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ARTICLE

The morphological pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ in Modern South Arabian

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Abstract

Reduplication is a linguistic phenomenon whereby a segment, or a part thereof, is repeated to convey grammatical functions and as a means of lexical derivation. In Semitic, reduplication is widely attested and productive both in the nominal and the verbal systems. Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL) are no exception, in that various reduplicated patterns are attested, among which the most common are $C^1C^2C^1C^2$, i.e. Soqotri *ḥálḥal* "gris" (Lonnet 2008: 130), Jibbali/Shehret *xɔlxɔ́l* "Brown-spotted grouper" (Castagna 2024: 9) from Proto-MSAL *√*xl(xl)* "brown/grey", and $C^1C^2C^3C^3$, i.e. Mehri *haźīrūr* "to go pale, green, yellow" (Johnstone 1987: 163), Jibbali/Shehret *šəṣ́rɔ́r* "yellow" (Johnstone 1981: 265) from Proto-MSAL *√*šṣ́r* "(to be) yellow, green". Another type, namely $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$, has received little attention to date, despite its attestation in Modern South Arabian where it is more frequently, but not exclusively, found in the eastern branch (Jibbali/Shehret and Soqotri). This study primarily aims to provide an account of the morpho-phonological and semantic characteristics of this pattern.

Keywords: Modern South Arabian; Non-concatenative morphology; Reduplication; Diminutives; Intensives

Transcription

Table 1 shows the transcription used in this article and in the works cited.

1. Introduction

Reduplication is a widely attested morphological device in Semitic, and a number of studies have described the traits of reduplicated patterns, starting with a subsection of the *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* (Brockelmann 1908: 517–9), to more recent studies exclusively concerned with this phenomenon (Butts 2011; Unseth 2003). Among the reduplicated morphological patterns described, $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ has received relatively little attention. Brockelmann (1908: 519) states that "Im Altarab. ist so wahrscheinlich der XII. Stamm gebildet mit nachträglicher Dissimilation des 3. Radikals in der 1." and derives the form XII verb اخضوضر *ixḍawḍara* "be green; be dark" (Steingass 1884: 828) from an unattested earlier form **ixḍarḍara*.

Butts (2011: 99–104), carries out a meticulous reconstruction of its Proto-Semitic archetypes for adjectives and substantives (*$C^1aC^2aC^3C^2v̆C^3$ and *$C^1aC^2aC^3C^2v̄C^3$ respectively), and outlines the semantics of the lexical items of this pattern: according to him,

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Table 1. Key to transcription in this and other works cited below

IPA	This work	Johnstone (**1973**; **1977**; **1981**; **1987**)	CSOL I and II[1]	Miller and Morris (2004)	MLZ[2]
ʔ	ʔ	’	ʾ	ɔ	ء
ʕ	ʕ	‘	ʿ	ʿ	ع
ɬ	ś	ś	ŝ	ś	ش
ɬ’	ṣ	ź	ẑ	/[3]	ض
θ’	ṯ	ḏ	/[4]	/	ظ
ʌ	ʌ	/	/	ʌ	/

substantives do not have “discernible semantic characteristics, although isolated examples of diminutives are found in Gəʕəz, Arabic, and Israeli Hebrew”, whereas adjectives “fall into well-defined semantic groups, such as diminutives, intensives, sound-symbolic terms, and bodily or personal characteristics, including defects and color terms” (ibid. 99). As will be seen below, Butts’ definition of adjectival semantics holds true in Modern South Arabian for both nouns and adjectives of this pattern (see section 5).

Unseth’s analysis (2003) surveys the presence and productivity of this pattern (which he calls “bi-consonantal reduplication”) in the nominal systems of various Semitic subgroups. Moreover, the pattern in question is cursorily mentioned in several descriptions of the morphological typology of Semitic (for example, Gensler 2011).

However, none of the aforementioned studies point out that the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ exists in Modern South Arabian and is particularly productive in Jibbali/Shehret and Soqotri.[5] Its semantics, along with the description of various phonologically conditioned allomorphs, form the focus of this article, and will be dealt with in the following sections, the first of which will offer a general description of this pattern. The subsequent two sections will survey its productivity and characteristics in western (Mehri, Harsusi, Bathari and Hobyot)[6] and eastern (Jibbali/Shehret and Soqotri) Modern South Arabian. The discussion section puts forward some generalizations about the morphophonology and semantics of this pattern in the MSAL. Finally, the conclusion will recapitulate and summarize the contents of the paper and draw some comparisons with other Semitic and Afroasiatic subgroups.

[1] *Corpus of Soqotri Oral Literature* (Naumkin et al 2014; 2019).

[2] معجم لسان ظفار *muʕǧam lisān ḏufār* “Dictionary of the Dhofari language” (al-Maʕšani 2014).

[3] This sound does not occur in the lexical items analysed.

[4] This sound does not exist in Soqotri.

[5] These two languages form the eastern branch of Modern South Arabian, whilst Mehri, Harsusi, Bathari, and Hobyot form the western branch. This bipartite classification, for which there is a wide consensus, was formulated by Lonnet (2008), although its antecedents can be found in the literature as early as Thomas (1939), followed by Simeone-Senelle (1997), and some of Lonnet’s earlier works (1994, 2006). This classification is based on some morphological isoglosses: it is worth mentioning, among others, the apophonic feminine of non-triliteral adjectives (see also section 5 below) and the loss of the *t-* morpheme in the prefix conjugation of certain verbal classes of the eastern group, and the presence in the western group of a word-initial non-etymological laryngeal or pharyngeal fricative deriving from Proto-Semitic /ʔ/. Furthermore, a significant number of lexical isoglosses speak to this classification (Kogan 2015: 498).

[6] Whilst Hobyot can be regarded as a member of the western group (Rubin 2015), Manoubi points out that “il y a également un certain nombre de faits qui peuvent être lus comme révélant un continuum linguistique entre les différentes variétés de la region” (2023: 285).

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2. The reduplicated pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ in Semitic

This pattern is known to occur throughout West Semitic (Butts 2011: 99). With regard to Akkadian, despite a lack of direct attestation, some nouns, such as *zuqāqīpu* "scorpion", are thought to derive from **zuqapqīpu* (Brockelmann 1908: 158 *apud* Butts 2011: 99). In West Semitic, it is sparsely attested in Arabic,[7] Hebrew, and Syriac (Butts 2011: 100–4), and significantly productive in Ethio-Semitic (Leslau 1987 *passim* for Gəʕəz, Unseth 2002 for Amharic).

In most cases, nominals and verbs of this pattern can be traced back to a triliteral $C^1C^2C^3$ root, with which they maintain a noticeable semantic connection: for example, Arabic *kuḏubḏub* "liar" < *kḏb* "to lie" (Butts 2011: 100), Gəʕəz *wərəqrəq* "glistening" < *wärq* "gold" (Unseth 2002: 74), and *xasarsara* "be reviled, be humiliated" < *xasra* "be disgraced, suffer disgrace" (Leslau 1987: 265–6). A similar semantic connection can be detected in the relevant MSAL lexical items: for example, Jibbali/Shehret *ənšəṭərṭér* "to bear many females" (Johnstone 1981: 264) to be compared with *šṓṭər*, "2–3-month-old female calf" (Ibid.), and Soqotri *knimnīmoh* "itch-louse" (Naumkin and Porkhomovsky 1999: 111) to be compared with *kónum*, "louse" (ibid.). However, the semantic relationship between a reduplicated term and its non-reduplicated counterpart may occasionally be rendered opaque by peculiar semantic developments: for example, Amharic *tä-zräfärräfä* "dribbled (of bits)" < *zrf* "pillage" (Unseth 2002: 72).

Butts (2011: 104) points out that "The pattern *$C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ became increasingly more common throughout the history of Hebrew to the point that it is partially productive in Israeli Hebrew", so that it may be used to form diminutive nouns, such as *klavlav* "little dog" < *kelev* "dog", and approximative adjectives like *šmanman* "fattish" < *šamen* "fat" (ibid.).

Unseth's PhD thesis (2002) offers an in-depth analysis of the verbal forms of this pattern in Amharic and Ethio-Semitic at large. His analysis offers a valuable description of the semantics of these verbs highlighting a substantial number of semantic fields, which can be summarized thus: writhe, wriggle, lines of people moving, gait impairment, shake, vibrate, flutter, be wet, damp, turbid, slippery, slimy, dribble, leak, ooze, gush out, boil, overflow (ibid.: 216, 218–20). In general, the author states that these verbs tend to carry a strongly evaluative component, often with a negative connotation (ibid.: 216). Outside of Ethio-Semitic, mentions of this pattern in the verbal morphology of other Semitic languages are very sparse: apart from the reconstruction of the proto form at the basis of form XII in Arabic (see above), Butts (2011: 103) mentions Ugaritic "<ttpp> "she makes herself beautiful", which is most likely a T-reflexive of the reduplicated verbal stem *$C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ from the root √ypy "to be beautiful". Two occurrences of the pattern are found in Ancient South Arabian, within the Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions (CSAI): Central Middle Sabaic *ḏ-hlmlm* (MuB 7 = Ir 16) and Late Sabaic *ḥlmlm* (Ry 520). Both are tribe names and, therefore, poor indicators of productivity and autochthony in the language in which they occur.

From the above reports, the morphological pattern under examination would appear to be scarcely productive in Semitic subgroups, with the exception of Ethio-Semitic. The data presented below will, however, slightly alter this picture and show that the pattern is moderately productive in the nominal and verbal systems of Modern South Arabian languages.

[7] A toponym in Yemen may be of particular interest: *ǧabal ḍalamlam* in the Raymah governorate, located at coordinates 14.5559440, 43.5998660 (OpenStreetMap contributors 2024). A term from the same root exhibiting the $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ reduplication is attested in Jibbali/Shehret: *ḍəlmᵊlúm* "very dark", feminine *ḍəlmᵊlím* (Suhail al-Amri, p.c.). A male personal name *mahalhal* [sic] is reported by Wilfred Thesiger for a member of the Awamir tribe in the area that currently lies at the border of Oman and the United Arab Emirates (Thesiger and Stewart 2007: 294).

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3. Western Modern South Arabian

Semitic scholars who are not specialists in Modern South Arabian may not be held accountable for not noticing the existence of the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ in Mehri and closely related languages. In fact, it does not appear in the classical reference work for Mehri, the *Mehri Lexicon* (Johnstone 1987). As for Harsusi, the plant name *kebśebéś* "a plant, used to prepare snuff and a smoking mixture" found in the *Harsusi Lexicon* (Johnstone 1977: 66) is the only recorded occurrence of this pattern in the corpus. As for Bathari and Hobyot, no trace of it could be found in the literature until very recently.

A cursory but significant mention of this pattern can, however, be found in Johnstone's article about diminutive patterns in Modern South Arabian, in which he states that the plural patterns of diminutives formed with a long vowel after the second root consonant, or after the third root consonant in the case of quadriliterals, are "of considerable interest, in that some of them involve reduplication of the two final radicals" (Johnstone 1973: 102). He then provides the following examples for Mehri: *ḥōṭər* "kid" > *ḥewāṭār* (SG.)/*ḥeṭrēṭōr* (PL.), *nēḥer* "side-valley" > *newāḥār* (SG.)/*neḥrēḥōr* (PL.), *ḏarb* "wood" > *ḏewērēb* (SG.)/*ḏerbērōb* (PL.), *śayga* "cave; pen; fold" > *śewēgēʔ* (SG.)/*śegāgew* (PL.), *ḳarš* "Maria Theresa dollar" > *ḳewērēš* (SG.)/*ḳerščērōš* (PL.) (Johnstone 1973; see also Rubin 2018: 102). Watson et al. (2020: 227) report a few more occurrences of this plural diminutive pattern: *ṣaḳrēḳōr* "falcons", *ṭafnēfōn* "rock hyraxes", *saknēkōn* "families". Importantly, Watson et al. add that this is the morphological pattern on which most masculine nouns that take stress on the first syllable form the diminutive plural.

A limited number of adjectives and non-diminutive nouns of this pattern can be found in Alexander Sima's Mahriyōt[8] texts (Sima 2009): *ṣḥamḥām* "etwas braun" (p. 136), *ʕfarfōr* "place name" (p. 164), *xalḳālōḳ* (p. 168),[9] *ṣbarbēr* "plant name" (p. 406), *jśarśār* "grob gemahlen" (p. 410), *ḥśamśām* "scharf" (p. 412), *xśafśēf* "insect name" (p. 458), *xarṭ[a]rāt* "plant name" (p. 470), *ġbarbār* "gemischtfarben" (p. 470). Interestingly, according to some Dhofari Mehri speakers, the adjectives *ṣḥamḥām, jśarśār, ḥśamśām* and *ġbarbār* do not inflect for gender, in a parallel fashion to quadriliteral adjectives.[10]

The pattern is found in Bathari for diminutive plural forms, albeit in a considerably more limited fashion than in Mehri. Morris and Gasparini (2025: 121) list the following items: *xáder* "place offering shade; cave (housing people and livestock)" > *xadāwər* (SG.)/*xadərdār* (PL.) and *zəríbət* "enclosure, pen; rubble stone dwellings of earlier times" > *zwērīb* (SG.)/*zərbərāb* (PL.). In addition to the above, there are two nouns of this pattern that do not appear in the singular and exhibit a slightly different pattern: *ḥaśəlṣīl*, "string of beads, shells" and *ḥaṣəlṣīl* "small pebbles, gravel" (ibid.: 99).

No trace of the pattern under examination can be found in the published literature on Hobyot, and its absence in the morphology of lexical items whose Mehri and Bathari cognates exhibit it may effectively speak to its absence. For example, *xádər* "shelter; cave settlement; sheltered overhang", cognate of Bathari *xáder* "place offering shade; cave (housing people and livestock)" (see above) has a diminutive singular form *xidér* and a plural *xidərútə* (Morris et al. 2019: 120). A recent description of this language does list a small

[8] *Mahriyōt* is the native term with which speakers refer to the dialect of Mehri spoken in the far eastern part of the Mahrah governorate, whereas *Mehrīyət* designates the dialect spoken between Ras Fartak and the eastern bank of the Wadi Masila. The dialect spoken in Dhofar (Oman) is known as *Məhrəyyət* (Simeone-Senelle 2011: 3).

[9] This is in all likelihood a diminutive plural, and its meaning is rendered in German as "eine kleine Zahl", probably referring to people, as the root √xlḳ would suggest.

[10] A study focused on the morphology of non-triliteral adjectives in western Modern South Arabian, which is currently poorly understood, is needed in order to shed additional light on one of the most important isoglosses that differentiate the western and the eastern group.

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Table 2. Substantives on the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ in Jibbali/Shehret

	Jibbali/Shehret term	Arabic definition	Transliteration	Gloss	Reference
1	تَنْجَنجت	السواد الشديد الذي به لمعة	*təngʲnégʲᵊt*[12]	Deep blackness with a shine	MLZ: 159
2	حَدنَدَنْ	اقامة شخص عند قوم مع عدم الترحيب به	*ḥadəndén*	A sojourn with unwelcoming people	MLZ: 225
3	خردرَدت	تغيّر الاشياء بشكل متقارب	*xardᵊréd*	Convergent change	MLZ: 284
4	شَعْلَغَل	نبات	*śəġəlġál*	Plant name	MLZ: 519
5	صَرْدرَدْ	نوع من الذباب	*ṣərdᵊréd*	Glowing fly	MLZ: 540
6	فعَرَعُر	ذكر عصفور الابلق	*fəʕɔrʕɔr*	Male sparrow	MLZ: 709
7	قَرْعرُع	حيوان اسطوري	*ḳərɔʕɔʕ*	Mythical creature	MLZ: 740
8	قَفْعَفْعْ	نوع من الحشائش	*ḳəfɔʕfɔʕ*	Type of grass	MLZ: 763
9	كُهْنهُنْت	تُصنع الحزن والبكاء	*khunhunút*	Pretence of sadness and weeping	MLZ: 817

number of plural diminutives, but none of them can be ascribed to the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ (Manoubi 2023: 168–9).

With regard to verbal morphology, the published literature does not report any verbal forms exhibiting the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$, which was confirmed during remote fieldwork with Mehri and Hobyot speakers.

4. Eastern Modern South Arabian

Jibbali/Shehret and Soqotri present the scholar with a picture of this pattern which differs substantially from that provided by Mehri and its closely related languages. As will be seen below, the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ is attested both in nominal (substantives and adjectives) and verbal morphology. Hence this section is subdivided into language-specific subsections.

4.1. Jibbali/Shehret

Johnstone (1973: 103) states that Jibbali/Shehret "seems to have no comparable formations" to those discussed above for the Western MSAL. However, while nothing points to a comparable productive pattern, one might want to consider *hermerúm* "small plant" (Morris 2002: 9), no doubt connected to *herúm* "tree" (Johnstone 1981: 99).[11] Non-diminutive substantives of this pattern are plentifully attested in the *Muʕǧam Lisān Ẓufār* (al-Maʕšani 2014, henceforth MLZ). Table 2 illustrates a number of them.

In the lexical items above, the underlying nominal pattern $*C^1əC^2əC^3C^2ɔ́C^3$ is realized as a series of allomorphs triggered by the lowering effect of gutturals on adjacent vowels (items

[11] Cf. also هرمرمتى *hermᵊrúmtə* النباتات الضارة "weeds" (al-Maʕšani 2014: 957). Transliteration of the Arabic-script lemma from personal fieldwork notes.

[12] The phoneme /g/ is realized as [gʲ] by Suhail al-Amri, who is a speaker of an eastern variety of Jibbali/Shehret. Realizations of this phoneme in other dialects include [g] and [ʤ].

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Table 3. Adjectives on the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ in Jibbali/Shehret

	Masculine Singular	Feminine Singular	Arabic definition	M.SG. transliteration	F.SG. transliteration	Gloss	Reference
1	حَلْبَلْبْ	حَلْبَلْبْ	حليبي)اللون(	*ḥalblɔ́b*	*ḥalbléb*	Milky colour	MLZ: 255
2	حلقْلَقْ	حلقْلَقْ	–	*ḥalkᵊlɔ́ḳ*	*ḥalkᵊléḳ*	Matte colour	Suhail al-Amri
3	عربْرُب	–	–	*ʕarbrɔ́b*	–	Physical defect (gloss uncertain)	Suhail al-Amri
4	عظمظم	–	قوي البنية	*ʕaṭəmṭúm*	–	Of strong constitution	MLZ: 637
5	فرْجْرُجْ	–	الصدر الضخم	*fərgʲᵊrɔ́gʲ*	–	With a wide chest	MLZ: 694
6	فُرْدْرُدْ	–	الصدر العظيم	*fərdᵊrɔ́d*	–	With a huge chest	MLZ: 695

2, 3, and 4),[13] the rising effect of nasals on adjacent vowels (item 9),[14] re-syllabification in the presence of liquids (items 3 and 5),[15] and the so-called "idle glottis effect"[16] whereby no vowel can stand between two unaccented voiceless and non-emphatic consonants (items 1 and 9). With regard to items 6, 7, and 8, their vocalic melody diverges from that of the other nouns listed in the table above, bearing a striking similarity with that of the adjectival pattern presented below.

Adjectives of the pattern in examination are attested, albeit in a moderate fashion. Some of the relevant items are presented in Table 3.

The underlying pattern for the adjectives of this pattern is $*C^1əC^2əC^3C^2ɔ́C^3$ for the masculine singular and $*C^1əC^2əC^3C^2éC^3$ for the feminine singular. All the above adjectives exhibit allomorphy triggered by the lowering effect of gutturals (items 1, 2, 3, and 4), re-syllabification in the presence of liquids (items 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6) and the lowering effect of nasals (item 4). In addition to the items listed above, items 6, 7, and 8 in Table 2 appear to be substantivized adjectives (Rubin 2014: 93–4) by virtue of the pattern they exhibit.[17]

Finally, the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ in Jibbali/Shehret is also moderately productive in the verbal system. Table 4 shows a list of verbs of this pattern.

The verbs of this pattern, all of which are *n-* prefixed, constitute a newly described verbal class in Jibbali/Shehret, labelled N3-stem in Castagna and al-Amri (2025). The pattern of the third person singular of the perfect is $ənC^1əC^2əC^3C^2éC^3$, the imperfect is $dinC^1əC^2əC^3C^2éC^3$, the subjunctive is $yənC^1C^2éC^3C^2əC^3$, and the imperative is formed on the pattern $ənC^1C^2éC^3C^2əC^3$. The tokens above reflect rather faithfully the underlying patterns, except item 6, which exhibits the lowering effect of the guttural [ʕ] between C^1 and C^2.

[13] al-Kathiri and Dufour 2020: 184.
[14] al-Kathiri and Dufour 2020: 183.
[15] al-Kathiri and Dufour 2020: 183.
[16] Bendjaballah and Ségéral 2014.
[17] Semantically speaking, it is relatively straightforward to trace the origin of these substantivized adjectives: in the case of *ḳərɔʕrɔ́ʕ*, the MLZ states that this term can be used to describe someone به طول مفرط لكن غير متناسق, that is "someone who is exceedingly tall, but not harmonious". As for *fəʕrʕ́r*, which is clearly related to *fɔʕ́r* "young bull, male calf" (Johnstone 1981: 51), it is not unreasonable to postulate a remnant of the diminutive pattern discussed above for the western MSAL.

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Table 4. The *n*-prefixed verbs with the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ (N3-stem) in Jibbali/Shehret

	PRF.(3.M.SG.)	IMPV.(3.M.SG.)	SBJT.(3.M.SG.)	IMP. (2.M.SG.)	Gloss	Ref.
1	*ənšxərxér*	*dinšxərxér*	*yənšxárxər*	*ənšxárxər*	To grow visibly old	MLZ: 472
2	*ənḥədəbdéb*	*dinḥədəbdéb*	*yənḥədébdəb*	*ənḥədébdəb*	To become hunchback	MLZ: 223
3	*ənhədərdér*	*dinhədərdér*	*yənhədérdər*	*ənhədérdər*	To be absent-minded	MLZ: 953
4	*ənšəṭərṭér*	*dinšəṭərṭér*	*yənšṭértər*	*ənšṭértər*	To bear only female calves	Johnstone 1981: 264
5	*ənśəkərkér*	*dinśəkərkér*	*yənśkérkər*	*ənśkérkər*	To set/rise (sun or moon)	MLZ: 513
6	*ənʕaṭəmṭém*	*dinʕaṭəmṭém*	*yənʕaṭámṭəm*	*ənʕaṭámṭəm*	To become stiff	MLZ: 636

4.2 *Soqotri*

Mentions of the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ are plentiful in Soqotri lexicography, and nouns are particularly abundant: for example, the *Corpus of Soqotri Oral Literature* (Naumkin et al. 2019) reports *di-riḳóbḳob* "Omasum, third stomach of a ruminant" (p. 361). Elsewhere, Naumkin and Porkhomovsky (1999: 111) report *knimnīmoh* "itch-louse". The ethnobotanical treatise *Ethnoflora of the Soqotra Archipelago* (Miller and Morris 2004) contains a vast number of such nouns corresponding to plant names, among which it is worth mentioning *di ḥaṭárṭəhɑr*[18] "Actiniopteris semiflabellata" (p. 285),[19] *ʕaṣábṣɑb* "Pluchea obovata" (p. 509) and *śerúbrub* "Hypericum scopulorum" (p. 575). However, an even greater number of items appear to be substantivized adjectives such as *ṣebérbəher* "Doryopteris concolor" (p. 287) said to mean "sour, astringent" and used to indicate not only Doryopteris concolor, but also a number of other plants with sour juices (Miller and Morris 2004 *passim*). In a similar fashion, the following items are noteworthy: *ʕalímləhum* "Anagallis arvensis", but actually meaning "striped, marked" (p. 657), *ḥalíblibo* "Portulaca kuriensis" and "buttermilk-like" (p. 654), *ḥaríṭrəṭ* "Teucrium balfourii" and "weak" (p. 585), *rxámxɑm* "Lachnocapsa spathulata" and "grey-coloured" (p. 531).

Indeed, Johnstone describes a comparable diminutive plural pattern for Soqotri nouns (1973: 102) and reports the following examples: *ḥágel* "eyebrow" > *ḥáwgehal* (SG.)/*ḥegálgehɔl* (PL.), *ḥarf* "amulet" > *ḥáwref* (SG.)/*ḥarúfruf* (PL.), *setreb* "sunshade" > *sáwater* (SG.)/*setértər* (PL.), *śɔrṭ* "condition" > *śoraṭ* (SG.)/*śeréṭrəṭ* (PL.), *śarḳ* "combed-out hair" > *śoraḳ* (SG.)/*śeréḳrəḳ* (PL.) and *ḳarš* "Maria-Theresa dollar" > *ḳaréšrəš* (PL.).

As for the verbal system, no trace of the pattern under examination could be found at the time of writing, although the rather high number of relevant verbal forms found in Jibbali/Shehret calls for a specific investigation into comparable forms in Soqotri.

[18] [h] in the final syllable of this term (and many other Soqotri terms listed below) is a non-etymological sound due to a phenomenon typical of the Soqotri language, known as "parasitic h" in the literature. This non-etymological [h] is thought "to have emerged when etymological long vowels of the second syllable of nominal bases lost their accent due to the general shift of the stress to the penultimate syllable" (Kogan and Bulakh 2019: 282). See also Bulakh 2022.

[19] Also reported by the *Corpus of Soqotri Oral Literature I* (Naumkin et al 2014: 192).

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Table 5. Attestation of the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ in Modern South Arabian

	Western MSAL				Eastern MSAL	
	Mehri	Harsusi	Bathari	Hobyot	Jibbali/Shehret	Soqotri
Plural diminutives	√	?	√	–	?	√
Nouns	√	–	–	–	√	√
Adjectives	√	–	–	–	√	√
Verbs	–	–	–	–	√	–

5. Discussion

The attestation of the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ in Modern South Arabian is summarized in Table 5. Plural diminutives that entail the reduplication of the second and third root consonants of a triliteral root are attested in Mehri, Bathari, and Soqotri, with only one attestation in Harsusi,[20] which may well speak to borrowing. Non-diminutive nouns and adjectives of this pattern are scantily attested in Mehri within the western subgroup, whereas they are rather widespread in both Jibbali/Shehret and Soqotri. As for verbs, they are attested in Jibbali/Shehret only.

All parts of speech exhibiting this pattern possess interesting and poorly described features. In the first place, whilst in reduplicative constructions "increase of quantity (Augmentation) and increase of degree (Intensification) are universally preferred over decrease of quantity (Diminution) and decrease of degree (Attenuation)" (Uspensky 1972: 70), reduplication is an uncommon pluralization strategy in Semitic that, at any rate, almost invariably involves the repetition of the last root consonant only (Ratcliffe 1996: 298–302). Therefore, the plural diminutives attested in Mehri, Bathari, and Soqotri represent a rare instance in Semitic, where the reduplication of C^2 and C^3 is used productively to express plurality.

The non-diminutive nouns of this pattern can be said to express intensive characteristics and exaggeration. However, in order to gain a better understanding of their intensive semantics, one must compare the meaning of a reduplicated lexical item with its non-reduplicated counterpart. For example, Jibbali/Shehret *təngʲnégʲᵊt* "deep blackness with a shine" (MLZ: 159) vis-à-vis *tinég* "ash used to colour the gums black" (Johnstone 1981: 271), *ṣərdᵊréd* "glowing fly" (MLZ: 540) vis-à-vis *ṣeréd* "light" (Johnstone 1981: 241), and Soqotri *knimnīmoh* "itch-louse" vis-à-vis *kónum*, "louse" (Naumkin and Porkhomovsky 1999: 111). By the same token, adjectives of this pattern convey a nuance of intensity: Jibbali/Shehret *ʕaṭəmṭúm* "of strong constitution" (MLZ: 637) vis-à-vis *ʕaṭím* "great" (Johnstone 1981: 8), and Soqotri *ḥalíblibo* "buttermilk-like" (Miller and Morris 2004: 654) vis-à-vis *ḥélob* "lait" (Leslau 1938: 174). Furthermore, these adjectives are particularly interesting, at least in Jibbali/Shehret, in that their feminine is apophonic, similarly to a substantial number of non-triliteral adjectives in this language and Soqotri: *ḥalblɔ́b* "milky colour" (M.SG.) (MLZ: 255) > *ḥalbléb* (F.SG.), and *ḥalkᵊlɔ́ḳ* "matte colour" (M.SG.) (Suhail al-Amri, p.c.) > *ḥalkᵊléḳ* (F.SG.). See Lonnet (2008) for an in-depth description of this adjectival class and a hypothesis regarding its origin. Strikingly, however, Soqotri adjectives of the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ would seem to take the feminine suffix *-o: ḥalibl'íbo* "buttermilk-like" (Miller and Morris

[20] *Kebśebéś* "a plant, used to prepare snuff and a smoking mixture" (Johnstone 1977: 66).

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2004: 654) would seem to speak to this state of affairs. However, more research is needed to ascertain the full inflectional morphology of these adjectives in Soqotri, including the masculine and feminine plurals.

The Jibbali/Shehret verbs on this pattern partly share their vocalic melody with other anisomorphic[21] verbal classes. In the perfect, the accented vowel is /ɔ/ for all persons and numbers except the third persons (singular and plural) which have /e/. The imperfect has /e/ for all persons and numbers except the second feminine singular, second and third masculine plural which have /i/ (Castagna and al-Amri 2025: 426). In terms of accented vowels, however, the subjunctive of the N3-stem exhibits a state of affairs that rather reflects H1, Š1, ^{Q}H1, and ^{Q}N1-stems from isomorphic root, that is a /ɛ/ for all persons except the second feminine which has /i/, and /ɔ/ for the second and third masculine plural (ibid.). Some verbs of this class, derived from roots with a /b/ or an /m/ as C^2, surface as *ənC*^{1}*ēC*^{3}*C*^{2}*éC*^{3} due to the intervocalic deletion of labials (Rubin 2014: 28). For example, *əndērmír* "(water) to become muddy" < **əndəmərmír*,[22] from √*dmr* which in Jibbali/Shehret conveys the meaning of "mud", as well as the more recent Arabic meaning of "destroying" (MLZ: 338). A word of caution should apply to the above results, which have been obtained from a limited number of speakers, all of whom come from the area of Sadḥ and Gufɛ in eastern Dhofar. It is then likely that the same verbs would yield different vowel arrangements in different varieties of Jibbali/Shehret. As for semantics, these verbs carry an unmistakable nuance of intensity vis-à-vis their non-reduplicated counterparts: *ənšəṭərṭér* "to bear only female calves" to be compared with *ešṭér* "to bear many female calves" (Johnstone 1981: 264), and *ənśəkərḳér* "to set/rise (sun or moon)" (MLZ: 513) to be compared with *śśotḳər* "to be light-sensitive and squint in strong light" (JL: 252).

The specific patterns for diminutives, non-diminutive nouns, non-diminutive adjectives and verbs on the model *C*^{1}*C*^{2}*C*^{3}*C*^{2}*C*^{3} are summarized in Table 6.

On a final note, and with the above data in mind, one wonders if a *C*^{1}*C*^{2}*C*^{3}*C*^{2}*C*^{3} form might underlie certain uncommon verbal nouns in Mehri and Jibbali/Shehret corresponding to basic stem verbs with */w/ as *C*^{1} exhibiting the loss of *C*^{1} and the reduplication of *C*^{2} and *C*^{3}: for example, Mehri *kəbkēb* < √wkb "to enter" (Johnstone 1987: 425), *zemzēm* < √wzm "to give" (Jahn 1902 *apud* Kungl 2024: 219), and Jibbali/Shehret *gəḥgéḥ* < √wgḥ "to enter" (MLZ: 970), *zəkzák* (sic.) (Kungl 2024: 219) < √wzk "to be ill; to groan" (Johnstone 1981: 295).

6. Conclusions

The aim of this article was to confirm the existence of the morphological pattern *C*^{1}*C*^{2}*C*^{3}*C*^{2}*C*^{3} in Modern South Arabian and describe its forms and functions, which was achieved largely by condensing and reporting a considerable number of passing remarks in previous works. The resulting picture is a complex one, with Soqotri patterns exhibiting a great variety of vocalic arrangements, so that, based on the data analysed, the only plausible generalization is that the plural diminutive pattern has /ɔ/ between the reduplicated C^2 and C^3, while nouns and adjectives may have an array of short vowels. This state of affairs certainly warrants further research on the pattern in examination in this language.

[21] Anisomorphy is the morpho-phonological process whereby a root exhibiting a certain number of consonants is accommodated into a pattern normally corresponding to roots with a higher number of consonants.

[22] This form has a non-nasalized long vowel instead of the expected long nasalized vowel that normally results from the intervocalic deletion of /m/ (Rubin 2014: 28). However, there are several well-documented instances of */*vmv*/ > /*v̄*/ – for example, *rēṣún* "Ramaḍān" (Johnstone 1981: 214). Other comparable verbal forms are *ənzēkmík* "(meat) to start having a light smell", *ənṣēšmíš* "(meat) to smell rotten", *ənġāsmís* "(fabric) to turn blackish", *ənṣāʕbáʕ* "(ram) to give off an odour" (Castagna and al-Amri 2025: 425), *ənṯāxbáx* "to age quickly and prematurely" (MLZ: 164), and *ənkēzbéz* "to sigh, to sulk" (Johnstone 1981: 139).

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Table 6. Realizations of the $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ pattern in Modern South Arabian with vocalic melody

	Western MSAL				Eastern MSAL	
	Mehri	**Harsusi**	**Bathari**	**Hobyot**	**Jibbali/Shehret**	**Soqotri**
Plural diminutives	$C^1vC^2C^3\bar{e}C^2\bar{o}C^3$	*kebśebéś*	$C^1əC^2əC^3C^2\bar{a}/\bar{i}C^3$	–	–	$C^1vC^2\acute{v}C^3C^2$ *(vh)*$ɔC^3$
Nouns	C^1*(ə)* $C^2aC^3C^2\bar{v}C^3$	–	–	–	$C^1əC^2əC^3C^2éC^3$	$C^1vC^2\acute{v}C^3C^2$ *(vh)*vC^3
Adjectives	C^1*(ə)* $C^2aC^3C^2\bar{v}C^3$	–	–	–	$C^1əC^2əC^3C^2ɔC^3$ (M.)/$C^1əC^2əC^3C^2éC^3$ (F.)	$C^1vC^2\acute{v}C^3C^2$ *(vh)*vC^3
Verbs	–	–	–	–	*(ən)*$C^1əC^2əC^3C^2éC^3$ (PRF.)	–

With regard to the realizations of this pattern in the other MSAL, their vocalic arrangements and phonologically motivated allomorphs seem to be more predictable, as shown in Table 6.

Based on currently available materials, Harsusi and Hobyot would appear to be almost completely devoid of this morphological pattern. However, one must take into account multiple factors that may hinder its detection in these languages. First, diminutives in Harsusi are particularly rare (Johnstone 1973: 103), although not unheard of. Second, despite the recent compilation of an excellent sketch grammar in the form of a PhD thesis (Manoubi 2023), the documentation of Hobyot is still in its infancy. It is therefore likely that focused inquiries may reveal the existence of the pattern in examination of these languages.

Finally, it is not superfluous to point out that the morphological pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ is attested not only in Semitic, where it has been reconstructed to the proto language (Butts 2011: 99–104), but also in the Egyptian language, where it is scantily attested in the old and middle phases but significantly more frequently in late Egyptian and Coptic,[23] as well as in Chadic[24] and Berber.[25] Although not strictly relevant, one is compelled to mention the Cushitic morphological pattern $C^1C^2C^1C^2C^3$, that is, the prefixed reduplication of the first and second root consonant, commonly used to express nominal plurality, frequentative, pluractional and habitual formations (Mous 2008). In light of this, a systematic study on the reconstructibility of the pattern $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ and its allomorphs to Proto-Afroasiatic would constitute an interesting and potentially informative endeavour.

Abbreviations

M.	Masculine
F.	Feminine
Sg.	Singular
Pl.	Plural
Prf.	Perfect
Impv.	Imperfect
Sbjt.	Subjunctive
Imp.	Imperative
√	Lexical root

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[23] Compare, among others, Demotic *swtwt* "Spazierweg", Middle Egyptian *wḥ3ḥ3* "Überhebung", and the verbal form *ḥ3g3g* "froh sein" (Erman and Grapow 1926–63: 4.1 78; 1.2 340; 3.1 35 *apud* Butts 2011: 99), Pyramid Texts *nkjkj* "copulate, sleep with; commit adultery" (Borg 2021: 337), *nhmhm* "roar, rejoice, dance for joy" (ibid.: 334), Coffin Texts *srfrf* "be very warm" (Plas and Borghouts 1998: 260), Middle Egyptian *gw3w3* "strangle-hold" (Faulkner and Jegorovic 2017: 353), *k3p3p* "to cover" (ibid.: 348), *smtmt* "to eavesdrop" (ibid.: 282), Sahidic Coptic ⲱⲧⲟⲣⲧⲣ "to disturb", and ⲕⲣⲙⲣⲙ "to mutter" (Lambdin 1983: xiv).

[24] A $C^1C^2C^3C^2C^3$ pattern seems to underlie certain attested forms. Compare Hausa *kàfáffágóo* "a fig-like tree" < **kàfágófágó*, and *kùdándàmíi* "clay corn bin" < **kùdàmídàmí* (Newman 1986: 122)

[25] For example, compare Kabyle *bleḥleḥ* "Onduler, dodeliner (en déambulant)" (Dallet 1953: 7), *cleqleq* "Former des cloques; se couvrir de cloques" (ibid.: 28), *clewlew* "Enflé et brillant" (ibid.).

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