Elicitation Techniques and Considerations in Data Collection
in Early Arabic Grammatical Tradition

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Little has been written, in modern scholarship of Arabic linguistics tradition, on the actual elicitation techniques or procedures of data collection as implemented by traditional Arabic linguists. However, recently, Suleiman (1999) claims that the very data that traditional Arabic linguists collected "must be regarded as defective" due to limitations to do with the nature of data collection procedures.   The claimed limitations include (Suleiman, 24):

(1) the existence of indeterminacy, distortion and fabrication by informants
(2) the rivalry between grammarians
(3) the reliance by transmitters and grammarians on memory to record the data
(4) the representational inadequacy of the script used to record those data
(5) the absence of any information about the paratactic or suprasegmental of the language, such as intonation and stress
(6) the male gender bias of the data.

At least three of these limitations can be readily dismissed on their face value. First, it is not clear why "rivalry" between traditional grammarians renders the data defective any more than the data collected by the various contemporary linguists might be considered defective for the same reason. If anything, competitiveness gives grammarians an edge to seek all possible data in support of counter claims, thereby contributing to the collection of data that are wider in scope and more representative of the actual speech of the Arabs.[1]

Second, the claimed "representational inadequacy of the script used to record the data" is anachronistic at best. Almost all sources indicate that the linguistic tradition itself in fact started with developing additional symbols that made the script more adequate to avoid mispronunciation and misreading of the Qur'ān. Abu Al-Aswad Al-Du'alī is generally credited for establishing the basic triptote case and mood marking system and his student, Naṣr Ibn 'Āṣim, is credited for having later established the dotting system of the letters as we know them today (see e.g., Al-Sīrāfī, 33-38; Al-Qifṭī, 1/5; Al-Dānī a, 3, 7; Ibn Al-Nadīm, 55, 63;   Āl-Yāsīn, 54-55). A more intuitive vocalizing system was developed, by Al-Khalīl, that also included symbols for *tashdīd, takhfīf, rawm, 'ishmām,* etc. (see Al-Dānī a, 7; Al- Dānī b, 125; Makhzūmī, 38-39; and Āl-Yāsīn, 55). Errors or *taṣḥīf* did occur in words with letters that have identical shapes but different dots or vowels. What is significant here is that contrary to what the first claim purported, the rivalry and highly competitive nature of lexicologists and grammarians and both the large number of linguists and the

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[1] The main rivalry is known to have taken place between the Baṣrah and the Kūfah schools where the latter generally tended to claim for more forms to be productive than the former.

tremendous amounts of data gathered contributed, if anything, to enhancing the accuracy of the data and to eliminating mistakes due to human error.[2]

Third, it is not clear how the issue suprasegmental features, such as "stress" and "intonation," renders the data further defective. What is evident rather is that stress in Arabic is quite predictable and more significantly most of the suprasegmentals were covered in the study of *'arūḍ* "prosody" (founded and completed by Al-Khalīl) where the rhythm and sequence of the language is exhaustively captured.[3] Hence, attributing defectiveness to the data for lack of information of such features can hardly be convincing.

As for the other three claims attributing defective status to the collected data, they too cannot be substantiated from the literature. Although instances of "fabrication" by informants were reported in the literature, such fabrications are mostly limited to poetry and not the whole scope of the data. Understandably, the implication of the claim here carries some bearing on poetry as a data source which grammarians drew upon for their analyses and conclusions. However, the pool of data sources relied upon did not comprise solely poetry. Grammarians also relied on naturally occurring data, directly from the mouths of native speakers, which would reduce the margin of human errors and other errors due to poetry fabrication (for a thorough and fair treatment of the authenticity of the sources of pre-Islamic poetry, see e.g., Al-Asad 1962). Similarly, the claim of "reliance by transmitters and grammarians on memory to record the data" is inaccurate, as such tradition of memorization is limited to poetry and *'akhbār* of the Pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods as part of a long oral tradition of poetry narration *riwāyat al-shi'r*. The literature, as will be illustrated below, shows that the grammarians did not rely on memory alone but rather committed what they elicited to writing on the spot during their elicitation sessions. There is no evidence to suggest that the linguists who went about eliciting language data from native speakers were biased one way or the other in collecting their data or that they considered men to be the only competent speakers of the language. Rather, there is ample evidence that linguists did aim at collecting data across gender and age with same degree of credibility given to both genders.

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[2] It is noteworthy here that the instances of *taṣḥīf* "misreading" pointed out by Al-ʿAskarī, Ibn Jinnī and al-Fārisī and others to have occurred in *Kitāb Al-ʿAyn* are generally agreed not to have been made by al-Al Khalīl himself but rather attributed to the collaborative nature of the authorship of the work (see Al-ʿAskarī, 70-88, Ibn Jinnī, 3/291; Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/77-92). According to Al-Rafiʿī, following Ibn Khaldūn (296-97), errors or *taṣḥīf* "misreading" started to spread later as scribal practices became a mundane profession no longer carried out by scholars; hence, early books are argued to have been "exemplary for their accuracy and vocalization" *'āyah fī al-ṣiḥḥah wa al-ḍabṭ* (Al-Rafiʿī, 1/286:footnote 1, 1/345). Āl-Yāsīn (1980) argues that until the end of 10th century *taṣḥīf* was not a problem since linguists were in constant contact with informants and that only towards the end of 10th century when it was no longer possible to consult informants with reliable competence of *fuṣḥā* (following Ibn Jinnī, 2/55) that *taṣḥīf* started to spread (Āl-Yāsīn, 70).

[3] Note, even the full awareness of suprasegmental features of the language, especially with respect to stress and intonation as we know them today and as captured at a later period in the elegant analysis of Ibn Jinnī, did not result in any significant change in the analysis of the language (for a discussion on stress and intonation in Arabic, see Ibn Jinnī, 2/372-3; see also Mujāhid, 32-33; Anīs, 82).

In the remainder of this paper, I shall focus on the instrumentation used by traditional linguists in collecting their data and some of the most significant considerations they took into account as they undertook field linguistics. These will be dealt with below by focusing on five issues related to: (I) background of informants, (II) gender of informants, (III) criteria of informant selection; (IV) elicitation techniques; and (V) methods of actual data recording. By examining these issues in detail, I hope to convey a better understanding of the exact instrumentation (or data collection procedures) as carefully planned for in advance and consistently executed by traditional Arabic linguists for subsequent analysis and to demonstrate that claims such as the above cannot be substantiated. The discussion is limited to the period from 8th to 10th Century which happens to be the formative years of the tradition.

I. Informants' Background and Locale

At the outset of data elicitation and gathering practices, roughly in the first half of 8th Century, the earliest linguists sought informants in their own habitat; mainly, the tribes of *qays*, *tamīm*, *'asad*, *hadhīl*, *kinānah* and *ṭay'* (Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/211; Āl-Yāsīn, 65-66)[4]. Grammarians chose these tribes in particular for their location in the middle of Arabia to control for second language influence on the speech habits of the informants (see Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/212, for further explanation about excluded tribes). Among the earliest and most prominent linguists, particularly grammarians, who undertook trips to the desert tribe lands to collect data for subsequent analysis are: Ibn Isḥāq Al-Haḍramī (d. 117 H.), 'Īsā Ibn 'Umar (d. 149 H.), Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā' (70-154 H.), Al-Khalīl Ibn Aḥmad (100-175 H.), Yūnis (d. 182 H.), Al-Kisā'ī (d. 189 H.), Al-Farrā' (d. 207 H.) and many others.[5]

Most of these classical linguists are connected to each other by student-teacher relationships; hence, this tradition of field linguistics passed from teacher to student together with similar assumptions and most likely similar training and experience in methods and procedures of data collection. There are direct references in the

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[4] Although there is no conclusive evidence as to whether linguists first sought informants in the market places or in their desert tribe lands, the development suggested here follows the earliest known linguists who undertook trips to the desert to collect data, most prominent among whom is Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā', but it is also likely that elicitation was practiced in all possible locales discussed here (desert, market place and cities) all at once during the period of data collection practice (see also Āl-Yāsīn 1980; cf. Al-Shalaqānī a, 81; b, 155, 165).

[5] It is to be noted that this group of linguists were concerned with both the grammar and the lexicon parts of the Arabic language, including the cannons of the different literary genres. However, the contribution of most of them is more prominent in establishing the grammatical tradition of the Arabic language. There are others who had similar interests, but their contribution is more prominent in compiling the lexicon and the cannons of the literary genres. Among the most prominent of the latter group of linguists are: Abu 'Amr Al-Shaybānī (d. 206 H.), Al-Naḍr Ibn Shamīl (d. 203 H.); Abu Zayd Al-Anṣārī (d. 215 H.), Al-Aṣma'ī (d. 213 H.); Abu 'Ubaydah (d. 210 H.), Ibn Al-'A'rābī (d. 231 H.) and others (for a concise and accessible modern works on the history of Arabic linguistics, see Al-Ṭanṭāwī 1969; Al-Afaghānī 1960, 1987; Dayf 1968; Hanna Tarzī 1969; Al-Shalaqānī 1971, 1975; Al-Hulwānī 1979; Āl-Yāsīn 1980; Versteegh 1993).

literature of linguists suggesting to other linguists certain desert tribes of Arabia as the real source of one's knowledge and hence the real data source. Al-Kisā'ī is often reported to have learned from Al-Khalīl where to go to get data from, as the latter is known to have undertaken such trips to the desert in Al-Hijāz, Najd and Tihāmah (see Al-Qiftī, 2/257-58) and who, in turn, learned the practice from his teacher Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā'. Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā' (d. 154 H.) is reported to have compiled a room full of data files that reached as high as the ceiling (Āl-Yāsīn, 66).

Later, traditional Arabic linguists and their students sought out informants coming from Bedouin tribes of Arabia to the then famous markets of Al-Mirbad (outside the city of Baṣrah) and Al-Kunāsah (outside the city of Al-Kūfah). Located a mere three miles away in the outskirts of Baṣrah, Al-Mirbad, in particular, functioned just like its other famous counterparts, such as ʿUkāđ, dhū al-Majāz and Majannah, as not only markets for exchange of seasonal goods and commodities but also as sort of literary clubs or tribal conferences where orators, poets, narrators and others would meet, debate, recite their poetry and rhymed prose, expressing pride in their war victories 'ayyām al- 'arab and their lineage and tribes (see Al-Makhzūmi, 19-22; Al-Shalaqānī a, 69, 166).

In direct reference to Al-Mirbad as a locale where informants were sought, Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā' would ask his students to share with him data which they had gathered from there. Al-'Aṣmaʿī is reported as saying:

جئت إلى أبي عمرو بن العلاء فقال: من أين جئت يا أصمعي؟ قلت من المِرْبد. قال هات ما

معك ، فقرأت عليه ما كتبت في ألواحي ، ومرّت به ستة أحرف لم يعرفها فأخذ يعدو في

الدرجة وقال: شمّرت في الغريب يا أصمعي .

(Āl-Yāsīn, 68; Al-Shalaqānī a, 70; Al-Qālī, 720-21)

 I came [once] to Abī 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā' and he said: "Where have you been, 'Aṣmaʿī ?" "At Al-Mirbad [market]," I answered. He said: "Come forth with what you have brought!" So, I read to him all that I wrote on my boards. He encountered six words that he had not known before. He then started to give me high praise and said: "You have excelled in [gathering and knowing] the rare [forms of Arabic language], oh 'Aṣmaʿī."

When they knew they were sought after and a great deal of importance was attributed to the language they spoke, many Bedouins from Arabia made trips to the urban centers of the Arab-Muslim world, Baṣrah and Kūfah, to make themselves available as informants or narrators as well as being perhaps motivated by curiosity to see urban life and/or for mere trade. Abu ʿUbaydah (d. 210) gives reports on such an occasion:

قدم علينا رجال من بادية جعفر بن جعفر بن كلاب ، فكنّا نأتيهم فنكتب عنهم.
(Āl-Yāsīn, 68; Al-Qurashī, 55)

[When] some men cam to us from the desert land of Ja'far Ibn Ja'far Ibn Kilāb, we would meet them and write their speech down.

Some of those visiting Bedouins may have found this an opportunity for material gains, since the Caliphs (the Umayyad and the Abbasid) themselves were

widely known to have rewarded and given audience to narrators, linguists and Bedouins to recite poetry, compete and debate issues to do with language and poetry (see Hanna Tarzī, 44-45; Al-Shalaqānī b, 126). Some Bedouins later started to earn their living by taking on jobs teaching language and poetry. Others may simply have had social prestige as their prime motivation to make such trips to take pride in their being Bedouins ʾaʿrāb; i.e., speaker of proper *fuṣḥā*. Abu Muhammad Al-Aʿrābī Al-ʿĀmirī became known also as Al-Aswad. He is reported to have covered his face with tar and sit in the sun so that his complexion would turn darker and have a more Bedouin look (see Al-Shalaqānī b, 130). Abu Muhammad Al-Aswad is also reported to have made trips to more distant urban centers as far as Al-Andalus/Spain (Al-Shalaqānī b, 225), but the reports also indicate that he did not "pay much attention to scholars of the Arabic language" (Al-Shalaqānī b, 132; Al-Zubaydī, 312).

Whatever the motivation behind the Bedouins' visits to the urban centers of Baṣrah and Kūfah, there is clear evidence, as will be shown below, that linguists were observant of their informants' motivations and were careful about the selection of informants. Evidently they needed to be less concerned when they sought them in the desert than when they encountered them in the cities. There seems to have been a set of criteria that were consistently and systematically adopted by traditional linguists in selecting informants.

II. Gender of Informants and other Types Informants

Upon a cursory examination of the informants mentioned in the literature, it is undeniable to find that male informants outnumber their female counterparts. Al-Shalaqānī (1975), one of the most exhaustive works on the topic, mentions no less than 21 female informants (99-100, 117, 159, 161, 167, 261-66, 285-88) as opposed to 98 male or so informants. While this ratio is not unreasonable, many other female informants are likely to have gone unreported due to cultural-religious and/or personal reasons[6]. Many female informants may not have wanted to be identified as attested to by the lack of identifiable names of female informants (e.g., of those cited in Al-Shalaqānī 1975).   There is no evidence to suggest that those linguists where biased one way or the other in collecting their data or that men were considered the only competent speakers of the language.

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[6] Consider the following two examples where elicited data point at the same time to some of the reasons why most female informants were not identified by name or completely went unreported:

قال أبو زيد في نوادره: قلت لأعرابية بالعيون ابنة مائة سنة: مالك لا تأتين أهل الزّقّة؟ فقالت إني أخزى أن أمشي في الزُّقاق ؛ أي أستحي .(Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/139)

    Abū Zayd said in his *Nawādir*: "'I said to a one-hundred-year-old woman in Al-ʿUyūn [area] 'why don't you come out to see the elders' for which she answered: 'I feel shy to walk in the alley.'"

وقال أبو زيد: زعموا أن امرأة قالت لابنتها: احفظي بيتك ممن لا تنشرين ؛ أي لا تعرفين.(Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/139)

    Abū Zayd said: "It is claimed that a woman once said to her daughter: 'keep strangers away from your house.'"

Rather, there is sufficient evidence that linguists did aim at collecting data across gender and age with the same degree of credibility. For example, at times, women informants were called upon to resolve conflicting data by two male informants, such as when Abu Khayrah's mother was called upon in the following report:

قال الرياشي: سمعت أبا زيد يقول: قال المنتجع: أغمي على المريض، وقال أبو خيرة: غُمي عليه. فأرسلوا إلى أمّ أبي خيرة فقالت: غُمي على المريض، فقال لها المنتجع: أفسدك ابنك.

(Al-Shalaqānī b, 114-115; Ibn Jinnī, 3/308)

Al-Riyāshī said: I have heard Abā Zayd say that Al-Muntajiʻ said: *'uᵧmiya ʻalā al-marīd'* 'the patient fainted'; and Abū Khayrah said: *ᵧumiya ʻalayh* 'he fainted;' So, they sent for Abū Kahyrah's mother who said: *ᵧumiya ʻalā al-marīd* 'the patient fainted.'   Al-Muntajiʻ then said to her: Your son spoiled you.

The important point here, of course, is not how one of the two informants reacted to Abu Khayrah's mother, but rather the fact that she was called upon to verify two conflicting male data sources.

There is also evidence in the literature of linguists having elicited data from children and even the insane (e.g., Al-Shalaqānī b, 105). Al-Aşmaʻī is reported to have been criticized by a passerby while gathering data from kids talking to each other:

قال ابن دريد في أماليه: أخبرنا عبد الرحمن عن عمّه الأصمعي قال: سمعت صِبية بحِمى ضَرَيَّة يتراجزون ، فوقفت وصدّوني عن حاجتي ، وأقبلت أكتب ما أسمع إذ أقبل شيخ فقال: أتكتب كلام هؤلاء الأقزام الأدناع ؟!

(Al-Shalaqānī b, 105; Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/140)

Ibn Durayd said in his *'Amālī*: ʻAbdul-Rahman told us on the authority of his uncle, Al-Aşmaʻī, as saying: [while I was on my way] "I once heard a group of young boys in Dariyyah [area] reciting poems to one another, so they made me stop and distracted me from my main purpose. I started to write down what I was hearing when suddenly an old man came by and said: 'How is it that you write down the speech of these little dwarfs and no brains?!'"

It is apparent that linguists had a clear notion of sampling language from native speakers across gender and age and an awareness that sound conclusions about the data can only be arrived at when data are elicited accordingly including eliciting data from children, as the above report indicates, and old people (see footnote 4 above). It is moreover reported that they went as far as gathering data from the insane as well as the poetry of those who were known to have become insane by love (see Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/140-141).

As far as data collection and field linguistics are concerned, it does seem certain that the activities were carried out only by men--due perhaps to similar reasons pointed out above. Understandably, few women would have been willing to go out

and mingle with strangers in strange, isolated places and/or be willing to give out their personal information, such as name, tribe, etc.

III. Criteria for Informant Selection
III. i. Locale Selection (External Factor)

Informants were often sought from the same identified tribes in order to control for outside influences as mentioned above. However, traditional linguists (8th -10th Century) did in fact seem to have sought informants from other places in Arabia, especially at the beginning, to reach their selectional criteria or at least for comparative purposes.[7] Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā' seems to have elicited language from Himyarite speakers and thus reached the conclusion:

<div dir="rtl">

ما لسان حمير وأقاصي اليمن بلساننا ولا عربيتهم بعربيتنا.

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The tongue of *ħimyar* and farthest extremities of Yaman is not [the same as] our tongue; neither is their Arabic the same as ours.

Abu Zayd Al-Anşārī (d. 215 H.) reports on the location of his source of data (in the heart of Arabia), following Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā':

<div dir="rtl">

ما أقول قالت العرب إلاّ إذا سمعته من هؤلاء: بكر بن هوازن ، وبني كلاب ، وبني هلال ، أو

من عالية السافلة (نجد) أو من سافلة العالية (المدينة) ، وإلاّ لم أقل: قالت العرب.

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(Āl-Yāsīn, 67; Al-Shalaqānī b, 156; see also Al-Fārābī quoted in Al-Suyūṭī a,1/209-13)

I do not say the Arabs said [such and such] unless I heard [such speech] from these: Bakr Ibn Hawāzin, Banī Kilāb, Banī Hilāl, from the people of Najd and the people of Madīnah; otherwise I would not say the Arabs said.

III. ii. Native Speaker's Competence   (Internal Factor)

Selected informants were always among those who were born and/or raised in the desert in the Bedouin tribes mentioned above (not *ħaďarī* "urban" or farm dwellers) who learned Arabic as a native language. Therefore, linguists were proud to announce, as Abu ʿUbaydah did, in the following report:

<div dir="rtl">

قال الجَرْميّ فقلت له: عمّن أخذت هذا (تفسير مجاز القرآن الكريم) يا أبا عبيدة ، فإن هذا

خلاف تفسير الفقهاء ؟ فقال (أبو عبيدة): هذا تفسير الأعراب البوّالين على أعقابهم ، فإن

شئت فخذ وإن شئت فذر.

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(Al-Rafiʿī, 1/298; Al-Zubaydī, 176)

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[7] Later, linguists, e.g., Ibn Mālik (600-672 H.), sought informants from other tribes and were criticized for doing so (see Al-Suyūṭī b, 45).

> Al-Jarmī said: Then, I said to him [Abu ʿUbaydah]: "ʿAbā ʿUbaydah, from whom have you taken this [the latter's work on *Majāz Al-Qurʾān*], because it contradicts the commentary of *fiqh* scholars?' He replied: 'This is the explanation of the Bedouins who urinate on their heels; so take it or leave it.'"

For, as Ibn Jinnī explains, the rougher and more Bedouin the informants are, the more they are in "denial" or intolerant of lexically deviant forms and more so of deviant *ʾiʿrāb* "case and mood endings" (Ibn Jinnī, 2/28-29).

This criterion, however, did not exclude non-Arabs who acquired Arabic as their native language but were either born in the desert (such as Abu Al-Faraj Al-Husayn Ibn Muṭayr and Abu Al-ʿUmaythil) or born in a foreign land and raised in the desert, such as Al-Muntajiʿ (Al-Shalaqānī b,142-43).

Moreover, informants who came to dwell in the city were tested periodically—and as a result traditional linguists may have been the first linguists to have attempted to investigate some of the factors of language attrition (see Ibn Jinnī 2/14-15: *bāb fī al-ʿarabī al-faṣīḥ yantaqilu lisānuhu* "Chapter on the Native Eloquent Arab whose Tongue has Changed"). An example of one such test is that of Abū ʿAmr Ibn Al-ʿAlāʾ to test Abū Khayrah:

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كيف تقول استأصل الله عَرقاتهم ؟ ففتح أبو خيرة التاء (من عَرقاتَهم). فقال له أبو عمرو:

هيهاتَ أبا خيرة ، لانَ جلدك. (Ibn Jinnī, 2/15)

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> "How do you say Allāh rooted out their origins ['Amr Ibn Al-ʿAlāʾ asked]?" Abū Khayrah answered by placing a *fatḥa* {-a} [accusative marking] following [the final letter] *t* *ʿariqātahum* [instead of *ʿariqātihum*] "origins/roots." Abū ʿAmr then said: "Alas, Abā Khayrah! Your skin has softened."

Such an observation had a serious repercussion. Data from informants who exhibited signs of attrition as a result of dwelling in another linguistic environment were considered weak and not as reliable.

III. iii. Inability to Comprehend Speech with Grammatical Mistakes and Linguistic Terminology (external factors)

Prior to their selection, informants were tested for other external factors. One such test was finding out if they were unable to comprehend speech with grammatical mistakes. If they were able, they would have been disqualified. This is confirmed by Al-Jāḥiḍ (d. 255 H.)--on whom Yaqūt Al-Hamawī reports to have studied under Abu ʿUbaydah, Al-Aṣmaʿī, Abu Zayd Al-Anṣārī and Abu Al-Hasan Al-Akhfash and to have learned the language orally from *ʾaʿrāb* in Al-Mirbad (Al-Hamawī, 16/ 75)--in his following report :

<div dir="rtl">

إن أصحاب هذه اللغة لا يفقهون قول القائل منّا: مكره أخاك لا بطل ، و إذا عزّ أخاك

فهن. ومن لم يفهم هذا لم يفهم قولهم: ذهبت إلى أبو زيد ، ورأيت أبي عمرو. ومتى وجد

النحويّون أعرابياً يفهم هذا وأشباهه بَهْرَجوه ولم يسمعوا عنه.(Al-Rāfiʿī, 280; Al-Jāḥiḍ, 105)

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The speakers of this language [proper] do not understand any of us [city dwellers] saying "Your brother[+ Accusative] is driven by necessity not by heroism" and "Should your brother[+Accusative] feel with pride, then you should humble yourself." By the same token, those who do not understand such [speech], they do not comprehend sayings, such as "I went to Abū [+Nominative] Zayd" and "I saw Abī [+Genitive] 'Amr." Whenever the grammarians found a Bedouin who comprehended such [deviant forms], they would consider him a fake speaker and would not collect data from him.

Another test was to find out whether or not the informants knew linguistic terminology. The motivation for this is most likely to guard against collecting biased data one way or the other. This probably became a significant factor, especially after the rivalry between the two dominant schools at the time (Al-Baṣrah and Al-Kūfah) became apparent. The following example involving Al-Aṣmaʿī shows his informant not being aware of linguistic terms:

قال الأصمعي لأعرابي: أتهمز الفارة؟ قال: تهمِزها الهِرّة .   (Al-Rāfiʿī, 280)

Al-Aṣmaʿī said to a Bedouin: "Do you squeeze [pronounce it with a glottal stop] the mouse?" He answered: "The cat squeezes it."

Thus, if one was found to understand such terminology, he/she would be disqualified. This is made clear by Al-Jāḥiḍ in his following report:

سمعت ابن بشير وقال له المفضل العنبريّ: إني عثرت البارحة بكتاب وقد التقطته وهو عندي ، وقد ذكروا أنّ فيه شعراً ، فإن أردته وهبته لك. قال ابن بشير: أريده إن كان مُقيَّداً ، قال: والله ما أدري إن كان مقيَّداً أو مغلولاً . ولو عرف التقييد لم يُلتفت إلى روايته .   (Al-Rāfiʿī, 280; Al-Jāḥiḍ, 106)

I heard Ibn Bashīr say that Al-Mufaḍḍal Al-ʿAnbarī had said to him: "Yesterday I came across a book and I picked it up and now I have it; they mentioned that it contained poetry; if you want it, I will give it to you." Ibn Bashīr replied: "I want it if it is chained [with short vowels]." He [Al-Mufaḍḍal Al-ʿAnbarī] said: "By Allah, I do not know if it is chained with fetters around the wrists or chained around the neck." So, had he known what [the term] meant, his speech would not have been paid any attention.

III. iv. Trustworthiness and honesty [8]

Traditional linguists gathered data from only those whom they trusted. This is applicable to both informants as primary sources of data (see Al-Suyūṭī b, 51) and

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[8] As for the honesty of the grammarians themselves, Al-Suyūṭī argues that the tradition has its specialists who dealt with this issue extensively, such as what Abu Al-Ṭayyib Al-Lughawī did in his *marātib al-naḥwiyyīn* (Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/120).

narrators and linguists as secondary sources. The most prominent Arab linguist, Al-Khalīl, warns:

<div align="center">

إنَّ النحارير ربما أدخلوا على الناس ما ليس من كلام العرب إرادة اللَّبْس والتعنُّت.

(Al-Khalīl, 1/5.)

</div>

The ingenious may have introduced into the language what is not of the speech of the Arabs in order to cause ambiguity and inflexibility.

Ibn Fāris and others understood this as a call for caution while gathering data through secondary sources. He states accordingly:[9]

<div align="center">

(quoted in Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/138) **. فَليتحرَّ آخذ اللغة أهل الأمانة والصدق والثقة والعدالة**

</div>

Let the language gatherer seek the honest, truthful, trustworthy and just people.

This is extensively implemented by Sībawayhi, who often states in his book *Al-Kitāb*:

<div align="center">

(Sībawayhi, 1/154   **حدَّثنا من يوثق به ...**

"The one who is trusted told us …"

(Sībawayhi, 2/340)   **حدَّثني من أثق به ...**

"The one whom I trust told me …"

وحدثنا أبو الخطاب ويونس أن بعض من يوثق بعربيته من العرب يقول ...
(Sībawayhi, 2/346)

</div>

"Abū Al-Khaṭṭāb and Yūnis told us that an Arab who is trusted with his Arabic said…"

<div align="center">

(Sībawayhi, 1/167)   **حدَّثني من لا أتَّهم عن الخليل أنه سمع أعرابيا...**

</div>

"The one whom I do not accuse [for being dishonest] told me on the authority of Al-Khalīl that he [the latter] heard a Bedouin …"

<div align="center">

(Sībawayhi, 2/511)   **حدثنا من لا نتَّهم...**

"The one whom we do not accuse [of being dishonest] told us …"

(Sībawayhi, 2/147)   **أخبرني من أثق به ...**

"The one whom I trust told me …"

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[9] This call is already embedded in the culture, since the Prophet Muḥammad himself cautions:

<div align="center">

(see Al-Suyūṭī a, 2/302)   **إنّ العلم دين فانظروا عمّن تأخذون دينكم .**

"Knowledge is a religion; so, look carefully from whom you receive your religion."

</div>

سمعت من أثق به من العرب ...
"I heard an Arab whom I trust …"

(Sībawayhi, 1/141)

سمعنا من يوثق بعربيته ...
"We heard from an Arab whose Arabic is trusted …"

(Sībawayhi, 2/507)

سمعنا من يوثق به من العرب ...
"We heard from an Arab who is trusted …"

(Sībawayhi, 2/56, 194)

سمعناذلك ممن يرويه عن العرب الموثوق بهم
"We heard that from one who narrates on the authority of the Arabs who are trusted…"

(Sībawayhi, 2/348)

وقال ناس يوثق بعربيتهم ...
"Some people who are trusted with their Arabic said …"

(Sībawayhi, 2/316)

وزعم الخطاب بأنه سمع بعض العرب الموثوق بعربيتهم
"Al-Khaṭṭāb claimed that he heard some Arabs who are trusted with their Arabic …"

(Sībawayhi, 1/180)

ولا نعلم أحداً يوثق بعلمه قال خلاف ذلك
"We do not know anyone who is trusted with his knowledge to have said contrary to that."

(Sībawayhi, 2/97)

This is often the case when Sībawayhi refers to Al-Khalīl, Abu Zayd Al-Anṣārii, Yūnis and his other sources (see also Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/142-3; Al-Suyūṭī b, 57).[10] Furthermore, the use of the first person plural pronoun "we" suggests this was a common attitude shared by all as the reference to Al-Khaṭṭāb similarly suggests.

IV. Elicitation Techniques

There is ample evidence that elicitation techniques, especially those to do with both collecting data and soliciting grammaticality judgment, were well planned in advance. Informants were not given any hints as to what elicitors were after—an ideal elicitation procedure. The prompts were often open-ended targeting

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[10] In addition to the foregoing criteria, there were other criteria, such as illiteracy, that was later abandoned. Since literacy was an attribute of city dwellers (who were assumed not to have the proper intuitive competence of the language), traditional linguists initially sought out informant 'a'rāb who did not know how to read and write. However, this became impossible later as more and more 'a'rāb sought to become literate and even started authoring their own books (see Al-Shalaqānī a, 78-79; Al-Shalaqānī b, 134).

spontaneous unrehearsed informant's output.[11]   Consider the following report in which a techer, ʿĪsā Ibn ʿUmar Al-Thaqafī, visits his student, Abū ʿAmr Ibn Al-ʿAlā':

قال الأصمعي: جاء عيسى بن عمر الثقفي ونحن عند أبي عمرو بن العلاء فقال يا أبا عمرو: ما شيء بلغني عنك تجيزه ؟ قال: وما هو؟ قال: بلغني عنك أنك تجيز ليس الطيب إلاّ المسكُ "بالرفع". فقال أبو عمرو: نمت وأدلج الناس. ليس في الأرض حجازي إلاّ وهو ينصِب وليس في الأرض تميمي إلاّ وهو يرفع. ثمَّ قال أبو عمرو: قم يا يحيى --يعني اليزيدي --وأنت يا خلف --يعني خلفاً الحمر --فاذهبا إلى أبي مهدية فلقناه الرفع فإنه لا يرفع ، واذهبا إلى المنتجع ولقّناه النصب فإنه لا ينصب. قال: فذهبا فأتيا أبا المهدي وإذا به يصلي وكان به عارض ، وإذا هو يقول: اخسأنانِّ عني ، ثم قضى صلاته والتفت إلينا وقال: ما خطبكما ؟ قلنا جئناك نسألك عن شيء . قال: هاتِيا ؛ فقلنا: كيف تقول: ليس الطيب إلاّ المسكُ ؟ فقال: أتأمرانّي بالكذب على كِبْرَة سِنّي ، فأين الجادي ؟ وأين كذا وأين بَنَّة الإبل الصادرة؟ فقال له خلف الأحمر: ليس الشراب إلاّ العسلُ ؛ فقال: فما يصنع سودان هجر ما لهم شراب غير هذا التمر . قال اليزيدي: فلما رأيت ذلك منه قلت له: ليس ملاكُ الأمر إلاّ طاعةُ الله والعملُ بها فقال: هذا كلام لا دخل فيه ليس ملاك الأمر إلاّ طاعة الله ؛ فقال اليزيدي: ليس ملاك الأمر إلاّ طاعةُ الله والعملُ بها فقال: ليس هذا لحني ولا لحنَ قومي ؛ فكتبنا ما سمعنا منه ؛ ثم أتينا المنتجع فأتينا رجلا يعقل ، فقال له خلف: ليس الطيب إلاّ المسكَ "بالنصب" فلقّناه النصب وجهدنا فيه فلم ينصب وأبا إلاّ الرفع...

(Al-Shalaqānī a, 73; Al-Rāfiʿī, 281; Al-Suyūṭī a, 2/277-76; Al-Qālī 596-7; Al-Zajjājī, 241-3)

Al-Aṣmaʿī said: ʿĪsā Ibn ʿUmar Al-Thaqafī came while we were at Abī ʿAmr Ibn Al-ʿAlā's place and said: "Abā ʿAmr, what is it that came to my attention that you said it is a correct variant of Arabic?" He [Abū ʿAmr] asked: "What is it?" He [ʿĪsā Ibn ʿUmar] said: "It came to my attention that you consider 'No fragrance is a fragrance except musk *misku* [+Nominative]' as a correct variation." Abū ʿAmr replied: "You slept and the people journeyed from the beginning of the night; there is no one on Earth from [the

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[11] It is unfortunate, however, that the exact nature of elicitation techniques as devised and implemented by early grammarians is not well understood—one of the reasons behind the writing of the present paper.   For example, a typical comment by modern writers on the techniques of traditional Arabic linguists is that of Al-Shalaqānī (Al-Shalaqānī a, 71):

فكان طلاب العلم يتعلقون بهم {الأعراب} ويكتبون عنهم أويهيئون لهم الأسئلة بطريقة يفهمها الأعرابي ، وقد يتكلفون في السؤال وضعاً خاصاً يتطلب إجابة خاصة ، وقد يحملونهم على مجرد الكلام ؛ كل ذلك للإفادة من فصاحتهم ...

Scholars would get attached to them [Bedouins], would write down their speech and prepare questions for them in such a way that the Bedouin could understand. They may affect the phrasing of their questions in a certain way that would require a certain answer and they may make them just talk [on anything] in order to benefit from their proper speech.

tribes of] Hijāz who does not produce the [form in the] accusative and there is no one on Earth from [the tribe] of Tamīm who does not produce the [form in the] nominative." Abū 'Amr then said: "Get up, Yaħyā (i.e., Al-Yazīdī), and you, Khalaf (i.e., Khalaf Al-Aħmar), and go to Abī Al-Mahdiyyah and elicit from him [the form in] the nominative for he does not produce the [form in the] nominative, and go to Al-Muntaji' and elicit from him the [form in the] accusative for he does not produce it in the accusative." He [Al-Aşma'ī] said: so, they went to Abū Al-Mahdiyyah and found him praying and he looked preoccupied with an issue. He said [to them]: "Get away from me." He then completed his prayer and turned to us and asked: "What is the matter?" We answered: "We came to ask you about something." He said: "ask." We said: "How do you say: 'No fragrance is fragrance except musk *misk-u* [+nominative].'" He said: "Are you asking me to lie at an old age? What about *jādī* "saffron" and what about such and such and what about the camels' scent after they return from drinking?" Khalaf Al-Aħmar then said to him: "No Drink is a drink except honey *al-'asal-u* [+ nominative]." He replied: "What would the people of Hajar do; they have no drink except this date drink." Al-Yazīdī then said: "When I found him to be this way, I said to him: "Control of one's affair resides in none except in Allāh's obedience *ţā'at-u* [+nominative] and acting upon it." He replied: "This talk has nothing to do with 'Control of one's affair resides in none except in Allāh's obedience *ţā'at-a* [+accusative] and acting upon it.'" Al-Yazīdī then said: "Control of one's affair resides in none except in Allāh's obedience *ţā'at-u* [+nominative]." He then said: "This is not a deviant expression that I produce and neither does my tribe." So, we wrote down what we heard from him and went to Al-Muntaji' and found him to be a wise man. Khalaf said to him: "No fragrance is a fragrance except musk *misk-a* [+accusative]." We tried hard to elicit the accusative [ending on the form *misk*], but he produced it in no other form except in the nominative.

The informant in this report, Abu Al-Mahdiyyah, thought the two were asking about lexical or semantic aspects of the language whereas the two linguists were, in fact, eliciting his grammaticality judgment (syntax of *mustaθnā*). The report also reveals somewhat the scope and the amount of data gathered by someone such as Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā' to be at the level of confidence which he shows and with which he assures his teacher, Īsā Ibn 'Umar, surpassing him in knowledge about the speech of the Arabs, as the latter explicitly acknowledges (in the same report) by giving him his ring and saying to him *wa Al-lāhi fuqta al-nās* "By God you have surpassed all people" (Al-Qālī, 597) .[12]

Elicitation techniques need to be conducted in such a way that the elicited data are not contaminated or biased by elicitor which would render the data defective. Traditional Arabic linguists designed their elicitation techniques not only with care and planning (targeting especially unrehearsed data), but also with objectivity without influencing the informant to render the elicited data biased one way or the other. The following incident, documented by Al-Jawharī (chapter of *sīn*) reflects a great deal of training and a great sense of objectivity:

سألتُ أعرابياً من بني تميم بنجد وهو يستقي وبكْرته نَخيس "البكرة النَّخيس هي التي اتسع

محورها" ... فوضعت إصبَعي على النَّخاس فقلت ما هذا؟ وأردت أن أتعرف منه الحاء والخاء

فقال: نِخاس (بخاء معجّمة) قلت أليس قال الشاعر: وبَكْرةٌ نِحاسُها نُحاسُ ؟ فقال: ما سمعنا

بهذا في آبائنا الأولين.(Al-Shalaqānī b, 166; Al-Suyūţī a, 2/312; Al-Jawharī, 2/826)

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[12] Note additionally here, the elicited data are explicitly stated to have been immediately written down. This is elaborated on further below.

I asked a Bedouin from the tribe of Tamīm from Najd while he was drawing water for his herd to drink. His pulley was wide; *bakaratuhu nakhīs* "whose axel has widened." … So, I put my finger on the widened part and asked [him] "What is this?" I wanted to find out from him whether the word has a *ħā'* or a *xā'* sound." He answered: "*nixās*" (with a *xā'* and a dot on it). I then said: "Did not the poet say: "And a pulley, its widened axel is copper?" He said: "We have not heard this from our forefathers."

Another representative example is offered by Abu Hātim Al-Sajjistānī, reporting on an incident where both he and Abū Zayd Al-Anṣārī are eliciting data from an informant:

وأقبل أعرابي محرم ، فأردت أن أسأله ، فقال أبو زيد: دعني فأنا أَعْرَفُ بسؤاله منك .

فقال: يا أعرابي ، كيف تقول : رعَدَت السماء وبَرَقَت أو أرعدت وأبرقت ؟ فقال:

رَعَدَت وبَرَقَت. فقال أبو زيد: فكيف تقول للرجل مِن هذا ؟ فقال: أمِن الجَخيف

تريد ؟ يعني التهديد ؛ فقال: نعم. فقال: أقول: رَعَدَ وبَرَقَ ، وأرْعَدَ وأبْرَقَ.

(Al-Suyūṭī a, 2/339-40; Al-Qālī, 102-3)

A Bedouin going to Mecca went by. So, I wanted to ask him, but Abū Zayd said to me: "Let me [ask him]; I know how to ask him better than you do." He then said to him: "Bedouin, what do you say: *ra'adat al-samā' wa baraqat* or *'ar'adat wa 'abraqat* 'the sky thundered and lightened'?" He [the Bedouin] answered: "*ra'adat wa baraqat*." Abū Zayd then said to him: "How do you say this [expression] about a man?" He [the Bedouin] asked: "To do with [the meaning of] "threatening?" He answered: "Yes." He said: "I say *ra'ada wa baraqa wa 'ar'ada wa 'abraqa*."

It is clear how the elicited forms here (denoting human anger) were not prompted by mere repetition of an item, a "yes" or "no" response, a multiple-choice question type, etc. (though the non-relevant part at the beginning started as a multiple choice).

Ibn Jinnī, in eliciting grammaticality judgment from an informant, Abū 'Abdillāh Al-Jūthī Al-Tamīmī, proceeds in a different yet equally careful fashion, where the elicited forms are not contained in the elicitation prompt:

كيف تقول: ضربت أخوك ؟ فقال: أقول ضربت أخاك. فأدرته على الرفع فأبى ، وقال:

لا أقول أخوك أبداً. قلت: فكيف تقول: ضربني أخوك ؟ فرفع . فقلت: ألست زعمت

أنّك لا تقول : أخوك أبداً ؟ فقال: أيش هذا ! اختلفت جهتا الكلام . (Ibn Jinnī, 1/77)

"How do you say: 'I hit your brother [+nominative]'?" He answered: "I say I hit your brother [+accusative]." So, I had him focus on the nominative [case of *'axūka* 'your brother'], but he refused and said: "I never say 'I hit your brother [+nominative]'." I said: "How do you say then 'Your brother [+nominative] hit me?'" He produced the nominative *'axūka* [in his answer]. I then asked him: "Did you not claim that you never say *'axūka* 'your brother [+nominative]?'" He answered: "What is this?! The two expressions are different."

In eliciting the plural of a form from another informant, Ibn Jinnī similarly proceeds, showing that even when things do not go sometimes as anticipated in the elicitation session, the elicitation is still followed upon soundly, reflecting a great deal of training and awareness:

سألت الشجري ، فقلت: كيف تجمع المُحْرَنْجِم وكان غرضي من ذلك أن أعلم ما يقوله

أيكسِر فيقول: حراجِم ، أم يصحح فيقول: محرنجمات فذهب هو مذهباً غير ذين فقال:

فرّقه حتى أجمعه ، وصدق، وذلك أنّ المحرنجم هو المجتمع ، يقولها ماراً على شكيمته

غير مُحِس لما أريد منه ... قلت له: فدع هذا ، إذا أنت مررت بإبل محرنجمة ، وأخرى

محرنجمة ، وأخرى محرنجمة تقول مررت بإبل ماذا ؟ فقال... يا هذا ، هكذا أقول :

مررت بإبل محرنجمات وأقام على التصحيح ألبتة استيحاشاً من تكسير ذوات الأربع

لمصاقبتها ذوات الخمسة التي لا سبيل إلى تكسيرها لاسيما إذا كانت فيها زيادة.

(Al-Shalaqānī b, 170; Al-Hamawī, 12/108; Ibn Jinnī, 2/468)

I asked Al-Shajarī: "How do you gather [form the plural of] *al-muḥranjim* "the gathered ?" My objective was to know whether he would choose the broken [irregular] plural and say *ḥarājim* or he would choose the regular plural and say *muḥranjimāt*, but he chose neither and said: "Separate it before I gather it." He was truthful, for *al-muḥranjim* means the one gathered. He said it spontaneously relying on his intuition and not being aware of what is intended by the question… I [then] said to him: "This aside, if you pass by camels *muḥranjimah* and others *muḥranjimah* and others *muḥranjimah*, you would say 'I passed by camels that are what'?" He answered: "I say *marartu bi-'ibil muḥranjimāt* 'I passed by gathered camels.'" He unambiguously went for the regular [form] in dislike of the irregular plural for words with quadrilateral roots being close to words with quinqulateral roots, especially if containing extra [non-root] elements.

Another example offered by Ibn Jinnī shows how the technique is designed to elicit spontaneous output of an informant without giving the informant much time to think about the prompted form:

وسألته يوماً فقلت له:كيف تجمع دُكّاناً ؟ قال: دَكاكين. قلت: فسِرحان ؟ قال: سَراحين.

قلت: فقُرطان؟ قال: قراطين. قلت: فعُثمان ؟ قال: عُثمانون. فقلت له: هلاّ قلت أيضاً

عثامِين ؟ قال: أيش عثامين! أرأيت إنساناً يتكلم بما ليس في لغته ؟ والله لا أقولها أبداً.

(Al-Shalaqānī b, 168-9; Ibn Jinnī, 1/243)

I asked him [Al-Shajarī] one day: "How do you say the plural of *dukkān* 'shop'?" He answered: "*dakākīn* 'shops.'" I asked: "What about *sirḥān* 'wolf' ?" He answered: "*sarāḥīn* 'wolves.'" I asked: "How about *qurṭān* 'saddlecloth'?" He answered: "*qarāṭīn* 'saddleclothes.'" I asked: "How about *'Uthmān* 'snake' ?" He answered: "*'Uthmānūn* 'snakes.'" I said: "Why don't you also say *'Athāmīn* ?" He replied: "What is this?! Have you ever seen a human being who would speak what is not in his own language; by Allāh, I will never say it."

A final example below shows a great degree of sophistication of elicitation techniques arrived at by traditional Arabic linguists. In the following elicitation, Ibn Jinnī attempts at eliciting a difference in reaction time from two informants in an attempt to examine the influence of dwelling in an urban locale on language attrition with respect to the time spent there and possibly age. The two informants were the poet, Al-Shajarī, and his young cousin, Ghuṣn:

فقلت لهما: كيف تحقران حمراء ؟ فقالا : حميراء. قلت : فسوداء ؟ قالا : سويداء .وواليت من ذلك أحرفاً وهما يجيئان بالصواب ، ثم دسست في ذلك (عِلباء) ، فقال غصن : عليباء وتبعه الشجري. فلمّا همّ بفتح الباء تراجع كالمذعور، ثم قال :آه عليبى ورام الضمة في الياء.

<div align="center">(Al-Shalaqānī b, 169-70; Ibn Jinnī, 2/28)</div>

I said to both of them: "How do you form the diminutive from *ḥamrā'* 'red' ?" They answered: "*ḥumayrā*". I asked: "How about *sawdā* 'black' ?" They answered: "*suwaydā*." I followed these with other words and they would come up with the correct [forms] until I slipped in *'ilbā* 'neck vein.' Then Ghuṣn said: "'*ulaybā*'." Al-Shajarī followed suit, but he had no sooner attempted to follow [b] with a *fatḥah* [i.e., ā] than he retreated like a dog with rabies. Then, he said: "Oh, '*ulaybīu.*" He followed the [final] ī [after b] with a slight *d'ammah* [u].

There is evidence, moreover, that traditional linguists passed on elicitation techniques to their students and others from early on in the tradition. This is evident in the following report by Al-Aşma'ī (see also report of Abu 'Amr and his two students, Khalaf and Al-Yazīdī, above):

قال معاذ بن العلاء أخو أبي عمرو بن العلاء : كان أبو عمرو إذا لم يحج استبضَعَني الحروف أسأل الحارث بن خالد بن العاص بن هشام بن المغيرة الشاعر وآتيه بجوابها ، قال: فقدمت عليه سنة من السنين وقد ولّاه عبد الملك بن مروان مكة ، فلما رآني قال: يا معاذ هات مامعك من بضائع أبي عمرو ، فجعلت أعجب من اهتمامه بذلك وهو أمير.

(Al-Shalaqānī b, 157; Al-Aşbahānī, 3/1158)

Mu'ādh Ibn Al-'Alā', Abū 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā''s brother, said: If Abū 'Amr did not go on a pilgrimage, he would commission me with some words 'commodities' to ask Al-Hārith Ibn Khālid Ibn Al-'Āş Ibn Hishām Ibn Al-Mughīrah (the poet) and to get him the answers back. One year, I went to him and found that 'Abd Al-Malik Ibn Marwān [the Kaliph] had already appointed him ruler of Mecca. When he saw me, he asked: "What words 'commodities' do you have from Abī 'Amr ?" I became amazed at his taking interest in what I came for and him being a prince."

V. Methods of Actual Data Recording

From early on, there is ample evidence from the literature that traditional linguists relied on writing the data they elicited and did not just relegate it to memory. This can be traced as far back as 'Ali Ibn Abī Ṭālib, usually acknowledged in the

literature as the earliest founder of the tradition. He is reported to have pulled out from under a mat a sheet on which he had written grammatical mistakes that he heard people make in their speech together with his commentary on them, including corrections and definitions of parts of speech, case and mood marking, etc. The sheet is later referred to as *al-ta'līqah* "the commentary" which Al-Imām 'Ali is reported to have passed on to Abū Al-Aswad Al-Du'alī who started adding to it in consultation with the former (Āl-Yāsīn, 59-60; Al-Qiftī, 1/4; Ibn Al-Nadīm, 62-3; Ibn Al-Anbārī, 5).[13]

Abu 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā' (d. 154) is reported to have compiled a room full of data piles that reached as high as the ceiling (Āl-Yāsīn, 66). The following report reveals explicitly how Abū 'Amr Ibn Al-'Alā' would commit the elicited data to not only to writing, but also to commit it to writing on the spot:

قال شعبة: كنت أجتمع أنا وأبو عمرو عند أبي نوفل بن أبي عقرب ، فأسأله عن الحديث

خاصّة ، ويسأله أبو عمرو عن الشعر واللغة خاصّة ، فلا أكتب شيئاً مما يسأله عنه أبو

عمرو ، ولا يكتب أبو عمرو شيئاً مما أسأله أنا عنه.   (Al-Suyūṭī a, 2/304)

Shu'bah said: I and Abū 'Amr [Ibn Al-'Alā'] would meet with Abī Nawfal Ibn Abī 'Aqrab. I would ask him about *ħadīth*, in particular, and Abū 'Amr would ask him about poetry and language, in particular. I would not write down any thing that Abū 'Amr would ask him about and Abū 'Amr would not write down anything that I would ask him about.

When boards and sheets were not available, linguists went out of their way to commit collected materials to writing on anything (for a direct reference to use of boards, see quote of Al-'Aṣma'ī in Section I above). Yūnis [Ibn Habīb] once had to write on his arm:

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[13] The practice of writing down elicited data is most likely in line with the general practice of *Qur'ān*, *ħadīth,*and *fiqh* traditions (indeed most of the early generations of linguists were also *Qur'ānic* readers) acting upon a Prophet's *ħadīth* "saying":

قيدوا العلم بالكتابة (Al-Suyūṭī a, 2/303)
Chain [/document] knowledge in writing.

The two following lines are attributed to Al-Shāfi'ī, the founding *'imām* of the *Shāfi'ī* school of *fiqh*, reinforcing such an assumption:

قيّد صيودك بالحبال الواثقة   العلم صيد والكتابة قيده
وتتركها بين الخلائق طالقة   فمن الحماقة أن تصيد غزالة
(Bijo, 55)

 [The pursuit of] knowledge is a hunt and writing, its chain
 Tie your game with the sure ropes

 For it is stupid, after hunting a deer
 To let it among the creatures loose

قال القالي في أماليه: حدثنا أبو الحسن علي بن سليمان الأخفش. حدثنامحمد بن يزيد عن

أبي المُحَلِّم. قال: أنشدت يونس أبياتاً من رجز فكتبها على ذراعه ؛ ثم قال لي: إنك لجيّاء

بالخير.

Al-Qālī in his *Amālī* said: Abū Al-Hasan 'Alī Ibn Sulaymān Al-Akhfash told us that Muḥammad Ibn Yazīd told us on the authority of Abī Al-Muḥallim who said: "I recited some poetry to Yūnis and he wrote it on his arm and then he said to me: you are indeed a doer of good deeds."

Al-Kisāʾī (d. 189 H.) is reported to have emptied as many as 15 bottles of ink writing down what he heard from the speech of the tribes which Al-Khalīl advised him to go to (Āl-Yāsīn, 67; Al-Qifṭī, 2/257; Al-Hamawī, 13/169). It is also reported in the literature that Abu 'Amr Al-Shaybānī (d. 206) emptied two pots *dastījān* full of ink on data he wrote down in the desert tribes (Āl-Yāsīn, 67; Al-Qifṭī, 1/224).

There are direct references in the literature that even the general population of *'a'rāb* saw linguists writing down the data they were eliciting. Consider the following report where a woman approaches and guides Al-Aṣmaʿī to an old man as a possible informant. She appears to have already known Al-Aṣmaʿī and that he used to write down what he would hear from informants. So does the old informant whom she guided Al-Aṣmaʿī to:

قال محمد بن المعلى الأزْدي في كتاب الترقيص: حدَّثنا أبو رياش عن الرِّياشي عن الأصمعي

قال: كنت أغشى بيوت الأعراب ، أكتب عنهم كثيراً حتى أَلِفوني ، وعرفوا مُرادي ، فأنا

يوماً مارّ بعَذارى البصرة ، قالت لي امرأة: يا أبا سعيد ائت ذلك الشيخ ، فإنّ عنده حديثاً

حسناً ، فاكتبه إن شئت. قلت: أحسن الله إرشادك ؛ فأتيت شيخاً هِمّاً فسلّمت عليه، فردّ

عليّ السلام ، وقال: من أنت ؟ قلت: أنا عبد الملك ابن قُرَيْب الأصمعي ، قال: ذو يتتبع

الأعراب فيكتب ألفاظهم ؟ قلت: نعم ، وقد بلغني أنّ عندك حديثاً حسناً مُعجِباً رائعاً ،

وأخبرني باسمك ونسبك. قال: نعم ، أنا حذيفة بن سور العَجْلاني...

Muḥammad Ibn Al-Muʿallā Al-Azdī in his book *Al-Tarqīṣ* said: Abū Riyāsh told us on the authority of Al-Riyāshī who in turn [narrated] on the authority of Al-Aṣmaʿī who said: I used to enter the Bedouins' houses and I would write down their speech a lot until they have known me very well and have known what I was after. One day while I was passing by the virgins of Al-Baṣrā, a woman said to me: "Abā Saʿīd, go to that old man, for he has a nice speech, and write it down if you want." I said to her: "May God return your favor for your guiding me [to the man]." So, I went and met a very old man. I greeted him. He returned the greeting and asked: "Who are you?" I answered: "I am 'Abd Al-Malik Ibn Qurayb Al-Aṣmaʿī." He said: "The one who follows the Bedouins and writes down their speech?" I answered: "Yes, and I came to know that you have a nice, wonderful, excellent speech; so, tell me your name and your family name." He said: "Yes, I am Hudhayfah Ibn Sūr Al-'Ajlānī …"

Another linguist, Ibn Al-Aʿrābī, states emphatically thus:

<div dir="rtl">

كنت إذا أتيت العُقيْلي لم يتكلم بشيء إلاّ كتبته. فقال: ماترك عندي قابَّة إلاّ اقْتبّها ولا

نُقارة إلاّ انتقرها .   (Al-Suyūṭī a, 2/304.)

</div>

When I used to go to Al-'Uqaylī, I would not leave anything that he says without writing it down until he said [about me]: " He did not leave a single drop [of knowledge] without wiping it [i.e., without writing it] nor [an amount of] a bird's pecking without pecking it [i.e., writing it down]."

On the other hand, when, for some reason, they were not quite sure of what they heard during the elicitation sessions, traditional linguists would acknowledge their uncertainty through the use of hedges. The following are some examples of reports that include explicit expressions of uncertainty of data gathered:

<div dir="rtl">

ـ قال أبو عبيد : قال أبو عمرو (بن العلاء): أحسِبني قد سمعت رياحاً أَزَنِيَّة .

ـ قال ابن دريد: أحسِبني قد سمعت جمل سِنْدَأب ؛ صُلْب شديد .

ـ قال (ابن دريد) في الجمهرة: أحسِب أنهم قالوا: أشَّ على غنمه يَئِشُّ أشًّا ،

مثل هَشَّ سواء ؛ ولا أقف على حقيقته .   (quoted in Al-Suyūṭī a, 2/320)

</div>

Abū 'Ubaydah said that Abū 'Amr [Ibn Al-'Alā'] said: "I think I heard *riyāḥan 'azaniyyah* "*'azaniyyah* winds."

Ibn Durayd said: "I think I heard *jamal sinda'b* 'strong, hard camel'."

Ibn Durayd said in his *Jamharah*: "I think they said *'ashsha 'alā ghanamihi* "to beat on the tree so the leaves would fall on his sheep to eat" *ya'ishshu 'ashshan*, the same as *hashsha*, but I do not know this for a fact."

In a chapter dedicated to the defense of the honesty and scrupulousness of his predecessor, Ibn Jinnī concludes the chapter (3/312-16) by commenting on his teacher, Abu 'Alī Al-Fārisī, being scrupulous, careful and hesitant to rush to conclusions:

<div dir="rtl">

فكان تارةً يقول: أنشدت لجرير فيما أحسِب ، وأخرى: قال لي أبو بكر فيما أظنّ ،

وأخرى: في غالب ظنّي كذا ، و أرى أني قد سمعت كذا.   (Ibn Jinnī, 2/316)

</div>

He would sometimes say: "I listened to some recitation of poetry that I think is composed by Jarīr"; sometimes he would say: "I think it was Abū Bakr who said to me …"; sometimes he would say: "To the best of my recollection such and such"; and sometimes he would say: "I think that I heard such and such."

VI. Conclusion:

No linguist, in the past or present, can guarantee or claim an error-free undertaking of field linguistics. Traditional Arabic linguists are no exception.

19

However, ample evidence from the literature shows that traditional Arabic linguists were extremely careful and scrupulous about their work. In addition, the tremendous amount of data gathered and the sheer number of competent linguists who undertook the task of data collection and data analysis are two significant factors to consider before judging the nature of the such data. The level of competence of traditional linguists is acknowledged by some of the most prominent scholars of other neighboring disciplines, such as by Shuʿbah, a *ħadīth* scholar, when he was once corrected by Al-Aṣmaʿī:

<div dir="rtl">

قال الأصمعي: كنت في مجلس شُعبة ، فروى الحديث ، فقال: تسمعون جَرْشَ طير الجِنّة (بالشين) فقلت: جَرْس ، فنظر إليّ وقال: خذوها منه ، فإنّه أعلم بها منّا .

</div>

(Al-Suyūṭī a, 2/354; Al-Jawharī, 2/772-3)

Al-Aṣmaʿī said: I was in the council of Shuʿbah as he narrated a *ħadīth* [saying of the Prophet Muħammad] by reading it thus "You will hear *jarash* (with a *shīn* [sh]) the ruffling of the birds of paradise."   I said: "[It is] *jaras* [with a *sīn* [s]]."   He looked at me and said [addressing his students who were present there]: "Take it from him; he is more knowledgeable of this than myself."

and by Abū Hanīfah, the founding *'imām* of the *ħanafī* school of *fiqh*, in the following report:

<div dir="rtl">

عن المازني ، سمعت أبا زيد الأنصاري يقول: لقيت أبا حنيفة فحدّثني بحديث فيه (يدخل الجنة قوم حفاة عراة منتنين أحمشتهم النار) فقلت له : إنّما هو (منتنون مَحَشَّتْهُم النار) فقال: ممّن أنت؟ فقلت: من أهل البصرة ، فقال: أكلُّ أصحابك مثلك ؟ قلت : بل أنا الأَخَسّهم حظّاً في العلم ، فقال: طوبى لقوم يكون مثلك أخَسّهم في العلم.

</div>

(Al-Qufṭī, 2/33; Al-ʿAskarī, 48-49)

On the authority of Al-Māzinī who said that he heard Abā Zayd Al-Anṣārī say: I met Abā Hanīfah who narrated a *ħadīth* to me that reads "A group of naked and barefooted, rotten people, who had been scourged by hellfire *muntinīn* [+accusative] *'aħmashat-hum al-nār*, enter paradise." I said: "It rather reads *muntinū*n [+nominative] *maħħashat-hum al-nār*." He asked me: "Where are you from?" "I am from the people of Al-Baṣrah," I answered. He said: "Are your people all like you?" I answered: "I am rather the slightest in knowledge of all of them."   He then said: "Beatitude be to people whom a person like you is the slightest of them in knowledge."

By the same token, the likelihood that there may have been dishonest informants is voiced by none other than the most prominent linguist, Al-Khalīl, and as mentioned above, his remark was taken as a warning to other linguists to be cautious when collecting data. Al-Rāfiʿī (289-90) explains Al-Khalīl's statement by arguing that such fabrications would not take place with productive forms, since this would be soon disconfirmed by data from other informants. Rather, fabrications may have taken place with rare and non-frequent forms for which there were no other data to verify. If unique forms were heard from a certain individual and were not heard from

anyone else, the practice was to attribute the data to that specific individual alone and never to attribute them to the speech of the Arabs as in "the Arabs said." A case in point is the dedication of an independent chapter in Ibn Jinnī's *Al-Khaṣā'iṣ* to non-frequent forms as heard only from Ibn Al-Aḥmar Al-Bāhilī (Ibn Jinnī', 2/23-30).

Due to the sustained mixing of *'a'rāb* Bedouins with others and their prolonged dwelling in urban areas outside their native locale, towards the end of the 9th and beginning of the 10th Century, linguists started to apply *ḥadīth* criteria on informants, narrators and linguists (see Al-Suyūṭī a, 1/113-44). This was roughly the point in time when linguists generally started to lose confidence in *'a'rāb* as reliable informants (as speaker of proper *fuṣḥā*) and to rely more on secondary sources (see Ibn Jinnī, 2/7-12).

From the forgoing arguments and report samples in the literature, I hope to have shown that Arabic field linguistics, as it was undertaken since its earliest inception, was a serious endeavor, carried out meticulously with a great deal of ingenuity, even by today's standards. Barring human errors, which similarly applies to today's practices, and a few issues to do with poetry data, the evidence indicates that the data gathered by traditional Arabic linguists are anything but defective. The data were obtained from proper reliable sources using specific criteria, objectively elicited and promptly committed to writing by the same linguists who developed the Arabic writing system to be unambiguously read.

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