

Revitalisation of Endangered Mehri and Soqotri Languages: SD Perspective in Reinforcing their Future.

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Abstract:

This paper addresses the importance of revitalisation of endangered languages and the awareness raising of the importance of minorities' languages in Yemen through Sustainable Development (SD) perspectives. Undoubtedly, Mehri and Soqotri languages are the largest spoken Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL). These MSAL comprise Mehri, Soqotri, Jibbali 'Shihri', Hobyot, Harsusi, and Bathari. Being the two biggest of these languages, according to the number of their native speakers, Mehri and Soqotri are considered the earliest and most traditional Semitic MSAL in the region. Although Mehri varieties spread over a wide range of lands in Yemen, Oman, and recently in Saudi Arabia, Soqotri remains within the territorial borders of Yemen, that is within the Socotra Island. However, they are the two important MSAL in Yemen, which need special preservation schemes to be revitalised and preserved within the life circle of their geographical domains of their indigenous speech communities. To underpin their vital role in their local societies, of course, important measures are to be commenced, of which documentation is an important step, which in this case has begun as early as the second half of the twentieth century on the hands of European linguists. Along with other important measures, this will be accomplished through a collaboration of both official and non-official efforts, including linguistic and social actions, in language policy and language planning (LPP). This would be maintained through supporting experts in linguistics and sociolinguistics and other allied disciplines to put scientific solutions to preserve

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Mehri and Soqotri through strengthening their role in their speech communities. This might be done through different SD strategies like developing Mehri and Soqotri language curriculum for younger generations in primary schools, developing programmes through mass media and other modern multimedia and social media applications to ensure their maintenance and continuation for the coming generations.

Keywords: *SD, MSAL, Mehri, Soqotri, Language Policy and Planning*

Introduction

Language endangerment has been of a great concern for a very long time, but as a scientific practice that caught the attention and efforts of linguists and anthropologists, it has been of a growing interest since 1970s. There has been a common consensus among these people that over half of world languages, which are around seven thousand languages, are endangered of extinction and their continuation as living languages, (Mosely 2010). Since early 1980s, many of these experts have started ringing the bell of danger regarding such serious issue. Some of them are blaming local and international authorities both official and non-official of being backward in their reaction towards such languages. Kraus (1992), for instance, argued that the next century will witness the death or the restriction of 90% of the world languages, which is in fact a huge number to imagine even. He, in fact, means the 21st century according to the time of writing his research in the 1990s. Eventually, linguists' concerns and endeavours may further be tackled so as to have an obvious answer for 'What are we linguists doing to prepare for this or to prevent this catastrophic destruction of the linguistic world?' (Krauss 1992, p. 7). Unfortunately, many of these languages almost disappearing or about to. In acknowledging the real situation of such endangered languages and finding a better way to get a breakthrough, Newman (1998) blames the European and American linguists in acting towards the endangered languages in Africa, America, and Asia as solely their own problem and so the solution is theirs as well. Local authorities in acting backwardly and slowly to salvage such languages in their immediate environments is also undoubtedly conceivable.

Accordingly, we may say that much of the effort is put on the shoulders of linguists and language preservation activists, and linguistic research associations and institutions, which have got the scientific capacities to perform this task satisfactorily such as western linguistic societies. Being qualified enough, these Linguistic entities are to perform the task much better

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than anyone else in the world. This does not mean to give the excuse to the local authorities and entities concerned, both official and non-official ones, rather they should exhibit their maximum efforts to ensure their effective involvement in this serious and urgent matter of preserving such endangered languages. There is another reason related to this serious issue in the sense that "linguistics as a discipline is dominated by abstract theoretical concerns in which fieldwork plays a minor part" (Newman 1998, p. 11). This obviously reveals the extent to which this serious matter is up to, and this might lead one to feel anxious about endangered languages, and how they are totally neglected by their speakers in so many cases. In parallel with such argument, indifference towards endangered languages may be "A sad lesson that has been learnt from the study of language-death situations is that a community does not realize its language is threatened until it is too late to do anything to remedy the situation" (Dixon, 1997, p. 147). This scenario eventually leads to language death as Crystal (2014) undoubtedly explicated that when a language is dead, it is almost like someone is deceased, no other justification for this serious issue. If you are the last speaker of your language, then it is considered dead language.

These views on language endangerment clarified above, makes it noticeably explicit how worth-effort and important is the preservation of endangered languages and MSAL, in particular. As some experts depict the situation gloomily of cautioning that half of the languages of the world may face total extinction by the mid of this century. The causes of language endangerment might be classified as reported by Austen and Sallabank (2011) who synthesized these causes from Nettle and Romaine 2000; Crystal 2000; and also, Grenoble 2011:

1. natural catastrophes, famine, disease: for example, Malol, Papua New Guinea (earthquake); Andaman Islands (tsunami)
2. war and genocide, for example, Tasmania (genocide by colonists); Brazilian indigenous peoples (disputes over land and resources); El Salvador (civil war)
3. overt repression, often in the name of 'national unity' or assimilation (including forcible resettlement): for example, Kurdish, Welsh, Native American languages

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4. cultural/political/economic dominance, for example, Ainu, Manx, Sorbian, Quechua and many others (p. 5).

Not only these four causes listed above, but also some more reasons may constitute a threat to MSAL, in general, and Mehri and Soqotri as endangered languages, in particular. These languages suffer a great deal of contempt and relegation for their cultures in the countries they spread within their boundaries as well. They are actually mother tongues for many speakers in Yemen, Oman and very limited parts of south KSA, nevertheless of their numbers, which is in fact, very less as in the case of Bathari language, for instance. Bathari faces the highest degree of endangerment among these six languages. MSAL, in Yemen for instance, deny both official and constitutional recognition. They never get the necessary and appropriate support both culturally and linguistically. Moreover, the unawareness of decision makers of the significance of these languages adds to their endangerment.

As acrimonious fact, about 20% of the world's population speak 2943 languages and only 0.13% of that population speak 3894 languages of the world. This reflects the amount of danger that threatens the majority of languages all over the world (Romaine 2007). The negative relationship reflects the tiny number of speakers of those great figures of languages, which gives an indication of the endangerment of extinction for many languages in the world as Krauss (1992) has anticipated the termination of 90% of the world's languages. This, unfortunately, provokes our concerns regarding MSAL and makes one very apprehensive about the future of these languages in this particular region. There are different stages an endangered language may pass through regarding the level of endangerment they encounter. These stages are arranged according to the UNESCO's framework which expresses the stage of danger each language may face in relation to its status of usage and transmission over generations. This framework is based on a six-stage scale as it is shown in the table below with the first stage as the normal one and the sixth stage is the extinction phase. Between these two lies four graded stages each one is characterised by the status of practice the native speakers perform their language. On implementing this scale to MSAL, we may find that these languages are suffering a lot and some of them might have experienced a very deteriorating situations towards the extinction phase of such a scale.

1. Status of Mehri and Soqotri as Endangered languages

As noted earlier, MSAL family includes six languages spoken in the southern part of the Arabia. They are Mehri, Jibbali 'Shiri', Harsusi, Soqotri, Hobyot and Bathari. They are spoken in the eastern part of Yemen and western part of Oman. Some native speakers of Mehri and Soqotri are disseminated here and there in the Arabian Gulf states as expatriates forming very small speech communities. Only Soqotri is spoken in the Yemeni Island of Socotra and some other islands of the same archipelago in the Indian Ocean at the distance of 150 miles to the east from the Horn of Africa. As being spoken languages, they have no orthographic systems to record them. The exact number of speakers of these languages are not officially declared albeit they are all recognized as in endangerment status by both Ethnologue and UNESCO (Bendjaballah and Shlonsky 2017). However, estimates of the speakers of these languages in total are about 200,000, with Mehri as the largest of these languages in terms of the number of its speakers (Simon-Snell 1999). According to what was reported by Rubin (2019), who estimates Mehri speakers as ranging from 75,000 to 150,000 speakers, and the Jibbali language may have approximately 30,000 speakers, and Socotra may have 10,000 speakers while the three remaining languages have less than a thousand speakers each.

In terms of Mehri and Soqotri being merely spoken and unwritten languages, it is absolutely true, but some efforts have been made for a long time, with regard to developing a written system for Mehri and the rest of the MSAL. Accordingly, the use of the Arabic script as a writing system for these languages was the closest, as asserted by some researchers. Belhaf (2017), as a native speaker of Mehri, for instance, believed that the Arabic orthography is the closest one to represent this language in writing and the most appropriate for that function. As a matter of fact, Belhaf was preceded by Al- 'Alidaroos (1999) who practically adopted the Arabic letters indicating their adequacy for such representation. However, a great deal of research written on Mehri, Soqotri and South Arabian languages in general was written in several European languages such as English, French, German, Austrian and Russian. The standard International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA), with some slight differences from one work to another, were adopted by these scholars. Others, on the other hand, used phonetic symbols

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which are different from IPA, i.e., in Roman letters with key placed for them to facilitate reading data from MSAL languages, for instance.

Focusing on the initial stages of studying and documenting MSAL languages, it was in 1835 James Wellsted, an officer in the Indian Navy, affiliated at that time to the Queen of Britain, who was the first to open the eyes of the Europeans to these languages. In 1843 he published a list of vocabulary that he collected during his survey of the island of Socotra, and shortly afterwards a longer list of vocabulary was published, i.e. in 1846 by Ludwig Kraff, which included Mehri numbers and some short phrases (Rubin 2010 b). A major turning point in the field of MSAL was the Austrian mission sent to South Arabia in 1898. Field work began at the hands of David Hirsch Mueller, Alfred Jean and Wilhelm Heine. Rubin also added that two native speakers of MSAL, were brought to Vienna and they spent most of the year 1902 for the purpose of codifying and studying these languages there. So, Soqotri was discovered in 1835 by Wellsted, and Jibbali in 1836 by Holton and Fresnel in 1838, Mehri by Wellsted in 1840, Harsusi and Bathari by Thomas 1936 AD, and Hobyot by Johnston in 1981 (See Bendjaballah and Shlonsky 2017). There are also field works on Mehri language on the Yemeni side, as well as on Soqotri and Hobyot, which were carried out by Antoine Lonnet and Marie-Claude Simon-Snell in the eighties of the last century, which resulted in a number of research articles and survey studies published by them either individually or as a team (Aaron Rubin 2019).

There are many challenges facing the MSAL, Mehri and Soqotri as the main concern of this paper in particular. All of these six languages suffer from the threat of extinction, but some of them are the most vulnerable to this imminent danger. Morris (2017) felt this dangerous situation and regarded Bathari as the most severe MSAL language affected by the risk of termination. This is the case for Mehri and Soqotri languages, if we look at their linguistic status and the number of their speakers, as well as the daily life contexts in which these languages are used. Languages that lose the close connection with their speakers suffer from weakness and limitations in expressions, or what is known as lexical impoverishment. Morris (2017) discussed thoroughly a number of examples of such impoverishment. In considering the word (living place / residence), for instance, she found that most of the speakers of these MSALLs use the Arabic word (house), but when asked about the word in their languages

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specifically, they have different words. The speaker of the Bathari says: /kəḏōt/, the speaker of the Hobyot says: /séken/, while the Soqotri speaker says /kaṣr/.

Among other challenges facing speakers of MSAL, language contact is a threat to these languages. It is believed that the spread of Arabic in the areas of Mehri for communication between the local population and the people of other Arab regions or countries influence the mother tongue of Mehri speakers, and narrows the geographical areas in which it is used (Simon-Snell 1999). Soqotri, on the other hand, is facing similar circumstances as many non-Soqotri speakers are heading and settling down in the main cities of the island for long time. This is obviously seen over the last three decades which might lead to a great impact on the indigenous islanders' culture and language, especially when those new commers are moving as families for longer conditions of settlement. Having Arabic constituting a dominant culture and language over time, younger generations may gradually lose maintaining their mother tongue.

In view of the reasons categorized by Austin and Salbank (2011) above, there is a real challenge facing Mehri and Soqotri languages. It is not necessary all of these four reasons be combined in a language that is vulnerable to this situation, but rather one of them may be sufficient to harm a language that was originally threatened. Looking more closely at these two languages, one may find two of additional factors that could possibly make them more susceptible to the threat of extinction. There is a misunderstanding among many about the concept of 'national unity' of a country. In the case of Mehri and Soqotri, some may perceive that the presence of these two languages and cultures besides Arabic, even in a limited area such as Mehri and Soqotri speech communities, is a factor threatening national unity culturally and politically, even if this is not disclosed publicly.

Some Yemeni decision makers may be overwhelmed by the tendency to get all cultures and languages assimilate and melt, instinctively, into one pot under the pretext of one nation, one language, one culture, and even one religion, as is the case in many countries around the world might be. Absolutely, this perspective threatens the cultures and languages of minorities, which are supposed to be nurtured. The cultural, political and economic dominations also accelerate the time life of many languages, pushing them to extinction. Mehri and Soqotri

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suffer from these two reasons clearly, in addition to the indifference towards them as two of the most significant tributaries of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country within its geopolitical realm.

On investigating language vitality and endangerment framework, we find that Mehri and Soqotri fall in the third degree of the UNESCO scale (i.e. definitely endangered) as a result of many reasons that they were suffering from over history. Language contact with Arabic as a dominant language, in particular is one of such reasons. Arabic with all its strong culture as a thriving language that derives its strength over a very long and rich history due to its economic, political, social and religious situation has a great impact on the areas where MSAL exist, in general, and Mehri and Soqotri, in particular. The situation for these endangered languages may deteriorate with the passage of time to an unimaginable consequence, and it may be difficult for any meaningful conservancy measures to help protect them if no real and sustainable action is taken.

Some of the MSAL may have exceeded Mehri on the UNESCO scale declining very closer to the status of moribund phase. Bathari, Hobyot, and Harsusi, as indicated by Morris (2017), may have reached the fourth or even the fifth stage. Apprehensions regarding the fate of these languages, including Mehri and Soqotri, stems from the abandonment of using those languages by their original speech communities. Shifting to another dominant language means the community stops using the mother tongue as a pre-contact language in favour of another language known as the post-contact language, which eventually becomes the new generations language. Furthermore, the social inferiority being practiced on the speakers of these languages, like Bathari for instance, may be one of the reasons that accelerated the decline of these languages towards endangerment (Morris 2017). Anyway, this situation enhances the feeling of the speakers of these languages to reduce self-esteem, which may play a negative role in the use of such indigenous languages.

Table (1) scale of domain of use

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5	4	3	2	1	0
Critically Endangered	Severely Endangered	Endangered	Threatened	Vulnerable	Safe
Used only in a few specific domains, such as ceremonies, songs, prayer, proverbs, certain limited domestic activities.	Used mainly just in the home and/or with family, and may not be the primary language even in these domains for many community members.	Used mainly in the home and/or family, remains the primary language of These domains for many Community members.	Used in some nonofficial domains along with other languages, and remains the primary language used in the home for many community members.	Used in most domains except for official ones such as government mass media, education, etc.	Used in most domains, including official ones such as government, mass media, education, etc.

Lee and Way (2016), p. 285

Table No. (1) above shows the domain of language use (Lee and Way 2016), which is to measure the actual daily life use of languages, as it shows the situations in which such languages can be measured against these criteria proposed by the UNESCO framework. MSAL can be assessed regrading such measures in terms of the places of use. It seems that Mehri and Soqotri are almost on the third stage, as we have noted down earlier, as used mainly at home or with family members, but it remains the main language of these areas for many members of the society. In support of this argument, and at the age of seven or eight, MSAL children have to enter the modern world that is witnessing huge advancement in technology, so they are forced to use their mother tongue intermittently, and this makes them lose the ability to use it automatically even at home (Simon-Snell 1999).

2. Vitality of Mehri and Soqotri and LPP

Looking closely at the status of Mehri and Soqotri language vitality, Ethnologue website documented Mehri as an “endangered indigenous language of [Yemen](#) and [Oman](#)... Direct evidence is lacking, but the language is thought to be used as a first language by adults only. It

is not known to be taught in schools". As it is shown in figure (1) below for its vitality level, it is neither institutional nor stable language in its areas of existence. It is approximately one step down to go to the extinction phase if no action is taken for its preservation. Comparing the documentation of Ethnologue and the UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley, 2010).

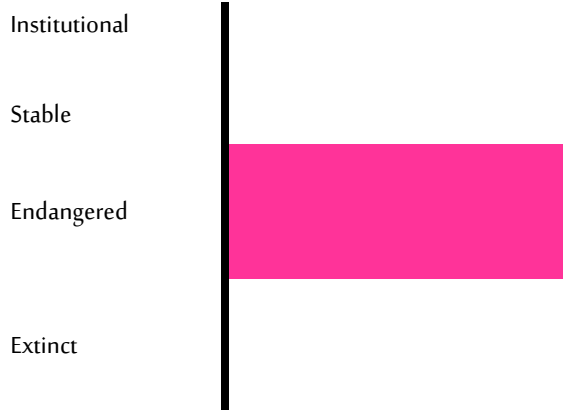


Figure (1) Language Vitality of Mehri. Source:

<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/gdq/>

Soqotri, on the other hand, is registered by Ethnologue as "an endangered indigenous language of [Yemen](#)[...] The language is used as a first language by some people in every generation of the ethnic community. It is not known to be taught in schools". The assessment of its current vitality is identical with its sister, Mehri language as shown above in figure (1), so these two languages are facing the same fate if being further neglected and left vulnerable facing the endangerment of extinction.

For what is linguistically known as Language Digital Support assessment, Ethnologue has proposed five-stage scale on which a language may be recognised. The lowest degree of these is 'still' followed by 'emerging' to which Mehri and Soqotri are affiliated, and then comes 'ascending' the next is 'vital' and finally comes the highest degree 'thriving', a status which very many world languages enjoy like Arabic, English and French, for instance. Mehri and Soqotri,

according to Ethnologue, have got very less Digital Language Support, what is graded as being in the emerging stage, as shown for both languages as in figure (2) below:

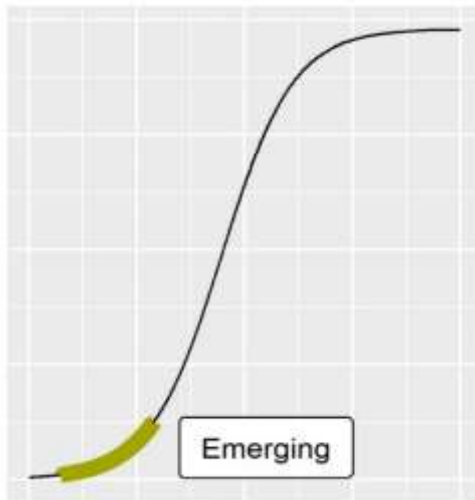


Figure (2) Digital Language Support for Mehri and Soqotri languages.

Source: <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/gdq/>

Having discussed the vitality of these two languages, we turn to language policy and planning as vital issues in endangered languages issue. A question is raised in this regard: What is language planning and what is language policy? These two terms might be used interchangeably as two synonymous terms. The term planning is firstly introduced by the American linguist Einar Haugen in 1950s. It refers to "all conscious efforts that aim at changing the linguistic behaviour of a speech community. It can include anything 'from proposing a new word to a new language' (Haugen 1987, as cited in Mesthrie et al 2002, p. 371). It is clear that LPP are two important linguistic concepts associated with decision-makers and entities interested in the matter of language, not only as a means of communication, but also as part of the policy of the country in which the language or languages are located within its geographical and sovereignty boundaries. Several factors are intricate in planning a language to take its natural position. Language as either national, official, or second language, it is closely linked to identity, and it is even possible to say that they are two sides of the same coin.

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The difference between language planning and language policy in terms of the field of practice and the direction taken by this practice as Sallabank (2011) explains the two terms very carefully and clarified the difference between direction and domain, “where domain refers to the degree of strategy or practice applied, while direction refers to who is involved in the decision-making process.” Language planning is not only necessary for living languages that do not have endangerment problems, but it is also an important practice in preserving endangered languages.

A language can be revitalised if that language has official institutional recognition. This is the bottom line with regard to Mehri and Soqotri languages, which have not received any official recognition by the concerned institutions as national languages of ethnic groups belonging to Yemen and the other countries that Mehri falls within their geopolitical domains, for instance. There is a near absence of both language policy and language planning towards MSAL and more precisely Mehri and Soqotri. There is a complete absence at the official, governmental and popular levels which reflects the negligence of these languages and even showing a state of indifference to their future, that results in the disappearance of their culture, and perhaps the identity of the minorities speaking these languages. Very modest activities are taking place in the right direction to document Mehri at the local level by activists in establishing some centres, such as Mehri Language Centre for Studies and Research, which is an institution for scientific research that works to preserve the cultural and linguistic heritage of Mehri tongue. It was established in October 11th 2016 and more recently the establishment of Soqotri Language Centre in May 8th 2023. We positively hope that the Yemeni Government will enact official legislations that preserve the status of MSAL of being recognized as national languages within the geographical and social boundaries along with Arabic in a multilingual composite that endures the sovereignty of the country. These legislations must be endorsed hand in hand with practical steps at all levels. In addition to this and to make it clear that nonprivileged groups in some countries, of which Yemen is of course one that do not put in consideration the rights of minorities practically, and hence get neglected in language policy and planning, we may refer to Tonkin (2023) who argues that:

Individuals who do not speak the prevailing language(s) (often the language(s) of government) may become wholly invisible to the policymakers who decide their fate. Such

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policymakers, even if they are favourably disposed to inclusion, may make decisions that exclude – simply because they do not see, or sufficiently appreciate, how important the language that one speaks really is, and because national cohesion trumps diversity. (p 1-2)

Additionally, encouraging people to think in a different and positive way about their languages that they speak with confidence, pride and self-esteem are supportive and even major factors for preserving these languages. People of these languages have an important role to play in the formation of special organizations to save these languages by documenting them and encouraging their people to use them. McCarty (2018) described "community language planning [as] a bottom-up process, that is, it is carried out by ordinary people in society and not government-supported officials [...] It is carried out with the participation of people from citizens of a language themselves."

We should also not forget the importance of documentation as a task that precedes the planning process or is almost an integral part of it, which was mentioned earlier in this research, and for the importance of documentation and study of these MSAL. As an expert in MSAL, we cite the opinion of (Morris 2017, p. 9-10), who proposed a number of general suggestions for studying these languages:

1. Elicitation and continuous recorded speech;
2. Lexical impoverishment;
3. Some possible social and cultural reasons for the decline of the most endangered languages;
4. Monolingualism and the MSAL;
5. Specialised vocabulary; the case of 'living quarters; home'
6. Terms used by MSA speakers to describe the incorrect speaking of their languages.

There are many works carried out by many linguists interested in MSAL such as Morris (2017) and Johnstone (1987) and the missions that preceded and followed him for decades are only an embodiment of this effort in documenting Mehri and the rest of MSAL. Local efforts, on the other hand, should not be overlooked, since they are undertaken by many

specialists and non-specialists in the fields of language and linguistics, including what was published in Arabic and other languages such as English, French, Russian and German.

3. Language Shift of Mehri and Soqotri speakers

Originally, studies in the field of Language Maintenance, (LM) and language shift (LS) focus on the languages of immigrants to other countries, either in order to improve living conditions or forcibly emigrate for reasons of wars or other disasters that led to the exodus of large linguistic communities to live in a different linguistic milieu in which the original language of the host country dominates. As it was not possible for these languages to withstand the dominant language in its strong social and economic situation, the new generations found it difficult to preserve the mother tongue over time, and it had a gradual transformation, or what is known in linguistic terms as (Gradual Shift) a status of slow diminishing. This linguistic shift may not only happen to non-immigrants in large numbers from their homelands, but may happen to speakers of a language in their country of origin, in a situation their language cannot withstand for generations in the face of a dominant language for several reasons, consequently a gradual shift occurs to them as well, just like immigrants. There are examples such as that existing in Iran with the speakers of the Azeri language in the Tabriz region, which did not stand up to Persian for political, economic, cultural, social and even religious reasons, and is powered by the idea of national unity sought by the state and through which Persian nationalism dominates over the linguistic scene itself. People may survive, but their language is in danger of dying, and these reasons for its death have no direct relation to the state of physical well-being of the speakers of that language. This is what Crystal (2014) pointed out, where he argues that the members of society remain alive and in the best case continue to live in their usual areas of presence, but their language slips towards extinction and thus becomes destined to disappear, and these people replace their language with another language, as this case is called 'cultural assimilation' in which one culture is affected by another dominant culture, and gradually begins to lose its personality as a result of its members adopting new behaviours and values. This may happen in various ways, as dominance may be due to submission as a result of the arrival of large numbers of speakers of another language to the areas of that original language community, and this number overwhelms the indigenous

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population, which happened repeatedly during the colonial era. A similar case to what Crystal (2014) mentioned above is that of the situation of Mehri and Soqotri languages which has occurred definitely, with the arrival of many residents of several regions in Yemen to live in the governorate of Mehra and Socotra Island. The new commers are certainly Arabic speakers of different dialects, consequently a negative impact on the entity, identity and life of indigenous people of these areas has been experienced. These languages go through several stages until they reach the state of abandonment by their speakers. Such a gradual shift does not occur if there is no linguistic contact between two different languages, as the case of Arabic and Mehri, for example. Without linguistic contact, it is not possible to talk about language shift of a speech community from using one language to another. Languages that are the only ones in their society naturally maintain their status as they are and may flourish as well.

Table 2. Thomason and Kaufman's (1988) borrowing scale, as in O'Shannessy (p. 81, 2011)

Stage	Features
1. Casual contact	Lexical borrowing only
2. Slightly more intense Contact	Slight structural borrowing; conjunctions and adverbial particles
3. More intense contact	Slightly more structural borrowing; adpositions, derivations, affixes
4. Strong cultural pressure	Moderate structural borrowing (major structural features that cause relatively little typological change)
5. Very strong cultural Pressure	Heavy structural borrowing (major structural features that cause significant typological disruption)

Source: O'Shannessy (2011)

Undoubtedly, there is a state of language contact between MSAL and Arabic at different linguistic levels and it certainly passes through such stages drawn in table (2) above, as it is very obvious that these languages borrow heavily from Arabic, each of which in its own contextual linguistic need and by virtue of the ancient heritage and religion. Since the main

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language of Islam is Arabic, and the local cultures of Arabic dialects have an impact on linguistic borrowing, it makes it perhaps reach the stage of the strong cultural pressure, since Arabic is strongly dominating in the vicinity of these languages.

4. Revitalization of Mehri and Soqotri and SD

As the reviewed research on endangered languages implies, we find that considering similar cases of Mehri and Soqotri languages and as Edwards (2010) argues in discussing the languages of minorities, preserving endangered languages will only succeed by achieving two conditions, the first of which is the steadiness of using the language in most of its important surroundings in which it used to work before, and this depends on the social, political and economic conditions within the society itself and outside its scope as well. The second is that it will be preserved if society has the will to confront the cessation of that language resulting, in most cases, from movement, modernity, and cultural transformation. As David Crystal (2014) explains in detail a number of conditions for improving the situation of endangered languages. He argues that an endangered language may be preserved if the native speakers of such language have got a higher respect to it, raise their level of wealth, raise their level of legitimate authority in the eyes of the dominant society, have a strong presence in the education system, can write their language and can use electronic technologies. In addition to Crystal's suggestions, Yamamoto (1998b) recommends a number of factors that help preserve endangered languages. He focused on promoting linguistic diversity, strong sense of ethnic identity in the community of endangered language, promoting educational programs and bilingual study programs, training speakers of the language to teach it, integrating language community as a whole, developing user-friendly language materials and written literature, as well as creating and developing environments for language use.

Endangered languages are closely related to Sustainable Development (SD), in the sense that they are an original resource of cultural diversity in many regions of the world and losing a language means losing a great portion of its culture. Traditional knowledge of local communities is preserved through maintaining such local languages and losing them means losing this knowledge. In short, languages of indigenous peoples are their national identity,

their economic development and linguistic rights. The central concept that we may have to tackle here is the concept of SD. In this regard, we refer to the following two definitions: the first is by the World Commission on Environment and Development, which says: It is the 'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' (WCED, 1987: 43). The second is by Sen (1999) who declares that 'A sustainable society is one in which peoples' ability to do what they have good reason to value is continually enhanced.' (Sen, 1999). They are both linking sustainability in one way or another to economic, social and natural factors as they are framed in figure number (3) below. Language is, no doubt, a social phenomenon that entails social practice regarding the whole frame work of sustainability but with no exclusion from the rest of the components of the framework. They are equally treated in handling such SD within human lives of which language, of course, remains the essential means of communicating and cultural heritage preserving and passing over generations.

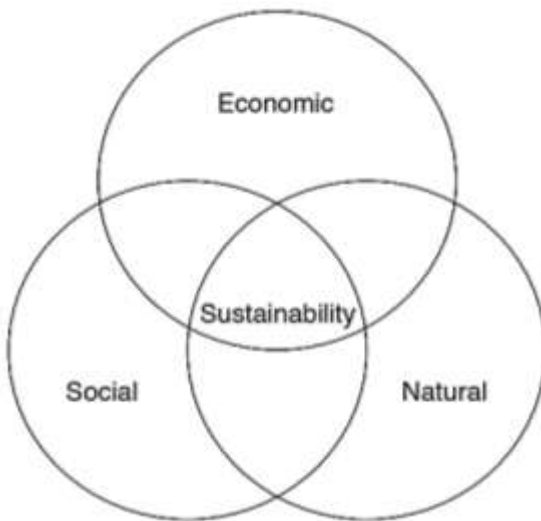


Figure (3) the sustainability components

Source: Eliot, J. A. (4th ed. 2013 P. 20)

Although languages are not referred to clearly neither previously in the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) nor recently in the SD Goals (SDGs) of the UN, as observed by

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Romane (2013), but still, languages, and particularly those of minorities and indigenous people, are to some extent, present strongly in the SD of human life as Romaine clearly suggests, is “at the very heart ... of the development process” and present at its “major fault-lines” (Romaine, 2013, p. 2). Much of the activity of SDGs is not totally exhibited without the strong presence of language, minorities languages are no exception, might be the case for our concerned MSAL, more precisely, Mehri and Soqotri.

Education, on the other hand, is an important factor in minority languages SD and ultimately in revitalization process as a whole because “all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote SD, including [...] human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to SD” (UNESCO as cited in Vasseur and Sepúlveda 2022, p. 105).

Raising the level of self-esteem in any society raises the morale of its members in their daily lives, and undoubtedly the language in particular, which is the vehicle to enact individual’s identity. The existence of cultural diversity and its promotion by policy makers to decide and control the course of life in a way that guarantees the continuation of the cultures and languages of minorities in our Arab society in this geographical area of South Arabian Peninsula is the best means to guarantee the endurance of these languages. In this regard, and as Servaes (2017) in his introduction regarding the emphasis on culture connection to communication in peoples’ life and how to benefit from information technologies to help underprivileged groups in creating SD, he believes that:

Communication and culture are both keys to Sustainable Development, at the same time as being development goals in themselves. To date, development has mostly focused on poverty and education, but the rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is changing that. People can now communicate any time and any place, catalysing a wider array of opportunities to the development sector. The world today is interconnected and interdependent. By promoting the free flow of ideas, as is the case in UNESCO’s mandate, a truly transformative environment can be enabled through the advancement of communication. Disadvantaged groups can now actively participate in their own community’s development. (p. 13)

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New technologies, according to the above argument, is an essential factor in indigenous peoples' communication and culture, of which language is vital component. Mehri and Soqotri languages' speakers are getting new chances to develop their own communication in their native tongues getting the most of the benefit of such up-to-date devices. This will help to enhance and preserve these endangered languages.

Based on a review of many studies, as well as the opinions of specialists, a number of which were referred to in this research, some recommendations are postulated as follows:

1. Endangered languages are better be enhanced and revitalised in considering them as medium of instruction at schools, particularly at the earlier stages of education. In the case of MSAL, especially Mehri and Soqotri, educational system of these areas is to be developed in a way to allow these two languages to accommodate their native speakers in the areas of their existence and to go hand in hand with Arabic in primary and secondary education. In this regard, Grenoble and Wiley (2006) think that the field of education is one of the most important areas for the use of language. In areas where the education system is administered regionally or nationally, the language of education becomes an effective element in linguistic use in other fields as well. This improves the preservation of Mehri and Soqotri if the appropriate language education policy is adopted to enhance their status.
2. Engagement and full commitment of locals in areas where Mehri and Soqotri are spread in both inland and the island of Socotra in revitalisation process and language planning schemes for survival. Programmes of such nature have to consider the participation of natives so as to take part in initiatives of establishing projects for these languages revival and sustaining such steps to ensure continuance and resilience for future SD.
3. Designing appropriate curricula along with teaching materials and preparing qualified native teachers of Mehri and Soqotri, who specialize in teaching these languages to younger generations and fully aware of current trends in teaching methods. This ensures the preservation of these endangered languages and guarantees their survival

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durably longer in the face of the threats through sustainable development programmes of education.

4. Considering establishing Departments for Mehri and Soqotri as endangered languages in higher institutes like Mehra and Socotra Universities. This ensures both academic instruction and research to promote the status of these languages and the rest of MSALs in these two academic higher institutions. The study plans and well-designed curricula should be taken care for providing schools at all levels with qualified native teaches of these endangered languages.
5. Integration of folklore and local literature both in schooling and cultural life of people assists endangered languages. Literature as an essential phenomenon for the steadiness and growth, both at linguistic and cultural levels, is considered as a main component of culture and even as a carrier of it through generations. Without national language, and without a local flourishing literature, it is difficult to transmit cultural, social, literary and linguistic heritage, as well as the folklore of indigenous groups on this globe. Preserving Mehri and Soqotri and transmitting them through generations is the guarantee for this rich heritage and the endurance of the language itself, along with the Arabic language at all levels in harmony with an amusing linguistic duality.
6. Production and publication of many creative works in literature and art, such as stories, folk tales, and popular poetry and other works, in Mehri and Soqotri, and publish and disseminate all of this through TV channels dedicated to these languages, or dedicating programs through current TV channels to spread this local culture and literature. Imagery and live visual recording through dramas have a role that outweighs the role of other means to reach the largest number of target audience without cost and effort, compared to written and readable means that cost people money and effort together. This should be done in collaboration with the newly established centres of Mehri and Soqotri languages.
7. Using media among younger generations is one of the priorities of preserving Mehri and Soqotri languages. This is done through making programmes and cartoon series in these languages publicly spread through social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok and others, because of the great impact and spread of these means.

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This is to promote the dissemination of the language on a large scale, and ensuring its preservation. It is also done by dubbing children's series in Mehri and Soqotri.

8. Using technology in manging language corpus and compiling dictionaries electronically to preserve the language. Many electronic and modern software applications and programmes on the Internet facilitate access to endangered languages and learning them in an interesting and smooth way. In this context, such electronic programs help to teach languages, as Frisian Language, where this language is being revived, through programmes for learning on the Internet, computers, or tablets. This is known as (Studio F). These digital programmes facilitate the learning of these endangered languages in a modern and up-to-date fashion that creates self-confidence and self-esteem as well.

Conclusion

This paper first tackled the importance of awareness raising of endangerment of a large number of world's languages, and focused on the importance of scientific research on identifying the danger threatening these languages, and the extent of the difficulties facing specialists and those interested in the subject of endangered languages. It focused on the efforts placed on the shoulders of linguists and Sociologists and those interested in the related disciplines in language endangerment, and how documentation is to be considered first to preserve these languages, including MSAL, and Mehri and Soqotri in particular.

It has also explained many of the reasons that lead to the endangerment of these languages and what are the measures used to track the effect of the state of languages in terms of their vitality and the extent of the danger they have reached, especially the UNESCO standards, where an attempt was made to determine the level that these two languages and the rest of the MSAL have reached. According to UNESCO and Ethnologue websites standards, Mehri and Soqotri are endangered languages and have reached brinks of endangerment.

Local efforts were also discussed at the personal level as well as global efforts either individually or institutionally to collaborate in documenting and studying Mehri and Soqotri in particular, and the rest of MSAL in general. We referred briefly to the historical stages of

documentation of these languages showing that most of which was written in English and other Indo-European languages such as German, French, and Russian as well.

The concepts of language policy and language planning were also tackled, and how to link these to SD in order to gain some official, institutional and popular interest to preserve these languages through official recognition as national languages of minorities that fall within the boundaries of Yemen and its multilingual composite. How to raise the awareness of endangerment of these languages, which face extinction as an inevitable fate if they do not receive strong attention. It is concluded with some suggestions for the improvement of Mehri and Soqotri status so as to developed and preserve them and keep them sustainably developed and alive for communication as a national heritage that deserves SD plans to remain effective in their domains for generations to come.

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تعزير دو اللغتين المهرية والسقطرية بوصفهما لغتين مهددتين بالاندثار: مقارنة في ضوء التنمية المستدامة لتقوية دورهما المستقبلي

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الملخص

تناقش هذه الورقة العلمية أهمية إنعاش اللغات المهددة بالفناء، ورفع مستوى الوعي بأهمية لغات الأقليات في اليمن من خلال مفهوم التنمية المستدامة. إذ تعد اللغتان المهرية والسقطرية من أكبر اللغات العربية الجنوبية الحديثة من حيث عدد متحدثيها الأصليين؛ إذ تضم عائلة اللغات هذه كلا من المهرية والسقطرية والجبالية (الشحرية) والهوبوتية والحرسوسية والبطحيرة. فالمهرية والسقطرية من أولى اللغات السامية المكتشفة في عائلة اللغات العربية الجنوبية الحديثة. وعلى الرغم من انتشار عدد من لهجات اللغة المهرية على رقعة جغرافية واسعة في اليمن وغيرها من دول الجوار فإن اللغة السقطرية بقيت إلى حد ما- محدودة الانتشار في أراضي القطر اليمني، في عدد من جزر أرخبيل سقطري خاصة. وعلى أية حال فهما لغتان مهمتان في اليمن، وبهما حاجة إلى عناية خاصة من خلال خطة للحفاظ عليهما، لإبقائهما على قيد الحياة؛ لأجل استمرار استعمالهما في محيطهما الجغرافي لتبقيهما في ازدهار تام في مجتمعاتهما اللغوية. ولإظهار أهميتهما الحيوية في مجتمعاتهما المحلية، يجب اتخاذ العديد من التدابير، ولعل أول خطوة في تلك التدابير وأهمها هو التوثيق لأجل المحافظة عليهما، وهذه العملية قد بدأت بالفعل من النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين على أيدي علماء اللغة الأوروبيين والمهتمين بهذا الجانب. وإلى جانب التوثيق هناك إجراءات أخرى مهمة وهي ما يمكن تحقيقها إذا ما تضافرت الجهود الرسمية وغير الرسمية على المستوى اللغوي والاجتماعي من خلال التخطيط اللغوي والسياسة اللغوية. ولن يتم ذلك الا بتعاون ودعم العديد من اللغويين والمهتمين بعلم اللغة الاجتماعي والمجالات المعرفية ذات العلاقة لوضع المعالجات العلمية للمحافظة على اللغتين المهرية والسقطرية لتقوية دورهما في مجتمعاتهما اللغوية. سيتم ذلك كله عبر تبني العديد من الاستراتيجيات في ضوء التنمية المستدامة وتطوير مناهج تعليمية لغوية للأجيال الجديدة في مدارس التعليم الأساسي، وتطوير برامج عبر الاعلام، وكذا تطبيقات التواصل الاجتماعي والتقنيات الحديثة؛ لضمان الحفاظ عليهما ومواصلة دورهما كوسيلة تواصل بشرية حية للأجيال القادمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التنمية المستدامة، اللغات العربية الجنوبية الحديثة، المهرية، السقطرية، التخطيط والسياسة اللغوية.

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