi.'nah</i>
8	not	<b>ʃla /la</b>	<b>nɔ:h</b>	<i>law</i>	<b>la:-lɔw-'wej.lɔw</b>	<b>ɔb- lɔb- la</b>
9	all	<b>'ka.lan</b>	<b>kɔl.lo.'we.ta</b> <b>m</b>	<b>kɪl</b>	<b>kal</b>	<b>kaʔl</b>

10	many	'ma.kan	'ma.kan	'ma.kan	'me.kɪn	'ma.kɪn
11	one	t̪'a:d	t̪a:d	t̪'a:d	t̪'a:d	t̪'a:d
12	two	θrɪh	θroh	'θaa:.roh	θroh	θrɔh
13	big	nawb	ʔox	ʔox	ʔɔ:x	ʔeʔb
14	long	't̪'a:.wil	ʔa:m.'bir	't̪'a:.wil - t̪' wil	t̪'wil	rim
15	small	'k'an. nun	'k'an. nun	'k'an.nu	'k'an.nu	ni.'zaʔ
16	woman	teθ	tɛθ	tɪθ	tɛθ	tɛθ
17	man	ʋajg	ʋajg	ʋeg	ʋajɜ	ʋeg- ʋedɜ
18	person	ʋajg	bi.'ne. dɪm	ʋajg	bi.'ne. dɪm	ber.'dam
19	fish	sajd	si.'dit	tsid	tsajd	tsud
20	bird	tʃɛf.'ra:t / ʃa.k'a.'bit	tʃɛf.'ryt	ʃa.k'a.'bit	ʃa.k'a.'bit	ʃid.'tʃjet
21	dog	kawb	kawb	kub	kawb	kɔ:b
22	louse	kɛ.nɪ.'met	kɪn.'mut	kɪ.nɪ.'mit	kɪ.nɪ.'mit	ʃi.'nit
23	tree	har.'mit/ hrem	ʔɪg.'ret	ha:.'ru	ʔɪg.'rit- hrɔ:m	hi.'rɔm
24	seed	jaʃ.'qa:b/ tajd	hi.'bbet	hɔ.'bbɔ:t	hɔ.'bbɔ:t	bið.'ret
25	leaf	wɪr.'k 'at	wɪr.'k 'a:t	tsʋal.'fɔ:t	wɪr.'k 'at	tsʋa.'lɪf
26	root	rak.'nut	ark'	ʔi.'rɔχ	ʔi.'riχ	ʔir.'χɪ.ta
27	bark (of a tree)	hað.'lil/ ʃarg	sawg	rak.'nat	rɪk.'nit	ra:.'ʋab
28	skin	gɔ:d	gɔ:d	ʒɔ:d	ʒɔ:d	gɔ:d -ʒɔ:d
29	flesh	tɪh	'tu.wi	teʔ	'ti.wi	teʔ
30	blood	'ðe.raʔ	'ðɔ:.raʔ	ðɔ:r	'ðɔ:.raʔ	ðɔ:r
31	bone	ʃðeð	ʃa.'tʃetʃ	ʃɛ.'tʃetʃ	ʃaj.'tʃetʃ	ʃi.'tʃ'etʃ'
32	grease	ʔabɸ	'ʔa.baɸ	'ʔa.baɸ	ʔabɸ	ʔabɸ
33	egg	baq.'lut	bið	bi.'ðɪt	bi.'tʃ'eɪt	'k'a:.hal
34	(animal) horn	k'a:n	qɔ:n	k'a.'ru	k'rɔn	k'i.'rɔn
35	tail	ðnɔ:b	ða.'nɪb	ða:.'nub	ðnɔb	ðu.'nub
36	feather	ʔɪf	ʔa:ʃ.'fir	k'at.ʋiθ	k'atf	k'at.'fif
37	hair	ʔɪf	ʔɛf	ʔɪf	ʔɪf	ʔɔ:f
38	head	rɪh	rɪh	ha:.'rɪh	hɛ'reh	ʔi.'rɪʃ-rɪʃ
39	ear	haj.'ðin/ ʃaj.'ðin	ʔɪ.'ðin	haj.'ða	haj.'ðin	ʔɪ.'ðan
40	eye	ʃajh	ʔa:ʃn	ʃɪh	ʃajʔ	ʃɪh
41	nose	naχ.'rir	nɪχ.'rir	na:χɪ.'rir	na.χɪ.'rir	naχ.'rir
42	mouth	χah	χah	χuh	χɔh	χɔh
43	tooth	'mθe.nɪ	mɪθ.'net	mθɪn.'jɔt	mθɪn' j ɔ:t	ʃni



44	tongue	lʃin	lʃin	lʃa:n	lʃin	lʃi-lʃa:n
45	finger nail	ðfer	ðfer	d'i. far	ði'fer	ði. far
46	foot	'fa.ʃam / χuf al.'fa.ʃam	fa:m	fa:ʔ	fa:ʔm	faʃm
47	knee	fa.l.'kɔ:t / bark	bark	bark	bark	ʔa:rk
48	hand	hed	jid	hid	hid	ʔi:d
49	belly	'he.fil	'hɔ:.fal	'hɔ.fil	'hɔ:.fil	'ʃɔ:.fil
50	neck	'kɔ:.dah	'kɔ:.θɪ	'kɔ.θa	'kɔ:.θɪ	'kɔ.θa
51	chest	ʔa.'quf/ 'gal.fas	gawf	ʒɔf	ʒɔ:f	'gɛ.hi- 'gɛ.ha
52	heart	k'alb / ħaw.'bib	ħa:l.'bib	k'alb /hal. 'bɪ	k'alb /hal. 'bɪ	ɔ:b- k'alb
53	liver	ʃɪb.'dit	ʃɪb.'dit	ʃɛb.'dit	ʃɪb.'dit	ʃɪb.'dit
54	**drink (V)	jɪtɪf / jɪt.'tak'	'jgɔ:.raʃ	jah.'tɔ.k'a	jɪh.'tu. k'i	jɪʃ.'tig
55	eat (V)	jteh	'jte.jɔw	'jtu.wi	jtej	jtej
56	bite (V)	ji.ni.'ðek	jin.'ðɔ:k	jaɪt.'ʃɔɾ	jaɪt'.ʃɔɾ	jaɪt'.ʃɔɾ
57	see (V)	'jʃa.nah/ 'jɔɔ:.liɡ	'jɔɔw.liɡ	'jɔɔ.liɡ	'jɔɔ:.liɡ - jɪjn	jhe.'rɔk' - 'jta. k'aʃ-jɔɔɛɾɡ
58	hear (V)	'jhe.maʔ	'jhɔ.maʔ	'jhɔ.maʃ	'jhɔ:.maʃ	jʃuʃ-ji.ʃɪ.dz e.ʃan
59	know (V)	'jɔɔa:.rɪb	'jɔɔa:.rɪb	'jɔɔa.rɪb	'jɔɔa:.rɪb	jɔɔarb
60	sleep (V)	jʃif	jʃu.'kuf	'jʃu.kɔf	jʃu.'kɔ:.f	jʃef
61	die (V)	jɪm.'jut	jmut	ði.'mɔt	jmut	jɔɔɛɾɡ
62	kill (V)	'jla.ta ɸ	'jlu.taɸ	'jɪɔ.taɸ	'jɪɔ.taɸ	'jɪɔ.taɸ
63	Swim (V)	'jre.bɪh	'jsu.bah	ði.'rɔ.hag	'jɔɔa:.bah	jɔɔa:h-jrɔ:h
64	fly (V)	jɪf.'ðuð /jɪfð	jɪf.'rur	ði.ti.'jɔ:r	jɪf.'rur	jɪf.'rir
65	walk (V)	jɪs.'jur	jɪs.'jur	ði.sɪ.'jur	jɪs.'jur	jɪb.'ɔɔ:d
66	come (V)	'jɔɔa:.kaʔ	'jɔɔa:.kaʔ	ði.'nɔ.kaf	'jɔɔa:.kaf	'jɔɔa:.kaf- jza.'hɔ:m
67	lie (down) (V)	'lma.tɪd /jɪg.'ʃa:r	jɪt.'tejk	ðu.'k'a.ha. 'nɔ.fah	'ðmma.tɪd- ðu.'k'a.ha. 'na.fah	jɪʃ.'tɪ'ekɪ
68	sit (V)	jɪt.χu.'lul	jɪt.χu.'lul	'jɔɔa.kɔf	jɪt.χu.'lul	jɔɔkf
69	stand (V)	jɪtsur/ ʃjuθ	'jzawr	jɪtsɔr	jɪtsur	jɪtsɛr
70	give (V)	'jɔɔa.zɪm	'jwu.zɪm	'jwa.zam	'jɔɔa:.zɪm	'je.zɛm

71	say (V)	'jɔ̃:.mɔ̃r/ ɸmur	'jɔ̃:.mar	'jɔ̃.mar	'jɔ̃:.mɔ̃r	jɸur
72	burn (V)	ħarg/ ji. 'ħe.rig	jig. 'lul	ja:. 'nɔ̃.hah	jih. 'nejħ	'jnõ.hi- 'jnõ.ha
73	sun	jum	jɔ̃:m	ħa:. 'jum	ħjum	ɸum
74	moon	ħa:. 'rit	rit	ħa:. 'rit	ħa:. 'rit	ʔa:. 'rit
75	star	kɛb. 'kib	kɛb. 'kib	kɛb. 'kɪb	kib. 'kib	kɪb. 'kɪb
76	water	muh	moh	ħa:. 'moh	hmoh	mɪħ
77	rain	mu:. 'sɪ	miɪ. 'sɪ	mal. 'sɪ	mɔ̃:. 'sɛ	u. 'sa-mu. 'sah-mu. 'sɪ
78	stone	tɔ̃:.jɔ̃:.n/ 'ʔa:.ban	'tɔ̃:.war	tɔ̃wir	'tɔ̃:.war	fu. 'dun
79	sand	bath	ħɔ. 'hej	'ba.tah	bath	'ħa.ɸi
80	earth	ʔa. 'qa:ɸ	gir. 'diħ	ʔrdɟ	ʔrdɟ	gid. 'rit
81	cloud	sɪ. 'ħa:b	shɔ:b	ɸa:. 'fɔ̃:r	ɸa:. 'fɔ̃:r	ɸa:. 'fɔ̃:r
82	smoke	ʔm. 'daɰ	ndaɰ	'ni.daɰ	ni. 'dex	ʔm. 'dɔ̃ɰ- mɪn. 'dɔ̃ɰ
83	fire	ħa:ɟ	ħwet	ħɪ. 'wuɟ	ħɪ. 'wɔ̃:ɟ	ħɔ̃:ɟ
84	ash	ri. 'mid	rmid	ra:. 'mɪd	rmid	rid
85	path	'ħa:.rim/ 'ʔa:.rim	'wɔ̃:.rim	'ħɔ̃.rom	'ħɔ̃:.rom	ɔ̃:rm
86	mountain	kar. 'ma:m	kar. 'mem	ʒa:. 'ba:l	ʒbel	gja:l- ħer-
87	red	'ɸa:.fir	'ʔaf.far	'ɸɔ̃.far	'ɸɔ̃:.far	'ɸɔ̃.far
88	green	'ħɪ.tħ'a:r	ħɪ. 'tħ'ur	'ħe.tħ'or- 'ħe.tħ'or	'ħe.tħ'or	'ɸɪ.tħ.rir
89	yellow	'ɸa:.far	ɪɪb. 'rir	kar.kɔ. 'mɪ	kɔrk. 'mi	tɔ̃'a.ɸa. 'ra- tɔ̃ 'a.ɸa. 'ri
90	white	la. 'bun	lbun	'la:.bɔ̃:ʔ	lbɔ̃ʔn	lun
91	black	'ħa:.war	'ħɔ̃:.war	'ʔah.war- 'ħɔ̃.war	'ħɔ̃:.war	ħɔ̃:r
92	night	bɪɪ. 'lil	bħel. 'lɛj	ba.ha. 'llɛ	bħa. 'llɛ	ɪɪs. 'rɛj
93	hot	'baɟ.ħa/ ħarg	ħarg	ħarg	ħarg	ge. 'laʔɪ
94	cold	'qa.zɪm	'ka.zɪm	'tħa.bɪɪ	'tħa.bɪɪ	tħa:l
95	full	'lmi.ɪ	'mɪ.ɪ	ða. 'mɪ.ɪ	'ðmi.ɪ	'dmi.ɟi
96	new	jded	jɟin	ħaj. 'dɪn	ħaj. 'dɪn	'u.dɪ
97	good	'θu.ri	gɛd	ʒid	ʒid -rħim	'es.tɔ̃-rħim-dɪ k'. 'tes
98	round	di. 'rat/ 'de.jir	'k' m.ɪ.rut	ħal. 'k'at	ħal. 'k'at	dɔ̃. 'ra:t
99	dry	'qɔ̃:.ħaɸ	'k'aw.ħa	'k'ɛ.ħaɸ	'k'e.ħaɸ	k'ɛħ. 'ɸun
100	name	ham	ham	ħom	ham	ɸuʔm

\*\* Jabbali has several equivalents to the verb 'drink' depending on the type of drink. The verb /jɪftig/ is used for water; the verb /jilkɔ:f/ is used for milk whereas the verb /jinlɔ:z/ is used for

hot drinks such as tea and coffee. The same holds true for Mehri. /jihtu.k'i/ means drinking water; /jiikɔ:f/ means drinking milk; /jinlɔ:z/ means drinking hot drinks whereas /jdɔ:raʃ/ is used for any other type of drinks.

#### 4.1 One Cognate Group

This group includes lexical items that belong to one cognate group only in all or most of the five languages under investigation. Lexical items that do not belong to the cognate group do not form a second cognate group but rather sound distinct from those of the cognate group. They are mentioned beside each language and are marked as none cognate words (henceforth NCW). This group includes seventy nine words in total presented underneath.

I, you, we, who, all, many, one, two, big (NCW in Bathari & Jabbali), long (NCW in Harsusi & Jabbali), small (NCW in Jabbali), woman, man, fish, dog, louse (NCW in Jabbali), seed (NCW in Bathari & Jabbali), root (NCW in Bathari & Harsusi), bark (of tree) (NCW in Bathari, Harsusi & Jabbali), skin, blood, bone, grease, egg (NCW in Bathari, Mehri & Jabbali), (animal) horn (NCW in Harsusi), tail, feather (NCW in Bathari & Harsusi), hair, head (NCW in Jabbali), ear, eye, nose, mouth, tooth (NCW in Jabbali), tongue, fingernail, foot, knee, hand, belly, neck, chest (NCW in Bathari & Jabbali), liver, drink (NCW in Bathari, Harsusi & Jabbali), eat, see, hear (NCW in Jabbali), know, die (NCW in Jabbali), kill, swim (NCW in Hobyot & Jabbali), fly (NCW in Bathari & Hobyot), walk (NCW in Jabbali), come, stand, give, say, burn (NCW in Bathari, Harsusi & Mehri), sun, moon, star, water, rain, stone (NCW in Jabbali), sand (NCW in Harsusi & Jabbali), smoke, fire, ash, path, red, green (NCW in Jabbali), yellow (NCW in Bathari, Harsusi & Jabbali), white, black, night (NCW in Bathari & Jabbali), hot (NCW in Jabbali), full, dry, name (NCW in Jabbali)

#### 4.2 Two Cognate Groups

This group includes lexical items that form two distinct cognate groups. Lexical items that belong to none of these two cognate groups do not form a third cognate group but are rather distinct from all lexical items of both groups. Twenty one lexical items fall in this group as presented below.

This (NCW in Mehri), that (NCW in Jabbali), what (NCW in Harsusi), not (negation marker) (NCW in Harsusi), person (NCW in Jabbali), bird (NCW in Jabbali), tree, leaf, flesh, heart, bite, sleep, lie down (NCW in Harsusi & Jabbali), sit, earth (NCW in Bathari), cloud, mountain, cold, new (NCW in Jabbali), good (NCW in Bathari), round (NCW in Harsusi)

As revealed above, all investigated lexical items are shared by two or more languages in the group. No cases exist of lexical items that are distinct in all five languages, for each word is shared by either all, most or at least two languages. A substantial number of the shared lexical items exhibit slight segmental discrepancy. Many other cases are of those that form minimal or near minimal pairs as they exhibit one or two consonantal and/or vocalic discrepancies. Cases can also be found of identical lexical items that exhibit no or a very slight difference in the segmental level. Even lexical items that do not seem to belong to any cognate group share some segments with those that belong to cognate groups. Such cases of lexical items that form cognate groups as well as those that exhibit minimal and near minimal pairs in addition

to those that reveal some resemblance though at the segmental level indicate the extent of lexical resemblance among these languages.

Mutual intelligibility tests, however, do not go hand in hand with word recognition. When shared lexical items were used in sentences in a language unfamiliar to the speakers, speakers indicated that mutually intelligibility ranged from very minimal to impossible despite the fact that they could recognize lexical resemblance of these lexical items to those in their ethnic group languages. Speakers reported that these languages sounded as distinct languages to them rather than dialects that exhibit some sort of phonemic or lexical disparity. Such outcome gives an insight that similarity among these languages entitles no or little mutual intelligibility despite such huge range of lexical resemblance. Noteworthy, however, is that such resemblance among them stands behind the fact that speakers can effortlessly learn other languages within the same group. Some speakers, as a matter of fact, speak more than one of these languages due to such huge extent of lexical resemblance, especially the three languages Hobyot, Mehri and Jabballi. Speakers' view of these languages as dialects of one another rather than languages of their own as well as language shift to other languages within the group are also based on lexical resemblance ground.

### 5. Arabic Loan Words

An interesting and exotic remark about the investigated list of words is that a good number of them are borrowed from (Omani) Arabic, an inevitable fact since all speakers of these languages are also speakers of Arabic with some speakers simultaneously bilingual. Table 2 displays these words compared to their equivalents in Arabic.

Table 2. Lexical items borrowed from Arabic.

N.	Lexical item	Arabic original form	Gloss
1	nħah	naħnu	we
2	ðah	ha:ða	this
3	ðak	ða:k	that
4	man	man	who
5	la	la	no-not
6	kalan	kul	all
7	ʔa:wil	ʔawil	long
8	bɪnedɪm	baniʔa:dam	human being
9	ʔsid	ʔsaid	fish
10	ħobbɔ:t / bɪðret	ħabbah / baðrah	seed
11	wɪrk'at	waraqah	leaf
12	raknat	riknah	tree branch
13	gɔ:d	ʔɪld	skin
14	bið	bajð	eggs
15	k'a:n	qarn	animal horn
16	ðanub	ðanab	tail
17	ʔɪðin	ʔuðun	ear

18	ʕa:jn	ʕa:jn	eye
19	nɪɣrɪr	manxarah	nose
20	lʃɪn	lɪsan	tongue
21	ðfer	ðufr	fingernail
22	bark	jabrək	kneel down
23	jid	jad	hand
24	gawf	zawf	cavity
25	k'alb	qalb	heart
26	ʃɪbdɪt	kabɪd	liver
27	jtejow	jtwi	eat
28	jhemaʕ	jasmaʕ	hear
29	jmut	jamut	die
30	jsubaħ	jasbaħ	swim
31	ʃfɪrur	ʃafar	fly
32	ʃɪsʃur	ʃasir	walk
33	muh	ma:ʔ	water
34	sɪħa:b	saha:b	cloud
35	ʔɪndaɣ	doxa:n	smoke
36	rɪd	rama:d	ash
37	ħarg	ʃaħrɪq	burn
38	zbel	zabal	mountain
39	ʕa:far/kərkmi	ʔasfar- kurkumi	yellow
40	lbun	laban	white - yoghurt drink
41	ħa:war	ħawar	black
42	bɪllɪl	lail	night
43	lɪmlɪ	mɔmtalɪʔ	full
44	jded	zadid	new
45	dirat/ ħalk'at	daʔɪrɪ/ ħalaqah	round

## 6. Conclusion

The paper shed light on lexical resemblance among MSA languages in Oman which seems to stand behind the common view that depicts them as dialects of one another rather than languages of their own. Findings show that lexical resemblance among these languages is significantly high as all investigated lexical items are shared by two, three, four or all five languages within the group. Shared lexical items form one or two cognate groups exhibiting some consonantal and /or vocalic discrepancies. Although speakers taking part in the study were able to recognize a very large proportion of examined lexical items, they emphasized unintelligibility to the other languages in the group. Such unintelligibility to these languages despite the huge lexical resemblance among them gives more credit to the view that they are distinct languages rather than dialects of one another.

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