

# Reconsidering the Study of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic

Five Decades after E. Y. Kutscher and his Influential Methodology\*

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**Summary:** E. Y. KUTSCHER emphasized that the goal of the scholarship on Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (= JBA) is to reconstruct the historical language of the Jews speaking Aramaic in Babylonia in the first millennium CE. Given this task, the philologist must consider all forms and constructions that appear in the textual evidence of this dialect in order to determine what reflects the original language and what results from textual corruptions during the transmission of the texts. This methodology became the scholarly consensus for the academic study of JBA. However, no one who follows KUTSCHER's methodological tradition ever provided clear criteria for recognizing what should be considered original JBA. Therefore, this paper tries to piece together the methodological assumptions behind this quest to identify the original language. However, when considering the sociolinguistic model of diglossia, and the various types of developments that could take place in the transmission of the texts it becomes clear that those criteria are not decisive, and that the same phenomena can be explained in various ways. Consequently it is proposed that: 1) We may have to be satisfied with the fact that it is not always possible to determine which phenomenon is original. Often it is only possible to raise the various options regarding each and every form; 2) It is not advisable to determine generally which one of the manuscripts provides the most reliable textual evidence for *all* the linguistic phenomena (the so-called "best manuscript"), as this may change in each case. Consequently, it is suggested, instead, to discuss phenomena rather than sources, and focus on internal relations between forms and structures.

## 1. Introduction

Because of the confluence of two factors, Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (= JBA) provides the linguist and the philologist a fascinating, although challenging, opportunity to access, to some extent, the spoken forms of one of the late Eastern Aramaic dialects. First, a single standardized written variety of JBA was never developed; second, the texts written in this dialect were never fixed and manuscripts provide different traditions and variants to the same text.

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In the modern era it was S. D. LUZZATTO who initiated the grammatical study of this dialect<sup>1</sup> with the production of a grammar to JBA, focusing on the language of the Babylonian Talmud. However, it was not until the work of E. Y. KUTSCHER<sup>2</sup> that scholarship on JBA explicitly identified its task in reconstructing the historical language of the Jews speaking Aramaic in Babylonia in the first millennium CE. Given this task, the goal of the philologist is to consider all forms and constructions that appear in the textual evidence of this dialect in order to determine what reflects the original language and what results from textual corruptions during the transmission of the texts.

MATTHEW MORGENSTERN's new book on this dialect sets an example for a courageous study that touches upon the most delicate questions regarding this dialect,<sup>3</sup> based on an impressive, meticulous examination of broad and new data. In the concluding remarks of his book, MORGENSTERN states the following (p. 267):

The call for a more stringent methodological approach towards Babylonian Aramaic philology, specifically regarding its grammatical description, lay at the heart of E. Y. Kutscher's seminal review of Epstein's Grammar. In my opinion, the methodology he outlined remains valid forty years later.

Thus, since this methodology represents the scholarly consensus for the academic study of JBA, the publication of Morgenstern's new book presents us with a nice opportunity to explore the main theoretical assumptions of this majority position.

## 2. The methodology for identifying the original JBA

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of E. Y. KUTSCHER's review of J. N. EPSTEIN's Grammar of JBA.<sup>4</sup> In this watershed study of JBA,<sup>5</sup> KUTSCHER argues that any philological study of this dialect that aims to provide a systematic analysis should be based on the most reliable textual witnesses. Not surprisingly, he criticizes previous scholars for failing to do so systematically.<sup>6</sup> The methodology outlined by KUTSCHER highlights the need to begin

<sup>1</sup> LUZZATTO 1865. It is worth indicating that within fifteen years from its publication this grammar was translated into German, English and Hebrew.

<sup>2</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, pp. 149–183.

<sup>3</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011. On pp. 208–222, he surveys the literature concerning these issues and proposes his own ideas.

<sup>4</sup> EPSTEIN 1960.

<sup>5</sup> See, MORAG 1972–1973, pp. 60–61, 75; KARA 1983, p. 10; and MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 16–18.

<sup>6</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, pp. 149–150.

by identifying the most reliable Ur-text(s) written in JBA, from which the grammar of JBA can then be described.<sup>7</sup> It is in this spirit that the Academy of the Hebrew language in their historical dictionary relies on a single manuscript for each tractate, the one evaluated as the best one for the given tractate.<sup>8</sup>

Next to KUTSCHER's influential presentation stands the seminal work of S. Y. FRIEDMAN, who recognizes four groups identified according to their orthography among the manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud<sup>9</sup>: Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Yemenite and 'Mediterranean'.<sup>10</sup>

In light of these studies, MORGENSTERN has argued recently for the following syntheses:

- a) A combination of KUTSCHER and FRIEDMAN: Instead of looking for *the* Ur-texts, it is advisable to seek for the best *group* of manuscripts.<sup>11</sup>
- b) Addition to FRIEDMAN: There is a fifth group of manuscripts—the Early Eastern Manuscripts (= EEMss). MORGENSTERN provides the characteristics of the EEMss according to every level of philological and linguistic analyses.<sup>12</sup> He then identifies manuscripts included in this group and ranks them as grade A and grade B manuscripts.<sup>13</sup>
- c) An update to the identification of the Ur-texts: Previously, KUTSCHER pointed to *Halachot Pesuqot*, MS Sasson (= HPS) and MS Hamburg 165 for tractate *Neziqin* as potentially good manuscripts for laying the foundations for a grammar of JBA.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, MORAG argued that both the Yemenite reading and manuscript traditions are among the most reliable sources for JBA.<sup>15</sup> MORGENSTERN agrees only about the reliability of HPS while refuting the other claims made by KUTSCHER and MORAG.<sup>16</sup> Instead, he considers the EEMss group (HPS included) as the most trustworthy

<sup>7</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, pp. 171–177.

<sup>8</sup> WAJSBERG 1981–1983.

<sup>9</sup> FRIEDMAN 1993, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Below I will discuss the differences between the division of the witnesses into these groups and the identification of “traditions” in Mishnaic Hebrew, introduced by BAR-ASHER 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, KARA 1983 focuses on the Yemenite manuscripts as a group, and provides a systematic description of the phonology and morphology of JBA according to this group of manuscripts.

<sup>12</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 42–45.

<sup>13</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 49–52.

<sup>14</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, pp. 173–176.

<sup>15</sup> MORAG 1961, 1962, 1972–1973, 1988, 2002. For some comments on MORAG's work, see MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 18–20, and for an important evaluation, see BREUER 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Ch. 2 surveys various problems with the Yemenite traditions, and Ch. 5 demonstrates a syntactic problem with MS Hamburg 165.

source for the reconstruction of JBA. The conclusions of MORGENSTERN's inquiries regarding this group of manuscripts are as follows:

- 1) EEMss reflect a stage of the language closer to the original state of JBA than any other textual witnesses. (In MORGENSTERN's words, EEMss "maintain the language of the Talmud in its pristine state").<sup>17</sup>
- 2) All other manuscripts are consequences of later developments. Some of the developments are the outcome of leveling of the various alternative forms, while others resulted from attempts to "correct" the language of the Talmud.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, MORGENSTERN assumes that all the characteristics of the EEMss are reflections of the *original* JBA (1). Therefore, since these manuscripts reflect the original texts, MORGENSTERN suggests that all other manuscripts suffer more extensively from later corruptions (2). These arguments raise a critical question. The argument assumes that the original versions of the texts, and the "pristine state" of JBA, are equivalent. But in principle, one may suggest that the following are two related, but independent, questions:

- a) What did the original JBA look like, in terms of grammar and lexicon?
- b) What appeared in the original Talmudic and Rabbinic texts (assuming for a moment, perhaps naïvely, that such texts did exist)?

For the purposes of our methodological discussion it is important to note, firstly, that the differences between EEMss and the other manuscripts are only *quantitative*.<sup>19</sup> In other words, on the one hand, all of the phenomena which characterize the EEMss appear in other groups of manuscripts. They only appear *more often* in EEMss. On the other hand, although various phenomena are characteristic of the EEMss, they do not appear entirely consistently in the EEMss; alternative forms appear in the EEMss as well.<sup>20</sup>

In light of this, it is important to clarify that here we are talking about different "text groups", a different notion than the concept of various "traditions", discussed in the context of Mishnaic Hebrew. In Mishnaic Hebrew, there are consistent differences between groups of manuscripts, and therefore the natural conclusion is to see different traditions in this language, presumably dated to the period when Mishnaic Hebrew was still spoken.<sup>21</sup> In

<sup>17</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> See, MORGENSTERN 2011, *inter alia*, pp. 167–168

<sup>20</sup> This is the focus of Ch. 4 in MORGENSTERN 2011, where he lists the appearances of the various bi-forms in the EEMss. In fact, as MORGENSTERN demonstrates, very often in one paragraph different forms of the same grammatical category appear next to each other, sometimes even variations of the same form.

<sup>21</sup> BAR-ASHER 1987, pp. 21–27.

the case of JBA, most of the characteristics of the EEMss are related to the percentage of the occurrences of a certain phenomenon. All manuscripts have them, but in a different frequency. Hence, the question at hand turns out to be related only to quantity and it should be phrased as asking about what such percentages of appearances of several phenomena may indicate.<sup>22</sup>

Before considering the foundations of MORGENSTERN's arguments and conclusions, two notes are appropriate:

First, no one who follows KUTSCHER's methodological tradition ever provided clear criteria for recognizing what should be considered original JBA. As a result, the reasons behind certain assumptions remain unclear. For example, MORGENSTERN's suggestion that characteristics of the EEMss are reflections of the *real* JBA is, of course, a very significant conclusion. Therefore the lack of such specific criteria for the recognition of the original language is very problematic especially when MORGENSTERN goes on to identify the characteristics of the EEMss, claiming that their absence in the Yemenite traditions serves as an indication that the Yemenite sources are not reliable for revealing the original JBA/texts.<sup>23</sup> This, of course, has the potential of being a circular argument.<sup>24</sup>

Second, as noted, there is often the assumption that the original versions of the texts, and the "pristine state" of JBA, are equivalent. However, even if the characteristics of certain manuscripts are reflections of the original spoken language of JBA, it is conceivable that the original texts had a different representation of the language (*texts* for this purpose can be either written or oral).<sup>25</sup>

I would like to develop the second point a little bit further. Phrasing it to some extent differently, this point invites us to consider that the Jewish Babylonian Texts were composed in a linguistic situation of diglossia, a possibility worthy of some comments.

The sociolinguistic model of diglossia describes coexistence between two (or more) languages, or of two varieties of one language, within one speech

<sup>22</sup> WAJSBERG 1981–1983 makes it clear that his evaluation is according to quantity.

<sup>23</sup> This is the focus of Ch. 3 in MORGENSTERN 2011.

<sup>24</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 41, is aware of the threat of such a circular argument. However, he claims that "we now have sufficient criteria to make possible the identification of the best textual witnesses, at least in terms of the language". Below, I will examine whether we do indeed have such "sufficient criteria".

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of whether or not the Talmud was first transmitted orally, see *inter alia* ROSENTHAL 1988. At some points in our discussion—when, for example, we discuss morphological issues—issues of oral transmission are insignificant. At other times—as is the case when discussing spelling conventions—the question of oral transmission is only significant because these texts, at some point in their transmission, became written. See also MORAG 1993.

community. This concept, introduced by Ferguson in the context of Arabic,<sup>26</sup> characterizes multilingual situations in which the functional domains of each of the languages are apportioned in a kind of complementary distribution. These domains are usually ranked hierarchically, from the highly valued (H) to the less valued (L). The H-language is typically used for religious, educational, literary, and other prestigious domains, while the L-language, representing more of the vernacular, occupies primarily the spoken realm.<sup>27</sup>

An explanation of JBA texts that takes this possibility into consideration could suggest that the texts were composed in the H-language, not reflecting a genuine “spoken” JBA (the L-language), but rather a different literary grammar.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly these texts may reflect the grammar of older dialects of Aramaic, or other contemporary dialects of a higher prestige. Accordingly, it is even possible that manuscripts in general and the EEMss in particular could reflect a later textual development, in which the language of these texts became closer to the original spoken JBA.

Since, however, the majority position in scholarship does not generally take these ideas into consideration, it has become the custom in the study of JBA that an evaluation of form confronts a rather stark dichotomy: forms must reflect either the original language or a corruption of this original. In my opinion, and in light of the above, this scheme can be refined, however, in two ways:

First, we should consider a stage of diglossia and thus the possibility of more than one original language. This would include at least one variety of H-language and one variety of L-Language.<sup>29</sup>

Second, it is necessary to distinguish between the types of changes that occurred in the transmission of the texts written in this dialect: those which reflect the original *spoken* language, and those which represent a grammar distinct from the grammar of JBA grammar. (In addition, it is also possible that those instances which seem to be evidence for influence of a different

<sup>26</sup> FERGUSON 1959.

<sup>27</sup> For a presentation of how the model of diglossia can be applied to ancient languages, see E. A. BAR-ASHER SIEGAL, forthcoming—Diglossia.

<sup>28</sup> Previous studies suggested the existence of registers within the Babylonian Talmud itself (for a review of the literature on this see MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 210–211). However, this is a different phenomenon than what is proposed here. The idea of various registers in the Babylonian Talmud reflects a “literary diglossia”, i. e. that the redactors of the texts use different grammars in different contexts. This is probably the case when Palestinian Rabbis are quoted that the Talmud is using what is probably a fake foreigner dialects. The option discussed here is of an actual diglossia which distinguishes, for example, between the written and the spoken appearances of JBA. This is somewhat attested in the Talmud as well when rabbis phrase the content of legal documents and use an archaic language.

<sup>29</sup> For the purposes of simplicity I ignore, for the time being, the possibility of multiple dialects.

grammar could be mistakes.) Thus, I propose to have in mind the following model:

- Stage A—a diglossia with differences between the written and the spoken language;
- Stage B—transmission of the texts and the following types of changes inserted to the original language:
  - 1) adaptations to the spoken language;
  - 2) adaptations to grammars of both higher and lower registers;
  - 3) misunderstandings of the original language;
  - 4) and, mistakes.

The methodological hesitations that will be demonstrated in this paper are of two kinds:

- a) When something is suspected as a reflection of a spoken language it is difficult—if not impossible—to determine whether it is a manifestation of the diglossia in Stage A, or an indication of a change that took place later (B 1). We must also remember that it could simply be a mistake that occurred in transmission (B 4).
- b) When there is a reflection of some “classical” grammar, one should answer the following question: Is it an indication of what was the case in Stage A (either in the written or in the spoken register of Aramaic)? Or, is it a later adaptation to a different grammar representing a higher register (B 2)? As I demonstrated elsewhere, it is often a reflection of a misunderstanding of the grammar (B 3).<sup>30</sup>

In light of this, in most cases it is impossible to choose between these options, since their “symptoms” are the same.

It must be emphasized that I do not have positive evidence that such a diglossia existed. However, there are also no such evidence for the other opinion that the idiom of the Babylonian Talmud was spoken as it appears in this text. My only intention is to examine whether such a model is possible, and the consequences of the application of such a model.

In the following discussion I will try to piece together the methodological assumptions behind KUTSCHER’s quest to identify “the language of the Talmud in its pristine state”. In each case, I will evaluate the strength of the evidence and examine the tensions between the original JBA, that is, what did the original language looked like (A), in addition to what appeared in the original texts (B) (see above, for the distinction between [A] and [B]). As

<sup>30</sup> See BAR-ASHER SIEGAL, forthcoming (Zohar), where I presented an attempt to reveal, how Spanish scholars in the 13<sup>th</sup> century perceived the grammar of JBA.

will become clear, while in most cases previous analyses are convincing, I will argue that it seems to be the case that overall sometimes the argument stands for the original language (A), sometimes for the original texts (B), and sometimes it may argue for other alternatives altogether.

### 3. The implicit criteria for a phenomenon to be identified as part of JBA

#### 3.1 Criterion vs. guidance

Before listing the implicit criteria for identifying a phenomenon as belonging to be part of JBA, it is important to distinguish between such criteria and when scholars simply offer *guidance* for where it is more likely to find evidence for the original language. As for the latter, in general there is an assumption that earlier manuscripts are more likely to be more historically accurate. While it is *a priori* a reasonable assumption, KUTSCHER himself was careful enough to say that “this is only an assumption, and despite it being likely, it is not a proof”.<sup>31</sup> This is, indeed, an empirical question, and, as a matter of fact, several studies demonstrate this assumption to be problematic. Hence, it may be misleading to rely on this often accepted truism.<sup>32</sup>

It is in this context that KUTSCHER claims that it is very likely that texts from the Geonic period represent the original language.<sup>33</sup> In addition to KUTSCHER’S OWN reservations about the strength of this corpus for determining the original language of JBA, the discussion below will demonstrate some of the problems with this recommendation.

#### 3.2 The implicit criteria

##### 3.2.1 External meta-linguistic evidence

Occasionally, one encounters in texts written by speakers of JBA meta-linguistic comments about their language that reveal something about their language. While this is, *prima facie*, a firsthand testimony about the then

<sup>31</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, p. 171. In other contexts KUTSCHER proposed a similar methodology for the study of Galilean Aramaic and Mishnaic Hebrew. In these contexts he was not as careful and considered the age of a manuscript to be a useful criterion (see KUTSCHER 1963, p. 249).

<sup>32</sup> *Inter alia*, SABATO 1998, demonstrates that in many lexical issues the 17<sup>th</sup> century Yemenite manuscript for tractate Sanhedrin preserves a more accurate version than the other manuscripts for this tractate, dated four to five centuries earlier.

<sup>33</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, pp. 172–173.



living language, the main problem with some of these comments is that it is not always clear whether they should be taken as descriptive comments or as prescriptive instructions. For example, in his dissertation, MORGENSTERN quotes a grammatical comment by Rabbi Shmuel ben Ḥofni Gaon (from the Geonic period) to the effect that a phonemic distinction existed between the two vowels /i/ and /e/<sup>34</sup>:

אימא בנקטין תחת אלאף אקול אימא בנקטה ואחדה תחת אלאף קול

“The form אימא when it has two dots below the *Alef* it is ‘I will say’; when it has one dot below the *Alef* it is ‘say!’”

However, this line is ambiguous as it is still unclear whether this should be taken as a description of the fact that there was such a phonemic distinction or as prescriptive rules suggesting how one should make a distinction. In that case, the fact that it was necessary to make such a comment in his Arabic writing may serve as an indication that in reality such a phonemic distinction did not exist in the Gaon’s contemporary Aramaic. Accordingly it is possible that this comment relies either on his knowledge about earlier stages of Aramaic or on familiarity with other contemporary Aramaic dialects.

Another problem with relying on meta-linguistic comments for an accurate picture of a once living language centers on the question of what is achieved from such evidence. This issue can be illustrated with regard to the discussion concerning the phonological and phonetic status of the pharyngeal consonants in written sources of JBA. It is well known that in JBA these consonants occasionally either elided or shifted to laryngeals. The assumption that these spellings represent phonological developments that occurred when JBA was still being spoken can be supported by several *descriptive* Geonic testimonies indicating these phonological shifts: As they say that “in the Aramaic language ... there are not many ‘*ayins*’; or, in their descriptions of the pronunciation of certain words without the pharyngeal as the “light forms” of these words.<sup>35</sup> According to MORGENSTERN, non-historical spellings of the pharyngeals and laryngeals are more widespread in EEMss; for him, then, this fact is an indication of their superior representation of an original JBA.

While such comments from the Geonic period seem undoubtedly to meet the criteria for evidence about the spoken language of JBA (A), it does not in

<sup>34</sup> MORGENSTERN 2002, pp. 54–55. This observation was already noted by Asis 1991, p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> For the sources of these quotations, see MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 61–62.

and of itself necessarily show anything about the language of original *texts* (B). Allow me to clarify with an illustrative example.

As MORGENSTERN indicates, texts from all groups of manuscripts of JBA regularly have the spelling הַאִידְנָא for the word with the meaning “now” deriving from עִידְנָא + הַאִי “this time”.<sup>36</sup> In the EEMss, however, one occasionally finds different spellings—הִידְנָא, הִידְאָנָא—for the same word.<sup>37</sup> MORGENSTERN claims that these spellings seem to reflect the result of a two-stage development: a shift of ‘>’, and a later elision: *hāyi ‘iddānā* > *hāyi ‘iddānā* > *hāyīddānā*.<sup>38</sup> He further claims that the spellings in the EEMss represent the Babylonian texts in their most original form, because only here was the spelling not regularized. Regardless of the question of whether the diachronic analysis offered by MORGENSTERN is correct,<sup>39</sup> this evidence could easily support an alternative explanation: conceivably, the regular spelling of this form was הַאִידְנָא in the original *texts* (B). EEMss, influenced by the pronunciation (spoken JBA [A]), occasionally slipped into a more phonetic spelling. Thus, while the meta-linguistic comments can be useful with regards to what was part of the original language, they are not necessarily helpful for the evaluation of the textual evidence.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2.2 External linguistic evidence

In the context of Mishnaic Hebrew and Galilean Aramaic KUTSCHER advocated relying on epigraphic sources in order to reveal the original languages, working all the while under the assumption that these texts, without the corruption of transmission, should be able to reveal the real language.<sup>41</sup> With

<sup>36</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 59.

<sup>37</sup> It should be noted, once again, that both spellings appear dozens of times in other manuscripts as well, as a search in the database of the Jewish Theological Seminary’s Saul Lieberman Institute for Talmudic Research may easily reveal.

<sup>38</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Despite MORGENSTERN’s analysis, it is unclear whether a shift of ‘>’ took place in this form. The reason behind this reservation is that the use of *Alef* may simply indicate a vowel in word-initial position (and not a ‘>’ shift); once the vowel no longer occurred in word-initial position (when the demonstrative fused with the following word,) there was no longer any need for the *Alef* to indicate its presence. Accordingly, the development was the following: *hāyi ‘iddānā* > *hāyi iddānā* > *hāyīddānā*. The final stage may be represented by all three spellings: הַאִידְנָא, הִידְאָנָא, and הִידְנָא (accordingly the *Alef* in all these spellings is always a vowel letter), and it is not the case that one is closer to the actual pronunciation than the other.

<sup>40</sup> Similarly, MORAG 1993, pp. 342–345, suggests that the phonemic spelling indicates the language of the later scribes. He, however, assumes that the Talmud was transmitted orally until very late.

<sup>41</sup> See KUTSCHER 1963, p. 249.

similar reasoning, some scholars believe that the Aramaic magic bowls written in the Babylonian idiom provide the most reliable evidence for the actual historical grammar of JBA.<sup>42</sup>

This is an interesting assumption that merits further discussion, and I will suffice here with briefly noting two issues that are worthy of further elaboration. First, it is entirely possible that in the case of the magic bowls, as with more obviously “literary” texts, it is necessary to take issues of textual transmission into consideration. For example, the fact that there are duplicates written by different scribes reveals that to some extent scribes simply copied incantation formulae.<sup>43</sup> Second, there are significant differences between the corpora probably related to the fact that each corpus belongs to a different genre.<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that in this regard whoever uses the appearance of a phenomenon in this corpus as a criterion to identify the original language of JBA does not follow KUTSCHER, who expressed similar reservations concerning the relevance of the magic bowls for any reconstruction of JBA grammar.<sup>45</sup> Once again, the notion of diglossia may be applicable in this context.

I would like to consider one topic where data from the magic bowls plays a significant role in the discussion of the phonology and morphology of JBA—that is, in the case of first person masculine singular participial forms from roots of which the final radical is one of the following consonants: /d/, /l/, /m/, /n/, and /r/.<sup>46</sup>

Commonly, in texts written in JBA, these five consonants do not appear in word final position, so it is reasonable to assume apocopation of these

<sup>42</sup> MORAG 1972–1973, pp. 65–66 uses this source as important evidence. Similarly MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 41. On pp. 37–40, MORGENSTERN surveys the literature on this corpus from the last three decades.

<sup>43</sup> For a recent discussion on this phenomenon see LEVENE 2003, pp. 24–30 (esp. 27–29). More generally, it is an ongoing discussion where to locate the magic bowls on the continuum between orality and textuality. For a study that discusses this topic, and surveys the extensive previous literature about this question, see HÄBERL forthcoming.

<sup>44</sup> The affinity between the magic bowls and the “special tractates” (such as Nedarim and Nazir), and certain contexts in Geonic literature has been repeatedly discussed in the literature (*inter alia* HARVIAINEN 1984, pp. 97–113). Over the last decade it has been clearly demonstrated by Breuer in the context of the “special tractates” (BREUER 2007, pp. 1–45), and MORGENSTERN in the context of the Geonic literature (MORGENSTERN 2002, pp. 4–21), that the special characteristics of these corpora, which are also the characteristics of the magic bowls, are the result of stylistic decisions in an attempt to appear archaizing. This may shed a light on the nature of the language of the magic bowls in a more general way. In addition it is worth noting that within the Babylonian Talmud, when magic texts appear they are often in archaic language, see for example *Pesahim* 110a.

<sup>45</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, p. 172, n. 51.

<sup>46</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 116–120.

consonants in the original language of JBA.<sup>47</sup> If so, while the absence of these consonants from the end of the word is expected, the absence of any representation of these phonemes in the middle of the word is unexpected. Yet this is what is found in the first person masculine singular participial form and such forms are attested in EEMs. For example, one encounters **קטינא** instead of **קטילנא** or **אבינא** instead of **עבידנא** (with the additional sound shift of ' > '). This phenomenon is also attested in magic bowls in the form, where we encounter **אזינא** instead of **אזילנא**.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the appearance of such forms in other original Babylonian texts supports the suggestion that this is an actual diachronic development.

As for the linguistic phenomenon, MORGENSTERN regards this as an example of an assimilation of final radicals with the /n/ of the personal marker *nā* of the first masculine singular form in the participial declension. In light of their appearance in the magic bowls, for MORGENSTERN, the fact that such forms appear more frequently in EEMs than in other traditions supports his overall claim that this group of manuscripts is closer to the original JBA.

Given this diachronic analysis, it is surprising to encounter the form **אמינא** for the verb **אמר**, since the expected vowel between /m/ and /r/ in JBA is /a/, and hence the expected spelling is **אמנא**. Indeed the latter is the common form in the EEMs, but the former is found as well, even on magic bowls. Accordingly, both MORAG<sup>49</sup> and MORGENSTERN propose that the older form was **אמנא**, and that **אמינא** is a dialectal form representing an analogy to III-y verbs, since the 3<sup>rd</sup> masc. sg. suff. conj. form is the apocopated form **אמא** instead of **אמר**, similar to other III-y verbs. Thus the following analogy:

אמינא → ? : בנינא :: אמא : בנא

I would first like to note that MORGENSTERN's suggestion that forms such as **קטינא** and **אבינא** resulted from an assimilation of the final radical to the following /n/ is unlikely, since an assimilation of these consonants in a similar phonological environment is elsewhere unattested. Instead, in light of the analysis of **אמינא** as an early analogy to the root **אמר** to III-y verb, it is more likely that forms such as **קטינא** and **אבינא** indicate that this analogy was even

<sup>47</sup> BOYARIN 1976, pp. 103–107, suggests that the phonological process with verbs was not the result of apocopation, but rather assimilation to a // in enclitic dative forms, which occurs often with verbs. However, this phenomenon is clearly much larger, as this apocopation took place also in forms the clitics are not expected after them, such as **מדעם** **מידי** < **מדם** > „something“, **כריב** < **כרי** „obsolete“ and therefore these are then most likely examples of a sound rule of apocopation. See also MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 22, 174–175, for a similar conclusion.

<sup>48</sup> MORGENSTERN 2007, pp. 264–268.

<sup>49</sup> MORAG 1972–1973, p. 74. He considers also an alternative option according to which **אמינא** is the original, but as MORGENSTERN notes this alternative is less likely.

more prevalent in JBA, to the extent that one may consider a merger of the III-*y* paradigm with the III-*d, l, m, n, r* paradigm. Thus, this is the preferred explanation for the evolution of the forms *קטינא* and *אבינא*. Similarly forms such as *אוקיתיה* which appear instead of *אוקימתיה* „you located it“, derives by analogy from forms such as *אוקי* (instead of *אוקים*) „he located (it)“.

Second, while the external linguistic evidence from the magic bowls supports the claim that such a morphological development (not phonological, as MORGENSTERN argues) occurred in JBA (A), regardless of whether it took place both in the H-language and in the L-language, it does not prove that the other textual traditions (without this analogy) represent later changes to the text (B). In fact, the magic bowls may lead us to an opposite conclusion. As MORGENSTERN's study on this corpus indicates,<sup>50</sup> the writing on the bowls is more often historical; non-standard spellings appear only occasionally. This fact may indicate that there was a strong tradition of non-phonetic spelling in JBA, and that appearances of the non-standard spelling indicate scribal “mistakes”, providing evidence about the spoken language. Consequently, one may come to a similar conclusion about the EEMss—that these are not such “accurate” manuscripts (B), but rather that more scribal “mistakes” appear in them (A) which brought the dialect of the text farther from its original form and closer to the spoken dialect—assuming that their transmission was among native JBA speakers.

A similar conclusion can be reached regarding the phenomenon of the addition of an anaptyctic vowel in the following phonological environment:  $VCC\grave{a}CV > VCiCCV$ . More specifically, in an environment where a sequence of three letters representing consonants is expected from a historical point of view, the letter *Yod* appears after the first consonant  $\_CyCC\_$ . In the case of this development, a similar observation has been noticed already by NÖLDEKE in Mandaic,<sup>51</sup> in addition to being found in the JBA magic bowls.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the fact that forms such as *נשיבקה* occasionally appear in the rabbinic texts of JBA,<sup>53</sup> instead of the expected *נשבקה*, suggests that this development occurred in JBA as well. Consequently MORAG<sup>54</sup> and later MORGENSTERN<sup>55</sup> consider this to be an indication of good manuscripts.

<sup>50</sup> MORGENSTERN 2007, esp. 245–249.

<sup>51</sup> NÖLDEKE 1875, §25, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> It was first noted by MONTGOMERY 1913, p. 143, and later by ROSSELL 1953, p. 125.

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that such forms appear even in some of the printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud. For example, the form *תיקירעוה* (*B. Batra* 130b) appears in the edition printed in Pesaro in 1511.

<sup>54</sup> MORAG 1972–1973, pp. 65–66.

<sup>55</sup> For a survey of the literature and the evidence on this phenomenon in JBA, see MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 76–90.

While most written traditions do not reflect a vowel in such environments at all, EEMss often has a *Yod* after the first consonant indicating a vowel (either an *i* or a *schwa*). It should be clarified that all of the other manuscripts have neither a representation of an *ə* of the *VCCəCV* forms nor the *i/ə* of the *VCiCCV* forms; the spelling, for example, is always *נשבֿקיה*, and never *נשבֿיקיה*. It thus seems certainly possible that the spellings without a vowel letter in the middle reflect the exact same pronunciation.<sup>56</sup>

Although it seems to be the case that this data from the EEMss contribute to our knowledge about JBA, it could also easily be speculated that these are spelling amendments in the writing of the EEMss, inserted by scribes who were speakers of JBA, due to their own pronunciation. And let us not forget that a proximity to the original pronunciation is not necessarily an indication of a close relationship to the original texts.

This last point is relevant to a more substantive discussion. KUTSCHER repeatedly claims that the more a manuscript has *plene* spellings the more reliable it is.<sup>57</sup> This hypothesis assumes that originally the standard was *plene* spellings and later—from the influence of biblical traditions on the scribes—these vowels were eventually deleted.<sup>58</sup> In fact it is difficult to *a priori* determine what the standards for spelling were. As MORGENSTERN repeatedly demonstrates throughout Ch. 4 of his book, there is no consistency in the EEMss with regards to spelling. For example, in one context the same word may appear with or without an *Alef* to indicate the vowel /ā/. Similarly, in one context a representation of the anaptyctic vowel may appear and then in the same line it may be missing.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, instead of reflecting a tension between standard spelling (*plene*) and adjustment to the tradition (without *matres lectionis*), these variations can be regarded as a tension between the standard spelling (without every possible *matres lectionis*) and the occasional additions of phonetic representation (*plene*). Thus, it is clearly a very weak criterion to access manuscripts according to their spelling habits.<sup>60</sup>

The consequence of the last elaboration for the larger discussion is that the EEMss are not necessarily “conservative”. It is likely that they differed

<sup>56</sup> In fact MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 183, provides an example without a *Yod* that was (later) vocalized with an *i/* vowel. This example supports the suggestion that lack of a *Yod* does not necessarily indicate that this vowel was not present in these phonological environments.

<sup>57</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, p. 173, in this review he focused on the representation of /ā/, but elsewhere he spoke about it in more general terms.

<sup>58</sup> See also MORAG 1972–1973, pp. 61–64.

<sup>59</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 182–183.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly FRIEDMAN 1996 argues that the use of vowel letters varied amongst the different scribal schools, and therefore the fuller spelling is not necessarily better or more original

from the texts from which they were copied. Accordingly, we should rephrase the question under discussion in terms of tendencies of this group of manuscripts. When do they tend to be conservative and when do they tend to reflect amendments from the original texts they copied?

### 3.2.3 Consistency

Among the merits of the EEMss group MORGENSTERN often mentions “consistency”.<sup>61</sup> Most likely the idea behind this merit is that such a consistency reflects that these manuscripts are persistent in following the rules, i. e. “the grammar”. I would like to examine a case of such a consistency, preserved in one of the EEMss, in order to question the validity of this criterion when seeking to uncover the original language. While this is clearly an indication of the existence of some grammar system, the main question remains: To which grammar system does it belong?

HPS regularly distinguishes in its vocalized forms between the masculine plural morpheme of the participle ( $\bar{i}$  vowel) and the masculine plural morpheme of nouns ( $\bar{e}$  vowel). This distinction preserves the historical distinction between the forms, since nouns are in the long forms (known as the “emphatic forms”) and the participles, as predicate adjectives, are in the short forms (known as the “absolute forms”). This distinction is also still preserved in Syriac.<sup>62</sup>

According to MORGENSTERN, the fact that the Yemenite traditions lost this distinction supports his overall contention that these traditions suffer from a later leveling between the forms. The main problem with this argument is that this analysis assumes that the distinction between the vowel /i/ and /e/ was phonemic in JBA. As MORAG has demonstrated, this is not a simple assumption, since in HPS occasionally the two vowels are used interchangeably, even for the same word, as in אִלְאִ and אֵלְאִ (I am using the Tiberian system of vocalization, although originally a Babylonian one appears in the manuscript).<sup>63</sup> If this was not a phonemic distinction, then the consistency in HPS with regard to the plural endings may indeed indicate an attempt to follow a grammar; however, it may only be an artificial reconstruction of an old distinction between the grammatical categories, rather than the *preservation* of a distinction still present in the dialect of JBA. Accordingly, traditions which do not reflect such a distinction may at

<sup>61</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 43–45. See also WAJSBERG 1981–1983, pp. 343–344, for a similar criterion.

<sup>62</sup> EPSTEIN 1960, p. 40, already noticed this distinction. See also, MORAG 1967–1968, pp. 78–79, MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 112–113.

<sup>63</sup> MORAG 1967–1968, p. 80.

the same time be more accurate historically with regard to the spoken dialect of JBA (A).

Once again, while for some scholars the fact that other manuscripts, such as *Halachot Gedolot* Paris 1402,<sup>64</sup> do not always follow this distinction is a sign to their inferiority, it could be the case that they are inferior in preserving the prescriptive historical rules, but, for our purposes, are superior in representing the actual spoken JBA of the time. It is also worth noting that in the text written by Rabbi Shmuel ben Ḥofni Gaon the vocalization of the plural form of the participle is with an /e/ vowel.<sup>65</sup> It should be emphasized that the vocalization of this text was inserted either by the Gaon himself or by someone of his generation.<sup>66</sup>

MORGENSTERN argues that the fact that participles freely interchange between forms that end with a /n/ and forms that do not, while nouns do so only in syntactic environments where short forms are expected (according to the grammar of Syriac), supports the assumption that HPS preserved the old distinction grammatically.<sup>67</sup> However, it is unclear that this is sufficient to hold the weight of his claim. MORGENSTERN's observation—which is true in the entire corpus of JBA and not only for EEMss—only demonstrates that JBA still held a functional distinction between short and long forms. However, this demonstration is somewhat trivial, since there are different masculine adjective forms for the short and the long forms (for example **טב** vs. **טבא**). The question at hand is different, since we are wondering whether or not this grammatical distinction was indicated by the change of a vowel in the plural forms (with an apocopation of the /n/).

In this context it seems crucial to note about some previously unnoticed fact concerning the following two phrases from HPS: **כל תלתין יומי** “all thirty days,” and **בציר מתלתין יומי** “less than thirty days” (2:19 and 127: 21 respectively). In general, the plural short forms of substantives are often used in JBA, as is the case in Syriac,<sup>68</sup> with quantifiers, including the quantifier **סגיאינ**

<sup>64</sup> MORAG 1967–1968, p. 91. Compare with MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 113, n. 207.

<sup>65</sup> ASIS 1991, p. 40.

<sup>66</sup> ASIS 1991, p. 38. See, above, § 3.2.1, for references to Rabbi Shmuel ben Ḥofni Gaon's comments in other discussions. Surprisingly, MORGENSTERN does not refer to this vocalization in his discussion on this topic.

<sup>67</sup> It is worth noting that in this context MORGENSTERN, inconsistently with his own methodology, ignores the magic bowls (above § 3.2.2), where short forms of nouns often appear in unexpected contexts as well. See for example the repeated use of **חרשין בישין** ‘evil sorceries’ (M 102: 4, 8, 9, 12); and the expressions **שידין ושיבטין** ‘demons and plague spirits’ (M 59: 11), **פגעין בישין** ‘evil afflictors’ (M 121: 3–4), **לוטן ממלון** ‘oaths, curses and evil speeches’ (M 123: 2); **כוכבין** ‘stars’ (M131:4); **נהרין** ‘rivers’, **בנין** ‘children’ (M 155: 11), just to mention a few.

<sup>68</sup> See also BREUER 2007, p. 10, n. 55.



‘many’ and cardinal numbers. Thus we regularly find in manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud expressions such as תלת שנים ‘three years’, תלתין יומין ‘thirty days’, ארבעין זימנין ‘forty times’, תלתא ירחין ‘three months’, ארבע סאין ‘four seahs’, and, in an incantation text, חד עשר שמין ‘eleven names’. In Syriac, the short form of the plural is also used after כל, “all”; similar expressions are found in the incantation texts, where expressions such as כול עובדין בישיין “all evil magical acts” (M 103: 4), כל חרשין בישיין וכל סדנין אפכין “all evil sorceries and all perverted devils” (M 112: 4), and וכל בתולן “all virgins” (M 163:14) occur.

In the syntactic context of the two phrases mentioned above from HPS it is expected that both the nouns and the adjectives would appear in the short form. Indeed all manuscripts for these lines in their original Talmudic passages have the phrase with both in the short form, indicated by the final ן: כל תלתין יומין (Shabbat 129b) and בציר מתלתין יומין (Makkot 3b). The fact that unexpectedly HPS has יומי with an /e/ vowel in both passages, and not with an /i/ vowel suggests that the appearance of the /e/ vowel with nouns reflects an artificial preservation of an old distinction, a preservation kept even when syntactically it is unnecessary.

Thus, paying attention to these unnoticed examples may change our evaluation of the data significantly. One could have speculated that the fact that HPS does not keep the use of the short forms in this syntactic context indicates that, despite its frequent appearance in manuscripts, this distribution is not a reflection of the original JBA. Such a conclusion, however, would contradict what seems to be an otherwise an agreed-upon criterion for identifying original JBA: the preservation of grammatical phenomena used by scholars in other discussions. It is to this that we now turn.

### 3.2.4 Preservation of grammatical phenomena

Among the merits of HPS that KUTSCHER mentions is the fact that nouns and their attributive adjectives almost always agree in gender and number.<sup>69</sup> WAJSBERG used this criterion to determine which manuscripts are the most valued ones to be used for the historical dictionary of the Academy of the Hebrew language.<sup>70</sup> MORGENSTERN similarly notes that one of the characteristics of the EEMs is that these manuscripts preserve the grammatical accuracy of gender agreement.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, the fact that a certain manuscript

<sup>69</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, p. 175.

<sup>70</sup> WAJSBERG 1981–1983, pp. 339–344. However, the examples he uses are very problematic, and some of the cases that he uses for lack of agreements were explained by others as the result of various phonological development in JBA, such as apocope of final /h/ and weakening of the pharyngeal consonants.

<sup>71</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 43.

follows the grammar of what is known from previous periods of Aramaic testifies to the accuracy of this manuscript. This is, however, a problematic criterion, for it is almost impossible to determine whether lack of grammaticality in a later period reflects problems in the transmission of a text, or whether accuracy reflects conservative writing that corrects mistakes. Every speaker of Modern Hebrew knows that certain grammatical agreements, which are regularly attested in Modern Hebrew texts, do not reflect the spoken language, where these same agreements are rarely preserved.

The case of the first feminine singular form of the participial conjugation nicely brings to the fore the issue of the preservation of earlier grammatical rules. Historically, this conjugation in JBA is based on the participial nominal declension with copulative enclitic pronouns. As is the case in Syriac, but unlike other verbal conjugations, one would expect a distinction between the masculine and the feminine forms:

m. \**qātil+nā* > *qātilnā*

f. \**qātālā+nā* > *qātālānā*

Despite this expectation, however, an indication of the extra vowel for the feminine forms appears only very rarely and almost exclusively in a few EEMss.<sup>72</sup> While MORGENSTERN considers this to be evidence for the authenticity of the EEMss,<sup>73</sup> the lack of other evidence for these forms in the other manuscripts supports the idea of a syncretism of the masc. and the fem. forms. If this syncretism occurred, as was the case in Mandaic,<sup>74</sup> it was probably due to an analogy to the prefix and suffix conjugations, in which, as is regularly the case among the Semitic languages, there is no gender distinction between the forms of the 1<sup>st</sup> sg. Accordingly, the few forms that attest to the unique fem. forms may be taken as attempts to preserve an old grammatical distinction artificially. (In fact, in his dissertation, MORGENSTERN seems to endorse a similar explanation when he demonstrates that these forms appear exclusively in contexts that are prone to be “artificial”.)<sup>75</sup>

The discussion of this grammatical category raises another important issue for our discussion: the relationship between JBA and the Near Eastern

<sup>72</sup> It was first noted by FRIEDMAN 1981, p. 26 (note n. 99). KARA 1983, p. 158, n. 23, notes additional examples from HPS. He thinks that the evidence in the Yemenite manuscripts suggests that a syncretism occurred. For a survey of the data in EEMss, see MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 120–122.

<sup>73</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, p. 122.

<sup>74</sup> MACUCH 1965, §204, p. 277. This is also the case in the Neo-Mandaic dialect of Khorramshahr, see HÄBERL 2009, p. 180.

<sup>75</sup> MORGENSTERN 2002, p. 179.

Neo Aramaic (= NENA) dialects.<sup>76</sup> Many of these dialects preserve the distinction between the genders of the 1<sup>st</sup> sg. forms in tenses that derive morphologically from the historical participles.<sup>77</sup> On a more general methodological note, it is reasonable to conclude that while in various aspects JBA represents a middle stage in linguistic developments from the earlier Eastern Aramaic dialects (and for this matter Syriac is included among these dialects) to the NENA dialects,<sup>78</sup> this is, obviously, not always the case. This can be demonstrated, for example, in the realization of the pharyngeal consonants. While, as mentioned above, historical /h/ in JBA either elided or merged with the laryngeal consonant /ħ/, in many of the NENA dialects it merged with the velar fricative /x/. In other places NENA dialects are closer to Syriac than JBA. This is, for example, the case in overt existential predications in the past tense. In Syriac and in many NENA dialects the particle *ʾit* with an enclitic form of the verb *hwy* „to be“ appear. While this formulation occurs in JBA as well,<sup>79</sup> it is more common to encounter the classic construction of the verb *hwy* without the existential particle. Thus, once again, a comparison between JBA and other contemporary or later Eastern Aramaic dialects may only serve as an invitation for an investigation; however, this comparison cannot—nor should it—determine its results. It should be noted, though, that on this matter KUTSCHER himself was very careful to use the other dialects only to confirm the possibility of a certain development, and not to determine the final results of his investigations.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.3 A preliminary observation

While MORGENSTERN believes that the EEMss are closer to the original language of JBA (A) and better reflect the Babylonian texts (B), in light of the previous elaborations it is equally as possible to suggest an alternative picture. First, it seems advisable to not have a single verdict for each and every manuscript or group of manuscripts. A manuscript may preserve the original spoken L-language in one linguistic phenomenon; in another it may be

<sup>76</sup> For a preliminary discussion on this topic, see KHAN 2007.

<sup>77</sup> In this context it is interesting to note that in the dialect of Barwar there are two paradigms of the “present base”. In the “default base” there is no distinction between the genders, but in the “long forms” there are archaic forms that preserve this distinction. However, in this dialect the functional distribution motivation is prosodic and a mark of discourse structure (see, KHAN 2008, pp.157–164, 766–769).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, BAR-ASHER 2008, esp. pp. 375–380. This paper explores an example where JBA reflects the necessary middle stage in the developments of the NENAs’ new tenses from what Syriac had.

<sup>79</sup> Or the existential particle אִיכָּא, which is even more common in JBA.

<sup>80</sup> KUTSCHER 1962, p. 161, 170.

a witness to the original text, i. e., the H-language, which is different from the original spoken language; and yet another phenomenon may reflect an attempt to preserve an old grammatical phenomenon, that was neither part of the spoken language of JBA nor of its texts.<sup>81</sup>

Considering the data discussed above, if we follow the alternative proposals that were presented throughout this paper, it is possible to recognize tendencies among the EEMss. With regard to phonology, other sources are closer to the original Babylonian *texts*, while the EEMss better reflect the *spoken* language—as was the case with regard to the pharyngeals and the anaptyctic vowel. In the morphological cases discussed above (plural endings of the nouns and predicate adjectives and the 1<sup>st</sup> f.sg. participial forms), the EEMss preserve older distinctions from the history of Aramaic, but this does not have to be a necessary representation of JBA itself, nor a representation of the state in the original texts. Instead, the various phenomena discussed above could be reflections of later attempts to follow the grammar of other dialects. It should be emphasized that in all these cases, I do not argue that the alternative picture is necessarily the right one, but only that it is as plausible as the one MORGENSTERN has suggested, and so, the case for the reliability of the EEMss has not been proven.

Another example that may reflect the distinction between morphology and phonology is the phonological status of the particle קא appearing before participial forms.<sup>82</sup> In EEMss the particle is almost always separated (קא סבר), except when used with the verb אמ"ר, where some of the manuscripts also have קאמר. MORGENSTERN argues that this distinction has to do with the high frequency of the verb אמ"ר and the “weakening of the *aleph* between two *ā* vowels”. Other manuscripts often have the non-separated form with other roots as well: for example, קסבר.<sup>83</sup>

In contradistinction to MORGENSTERN’s analysis, it appears to be more likely that the קא went through a process of cliticization.<sup>84</sup> The loss of the original personal declension of the participial verbal form of the verb קו"מ, reflects the standard cline of grammaticality (*content item* > *grammatical word* > *clitic* > *inflectional affix*, or alternatively *full verb* > (*vector verb*) > *auxiliary* > *clitic* > *affix*)<sup>85</sup> hence it is very likely that this form became in JBA a proclitic unit indicating the progressive aspect with the participle. The fact that with the verb אמ"ר all groups of manuscripts indicate such a process

<sup>81</sup> BREUER 2001, p. 14, already made a similar point concerning the evaluation of a specific manuscript (or group of manuscripts).

<sup>82</sup> For a detailed study concerning this particle in JBA, see BREUER 1997.

<sup>83</sup> MORGENSTERN 2011, pp. 172–174.

<sup>84</sup> For a preliminary study on this issue, see BAR-ASHER SIEGAL forthcoming (Zohar).

<sup>85</sup> HOPER/TRAUGOTT 1993, p. 7 and 108.

is further support for this analysis, as otherwise the *Aleph* would have not been “between two  $\bar{a}$  vowels” for it to be elided.

Thus, the spelling in which the  $\aleph$  appears as a prefix better reflects JBA. The EEMs reflect an attempt to preserve an historical stage, before the syntactic phenomenon grammaticalized and, subsequently, became morphological. However, even in this tradition, as in the case of I-<sup>2</sup>verbs, where the phonology could not allow this “artificial” separation, due to the elision of the /ʔ/, the  $\aleph$  is written as a prefix to the participial verb.

The goal of the last few paragraphs was not to argue fiercely for the alternative picture, but only to demonstrate how different plausible explanations to the same data are possible simultaneously, and that we do not have definite criteria how to choose between them.

#### 4. Final remarks

Elsewhere I raised some other doubts about the scientific aspirations of the methodology to rely on specific textual witnesses in order to best reflect the JBA dialect.<sup>86</sup> In this paper, however, I have sought to uncover and explore the implicit criteria employed by the scholars who follow KUTSCHER’s methodology in order to identify certain phenomena as part of the original JBA, which lead the consensus in the study of JBA. Having brought these criteria to light, it became clear that at times this methodology does not yield the original language successfully, and at times results in confusion between the original language in the texts (H-language) and the original spoken one (L-language). This shortcoming is serious enough to warrant the consideration of a more sophisticated portrait of the history of this dialect and of the texts written in it, one relying on models of diglossia, and considering the various types of changes that could take place in the transmission of the texts.

It became clear that in most cases it is impossible to choose between various options, since their “symptoms” are the same. For example, in the case of an archaic language it could be an indication of a higher register in the stage when the text were composed, but at the same time it may be a later adaptation to a different grammar representing in an attempt to imitate a higher register in the transmission of the texts. Therefore, I believe that one may conclude the following instead:

- 1) Even if we accept KUTSCHER’s framework—i. e. that the goal of the philologist is to determine the actual historical language of JBA—we may have to be satisfied with the fact that it is not always possible to determine

<sup>86</sup> BAR-ASHER SIEGAL 2012.

which phenomenon is original. Often it is only possible to raise the various options regarding each and every form.

- 2) It is not advisable to determine which of the manuscripts provides the most reliable textual evidence in general for all the linguistic phenomena, as this may change from one discussion to another. It is better to discuss phenomena instead of sources. Elaborations on internal relations between forms and structures may be found more useful.<sup>87</sup>

Ch. 5 in MORGENSTERN's book is in fact an excellent example of such a study concentrating on the marking of direct objects in JBA.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, I wish to emphasize that even if one is not convinced that KUTSCHER has made a successful case for Hamburg 165, MORAG for the Yemenite traditions or MORGENSTERN for EEMss, as the most reliable sources for the original JBA and the best representations of the original texts, every future study on JBA must rely on their works which are replete with important information and excellent discussions on JBA.

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<sup>87</sup> Elaboration on this methodology are found in BAR-ASHER SIEGAL 2012 §4. As noted in this discussion, this type of elaboration is very suitable to syntactic issues.

<sup>88</sup> It is worth noting that the conclusions of this chapter are very important for discussions in general linguistics about languages without morphemes to mark definite nouns, and the way this is indicated with object marking. See, for example, AISSEN 2003, and the very rich literature, which followed her paper.

However, there are some problems with MORGENSTERN's presentation of the data. According to MORGENSTERN's account pronominal suffixes following the preposition ל- do not appear with verbal forms other than the participle. Consider, however the following two examples from HPS. The first is with a suffix-conjugation form: ולא אֶכְפִּיעַ לִּיהּ לַגְּבֵרָא „We do not force a man to divorce his wife unless she is among those who are disqualified for marriage“ (HPS 78b); and also with an infinitive: דְּלֹא אִיכָא לְמִיחְשָׁא לֵהּ לְמִילְתָּא „It is not necessary to take into consideration the matter“ (HPS 60b). As for the first example, one should note that the appearance of the suffix-conjugation in such a context is unique, and a participial form would have been more natural.

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