Many Peoples of Obscure Speech and Difficult Language: Attitudes towards Linguistic Diversity in the Hebrew Bible

Share Your Story

Many Peoples of Obscure Speech and Difficult Language:

Attitudes towards Linguistic Diversity in the Hebrew Bible

A dissertation presented

by

Cian Joseph Power

to

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

August 2015

Dissertation Advisor: Professor Peter Machinist   Cian Joseph Power

**MANY PEOPLES OF OBSCURE SPEECH AND DIFFICULT LANGUAGE:
ATTITUDES TOWARDS LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE**

Abstract

The subject of this dissertation is the awareness of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew
Bible—that is, the recognition evident in certain biblical texts that the world's languages
differ from one another. Given the frequent role of language in conceptions of identity, the
biblical authors' reflections on language are important to examine.

Of the biblical texts that explicitly address the subject of linguistic diversity, some are
specific, as in references to particular languages (e.g., "Aramaic,"), while others refer to
linguistic multiplicity generally, as in the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11:1–9). Linguistic
difference is also indicated implicitly, as when the speech of Laban in Gen 29–31 exhibits
Aramaic-like features that emphasize his foreignness.

Building on previous studies of limited scope, my approach is to collect and analyse
the evidence for awareness of linguistic diversity in the biblical books comprehensively.
Drawing on concepts from sociolinguistics, including style-switching, code-switching, and
language ideology, I categorize such evidence and explain its significance with respect to its
literary and historical contexts. I thus contribute to wider debates on the sociolinguistics of
ancient Hebrew, the development of the concept of the "holy language" in Judaism, and the
topic of linguistic diversity in the broader ancient Near East.

I find that the notion of linguistic diversity is used in the Hebrew Bible to set up, and
also to challenge, boundaries of various kinds, be they territorial, as in the Shibboleth test

(Judg 12:5–6), ethnic, as with the Judaean-Ashdodite children (Neh 13:23–4), or theological, as in Jeremiah's Aramaic oracle against idols (Jer 10:11). My analysis shows that references to linguistic diversity are concentrated in texts of the Achaemenid Persian period and later, reflecting changes in the sociolinguistic circumstances of Judaeans. Yet in all periods Israel and Judah's encounters with the empires Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia influenced attitudes towards linguistic diversity, whether this influence be manifested in fear (Jer 5:15) or ridicule (Esth 8:9). Overall, linguistic difference is not the primary means by which the biblical authors distinguish Israel from the nations, nor do they attribute a unique religious function to their own language.

Contents

Chapter 3: The Past and Future of Linguistic Diversity

Chapter 4: The Representation of Foreignness through Style-Switching

Chapter 8: Conclusion   379

Bibliography   392

Acknowledgements

I owe an enormous amount to the advisors, colleagues, friends and family who have encouraged and supported me during the preparation of this dissertation. Without them I cannot imagine having completed this journey.

To Professor Peter Machinist, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude. Professor Machinist's assistance, from guiding me in developing the broad contours of this project to attending diligently to the smallest details of the work, has been invaluable. But I have benefitted just as much from the great breadth of his knowledge and the keenness of his judgement, as from his abundant wisdom, patience, and kindness. Thanks to him, I have felt welcome ever since I arrived in Boston in 2009. I am certain that I could not have asked for more in a *Doktorvater*, and I hope to pass on the lessons he has taught me.

This dissertation has improved significantly through the insight and attention of Professors Jon Levenson and Andrew Teeter. I am grateful to them for their time in meeting with me and reading my work and for provoking me to examine my topic more deeply. All faults and shortcomings in this dissertation are mine alone.

In writing this dissertation, I have been able to rely upon the expertise, advice, and fellowship of colleagues in NELC and Harvard Divinity School. I am particularly grateful in this respect to Maria Metzler, Jonathan and Joanna Kline, Jennie Grillo, Michael Lesley, Yonatan Miller, Jacqueline Vayntrub, and Iosif Zhakevich. I am also fortunate enough to have made many wonderful friends at Harvard more broadly—in the GSAS residence halls, in Dudley House, and elsewhere. These friends have helped me to lead a fairly balanced and sane life as a doctoral student. Among them, I am particularly indebted to Anshul Kumar, David Sherman,

Mazen Elfakhani, and Elizabeth Weinbloom, who are all very special people. Maxim Cardew, who began this American adventure with me, often provided wise lips and an ear to hear.

The bulk of this dissertation was written within the walls of Cabot House—a house that became a home to me while I was a Resident Tutor there. This precious community of students, tutors, and staff, nurtured by Stephanie and Rakesh Khurana, has left an impression upon me to last a lifetime. I am grateful to a whole host of fantastic Cabotians, but I would especially like to thank Bethany Kibler, Benjamin Solomon-Schwartz, Bridget Alex, Roman Feiman, Lydia Federico, and David Palmer for their friendship.

To all of my loving family, including Indy, I owe so much. I am profoundly grateful to my ever-affectionate grandparents John and Rosemary Power, who have never stopped cheering for me. Aysel Tatar has given sustenance, both physical and spiritual, that has meant a great deal. Most of all, Karen Power has provided the unwavering and unconditional love that only a mother can offer, but that not all children are lucky enough to receive. She has displayed a tremendous amount of courage every time visited, and has inspired me to face my fears. From her I have been able to draw great strength, and I am inexpressibly grateful to her for everything.

Finally, for my beloved Dilan, I am deeply thankful. She knows best that this has been a long road, with many twists and turns, but I am so glad that we have walked it together. At every step Dilan has encouraged, consoled, and challenged me as needed. Her perseverance and faith in me has helped me move metaphorical mountains. Tack för allt, mitt hjärta.

for Mum and Dilanım

Abbreviations

The abbreviations listed below generally follow *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (ed. Billie Jean Collins; 2d ed.; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), § 8. Abbreviations of biblical books, which follow *SBL Handbook* § 8.3, are not listed here.

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992.
ABRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
abs.	absolute
act.	active
AHw	*Akkadisches Handwörterbuch.* W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965–1981
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*
Akk.	Akkadian
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
Ant.	Josephus. *Jewish Antiquities*
AOAT	*Alter Orient und Altes Testament*
ARA	*Annual Review of Anthropology*
Aram.	Aramaic
ASBR	Amsterdam Studies in Bible and Religion
b.	Babylonian Talmud
BaghM	*Baghdader Mitteilungen*
BAOS	*Bulletin of the American Oriental Society*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BCILL	Bibliothèque des cahiers de l'institut de linguistique de Louvain
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Oxford, 1907
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.* Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 1983
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BIFAO	*Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*

BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago, 1956–2011
CAP	Cowley, A. E. *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* Oxford. 1923
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
const.	construct
COS	*The Context of Scripture*. Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–2002
CT	*Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Edited by D. J. A. Clines. Sheffield, 1993–2015
diss.	dissertation
DNWSI	*Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*. J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling. 2 vols. Leiden, 1995
EA	El-Amarna tablets
ed.	editor(s); edited by
Eg.	Egyptian
EHLL	*Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. Edited by G. Khan. 4 vols. Leiden, 2013
ELA	*Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*
esp.	especially
et al.	and others
ETCSL	*The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. Edited by J. A. Black et al. Oxford, 1998–2006
ETL	*Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
fem.	feminine
FO	*Folia Orientalia*
GAG	*Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik*. Wolfram von Soden. 3d ed. AnOr 33. Rome, 1995
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d. ed. Oxford, 1910
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–1999

HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HB	Hebrew Bible
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
Heb.	Hebrew
Hist.	*Histories*
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HS	*Hebrew Studies*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990
ibid.	*ibidem*, in the same place
ICC	International Critical Commentary
idem	the same
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
IEL	*The International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. 2d ed. Edited by William J. Frawley. Oxford, 2003
Il.	*Iliad*
impf.	imperfect
impv.	imperative
inf.	infinitive
IOS	*Israel Oriental Society*
J	Yahwist
JANES	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
Jastrow	Jastrow, M. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. 2d ed. New York, 1903
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHebS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JIC	Judaism in Context Series
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
Joüon	Joüon, P. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. Subsidia biblica 27. Rome, 2006

JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSI	*Journal of Social Issues*
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
Jub.	*Jubilees*
K	Kethib
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KRI	*Ramesside inscriptions: Historical and biographical*. Kenneth Kitchen. 8 vols. Oxford, 1975–1990
KUB	*Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi*. Berlin. 1921–1990
Lane	Lane, E. W. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. 8 vols. London. Reprint, 1968
LBHOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
Lev. Rab.	*Leviticus Rabbah*
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford, 1996
LXX	Septuagint
m.	Mishnah tractate
masc.	masculine
Meghillot	*Meghillot: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls*
MM	Multilingual Matters
MT	Masoretic Text
n.	note
n.p.	no pages
NABU	*Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*
NAWG	*Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*
NCB	New Century Bible
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
Od.	*Odyssey*

OEBA	*The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Archaeology*. Edited by Daniel M. Master. 2 vols. Oxford, 2013
OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3d ed. Edited by John Simpson. Oxford, 2008–
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
Or	*Orientalia*
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTR	Old Testament Readings
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
P	Priestly author
p(p).	page(s)
PAPS	*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
pass.	passive
per.	person
pf.	perfect
pl.	plural
PMBH	*Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*. Joshua Blau. Winona Lake, Ind., 2010
ptc.	participle
Q	Qere
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*
Rab.	*Rabbah*
REB	Revised English Bible
REJ	*Revue des Études juives*
repr.	reprint; reprinted
RlA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie*. Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin, 1928–
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SBH	Standard Biblical Hebrew
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series
ScrHier	Scripta Hierosolymitana
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series
SepComm	Septuagint Commentary Series
sg.	singular

SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SJ	Studia judaica
SJL	*Southwest Journal of Linguistics*
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
StSa	Studia samaritana
Syr.	Peshitta
TADAE	*Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt: Newly Copied, Edited, and Translated into Hebrew and English.* Bezalel Porten and and Ada Yardeni. 4 vols. Winona Lake, Ind., 1986–1999
Tg.	Targum
Tg. Neb.	*Targum of the Prophets*
Tg. Neof.	*Targum Neofiti*
Tg. Onq.	*Targum Onqelos*
Tg. Ps.-J.	*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
trans.	translation; translated by
UEE	*The UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology.* Edited by Julie Stauder-Porchet, Andréas Stauder, and Willeke Wendrich. Los Angeles, 2008–
Ugar.	Ugaritic
VO	*Vicino Oriente*
vol(s).	volume(s)
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
Vulg.	Vulgate
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
Word	*Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York*
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie*
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebräistik*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

Chapter 1

Introduction

I. Overview

The subject of this dissertation is the recognition displayed in certain texts of the Hebrew Bible of the diversity of the world's languages. The speech of human beings is not everywhere the same, but differs from place to place, by greater or lesser degrees. This linguistic plurality is a ubiquitous and enduring reality, as biblical authors were aware, yet their handling of it has yet not been fully or systematically examined by scholars. This dissertation is an attempt to analyse patterns in the distribution of texts in various books of the Hebrew Bible that make reference to linguistic diversity; to elucidate their functions in their literary contexts; to examine the conceptions of the nature of language revealed in them; and to understand their relations to their historical settings. It will attempt to treat comprehensively those texts which explicitly refer to linguistic diversity, and will consider many other texts which make implicit reference to this fact.

Linguistic diversity takes many forms. One language differs from another, one dialect differs from another, and one speaker's use of some dialect differs from another's. Naturally, then, references to linguistic diversity take many related forms, including to the fact that one's own language differs from "foreign" languages and that one's own language is itself not uniform. I will be concerned with references to all such forms of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. Since, however, the majority of texts that contain such references deal with the difference between the authors' own language and the languages of foreigners, references to foreign language will constitute my main focus.

Explicit references to linguistic diversity occur in a variety of texts in the Hebrew Bible. The most familiar and, arguably, most powerful case is the account of the building of the Tower of Babel, and the frustration of this project by Yahweh, through the confusion of tongues and the scattering of peoples throughout the world (Gen 11:1–9).[1] The influence of this short tale, which grapples with a universal element of human experience with deep insight, on later Jewish and Christian interpretation is difficult to estimate. But references to linguistic diversity are also present in other familiar texts, such as the conflict between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites (Judg 12)—which has given English the word "Shibboleth"—and the Rabshakeh's intimidating address in Hebrew, or rather "Judaean," to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a memorable ancient use of psychological warfare (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36//2 Chr 32). Examples of sensitivity to linguistic multiplicity that are more implicit also come in various forms. Such a case is the curious presence of the Aramaic phrase יגר שׂהדותא, "heap of witness," in the speech of Laban in a Hebrew narrative (Gen 31:27). Likewise, the unusual linguistic forms in Jethro's speech are implicit indications of that character's linguistic otherness (Exod 18).

Because these and related passages are present in biblical texts of various genres from all historical periods, an analysis of the depictions and conceptualizations of linguistic difference contained in the Hebrew Bible must form part of our understanding of biblical history, literature, and thought. This subject, therefore, merits careful study, which this dissertation undertakes. Among the questions that will be addressed are: What role was linguistic difference perceived to play in indicating or even establishing social distinctions (tribal, ethnic, etc.)? What was the particular significance, if any, of the Hebrew language for the biblical authors? Do references to linguistic diversity exhibit different forms and functions in

---

[1] Citations of the biblical books in this dissertation follow the chapter and verse numbering of the Hebrew text.

different genres of biblical literature? And what relationship can be discerned between Israel's changing historical circumstances and its attitudes towards foreign languages?

I intend to show that, despite the diversity of the evidence and development over time, implicit and explicit references to linguistic diversity constitute a persistent and pervasive feature of the Hebrew Bible. These references address an overlapping set of problems tied to some of the central concerns of the Hebrew Bible, and share a number of perspectives and assumptions. In particular, I will demonstrate how these references in various ways reflect a common conception of language as a marker of difference. I will argue that this notion of language as an indicator of difference is often the key to understanding references to linguistic diversity.

Given the universality of the experience of linguistic diversity, it is hoped that a study of the biblical authors' treatment of this topic will be interesting, instructive, and useful not merely to practitioners of biblical studies, but to a broader audience of historians, linguists, and literary scholars.

II. History of Research

A great deal of research on the Hebrew Bible is concerned with language in the sense that it takes as its focus the language of the Bible, be it from a historical, comparative, stylistic or other perspective. Despite this fact, very little research has treated the topic of language *in* the Hebrew Bible, that is, language as a subject matter per se, as mentioned, discussed, commented and reflected upon in the biblical texts.

In modern times, discussion of this topic was initiated by Edward Ullendorff, who published a short article in 1962 entitled "The Knowledge of Languages in the Old Testament."[2] Ullendorff was motivated in this study by what he regarded as two "astounding, but apparently scarcely noticed, linguistic problems": the "unusual polyglottal talents" of the Assyrian Rabshakeh, who speaks יהודית, "Judaean," as well as, presumably, Aramaic and Akkadian (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36); and the apparently easy communication between Israelites and Philistines in the period of the Judges. In his consideration of these issues, Ullendorff was prompted to point to a set of texts which displayed a conscious awareness of linguistic issues. These include the biblical aetiology of linguistic diversity, the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11:1–9); texts that make use of Aramaic (e.g., Jer 10:11); and texts that illustrate awareness of diversity and unity within the language of the biblical authors, the שפת כנען, "language of Canaan" (Isa 19:18). Overall, Ullendorff offers only tentative and suggestive answers to the important questions raised by these texts, closing with a statement about the necessity of further research into these matters.

In a subsequent article published in 1968, Ullendorff made reference to some of the same texts in a general cross-cultural survey of expressions of the kind "it's all Greek to me."[3] Ullendorff's treatment of this topic ranges from ancient to modern languages from Europe and Asia, including biblical and rabbinic evidence. In his discussion of the possible biblical expressions that indicate a strange, unknown language, Ullendorff considered the verb לעז (Ps 114:1) in biblical and later Hebrew; the phrase עמקי שפה וכבדי לשון, "deep-lipped and heavy-tongued" (Ezek 3:5–6; cf. Isa 33:19); and the language of Ashdod, אשדודית (Neh 13:24),

---

[2] Edward Ullendorff, "The Knowledge of Languages in the Old Testament," *BJRL* 44 (1961–2), 455–65.

[3] Edward Ullendorff, "C'est de l'hébreu pour moi!" *JSS* 13 (1968): 125–35. Ullendorff's title makes use of the French version of "it's all Greek to me," in which Hebrew is the paradigmatically unintelligible language.

concluding that the latter, as a non-Semitic language, is used as an exemplar of linguistic strangeness.[4]

In an article from 1980, Werner Weinberg offered an ordered presentation of texts in the Hebrew Bible that display "language consciousness."[5] This study included sections on "language names and words for language," "bilingualism and translation," and "attitude toward foreign languages," thus assigning to categories the passages to which Ullendorff had earlier pointed (though Weinberg cites neither of Ullendorff's articles). In these sections, a number of the texts to be discussed in this dissertation, such as prophetic passages which speak of the unintelligible language of a foreign conqueror (e.g., Isa 28:11; Jer 5:15) were listed. Weinberg's interest was broader than Ullendorff's, however, because he was concerned with the treatment of linguistic issues beyond linguistic diversity. Thus Weinberg has sections devoted to biblical references to phonetics, semantic change, speech deficiency, and style and rhetoric. Weinberg's article represents really a catalogue of passages, with only brief interpretative comments offered. Beyond the categories in which he presents this material, Weinberg does not attempt to relate these passages to one another.

This contrasts with the approach of Daniel Block, who, in 1984, examined biblical texts mentioning foreign language in order to answer a particular question: What role did language play in ancient Israelite perceptions of national identity?[6] Block was motivated to answer this question because he took issue with what he saw as a prevailing assumption in approaches to the history of the ancient Near East, namely that language may be treated "as the basic means

---

[4] Ullendorff's identification of "Ashdodite" will be challenged in Chapter 6.

[5] Werner Weinberg, "Language Consciousness in the OT," *ZAW* 92 (1980): 185–204. Repr. as "Language Consciousness in the Hebrew Bible," in *Essays on Hebrew* (ed. Paul Citrin; SFSHJ 46; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 51–73. Page references will be made to this later publication.

[6] Daniel I. Block, "The Role of Language in Ancient Israelite Perceptions of National Identity," *JBL* 103 (1984): 321–40.

of distinguishing various ethnic units in the ancient Near East."[7] In determining whether this held for ancient Israel and its neighbours, Block analysed the association between, on the one hand, biblical language-names and words for language, and, on the other, words for and names of people-groups. He also investigated texts which have an "antithetical" attitude towards foreign language. Block found that "the Hebrews at least seemed to have recognized a correlation between nations and their languages" but that "this does not mean that the correspondence was one nation/one language."[8] More broadly, Block claimed that "the importance of language as an indicator of kinship, especially for this region, should not be overemphasized," since in this area "language is less a function of nationality than of geography."[9] Thus, Block advanced the discussion of the topic of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible by integrating a detailed study of many relevant passages into an argument for a particular conclusion. Block also introduced relevant comparative Near Eastern materials into this discussion. Akkadian, Sumerian, Egyptian, and Hittite sources were cited to provide parallels and contrasts to the biblical evidence.

Since Block's article appeared, no sustained treatment of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible has been published, but one other study may be mentioned. In 1999, David Aaron investigated the place of Judaism's "holy language," לשון הקדש, in Jewish tradition. In this article, Aaron devoted several pages to the attitudes of the biblical authors towards their own language.[10] After discussing biblical names for Hebrew, and the association of Hebrew with the patriarch Jacob in contrast to the Aramaic of Laban (Gen 31:47), Aaron draws a largely

---

[7] Ibid., 322; the quotation is from Ignace J. Gelb, *Hurrians and Subarians* (SAOC 22; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), vi.

[8] Block, "National Identity," 339.

[9] Ibid., 338.

[10] David H. Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language," in vol. 16 of *Approaches to Ancient Judaism* (ed. Jacob Neusner; SFSHJ 209; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 49–107, at 55–64.

negative conclusion about the biblical situation: "There is no discrete notion that Hebrew had a unique value or purpose as will become the case in post-biblical eras . . . Hebrew during the biblical eras of Israelite religion . . . is not yet Judaism's language, let alone, a holy tongue."[11]

Independent of these treatments of ideas of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible stands an area of research which is nevertheless very relevant. Especially since Jonas Greenfield's article on "Aramaic Studies and the Bible" (1982), scholars have paid attention to deliberate stylistic representations, on the part of biblical authors, of the foreign speech of certain characters, through the use of unusual lexis and morphology (e.g., Laban in Gen 31).[12] In 1988 Stephen Kaufman was the first to refer to this practice as "style-switching," a term from sociolinguistics (on which see further below).[13] Gary Rendsburg and, more recently, Brian Bompiani have shown particular interest in this topic.[14]

This review of previous research into biblical texts that raise issues of a linguistic nature indicates that further study is justified on several grounds. Firstly, no extended analysis of these texts has yet appeared, and no sustained attempt has been made to understand these texts in relation to one another. Secondly, the articles of Ullendorff, Weinberg, and Block, which have the broadest scope, do not take into account the phenomenon of style-switching in biblical texts as a manifestation of the recognition of linguistic diversity. Ullendorff wrote,

---

[11] Ibid., 64.

[12] Jonas C. Greenfield, "Aramaic Studies and the Bible," in *Congress Volume: Vienna 1980* (ed. John A. Emerton; VTSup 32; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 110–30, at 129–30.

[13] Stephen A. Kaufman, "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof" *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Jerusalem, August 4–12, 1985, Panel Sessions Hebrew and Aramaic* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1988), 41–57, at 55.

[14] See especially Gary A. Rendsburg, "Linguistic Variation and the 'Foreign' Factor in the Hebrew Bible," IOS 15 (1995): 177–90; Brian A. Bompiani, "Style Switching: The Representation of the Speech of Foreigners in the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012). A revised portion of this dissertation has been published in idem, "Style Switching in the Jacob and Laban Narrative" *HS* 55 (2014): 43–57.

for instance: "The languages of Israel's neighbours . . . are not used to express the idea of linguistic strangeness or eccentricity."[15] However, this appears to be precisely what several instances of style-switching are designed to achieve. Thus it is important that style-switching be integrated into the study of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. Finally, the research so far conducted in this area does not reflect important developments in the study of ancient Hebrew and ancient Israel. Block's article appeared more than three decades ago, and is not informed by methods from sociolinguistics, which have in recent years been fruitfully applied to the study of ancient Hebrew (see below), and are extremely relevant to understanding the study of attitudes towards linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible.

III. Methodological Considerations: Sociolinguistics

In addition to the standard philological tools employed in biblical criticism, in this study I employ several concepts and principles drawn from sociolinguistics. This discipline usefully provides categories for analysing certain references to linguistic diversity that are found in the Hebrew Bible, and also offers a framework for relating these acknowledgements of linguistic diversity to social circumstances in Israelite history. I shall outline here the chief concerns and approaches of sociolinguistics, as well as some specific areas of relevance within the discipline.

As Suzanne Romaine and Ronald Wardhaugh lay out in their introductions to this field, sociolinguistics is a discipline within linguistics that studies the relationship between language use and its social setting, and in particular how linguistic variation and change

---

[15] Ullendorff, "C'est de l'hébreu," 132.

relate to social factors.[16] The fundamental principle motivating the sociolinguistic study of language is that language use, variety, and change cannot be understood without thorough consideration of the setting of language within a community of speakers. Indeed, William Labov, a sociolinguistic pioneer, claimed that a separate name for this discipline was inappropriate, "as it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social."[17]

Sociolinguistics begins by studying how specific variants in language use (e.g., in lexis, phonology, syntax, etc.) are distributed in a speech community. For instance, a variant may primarily be found in the speech of people of a certain age or sex, or of those belonging to a particular race or ethnicity, or of those who have a certain level of education or wealth. Alternatively, a linguistic variant may be restricted to particular speech contexts, such as formal speech, speech to a child, or written language. Through association with a particular group or setting, a linguistic feature may come to indicate prestige or stigma; and much variety in language use, and language change over time, can be related to speakers' efforts to avoid stigmatized linguistic features and seek prestigious ones. Linguistic variants that regularly co-occur form language varieties of differing scales (styles, registers, sociolects, and so on), the prestige of which is related to the position of their speakers in the speech community.

Many important phenomena have been isolated and studied by sociolinguists. For instance, "diglossia," described particularly by Charles Ferguson and Joshua Fishman, is the co-existence of two dialects or languages in one speech community, these two dialects/languages occupying hierarchically distinguished social settings and functions (e.g., formal/informal,

---

[16] Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (5th ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 13–15; Suzanne Romaine, *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2d ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 67–75.

[17] William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1972), xiii.

written/spoken, religious/profane).[18] Diglossia of this kind exists, for example, in Arabic-speaking societies, where Modern Standard (*fuṣḥa*) Arabic exists alongside a vernacular Arabic dialect.

Other focuses of sociolinguistic research are the related phenomena of style-switching and code-switching, which have been studied by many, including Carol Myers-Scotton, Penelope Eckert and John Rickford.[19] During the course of a single conversation, speakers may switch between two or more of the language varieties that are available in a speech community. Those varieties may be distinct languages, in which case the practice is referred to as code-switching, or they may be lesser varieties, in which case the term style-switching is used. This switching has been shown by Myers-Scotton, Eckert, Rickford, and others, to be related to contextual factors, such as audience and setting. In particular, it has been shown that through code- and style-switching a speaker can project or suppress a certain identity, because of the social value associated with particular language varieties, in order to achieve desired effects.

A final subject of sociolinguistic research that I shall mention here is language ideology, a notion developed in particular by Judith Irvine, Susan Gal, Kathryn Woolard, and Bambi Schieffelin.[20] A speech community may possess a developed and explicit set of beliefs about particular linguistic features or language varieties. In these language (alternatively "linguistic") ideologies, social prestige or stigma is expressed in praise or censure of particular words, pronunciations, and grammatical structures, or, in written language, of

---

[18] Charles A. Ferguson, "Diglossia," *Word* 15 (1959): 326–40; Joshua A. Fishman, "Bilingualism with and without Diglossia; Diglossia with and without Bilingualism," *JSI* 23 (1967): 29–38.

[19] Carol Myers-Scotton, *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford (eds.), *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[20] Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Polities, and Identities* (ed. Paul V. Kroskrity; Santa Fe, N.Mex.: School of America Research, 2000), 35–85; Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, "Language Ideology," *ARA* 23 (1994): 55–82.

particular writing systems, character forms, spellings, and punctuation. Moreover, the names given to particular languages by some speech community ("glottonyms") may be informed by particular attitudes towards those languages and their speakers, and thus express a community's language ideology.

The relevance of these concepts and areas of research in sociolinguistics for understanding references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible is manifest. Linguistic diversity is not an abstract phenomenon, but an embodied social reality. References to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible reflect this, imbuing difference in language with social significance, be it in distinguishing tribes (Judg 12:6), peoples (Gen 11:1–9), or communities of worship (Isa 19:18); in conveying loyalty or disloyalty (Neh 13:24); or in many other ways. In revealing the nature of the connections between the social and the linguistic, sociolinguistics proves extremely useful in investigating references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible.

IV. Contributions

I regard this study of attitudes towards linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible as adding to ongoing discourses within three areas of research: 1) the broader project of a sociolinguistic account of ancient Hebrew; 2) the study of references to and reflections upon the topic of language and linguistic diversity more broadly in the ancient Near East, and; 3) the investigation of Hebrew's rise to prominence as the language of Jews and Judaism in the late Second Temple period and rabbinic literature. The fact that this dissertation contributes to these different fields of study indicates that the topic of attitudes towards linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible exists at the intersection of important concerns in scholarship. In this dissertation, I do not attempt to integrate my findings thoroughly into these large areas of

study, but it is hoped that future research by myself or others will make use of my findings to further these debates.

A. Sociolinguistics and the Study of the Hebrew Bible

A sociolinguistic account of ancient Hebrew has long been considered a desideratum. Ullendorff encouraged scholars to "endeavour to shed more light on dialect geography and the influence of social stratification on the Hebrew of Biblical times."[21] In recent years, a marked increase in such study is apparent, and several important contributions to that field may be noted.

The methods, evidence, and motivations for a sociolinguistics of Hebrew were outlined by William Schniedewind in 2004.[22] Here we may note some of the unfortunately severe limitations of such study that Schniedewind points out. For one thing, our knowledge of ancient Hebrew is limited in various respects. Our only evidence of ancient Hebrew is written, and thus, we cannot hope to construct a sociolinguistics of ancient Hebrew in general, but rather only of the written language; moreover, this written corpus is fairly small, and as a result cannot be expected to attest to nearly all of the features of the ancient language, or do so in a representative fashion. Secondly, though it has increased steadily in recent decades, our knowledge of the social history of ancient Israel is incomplete in important areas. Archaeological and textual evidence can be used to reconstruct certain social realities of ancient Israel (family life, settlement patterns, economic organization, religion, and so on), but often only in general or broad terms; moreover our access to important yet

---

[21] Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 465.

[22] William M. Schniedewind, "Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew" *JHebS* 5 (2004), n.p. (cited 20 March 2013; Online: http://www.jhsonline.org/).

ephemeral social distinctions (e.g., gender, class, age) is inadequate. Finally, our ability to relate the Hebrew language to particular social conditions is greatly hampered by the fact that the texts of the Hebrew Bible often cannot be dated with certainty; indeed, they frequently reflect a process of redaction that associates them with several historical periods.

But while, for these reasons, a sociolinguistic analysis of ancient Hebrew must be incomplete, such an analysis is nonetheless valuable. Schniedewind himself has now produced "A Social History of Hebrew" through to the rabbinic period.[23] In this work, Schniedewind relies on the work of scholars who have identified diversity and change in the language, such as dialectical differences between Hebrew in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the diachronically distinct language varieties usually referred to as Archaic, Standard, and Late Biblical Hebrew. More deliberately than previous scholars, Schniedewind links these linguistic differences and changes to social factors, including state-formation and consolidation, conquest and exile, and imperialism. In the process, Schniedewind is able to elaborate on the ideological dimension of various aspects of language change in ancient Israel, including the standardization of language and orthography, and in this respect, Schniedewind's work intersects with the project of Seth Sanders. Sanders has, in numerous studies, sought to demonstrate a link between the emergence of an idea of Israelite nationhood, and a state-sponsored spread of a standardized Hebrew vernacular alongside a standardized script for representing it.[24]

---

[23] William M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). This work has been thoroughly reviewed by Aaron Koller, who points out some of its notable achievements, and some of its shortcomings, especially in the approach to Hebrew scribal practices, and the application of sociolinguistic theory. See Aaron Koller, "Present and Future of the Hebrew Past," review of William M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Classical Hebrew*. *Marginalia Review of Books* 23 June 2015 (n.p.; online: http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/present-and-future-of-the-hebrew-past-by-aaron-koller/).

[24] Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Traditions; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); idem, "What was the Alphabet For? The Rise of Written Vernaculars and the Making of Israelite National Literature," *Maarav* 11 (2004): 25–56.

Other scholars have carried out notable research into the sociolinguistics of ancient Hebrew. On the basis of supposedly colloquial expressions in the Hebrew Bible, Rendsburg has argued that a situation of diglossia obtained in pre-exilic Israel, specifically, that a "high," variety of Hebrew existed for use in formal contexts, alongside a "low" colloquial variety used in everyday speech.[25] Rendsburg contends that the "high" variety is what has come down to us in the Hebrew Bible as Standard Biblical Hebrew, while the "low" variety was preserved for centuries as a spoken language, and is reflected in Mishnaic Hebrew. Rendsburg's thesis has not gained widespread acceptance, because there is insufficient evidence that formal and colloquial Hebrew differed to such an extent as to justify the classification of "diglossia."[26] However, Rendsburg's work likely does demonstrate that socially-indexed differences existed.

In addition, recent significant contributions to the study of sociolinguistic issues in ancient Hebrew have been made by Francis Polak. Polak's focuses include: diglossia and societal bilingualism among the Judaeans of the Achaemenid period; distinct styles of written Hebrew and their social contexts; the differences between the oral and the written language; and sociocultural dynamics of dialogue and negotiation in ancient Hebrew.[27]

The work of these scholars indicates the value of sociolinguistic approaches to the texts of the Hebrew Bible, and this dissertation contributes to this wider discourse by advancing

---

[25] Gary A. Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1990).

[26] For specific critiques, see Scobie P. Smith, "The Question of Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew," in *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; JSNTSup 193; Studies in New Testament Greek 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 37–52; and Sverrir Ólafsson, "On Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew and Its Graphic Representation," *FO* 28 (1991): 193–205.

[27] See, among others, Frank H. Polak, "Parler de la langue: Labov, Fishman et l'histoire de l'hébreu biblique," *Yod* 18 (2013), n.p. (cited 19 September 2014; online: http://www.yod.revues.org); idem, "Forms of Talk in Hebrew Biblical Narrative: Negotiations, Interaction, and Sociocultural Context," in *Literary Construction of Identity in the Ancient World* (ed. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 167–98; idem, "Sociolinguistics: A Key to the Typology and the Social Background of Biblical Hebrew," *HS* 47 (2006): 115–62; idem, "The Oral and the Written: Syntax, Stylistics and the Development of Biblical Prose Narrative," *JANES* 26 (1998): 59–105.

discussion of particular issues in the sociolinguistics of ancient Hebrew. In the case of style-switching, for instance, I address in greater depth than previous researchers some significant methodological difficulties in detecting its occurrence in the Hebrew Bible, and re-evaluate the number of texts in which this device can be safely identified. In addition, this dissertation significantly advances the study of ancient Israel's language ideology, by focusing on biblical attitudes towards linguistic diversity, and especially towards foreign languages.

B. The Topic of Language across the Ancient Near East

In the literatures of ancient Near Eastern cultures beyond Israel, references to linguistic issues, including linguistic diversity, occur in various forms. And while, generally speaking, this topic has been more often treated as a distinct area for study in Egyptology than in Sumerology and Assyriology, yet in all three areas scholars have investigated ancient attitudes towards language and languages.

The Egyptian situation has been laid out by Sami Uljas, building on earlier work by Sergio Donadoni, Mario Liverani, and Serge Sauneron.[28] The *Tale of Sinuhe* (perhaps dating from the 19th century) vividly illustrates the linguistic difference of various peoples through the experience of a single individual, while in the *Hymn to Aten* (14th century) the general condition of linguistic diversity is attributed to the gods. The letters from Amarna attest to a multilingual bureaucracy that carried out relations with Egypt's close and distant neighbours

---

[28] Sami Uljas, "Linguistic Consciousness," *UEE* 2013 n.p.; Sergio Donadoni, "Gli Egiziani e le lingue degli altri," *VO* 3 (1980): 1–14; Mario Liverani, "Stereotipi della lingua 'altra' nell'Asia anteriore antica," *VO* 3 (1980): 15–31; Serge Sauneron, "La différenciation des langages d'après la tradition Égyptienne," *BIFAO* 60 (1960): 31–41.

in forms of Akkadian in the 14th century;[29] but in other texts, the Egyptian language is associated with Egyptian political superiority. For instance, in the inscriptions of Ramesses III (12th century), foreign captives are taught Egyptian and forget their native tongues.[30] Thus, relations with foreign peoples naturally played a role in shaping Egyptian attitudes towards foreign languages. In addition, the long history of the Egyptian literary tradition stimulated recognition of linguistic issues. As later copyists were confronted with the archaisms of older texts they gained an awareness of language change, although evidence of grammatical conceptualization is slim.

In Mesopotamia, too, these two factors—scribal tradition and relations with foreign peoples—played a role in the forms in which references to linguistic issues are attested. A sophisticated degree of linguistic awareness, including in the areas of lexis and grammar, is displayed in relation to the long history of a bilingual Akkadian-Sumerian scribal culture, as has been pointed out by Wolfram von Soden, Dominque Charpin, Irving Finkel, and others.[31] This long history may have led to distinctive ideas about the unique nature of the relationship between these two languages, and the possibility of translation between them, as has been suggested by Aaron Shaffer and Stefano Seminara.[32]

---

[29] See, for instance, Mario Liverani, "Political Lexicon and Political Ideologies in the Amarna Letters," *Berytus* 31 (1983): 41–56; William L. Moran, "Some Reflections on Amarna Politics," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots* (ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin and Michael Sokoloff; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 559–72.

[30] KRI V: 91.6–7.

[31] Wolfram von Soden, *Zweisprachigkeit in der geistigen Kultur Babyloniens* (SÖAW 235:1; Vienna: Böhlau, 1960); Dominique Charpin, *Writing, Law, and Kingship in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (trans. Jane Marie Todd; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Irving Finkel, "Strange Byways in Cuneiform Writing," in *The Idea of Writing: Play and Complexity* (ed. Alex de Voogt and Irving Finkel; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 9–25.

[32] Aaron Shaffer, "The Tower of Babel" (unpublished lecture; delivered at the University of California, Berkeley; Yale University, New Haven; and elsewhere, 1977); manuscript kindly made available by Peter Machinist. Stefano Seminara, "The Babylonian Science of the Translation and the Ideological Adjustment of the Sumerian Text to the 'Target Culture,'" in *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena: Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Heritage Project, Held in Chicago, USA, October 27–31, 2000* (ed. A. Panaino and G. Pettinato; Milan: Università di Bologna, IsIAO, 2002), 245–55.

In the "Spell of Nudimmud," within the Sumerian epic *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, the origins of linguistic diversity appear to be assigned to an act of Enki, in a way that Samuel Kramer related to the biblical Tower of Babel account.[33] Elsewhere, language is highlighted in relations with foreign peoples, especially in the Neo-Assyrian period. Carlo Zaccagnini has discussed ethnic, including linguistic, aspects in the characterization of the enemies of Neo-Assyria, and Peter Machinist has considered the ways in which Assyria was defined in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, making mention of the role that Assyrian Akkadian played in Assyrian identity discourse.[34] The issue of the increasing use of Aramaic in Neo-Assyrian internal and external affairs, explored notably by Hayim Tadmor, and more recently by Martti Nissinen, Holger Gzella and others, explicitly surfaces in some texts, including Sargon II's angry letter berating an official for corresponding with him in Aramaic rather than Akkadian.[35]

This dissertation allows us to place ancient Israel in this broader context, and to reflect upon the similarities and differences in the forms of references towards linguistic diversity that are found in the Hebrew Bible and these other literatures. I show that the particular circumstances of the history of Israel, including invasion by more powerful nations and loss of national sovereignty to an imperial power, have conditioned biblical attitudes towards

---

[33] Samuel N. Kramer, "Man's Golden Age: A Sumerian Parallel to Genesis XI. 1," *JAOS* 63 (1943): 191–4; and idem, "The 'Babel of Tongues': A Sumerian Version," *JAOS* 88 (1968): 108–11.

[34] Carlo Zaccagnini, "The Enemy in the Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The 'Ethnographic' Description," in vol. 2 of *Mesopotamien und Seine Nachbarn: Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. Jahrtausent v. Chr.* (ed. Hans-Jörg Nissen and Joannes Renger; Berlin: Reimer, 1982), 409–424; Peter Machinist, "Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millenium B.C.," in *Anfänge politischen Denkens in de Antike: Die nahöstlichen Kulturen und die Griechen* (ed. Kurt Raaflaub; Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993), 77–104.

[35] *CT* 54 no. 10; see, for instance, Hayim Tadmor, "On the Role of Aramaic in the Assyrian Empire," in *Near Eastern Studies Dedicated to H. I. H. Prince Takahito Mikasa on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday.* (ed. Masao Mori, Hideo Ogawa and Mamoru Yoshikawa; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), 419–26.; Martti Nissinen, "Outlook: Aramaeans Outside of Syria, I. Assyria," in *The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria* (ed. Herbert Niehr; HO 1.106; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 273–96; Holger Gzella, *A Cultural History of Aramaic: From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam* (HO 1.3; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 104–56.

foreign languages. As a result it is to be expected that references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible show some differences from those found in Egyptian and Mesopotamian writings.

C. Hebrew's Emerging Significance in the Late Second Temple Period and Beyond

In non-biblical Jewish literature of the late Second Temple period, an increasing number of references to Hebrew can be found, and the ideas expressed about Hebrew in these references differ significantly from those found in the Hebrew Bible. This sets apart this literature as a subject of research distinct from the biblical books in the matter of linguistic diversity. This holds despite the fact that in general, a sharp distinction should not be made, in historical context and community of origin, between these corpora. Many of the attitudes expressed in the late Second Temple period literature prefigure features of rabbinic language ideology, and we may mention here the scholarly perspectives on certain of these texts.

2 Maccabees 7 contains an account of the brutal martyrdom of a Jewish woman and her seven sons at the hands of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who were put to death for refusing to eat pork. This story contains several references to the "ancestral [πάτριος, πατρώιος] language" of the Jews (2 Macc 7:18, 21, 27), in which the martyrs exhort one another to die. Jan Willem van Henten has shown that this most likely refers to Hebrew, and that the close association of this language with the "ancestral customs" and "laws of the ancestors" given through Moses indicates that the language possesses an ethnic and religious significance.[36] Moreover, the emphasis on this language in the context of resistance to Antiochus gives Hebrew a political

---

[36] Van Henten argues this on the grounds that 2 Macc was composed in Jerusalem during the Hasmonean period, when Hebrew was used as a national cultural icon; and further that the only other serious candidate—Aramaic—was a language used widely, so would not express the distinctive identity that seems to be in view here. See Jan Willem van Henten, "The Ancestral Language of the Jews in 2 Maccabees," in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda* (ed. William Horbury; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 53–68.

importance. This is in keeping with the use of the Hebrew language and the Palaeo-Hebrew script, for instance on coinage, first in the late fourth century B.C.E., but especially later as emblems of Jewish political sovereignty in Judea under the Hasmoneans,[37] the likely compositional setting of 2 Maccabees.[38]

In the prologue to the Greek translation of the Wisdom of Sirach (dated in the work to 132 B.C.E.), the translator remarks upon the unique expressive power of Hebrew in comparison with other languages into which it might be translated (lines 21–22).[39] In this text, Stefan Schorch detects the first signs of the concept of the original, "ideal text," and a reflection of the debate about the relative status of a scriptural translation in comparison with that ideal original.[40] This debate is attested also in the *Letter of Aristeas*, and continues well into the rabbinic period (e.g., *m. Sotah* 7), as Willem Smelik has documented.[41]

In the *Book of Jubilees* (second century B.C.E.), Hebrew appears as the revealed "language of creation" (*Jub.* 12.25–26). This phrase is normally taken to mean that Hebrew is the language in which God created the world, since, as Milka Rubin has shown, this theme is well-attested in rabbinic works (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 18.4).[42] This language was the original tongue of all humanity, forgotten at the confusion of man's speech at Babel, and, at God's command, it is

---

[37] See, e.g., Kevin Butcher, "Numismatics in Roman Palestine," *OEBA*, n.p.

[38] See, e.g., Robert Doran, *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), xv–xx.

[39] This text also contains the earliest reference to the language as Hebrew (Εβραϊστὶ); see Chapter 2 below.

[40] Stefan Schorch, "The Pre-Eminence of the Hebrew Language and the Emerging Concept of the 'Ideal Text' in Late Second Temple Judaism," in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime'on Centre, Papa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006* (ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér; JSJSup 127; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 43–54.

[41] Willem F. Smelik, *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); idem, "Language Selection and the Holy Tongue in Early Rabbinic Literature," in *Interpretation, Religion and Culture in Midrash and Beyond: Proceedings of the 2006 and 2007 SBL Midrash Sections* (ed. Lieve M. Teugels and Rivka Ulmer; JIC 6; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2008), 91–151.

[42] Milka Rubin, "The Language of Creation or the Primordial Language: A Case of Cultural Polemics in Antiquity," *JJS* 49 (1998): 306–33, at 309–17. So also Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language," 73; Schorch, "Pre-Eminence of the Hebrew Language," 47.

retaught to Abraham by an angel so that he might read texts written by his ancestors (*Jub.* 12.25–27). As Aaron notes, *Jubilees* thus imbues Hebrew with both a universal and a divine significance, and also a particular significance for the Jewish people: Hebrew is first and foremost the language of heaven, but on earth it serves to mark off Jews as Abraham's heirs and the people of God's covenant.[43]

Similarly, the documents discovered at Qumran show a clear preference for Hebrew as the language for composing religious works, which attests to an association of this language with divine matters. Jonathan Campbell and William Schniedewind, following Chaim Rabin, have written of the linguistic ideology contained in and revealed by this use of Hebrew, and in particular in the use at Qumran of a form of that language which is very distinctive, especially in orthography.[44] Indeed, it is in a fragment from Qumran that the phrase לשׁון הקודשׁ, "the holy language," common in rabbinic literature, is first attested (4Q464), though it is uncertain whether Hebrew is intended. In the Qumran fragment, this phrase is used alongside שׂפה ברורה, the "purified speech" which, in Zeph 3:9, Yahweh will bestow upon all the nations. The use of these two phrases together may suggest, as Esther Eshel and Michael Stone have argued, that Hebrew is here imagined as the language that will one day be spoken universally among mankind.[45] The origins of the phrase לשׁון הקודשׁ are not clear, if we are to look for an explanation beyond the simple fact that it was coined to designate Hebrew as "the language of holiness, the holy language." A fuller expression לשׁן בית קדשׁא, "the language of

---

[43] Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language," 73.

[44] Jonathan Campbell, "Hebrew and Its Study at Qumran," in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda* (ed. William Horbury; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 38–52; William M. Schniedewind, "Linguistic Ideology in Qumran Hebrew," in *Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (ed. Takamitsu Muraoka and John E. Elwolde; Brill: Leiden, 2000), 245–55; Chaim Rabin, "The Historical Background of Qumran Hebrew," in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin; ScrHier 4; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1958), 144–61.

[45] Esther Eshel and Michael E. Stone, "The Holy Language at the End of Days in Light of a New Fragment Found at Qumran," *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 169–77 [Hebrew]. Eshel and Stone note that a universal tongue of humanity at the end of days is also envisaged in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* 25.3.

the house of holiness," attested in Targumic texts (e.g. *Tg. Neof.* to Gen 11:1), has suggested to some that לשׁון הקודשׁ referred originally to the "language of the sanctuary," the language in which the Temple service was performed. Alternatively קודשׁ may refer to Yahweh, Israel's Holy One.[46]

This brief overview of attitudes towards Hebrew attested in late Second Temple period literature demonstrates that many tenets of later rabbinic thought regarding Hebrew were already in existence at this time—Hebrew as God's language, and the language of creation; Hebrew as the original language of humanity; Hebrew as the language of God's people; etc. Other themes that emerge later and form part of the language ideology of rabbinic Judaism are the cosmic significance of the Hebrew alphabet and the unique role of Hebrew in effective prayer and study, as Smelik and Bernard Spolsky have explored.[47] Additionally, the tradition of Hebrew as the "holy language" among the Samaritans has been examined by Abraham Tal.[48]

In this dissertation these attitudes towards Hebrew from the late Second Temple period and beyond will occasionally be referred to in order to elucidate the biblical material, or show how a particular biblical theme is related to one attested in later Judaism. However, the study of these attitudes is a major area of research in itself, and therefore they will not be treated in depth in this dissertation. The relationship of my study of attitudes towards linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible to the study of these later attitudes towards Hebrew is as an important backdrop to research. By examining the attitudes expressed in the texts considered

---

[46] See Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language," 74–75.

[47] Smelik, *Rabbis, Language, and Translation*; see also Bernard Spolsky, "Jewish Multilingualism in the First Century: An Essay in Historical Sociolinguistics," in *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages* (ed. Joshua A. Fishman; vol. 1 of *Contributions to the Sociology of Jewish Languages*; ed. Joshua A. Fishman; Brill: Leiden, 1985), 35–50.

[48] Abraham Tal, "'Hebrew Language' and 'Holy Tongue' between Judea and Samaria," in *Samaria, Samarians, Samaritans: Studies on Bible, History and Linguistics* (ed. by József Zsengellér; SJ 66; StSa 6; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 187–201.

authoritative by the communities among whom Hebrew became so highly regarded, we gain a more sensitive understanding of the exegetical "raw materials" furnished by the Hebrew Bible, and perhaps therefore of the origin of the later traditions. In particular, in my final chapter, I shall specifically reflect upon what can be discerned about the attitudes of the biblical authors towards their own language.

V. Plan of the Dissertation

Following the present introductory first chapter, the second chapter is concerned with the terminology used to indicate linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. I offer in it an analysis of the semantic range of words meaning "language" in the Hebrew Bible, including the synecdochic use of Hebrew לָשׁוֹן and Aramaic לִשָּׁן as "a linguistic community." In light of sociolinguistic observations on language-naming practices, the five names of particular languages that are found in the Hebrew Bible are examined to see what distinctions they assume or impose between peoples. These considerations allow me to address the question of whether a distinction between language and dialect is recognized in the Hebrew Bible, and of how closely peoplehood and language are associated in these texts, in theory and practice.

In Chapter 3, I continue to pursue the relationship between peoples and language, with references to texts that describe the origins of linguistic diversity and those that may predict future changes to the world's linguistically diverse situation. The origins of linguistic diversity are addressed, though a consideration of the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11:1–9) and the Table of Nations (Gen 10), in light of potentially relevant comparative material. I investigate the presentation of linguistic and national diversity as closely linked in these texts. I also assess Yahweh's role in confusing the language of humanity in the Babel episode, and

the story's possibly negative evaluation of the world's linguistically diverse condition. Next I examine several prophetic texts that may predict a change in the world's linguistic situation in the future, and consider whether these suggest that Hebrew has a unique religious function. Finally I discuss the issue of whether divine language, the speech of heaven, is distinguished from terrestrial human language by the biblical authors.

The subject of the fourth chapter is style-switching in the Hebrew Bible. I give an overview of sociolinguistic research into the switching of style, which will involve introducing some distinctions in the forms that such switching takes, various factors that condition it, and the numerous goals that it may be used to achieve. As noted above, several scholars have detected the use of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible, and have attributed to it the purpose of conveying the linguistic otherness of a foreign character or environment. I address the significant methodological difficulties that confront us in attempting to detect the use of this device in the Hebrew Bible, and apply a set of refined criteria for detection to several cases: Gen 31, Exod 18, Num 23–24, Judg 12, Isa 21, and Ruth. These case studies reveal that the device is less widespread than has been supposed, and that in some cases the device is used to convey foreignness not, but other kinds of linguistic difference, such as archaism. I then analyse the cases that may be considered secure to determine what they reveal about the attitudes towards foreign language among the biblical authors, including the specific respects in which the authors of these passages recognized that languages differ, and the possibility that there is, as has been suggested, something distinctively Israelite, in the context of the ancient Near East, about the use of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible to represent foreignness; or that, conversely, style-switching is intended by the biblical authors who use it to convey Israel's distinctiveness.

In Chapter 5 I consider two instances in particular in which code-switching is clearly at issue in the Hebrew Bible, and is associated with a boundary dividing the Hebrew-speaking in-group, Israel/Judah, from an Aramaic-speaking out-group. In Jer 10:11, a brief, carefully worded Aramaic message against idolatry is embedded in a Hebrew context. I consider the relevance of the author's probable sociolinguistic context for determining the purpose(s) of this code-switch. In particular, the likely social significance of Aramaic for the author and his audience is explored. I next examine the reference to code-switching in the episode of the Rabshakeh's speech at the wall of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36). Here, the Judaean officials' request that the Rabshakeh code-switch from Judaean to Aramaic serves an important structuring device in the narrative, and is carefully phrased to reflect the relations of power between the participants. The question of the source of the Rabshakeh's knowledge of Hebrew will also be addressed. Finally, the omission of the reference to code-switching in the parallel account to the Rabshakeh episode in 2 Chr 32 is addressed, and is seen to be closely connected with the Chronicler's goals in writing his history, and perhaps with his specific sociolinguistic situation.

Chapter 6 examines a set of related passages, largely from prophetic literature, that concern the invasion of Israel/Judah by an unnamed people who speak a foreign language. In Jer 5:15 and Deut 28:49 this prediction is stated most fully. It is alluded to in Isa 28:11, and apparently a reversal of this prediction is found in Isa 33:19. In Ezek 3:5–6, the elements of this prediction are redeveloped to convey a hypothetical situation. I argue that these passages attest to a prophetic trope within ancient Israel, that of the "alloglot invader," and I analyse the key language used to express this trope, and the force and meaning of the prediction of invasion by alloglots. A possible occurrence of this trope in narrative (the Rabshakeh episode) is discussed at this point. After considering the relationship between the uses of the trope in these various passages, I offer some observations concerning the history of this

prophetic tradition in the Hebrew Bible. I then examine the similarities between the image

presented in these passages—a people who are both linguistically other and rapaciously

violent—and the Greek concept of barbarity.

The focus of the seventh chapter is references to foreign language in the books of Ezra-

Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel; a single verse in Genesis 42 will also be discussed. Ezra-

Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel reflect a related set of experiences and perspectives, stemming

from the postexilic (Achaemenid to Hellenistic) period in which the relationship between the

diasporic Judaean people, their former homeland, and their historic language is considerably

different from the relationship between these that had obtained in the kingdom of Judah

before its destruction. Relevant to our discussion, these books contain a disproportionately

high number of references to languages and linguistic issues, in comparison with the rest of

biblical literature. I examine the forms of references to linguistic diversity that appear in these

books. For one thing, several references to translation and interpretation occur, most

frequently in the context of the Persian imperial administration (e.g., Ezra 4:7; Esth 8:9). In

addition, the bilingual books of Ezra and Daniel vividly present the reality of linguistic

diversity, also in association with imperial administration; however, Aramaic plays quite a

different role in each book, as I demonstrate. Finally, I explore the suggestion of linguistic

nationalism that is contained in Nehemiah's censure of Judaean men whose children spoke

Ashdodite rather than Judaean (Neh 13). I set these various forms of references to linguistic

diversity in the context of the new linguistic situation of Judaeans in the Persian period,

which appears to have involved widespread bilingualism.

In Chapter 8 I draw some conclusions from the research carried out in this dissertation. I

reflect upon the overall picture that emerges from the Hebrew Bible, through a consideration

of several issues: the diachronic distribution of references to linguistic diversity; the role of

empire in shaping biblical attitudes towards foreign language; the biblical authors' attitudes towards their own language; and the general significance of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. Finally, I shall indicate some desirable directions that future research on language in the Hebrew Bible might take.

Chapter 2

The Language of Languages in the Hebrew Bible

I. Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the terminology of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. First, an analysis will be offered of the Hebrew and Aramaic words used for "a language" in the Bible, לָשׁוֹן, לִשָּׁן, and שָׂפָה. The range of meanings of these words in the Hebrew Bible will be explored, as will their use to denote "a language." I shall then consider the five names of languages mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, יְהוּדִית, "Judaean," אֲרָמִית, "Aramaic," אַשְׁדּוֹדִית, "Ashdodite," שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן, "language of Canaan," and לְשׁוֹן כַּשְׂדִּים, "language of the Chaldeans." Sociolinguistic considerations about language-naming practices will be brought to bear on these biblical names. A word for unintelligible language, לָעֵז, will also be examined.

Throughout these discussions, a related set of questions will be borne in mind: What distinctions are associated with linguistic difference in the Hebrew Bible? What distinctions are made between languages, and within them? What distinctions are made through language? These questions will allow us to explore, in particular, two important issues: the nature of the relationship between ethnic and linguistic diversity, between a people and its language, that is assumed to exist in these texts; and the recognition (or lack thereof) in the Hebrew Bible of a distinction between language and dialect—of varieties of languages that differ in order of magnitude.

II. Words Meaning "a Language" in the Hebrew Bible

Three terms are used in the Hebrew Bible with the meaning "a language," in a total of approximately 35 instances: Hebrew לשון (18 times) and שפה (10), and Aramaic לשן (7).[1] This section will examine the meaning and usage of these words, including their relation to one another; their distribution in the Hebrew Bible; issues of language and peoplehood; and the language/dialect distinction.

A. לשׁון *(Heb.), "Tongue; Speech, Talk; a Language"*

The word most commonly and widely used to indicate "a language" in the Hebrew Bible is לָשׁוֹן, *lāšôn*.[2] I shall here briefly outline the wide range of meanings of this word, before focussing on its use to mean "a language."

לשׁון (fem.; pl. לשׁנות) has the anatomical meaning "tongue," and is used in this sense in reference to humans (e.g., Judges 7:5), animals (e.g., Exod 11:7), and, in one case, a divine being (Isa 30:27). The word is most frequently used in contexts that invoke the tongue's function as an organ of speech, as in 2 Sam 23:2: "[Yahweh's] word is upon my tongue [ומלתו על לשוני]"; and Ps 12:4: "May Yahweh cut off . . . the tongue that makes great boasts [לשון מדברת גדלות]."[3] The word can also refer to items that resemble tongues in shape (technically a

---

[1] English "language" has several meanings, including "a (particular) language," "wording, phraseology" ("poetic language"), the human faculty for speech ("language separates us from the animals"), and "profanity" (see *OED* at "language," definition 2e). In the discussion in this chapter, only the meaning "a (particular) language" is examined in depth for the Hebrew and Aramaic terms.

[2] Transliterations of biblical Hebrew and Aramaic follow the conventions of the "academic style" outlined in *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (ed. Billie Jean Collins; 2d ed.; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), §5.1.1. The "general-purpose style" (§5.1.2) is used for transliterations of the names of Hebrew letters and of vowels in the Tiberian system.

[3] Unless otherwise stated, translations of the Hebrew Bible are taken from NRSV. Modifications to NRSV are noted, except that NRSV's "the LORD" is consistently changed to "Yahweh."

metaphorical semantic value), including bodies of water (bays or gulfs—Josh 15:2; Isa 11:15), bars of gold (Josh 7:21, 24), and flames (e.g., Isa 5:24).

In yet other cases, the reference is to what is produced by the bodily organ, that is, speech or talk. Thus לשון may be a particular act or acts of speech, as in Isa 3:8: "Judah has fallen, because their talk and their deeds [לשונם ומעלליהם] are against Yahweh." Furthermore, this may be the ability to speak, or speech as a means of communication: "death and life are in the power of language [ביד לשון]" (Prov 18:21).

Most commonly in this use as "speech," לשון refers to some manner or kind of speech. In this sense, לשון is often used in the book of Proverbs in association with a noun denoting falsehood or deceit (שקר, מרמה, רמיה) to indicate speech of a false nature, lying, as in Prov 21:6: "Getting treasures by false speech [בלשון שקר] is fleeting vapour and a deadly snare."[4] A specific nuance of לשון as "manner of speech" is the use of the word to indicate the distinctive mode of speech of a particular community, a language.[5] For instance, in Babylon Daniel learns "the language of the Chaldeans [לשון כשדים]" (Dan 1:4). One particularly bad type of speech, namely accusation, gossip or slander, may be indicated by לשון without further qualification: "Do not let the slanderer [איש לשון] be established in the land" (Ps 140:12).

As Tamar Sovran points out, the use of לשון for "speech, talk" is (or originated as) metonymy, "the act of referring to one thing by the name of a closely related thing or notion."[6] Thus, tongue, the organ associated with speech, acquires the meaning "speech." In

---

[4] NRSV modified. Similarly Prov 6:17; 12:19; 21:6; 26:28; Pss 52:5; 109:2; 120:2,3.

[5] The technical language or jargon belonging to a particular profession may be indicated by לשון in לשון למודים, "the language of the learned," in Isa 50:4. This meaning is clearly attested for the Akkadian cognate *lišānu*, as in *lišān kuttimmi*, "the (technical) language of the silversmith," and *lišān purkulli* "the (technical) language of the seal cutter"; see *CAD* L 213b–214a.

[6] Tamar Sovran, "Metonymy and Synecdoche," *EHLL*, n.p.

poetic texts, which make use of imagery and ambiguity, it can be difficult to distinguish this metonymic use of לשון from the anatomical meaning: "your tongue/speech is like a sharp razor" (Ps 52:2).[7]

1. לשון as "a Language"

Out of a total of 117 occurrences of לשון in the Hebrew Bible, 18 (that is, roughly 15%) clearly refer to "a language."[8] They are listed here for reference, since they will form the basis of much discussion in this study. Many of these verses contain significant interpretative difficulties. These are not remarked upon here, but will rather be discussed later on in this and subsequent chapters as I analyse each passage throughout the dissertation:

1. Gen 10:5: "These are the descendants of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language [איש ללשנו], by their families, in their nations."

2. Gen 10:20: "These are the descendants of Ham, by their families, their languages [ללשנתם], their lands, and their nations."

3. Gen 10:31: "These are the descendants of Shem, by their families, their languages [ללשנתם], their lands, and their nations."

4. Deut 28:49: "Yahweh will bring a nation from far away . . . a nation whose language you do not understand [גוי אשר לא תשמע לשנו]"

5. Isa 28:11: "Truly, in a stammering speech and in a foreign language [ובלשון אחרת] he will speak to this people"[9]

6. Isa 33:19: "No longer will you see the fierce(?) people [עם נועז], the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend, stammering in a language that you cannot understand [נלעג לשון אין בינה]."

7. Isa 66:18: "For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all the nations and languages [לקבץ את כל הגוים והלשנות]"[10]

---

[7] Block provides useful tables illustrating the distribution of the various meanings of Heb. לשון / Aram. לשן, and שפה in the Hebrew Bible. Block, "National Identity," 324–25.

[8] Other possible instances will be discussed below.

[9] NRSV modified.

8. Jer 5:15: "I am going to bring upon you a nation from far away … a nation whose language you do not know [גוי לֹא תדע לשׁנו], nor can you understand what they say."

9. Ezek 3:5: "For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language [וכבדי לשׁון], but to the house of Israel"

10. Ezek 3:6: "not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language [וכבדי לשׁון], whose words you cannot understand."

11. Zech 8:23: "In those days ten men from all the languages of the nations [מכל לשׁנות הגוים] shall take hold of a Judaean, . . . saying, 'Let us go with you'"[11]

12. & 13. Esth 1:22: "he [King Ahasuerus] sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province according to its own script and to every people according to own language [אל עם ועם כלשׁונו], declaring that every man should be master in his own house and speak according to the language of his people [ומדבר כלשׁון עמו]."

14. Esth 3:12: "an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written . . . to every province according to its own script and every people according to its own language [ועם ועם כלשׁונו]"

15. & 16. Esth 8:9: "an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded . . . to every province according to its own script and to every people according to its own language [ועם ועם כלשׁנו], and also to the Judaeans according to their script and their language [וכלשׁונם]."[12]

17. Dan 1:4: "[the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility], young men without physical defect and handsome . . . and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans [וללמדם ספר ולשׁון כשׂדים]."[13]

18. Neh 13:24: "and half of their children spoke Ashdodite, and they could not speak Judaean, but the language of various peoples [וכלשׁון עם ועם]."[14]

2. Syntax

Some syntactical features of these uses of לשׁון may be noted that will permit a comparison of the range of use of this word with the use of שׂפה later on. In eight cases, לשׁון occurs with a

---

[10] NRSV modified.

[11] NRSV modified.

[12] NRSV modified.

[13] NRSV modified.

[14] NRSV modified.

pronominal suffix. In four cases, לשון is the *nomen regens* in a construct chain, and in four cases it is the *nomen rectum*. In nine cases a preposition is prefixed to לשון (most frequently the *kaf* preposition, "according to" six times). In four cases, לשון is the direct object of a verb, while it is the subject in none. In twelve cases לשון is definite or is in a definite noun phrase.[15] The definite article is prefixed only once to לשון, and לשון is modified only once by an adjective.[16]

3. Semantic Considerations: Scale

The plural of לשון is a true plural, meaning "languages" (four cases), but the nature of the distinction between languages is not clear from these passages. Specifically, it is not clear from these passages how broad or narrow a לשון was for the biblical authors, or whether there was a definite or consistent conception of the range of coverage of a לשון. That is, we cannot tell from these passages alone whether לשון could refer both to a language and also to the subdivision of a language that we would refer to as a dialect.[17] Nor can we tell whether לשון could refer to a language family, the larger class of which we say that individual languages form a part. In most of these passages, the boundaries of a לשון seem to correspond to the boundaries of a people or nation, expressed generally (עם, גוי) or specifically (כשדים, היהודים). But since the extents of peoples and nations are not uniform or consistent in Hebrew Bible,[18] the extent of a לשון is correspondingly vague. This issue will be considered further below,

---

[15] Thirteen, if כשדים in Dan 1:4 is taken as definite.

[16] The adjectives in construct with לשון in Isa 33:19 and Ezek 3:5–6 describe this לשון, and in that sense they modify it, but their gender and number are explained with reference to עם.

[17] On the complicated issue of defining language and dialect, see Romaine, *Language in Society*, 1–18. More important than the intrinsic size or scope of a language vs. a dialect seem to be their relational properties: languages (can) consist of more than one dialect; and dialects are always part of some language.

[18] Thus עם, for instance, can refer to Judah (1:5), all Israel (Exod 1:10) and even all of mankind (Gen 11:1). The term apparently expresses relational properties about a group, rather than a property of magnitude.

with reference to the names used for particular languages in the Hebrew Bible, and an analysis of the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11:1–9) and the Table of Nations (Gen 10) in the next chapter.

4. לשון as "Linguistic Community"

In at least one of the cases listed above, Isa 66:18, לשון cannot refer to a language per se: "I am coming to gather all nations and languages [לקבץ את כל הגוים והלשנות]; and they shall come and see my glory."[19] Languages are not physical realities that can be gathered, nor are they subjects of sense perceptions that they could see Yahweh's glory. Rather in this case לשון refers to the speakers of a language, that is, to a group bound by a common language, a linguistic community. This is an instance of synecdoche—the reference to a thing by the name for one of its parts or elements, and it is also attested for Aramaic לשן and Akkadian *lišānu*.[20] In Isa 66, the linguistic dimension of these communities does not appear to be emphasized, and לשון appears to be simply a poetic parallel for גוי.

In two other occurrences of Hebrew לשון, the word may stand for the human speakers of a language.

One of these cases is Zech 8:23: "In those days ten men from all the languages of the nations [עשרה אנשים מכל לשנות הגוים] shall grasp the garment of a Judaean man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"[21] The phrase "ten men from all the languages of the nations" is slightly awkward; it is more natural to say that one belongs to or

---

[19] Joseph Blenkinsopp classifies the use of this pair as hendiadys, translating "nations of every tongue"; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 310.

[20] See the discussion of Aramaic לשן below.

[21] NRSV modified.

comes from a nation, a people, or a land, and not a system of communication. Generally translators and commentators obviate this awkwardness by reversing the order of the elements of this phrase in English: "from nations of every language" (NRSV); "nations of all tongues" (Carol and Eric Meyers)[22] "from every nation of every tongue" (David Petersen);[23] "from nations of every tongue" (NJPS). Meyers and Meyers probably speak for most interpreters when they write that "the construct form here [i.e., לשנות הגוים; CP] surely denotes those foreign nations outside lsrael/Yehud that speak other languages."[24] This must be correct, generally speaking, but it is imprecise; it does not sufficiently explain the apparently peculiar function of the constituent elements of the phrase לשנות הגוים.

This difficulty can, however, be alleviated if לשנות is interpreted as "linguistic communities," since a person may be said to belong to or come from such a group: thus, "ten men from all the linguistic communities of [among, in] the nations." This distinction may seem somewhat trivial, but it is right to be wary of conflating the concepts of nation and linguistic community, as indeed Meyers and Meyers recognize with reference to this verse: "Insofar as language is a cultural phenomenon, this expression adds a nonpolitical dimension to the inherently political connotation of 'nation.'"[25] Linguistic community and nation are certainly related categories, but it remains to be seen below how closely they are in fact related in the eyes of the biblical authors.

---

[22] Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 440.

[23] David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1984), 318.

[24] Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 441.

[25] Ibid., 441.

In one other case, Ezek 36:3, the meaning "linguistic community" has been discerned for לשון, by Yael Landman, following the NJPS translation of this verse.[26] In Ezekiel 36:3, Yahweh tells Israel that he will punish its neighbouring nations "because they made you desolate indeed, and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the 'lip of tongue' and slander among the people [ותעלו על שפת לשון ודבת עם]."[27]

The phrase שפת לשון is unique in the Hebrew Bible,[28] but according to the standard interpretation among commentators it means "slanderous speech."[29] Here, שפה is understood to carry its common meaning "speech." This "speech" is of the nature of לשון, understood as gossip or slander in light of דבה, "defamation." As was noted above, "slander" is a not infrequent meaning of לשון.

However, in the interpretation of the NJPS translation, referred to by Yael Landman,[30] לשון here may mean "linguistic community": "you have become the butt of gossip in every language and of the jibes from every people." The sense of the translation "in every language" appears to be "among every linguistic community." The motivation for this interpretation is a perceived parallelism between the phrases שפת לשון and דבת עם: since עם

---

[26] Yael Landman, "On Lips and Tongues in Ancient Hebrew: A Semantic Analysis" (paper presented at the annual national meeting of SBL; San Diego, Ca.; 23 November 2014).

[27] The interpretation of תעלו is difficult, perhaps "were mentioned"; see Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 711.

[28] Block mistakenly claims that it appears also in Job 12:20; Block, "National Identity," 324. This mistake appears to have arisen from a misreading of the BDB entry for שפה, in which a reference to Job 12:20 follows a quotation of Ezek 36:3; see BDB 973b.

[29] So, e.g., G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 386; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 488; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 711. Block's interpretation of the phrase שפת לשון as "the ability to speak" is quite unintelligible in the context of Ezek 36:3; Block, "National Identity," 324.

[30] Landman, "Lips and Tongues."

and לשׁון appear to correspond, the thinking is that we should seek a meaning of לשׁון similar to that of "people." Hence, perhaps לשׁון means "linguistic community."

However, it is apparent that the two phrases are not exactly parallel. For while לשׁון might correspond with עם in the sense of a people group, שׂפה does not correspond to דבה. That is, שׂפה, unlike לשׁון, does not mean "slander, gossip" in biblical (or Mishnaic) Hebrew, but rather, more neutrally, "speech, talk." Thus the sense of שׂפת לשׁון as "the speech/talk of a linguistic community" does not closely match דבת עם, which tells against an interpretation of the two phrases as a parallelism expressing a related idea, if לשׁון is taken to mean "a linguistic community."[31] Nevertheless, it is possible that in this case שׂפת לשׁון, the neutral "speech of a linguistic community" is specified by דבה: that "speech" is specifically speech of a slanderous kind. This interpretation retains the apparent parallelism of לשׁון and עם in this verse.

It is does not seem possible, therefore to determine whether לשׁון in this verse means "linguistic community," or whether the more usual interpretation "slander" (in "speech of slander") is preferable. Consequently, it does not seem prudent to count this verse among references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible.

5. לשׁון as "a Language": Uncertain Cases

Three cases (Ps 55:10; Prov 6:24; Ecc 10:11;) in which the meaning of לשׁון as "a language" is disputed may now be considered.

---

[31] It might also be mentioned that, unlike in Ezek 36:3, in the two other instances in which Hebrew לשׁון appears to mean "linguistic community" just discussed, the word occurs in the plural, as do the Akkadian and Aramaic words in a significant majority of the pertinent cases; see below.

i."Split, Swallow their Tongue": Psalm 55:10

In Ps 55, a lamenter describes his treatment at the hands of wicked enemies, and asks God to intercede. The wording of Ps 55:10 has suggested to Block that לָשׁוֹן is used in this psalm in the sense of "a language," although beyond detecting this meaning here, Block does not offer an interpretation of its meaning: "Swallow up, my Lord, split their tongue/language [בַּלַּע אֲדֹנָי פַּלַּג לְשׁוֹנָם]; for I see violence and strife in the city."[32]

The value of לָשׁוֹן here is uncertain in part because the verb פלג, apparently meaning "to divide," is rare, occurring only two other times in the Hebrew Bible. Its meaning in Gen 10:25 is unclear,[33] and in Job 38:25 the verb refers to making channels for water, in accordance with the meaning of the more common noun פלג, "channel, watercourse." Hans-Joachim Kraus declares this verse corrupt and proposes major emendations.[34] However, an interpretation is available in light of the meaning of בלע in this verse, if we assume that פלג here means "to split, divide," and לָשׁוֹן has the meaning "speech." In Ps 55:10, the verb בלע appears in the Piel; in this stem, this verb can mean "confuse, confound."[35] The verb's object be also be לָשׁוֹן, and this "confusing" of the לָשׁוֹן would express the idea of rendering the enemies' communication ineffective. Similarly, the division of the enemies' speech indicated

---

[32] NRSV modified; Block, "National Identity," 323 n. 10.

[33] See the discussion of the Table of Nations in the next chapter. Any connection that may be discerned between this psalm and the Tower of Babel events (Gen 11:1–9) is indirect and secondary, arising from an association worked out in the history of interpretation of Gen 10:25.

[34] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 519. Mitchell Dahood proposes an anatomical meaning for "tongue" here, comparing the imagery of this verse to Ps 3:8: "For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked." God's destroying of the enemies' (anatomical) tongues would deprive them of speech, and thus their ability to slander him and conspire against him (Ps 55:13); Mitchell Dahood, Psalms (3 vols.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966–1970), 2:33. The analogy is not especially close, however.

[35] BDB at בלע, 118a. The meaning "confuse" is not attested for the Pual or Niphal, which rather mean "to be swallowed up."

by פלג could refer to creating discord in their counsel (so BDB interprets פלג here),[36] thus "Confuse, O Lord, divide their speech."[37]

In any case, the meaning "a (particular) language" for לשון does not seem to fit the context. The psalm contains no indication that the enemies speak a language other than that of the psalmist. In fact, the psalmist emphasizes that he has previously had a very close relationship with one who now persecutes him (vv. 14–15). Thus לשון is better interpreted as "tongue" and/or "speech" in Ps 55:10.

ii. "Smoothness of a Foreign Tongue": Prov 6:24

The phrase לָשׁוֹן נָכְרִיָּה in MT Prov 6:24 should also be mentioned. The description of a tongue as "foreign" here might suggest that לשון means "a language." Now, sense can be given to "the smoothness [חלקת] of a foreign language"; after all, we frequently evaluate certain languages as seductive, passionate, mellifluous, and so on, and this meaning might be at play since the subject of this passage is the risk involved in adultery (vv. 24–35). However, in line with the Peshitta, Vulgate, and Targum, it seems best to emend MT's לָשׁוֹן (absolute) to לְשׁוֹן (construct), so that the phrase reads "the smoothness of a foreign *woman's* tongue." The phrase then refers to the seductive talk of a would-be adulteress.[38] Proverbs 5:3 provides a close parallel to this interpretation: "the lips of a strange woman [שפתי זרה] drip honey." A reference to foreign language is (probably) not, therefore, to be found in Prov 6:24.

---

[36] BDB 118a.

[37] This reference to "dividing" speech might suggest a similarity to the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11:1–9), in which case בלע could be a case of wordplay on בלל in that episode. As I discuss in Chapter 3, however, although the languages of the earth do end up divided after the Tower of Babel account, "division" is not emphasized in that account, and it is not expressed through בלל, "mix, confuse."

[38] So, for instance, Nancy Nam Hoon Tan, *The "Foreignness" of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9* (BZAW 381; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 94–95.

iii. "Master of the Tongue": Ecc 10:11

A possible use of לשׁון with the meaning "a language" is found in Ecclesiastes 10:11: "If the snake bites before it is charmed [בלוא לחשׁ], there is no advantage for the master of the tongue [ואין יתרון לבעל הלשׁון]."[39] The thrust of this proverbial statement is apparently to indicate that human action often contains within it the undoing of its intended purpose (cf. vv. 8–10). In any case, it is clear that בעל הלשׁון is a way of referring a snake charmer, though C. L. Seow points out that this phrase is unique in the Hebrew Bible (snake charmers being referred to otherwise in Hebrew as מלחשׁ, "whisperer" [e.g., Ps 58:6], and חבר "binder [of spells]" [e.g., Sir 12:13]).[40]

If בעל הלשׁון refers to the trained snake charmer, then, it is likely that בעל here is used in the sense "one skilled in, one with mastery/control of." But in which tongue is the charmer skilled? Seow considers, but rejects, the possibility that this is the snake's tongue conceived of as a source of poison or harm, as it is in Job 20:16. We may also compare Yahweh's binding of Leviathan's dangerous tongue in Job 40:25. Seow considers it more likely, however, that in בעל הלשׁון, "the reference is to the charmer as an expert of incantations."[41] He points out that Akkadian *lišānu* can be used of spells and prayers, and also notes a structural (though not semantic) parallel in Akkadian *bēl lišāni*, "one who knows a foreign language," found in Standard Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian.[42] The incantations known to the charmer would be those that enchant the snake and render it harmless.

---

[39] NRSV modified.

[40] Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 318.

[41] *CAD* L, *lišānu*, 209a–215a, at 211b.

[42] *CAD* L, *bēl lišāni*, 215a–b.

Seow's interpretation is possible, although in biblical and later Hebrew לשׁון does not carry

the meaning "spell, incantation."[43] But because of the the exactness of parallel, Akkadian *bēl*

lišāni deserves further consideration. In this phrase, *lišānu* does not refer to spells, but to

language, with the whole meaning "one skilled in some language, someone who knows a

particular language."[44] For instance, in Prism texts of Ashurbanipal, we read of a rider who

visits the Assyrian court, apparently sent by King Gyges of Lydia: of "all the languages of

East and of West, over which the god Ashur has given me [Ashurbanipal] control, there was

no [speaker] of his tongue [*bēl lišānīšu ul ibšima*]. His language was foreign, so that his

words were not understood."[45] As Cogan and Tadmor note, the function of this encounter is

to emphasize Ashurbanipal's broadening of the horizons of Assyrian influence and contact

(although clearly Ashurbanipal does not have control over Lydia, or its [non-Semitic]

language.)[46]

A corresponding interpretation of Hebrew בעל הלשׁון in Ecc 10:11 makes good sense: the

charmer is "one skilled in the language" of snakes, at the very least in the metaphorical sense

that he makes the same sibilant, whispering noises (לחשׁ) made by a snake. Furthermore it

may be that this whispering is conceived of as a system of communication between the

charmer and the snake, and thus literally a language, which allows the charmer to exert

---

[43] See Jastrow לשׁון 720a.

[44] *CAD* L, *bēl lišāni*, 215a–b.

[45] The text and translation are found in Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, "Gyges and Ashurbanipal: A Study in Literary Transmission," *Or* 46 (1977): 65–85, at 68. Cogan and Tadmor translate *bēl lišānī* as "interpreter," which is surely the function that this individual is intended to perform in this context. However, "interpreter, dragoman" (Akkadian *targumannu*) conveys a specific piece of information not clearly indicated in *bēl lišānī*, namely, mastery of *two* languages. I have therefore translated *bēl lišānī* here as "speaker of a language," in line with *CAD* L, *bēl lišāni*, 215a–b. On the figure of the dragoman in the ancient Near East, see Ignace J. Gelb, "The Word for Dragoman in the Ancient Near East," *Glossa* 2 (1968): 93–104.

[46] Cogan and Tadmor, "Gyges and Ashurbanipal," 73–75.

influence over the animal.[47] Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, of course, communication between a snake and a human is depicted (Gen 3:1–5).

Thus the interpretation of בעל הלשׁון as "one skilled in some language, one who speaks some language" works well in Ecc 10:11, and we therefore have reason to add this phrase to the terminology for matters relating to foreign language of the biblical authors. The particular language referred to here, however, is a beastly, and not a human one, so it will not play a further role in my investigation of the attitudes of the biblical authors to the diversity of human language.

6. לשׁון: Distribution and Diachronic Considerations

We are now in a position to remark upon the distribution of לשׁון with the meaning "a language" in the biblical corpus. לשׁון as "a language" occurs in texts of various genres (narrative, prophecy, wisdom), but is most commonly found in two corpora: prophetic literature (Isa, Ezek, Jer, Zech), and literature of postexilic imperial courtly and administrative life (Dan, Neh, Esther). There are only two texts in the Pentateuch (Gen 10, Deut 28) in which לשׁון as "a language" occurs, and לשׁון in this meaning is entirely absent from Josh–Kgs (the Deuteronomistic History), and the extended poetic books (Psalms, Proverbs, and Job).

This distribution does not strongly indicate any significant diachronic information about the semantic value of לשׁון in biblical Hebrew. The attestations in Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah make it clear that לשׁון as "a language" is well-established in Late Biblical Hebrew. In

---

[47] In the Harry Potter series, the language of snakes, which is known to some humans, is called "parseltongue," and its speakers "parselmouths." I am grateful to Jan Joosten for the comparison (private communication).

addition, this meaning of לשון is rare in the corpus considered definitive of Standard Biblical Hebrew, Gen–Kgs. But the attestations in Gen, Deut, Isa, Jer (and Ezek) suggest that לשון as "a language" was not only found in Hebrew of the postexilic period.[48] The two occurrences of the meaning "linguistic community" are in securely postexilic texts (Isa 66:18; Zech 8:23), and it is possible that Aramaic לשן has influenced Hebrew in this regard.

B. לשן (Aram.), "Linguistic Community"

In the Aramaic of the Bible, לִשָּׁן, *liššān*, occurs seven times. All seven occurrences are in the book of Daniel, in variations of the phrase כָּל עַמְמַיָּא אֻמַיָּא וְלִשָׁנַיָּא, "all peoples, nations, and languages" (Dan 3:4, 7, 29, 31; 5:19; 6:26; 7:14).[49] The use alongside words for people groups, אמה and עם, clearly shows that לשן is being used in the synecdochic sense of "linguistic communities."

In Old and Imperial Aramaic, לשן is attested only with the meanings "tongue" and, in the instructional portion of *Ahiqar*, as "speech," in sayings reminiscent of the use of לשון in Proverbs.[50] In later Jewish Aramaic, the meaning "a language" is attested,[51] and it is reasonable to believe the word, like the Akkadian and Hebrew cognates, had this valence in earlier stages of the language. Indeed the meaning "linguistic community" is dependent or derivative from the meaning "language."

---

[48] In the very small poetic corpus of Archaic Biblical Hebrew, the word לשון, with any meaning, does not occur at all, but no significance may be drawn from this fact. The standard list of chapters belonging to this corpus is given in, for instance, Saénz-Badillos: Gen 49; Exod 15; Deut 32, 33; Num 23–24; and Judg 5; Angel Saénz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (trans. John E. Elwolde; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56–62.

[49] כל is absent at 3:4. The words are sg. in 3:29.

[50] *DNWSI* at *lšn*, 584–85.

[51] Jastrow at לישן, 710a–b.

Among cognate languages, we may note that Akkadian *lišānu* can also be used to indicate "a linguistic community," as well as "an individual who speaks some language."[52] Both meanings are attested from Old Babylonian on, and the meaning "linguistic community" for *lišānu* is found in royal titulature, apparently for the first time, in reference to the Achaemenid kings Darius I and Xerxes I: *šar napḫar lišāni gabbi*, "king of absolutely every linguistic community." Such rhetoric may be reflected in Daniel's use of לשׁן in this sense.[53]

C. שׂפה (Heb.), "Lip; Speech; Language"

The word שָׂפָה, *śāpāh*, is also used to indicate "a language" in the Hebrew Bible, though less commonly or widely than לשׁון. As before, I shall briefly outline the wide range of meanings of this word, before considering its use as "a language."

שׂפה (dual: שׂפתים; pl.: שׂפתות [rare]) has the anatomical meaning "lip," chiefly of humans (e.g., 2 Kgs 19:28), but twice also of a divine being (Isa 11:4; 30:27). The lips' function as organs of speech is most often in view in the use of שׂפה in the Hebrew Bible., as in Ps 34:15: "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit [ושׂפתיך מדבר מרמה]." In this usage, the dual is much more common than the singular. In a common usage (technically metaphorical), שׂפה in the singular means "edge," and is applied to furniture (Ezek 43:13), vessels ("rim, brim," 1 Kgs 7:23), garments ("hem," Exod 26:4), territory ("border," Judg 7:22), and in, particular, watercourses or bodies of water ("shore, bank," Gen 22:17, Gen 41:3).

---

[52] *CAD* L 214a.

[53] See further in Chapter 7.

שׂפה can, by metonymy, indicate the product of the lips, speech or talk, most often referring to a manner of speech, be it good (e.g., שׂפה ברורה, "purified speech," Zeph 3:9) or, more usually, evil (e.g., שׂפתי שקר, "false speech," Prov 12:22). Again, in this usage, the dual is much more common than the singular. This may also be the distinctive manner of speech of a particular ethnic or territorial group, that is, a language, as in "the language of Canaan [שׂפת כנען]" (Isa 19:18). שׂפה may also refer to the ability to speak, as in Job 12:20: "[Yahweh] deprives of speech those who are trusted [מסיר שׂפה לנאמנים]." In legal usage שׂפתים (especially בשׂפתים) refers to a statement made "in speech," that is, aloud, orally, which may thus be considered binding (Lev 5:4; Num 30:7,9) or constitute grounds for punishment (Job 2:10; Prov 12:13).

1. שׂפה as "a Language"

Of a total of 176 occurrences of שׂפה in the Hebrew Bible, שׂפה appears to mean "a language" in ten cases, roughly 5.7%. Again, interpretative difficulties in these verses are not indicated here, and will be dealt with later in this and subsequent chapters:

1. Gen 11:1: "Now the whole earth had one language [שׂפה אחת] and the same(?) words."

2. Gen 11:6: "And Yahweh said, 'Look, they are one people, and they have all one language [ושׂפה אחת לכלם]."

3. & 4. Gen 11:7: "Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there [ונבלה שם שׂפתם], so that they will not understand one another's language [איש שׂפת רעהו]."[54]

5. Gen 11:9: "Therefore it was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of all the earth [שׂפת כל הארץ]."

6. Isa 19:18: "On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan [שׂפת כנען] and swear allegiance to Yahweh of hosts."

---

[54] NRSV modified.

7. Isa 28:11: "Truly, in a stammering speech [בלעגי שפה] and in a foreign language he will speak to this people."[55]

8. Isa 33:19: "No longer will you see the fierce(?) people [עם נועז], the people of a speech too obscure to comprehend [עם עמקי שפה משמוע], stammering in a language that you cannot understand."

9. Ezek 3:5: "For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech [עם עמקי שפה] and difficult language, but to the house of Israel."

10. Ezek 3:6: "not to many peoples of obscure speech [עמים רבים עמקי שפה] and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand."

2. Syntax

שפה never occurs in the dual or plural with the meaning "a language." In one case שפה occurs with a pronominal suffix. In three cases it is the *nomen regens* of a construct chain, and in four it is the *nomen rectum* (three times in the phrase עמקי שפה). In no cases is a preposition prefixed to שפה. In four cases, שפה is the direct object of a verb, and it is the subject in one.[56] In four cases שפה is definite or part of a definite noun phrase, though it never occurs with the definite article. שפה is modified twice by an adjective.

From this we see that, in two respects, the usage of שפה stands out from that of לשון. Firstly, whereas לשון is commonly used with prepositions, שפה is not. In particular, we do not find שפה used in phrases of the kind "according to the language of each," which were fairly common for לשון. Secondly, whereas the plural לשנות indicated several languages, the plural (or dual) of שפה is not attested in this meaning. This may, however, merely be an accident of preservation. In Genesis 11:7, for instance, איש שפת רעהו, "each other's language," seems to imply that many שפה's came to be spoken at Babel; cf. איש ללשנו, "each with their own language," Gen 10:5.

---

[55] NRSV modified.

[56] It is apparently a subject complement in Gen 11:1; see the section on the Tower of Babel below.

3. Semantic Considerations

In the ten cases listed, the meaning "a language" for שפה is suggested for a number of

reasons. In several cases, שפה is used in parallel with לשון in this sense (Isa 28:11; 33:19;

Ezek 3:5–6; always as the first element of the pair).[57] In Isa 19:18, the name of a region,

Canaan, is given which prompts us to understand שפה as "a language." And in Gen 11:1–9, as

in Isa 33:19 and Ezek 3:5–6, a people or nation is closely associated with a particular שפה,

thus suggesting "a language."[58]

Once again, however, the scope of "a language" on the dialect-language-language family

scale is not readily apparent from these uses. Nevertheless, Christoph Uehlinger has proposed

that שפה indicates a language on a greater order of magnitude than לשון; thus if שפה were

"language," then לשון would be "dialect": שפה "bezeichnet . . . nicht eine Sprache im Sinne

eines Idioms oder gar Dialekts . . . sondern eine Sprachfamilie."[59] The evidence Uehlinger

uses in support of this suggestion is Isa 19:18, in which שפת כנען indicates the "language of

Canaan" of which יהודית, "Judaean," presumably considered a לשון (cf. Esth 8:9), is a

subdivision.

Now, this explanation of the relationship between "the language of Canaan" and "Judaean" is

likely true.[60] But that does not mean that this is expressed by the semantic value of שפה. In

fact, this single usage cannot support such a reconstruction of the relationship in meaning

between לשון and שפה, and in uses of these words together, no contrast may be detected. Thus

---

[57] לשון and שפה also commonly occur in parallel outside this usage; see Block, "National Identity," 324.

[58] See the discussion of the Tower of Babel episode below for some scholars' objections to understanding שפה as "language" in this story.

[59] שפה "indicates . . . not a language in the sense of an idiom or even dialect . . . but rather a language family"; Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und "eine Rede": eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Gen 11, 1–9)* (OBO 101; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), 348.

[60] See the section later in this chapter on the glottonyms in the Hebrew Bible.

we should not distinguish שׂפה and לשׁון semantically by order of magnitude of the language variety that they denote.

Unlike לשׁון, שׂפה is not used in the meaning "a group speaking a common language, a linguistic community." This is natural if we imagine that such a use of Hebrew לשׁון was influenced by the use of the cognate in Aramaic. In contrast, the cognates of Hebrew שׂפה in Aramaic (שׂפה, "lip") and other Semitic languages (e.g., Akkadian *šaptu*, "lip; utterance, command") are not used to mean "a language,"[61] let alone "a linguistic community." As Block points out, the development of the meaning "a language" for שׂפה in Hebrew appears to be unique.[62]

4. Disputed Cases

In two other uses of שׂפה, Ps 81:6 and Zeph 3:9, the meaning "a language" has been detected by numerous scholars. I shall discuss the שׂפה ברורה, "purified speech," of Zeph 3:9 after my analysis of the Tower of Babel story in the next chapter, with which it has often been associated by interpreters. A consideration of Ps 81:6, in which I do not detect this meaning, will also be included at the end of that chapter, in relation to the question of divine language.

5. שׂפה: Distribution and Diachronic Considerations

The distribution of שׂפה is much more limited than לשׁון. Half of the ten total cases occur in a single episode, Gen 11:1–9. Outside this episode, the word is only found as "language" in

---

[61] For Aram., see *DNWSI* at *šph*, 1181; Jastrow at שׂפה, 1613a–1614b. For Akk., see *CAD* Š1 at *šaptu* 483a–487a. As in Hebrew, Akk. *šaptu* can have a metonymic usage, specifically "utterance, speech, command," although not the meaning "a language."

[62] Block, "National Identity," 323.

three passages in Isaiah, and one in Ezekiel. Thus, we do not have evidence of שָׂפָה as "a language" in the corpus of Late Biblical Hebrew, nor does it appear with this meaning in Mishnaic Hebrew.[63] We may therefore, with Landman, tentatively detect a diachronic significance in this distribution: the meaning of "a language" for שָׂפָה may have been absent from the latest form of Hebrew attested in the Hebrew Bible.[64] However, two factors condition the certainty of this hypothesis: the dating of the biblical texts from which these attestations of שָׂפָה come is uncertain; and the total number of attestations of שָׂפָה as "a language" are few, and so are possibly unrepresentative of the actual linguistic reality.

D. Words for Languages: Summary

The three words used for "language" in the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew לָשׁוֹן and שָׂפָה, and Aramaic לִשָּׁן, exhibit overlapping but distinct usages and distribution. Hebrew לָשׁוֹן and שָׂפָה indicate bodily organs of speech, the speech produced by these, and a community's distinctive manner of speech, a language. In that meaning, לָשׁוֹן is found in texts from various periods, whereas שָׂפָה seems to be restricted to pre-exilic and exilic literature. לָשׁוֹן is sometimes used to indicate a "linguistic community," but שָׂפָה is never used in this way, while Aramaic לִשָּׁן is attested only with this sense. None of these words conveys differences of scale (language vs. dialect), and all three are frequently used in close connection with words indicating nation or people.

---

[63] See Jastrow at שָׂפָה, 1613a–1614b. *DCH* lists a possible occurrence in a text from Qumran (1QMyst 1.1.10); *DCH* שָׂפָה 8:177a–179b, at 179a.

[64] Landman, "Lips and Tongues."

III. Naming Languages: Glottonymy in the Hebrew Bible

A. Sociolinguistic Considerations

Within sociolinguistics, "glottonymy," or the naming of languages, is an important focus of research. Isabelle Léglise and Bettina Migge write, "linguistic naming conventions provide valuable insights into the social and linguistic perceptions of people."[65] Several significant factors in language naming in particular may be highlighted here that may be brought to bear in examining the names of languages used in the Hebrew Bible.

Firstly we may note the important distinction between endonyms and exonyms in glottonymy. Patrick Sériot, for instance, has shown how a name given to a language from within the community of its speakers, an endonym (e.g., *Deutsch)*, may have a very different history and set of connotations from an exonym, one given by outsiders (German, *allemand*).[66] Moreover, languages may not be named at all, and many factors may contribute to avoiding the name of a language, as Salih Akin has explored. Non-naming may be, for instance, a polemic device aimed at suppressing identity, as in the case of Kurdish, the speaking and naming of which were outlawed in Turkey for several decades in the 20th century.[67]

A further important recognition that has been emphasized by Andrée Tabouret-Keller is that glottonyms exist within specific domains, and must be related to the conventions and

---

[65] Isabelle Léglise and Bettina Migge, "Language-Naming Practices, Ideologies, and Linguistic Practices: Toward a Comprehensive Description of Language Varieties," *Language in Society* 35 (2006): 313–39, at 313.

[66] Patrick Sériot, "Le cas du macédonien: faut-il nommer les langues?" in *Le nom des langues I: Les enjeux de la nomination des langues* (ed. Andrée Tabouret-Keller; BCILL 95; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 167–90.

[67] Salih Akin, "Désignation d'une langue innommable dans un texte de loi: le cas du kurde dans les textes législatifs turcs," in Tabouret-Keller (ed.), *Le nom des langues*, 69–80.

assumptions of those domains.[68] For instance, in modern English, a speaker might refer to the language of the Hebrew Bible as *leshon hakodesh*, Hebrew, or Classical Hebrew, each potentially indicating an important difference of setting. In addition, Tabouret-Keller notes that glottonyms are not fixed through time: through many processes, names may come to be established or displaced, as with Yugoslavian versus Serbo-Croatian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin.

This last example brings to mind the fact that an act of naming may be intended to reify an entity, and thus create or bolster an identity. As Benedict Anderson has shown, in this respect glottonymy has been extremely important in the politics of identity in Europe. The formation of nation states has been closely associated with the development of national vernaculars, and their promulgation among populations.[69]

All of these considerations, and more besides, are relevant to determining the dynamics of an individual speaker's use or avoidance of a particular glottonym, at a particular moment, in a particular setting. These will be borne in mind in the discussion of the glottonyms found in the Hebrew Bible.

B. The Glottonyms of the Hebrew Bible

Five names for specific languages are given in the Hebrew Bible—Judaean, Aramaic, Ashdodite, Canaanite, and Chaldean. These glottonyms names fall into two basic types,

---

[68] Tabouret-Keller, "Les enjeux de la nomination des langues: presentation," in Tabouret-Keller (ed.), *Le nom des langues*, 69–80.

[69] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. ed.; London: Verso, 2006), 67–82.

which I shall examine in turn: names with suffix *-ît*; and name in the form of a construct phrase, containing a word for "language" followed by a people/place name.

1. Glottonyms with Suffix –ît: Form and Syntax

Three glottonyms occur in the Hebrew Bible with the suffix *-ît*: יהודית, *yəhûdît*, "Judaean"; ארמית, *ʾărāmît*, "Aramaic"; and אשדודית, *ʾašdôdît*, "Ashdodite." These words are proper nouns, from the gentilic adjective (Arabic *nisba*) that indicates association with a group (people, tribe, nation, etc.).[70] The form of the adjective in this case is feminine singular. This may be related to the fact that the words for "language" in Hebrew, לשון and שפה, are feminine, but fuller expressions of the kind הלשון היהודית, "the Judaean language," are not found in Biblical Hebrew. In fact, a feminine gentilic adjective for glottonyms is widespread in Semitic languages.[71] In the Hebrew Bible, a distinction may be observed in the distribution of the two feminine singular forms of the gentilic adjective, *-ît* and *-iyyāh*: people are described using both forms, while languages are known only by the *-ît* form. Thus, while these two forms probably share a single historical origin (*-iyat*),[72] they may have developed semantically distinct functions in ancient Hebrew. In the case of ארמית, at least according to the Tiberian vocalization, these functions are further phonologically distinguished: a person is אֲרַמִּי (אֲרַמִּיָה), with *patah* and doubled *mem*, whereas the language is אֲרָמִית, with *qamets* and single *mem*.

In several cases, these *-ît* glottonyms occur as the direct object of a verb of speaking. Thus דבר נא אל עבדיך ארמית, "speak Aramaic with your servants" (2 Kgs 18:26). In other cases they

---

[70] See Yitzhak Hilman, "Gentilic: Biblical Hebrew," *EHLL* (online), n.p.

[71] E.g., Hebrew: עברית, "Hebrew"; Aramaic: ארמית, "Aramaic"; Arabic: العَرَبِيّة (with definite article), "Arabic."

[72] See *PMBH* 264.

seem to be used, without prepositions, in an adverbial sense: "he called aloud *in* Judaean" (2 Kgs 18:28); "written *in* Aramaic" (Ezra 4:7, first occurrence). In two cases, the names for language may be late glosses (Ezra 4:7 [second occurrence]; Dan 2:4).[73] Here, these glottonyms have a paratextual function, indicating the language of the text that immediately follows them, and thus they stand outside the syntax of their context.

i. יהודית, *yəhûdît*, "Judaean"

The glottonym יהודית, "Judaean," derived from יהודה, "Judah," occurs a total of six times in the Hebrew Bible, in two contexts.[74] Five occur in the three versions of the episode of the Rabshakeh at the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:26, 28; Isa 36:11, 13; 2 Chr 32:18). Here, in order to avoid panic among the city's populace, the Judaean officials request to be addressed by their Assyrian besieger in Aramaic, rather than Judaean, but to no avail. The other occurrence is in the account of a mixed-marriage episode in the time of Nehemiah, in which Judaean men married to Ashdodites are scolded because their children cannot speak Judaean (Neh 13:24).

Because of the wide range of applications of the name יהודה, "Judah," the origin and referent of the glottonym is unclear. "Judah" in the Hebrew Bible is the name of a patriarch, a tribe, a tribal territory, a district within a larger kingdom, an independent kingdom, a Persian province, and a diasporic people. To which one or which several of these does יהודית refer? We may give two kinds of answer, contextual and historical.

---

[73] See the discussion of Ezra 7:7 and Dan 2:4 in Chapter 7.

[74] Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, יהודית is the name of an individual, a wife of Esau (Gen 26:34).

We may first consider the meaning of יהודית in its biblical contexts. The Rabshakeh episode is set during Hezekiah's reign over the kingdom of Judah. Here the glottonym יהודית is used first by the characters in the story, the high officials of the kingdom (2 Kgs 18:26), and then by the narrator, presumably with the same sense (2 Kgs 18:28). It is a language that the inhabitants of Jerusalem understand, unlike Aramaic. Thus it is quite natural to assume, that in this case יהודית is imagined to be the language widely spoken in the kingdom of Judah.

In Nehemiah's case, the function of יהודית must be different. This episode takes place in the Achaemenid province of Yehud/Judah. But יהודית probably does not indicate the official language of that district, whose administration was likely undertaken in Aramaic, and the population of which may have spoken Aramaic as widely as Hebrew.[75] Surely instead, יהודית here is a reference to the particular language associated with the Judaeans, a diasporic people living throughout the Achaemenid territories.[76] In the book of Esther, this language is referred to by mentioning that people: "an edict was written . . . to the Judaeans in their script and language" (Esth 8:9).

In the broader canonical context, of course, these languages of Hezekiah's and Nehemiah's periods are one and the same: the Judaeans kept their language after the fall of the kingdom of Judah. Moreover, this is the same language in which apparently the bulk of the biblical texts are written. Indeed, this perceived continuity is part of the rhetorical strategy of Neh 13: Judaeans living in their historic homeland *ought* to speak the language of the former kingdom. This theme becomes especially pronounced in later Jewish literature. For instance, in the story of the martyrdom of the woman and her seven sons in 2 Macc 7, it appears that the Judaean language is referred to as the "ancestral [πάτριος, πατρώιος] language" (2 Macc

---

[75] See Chapter 7 for a discussion of the linguistic situation of Achaemenid Yehud.

[76] Clearly Nehemiah perceives this to be a normative relationship—Judaeans *ought* to be able to speak Judaean. See Chapter 7 for a discussion of this theme in Neh 13.

7:18, 21, 27).[77] Thus, יהודית comes to resonate with all the associations of "Judah"— the patriarchal, tribal, monarchical, territorial, and ethnic.

As for the historical issue of when and with what meaning the glottonym יהודית originally arose, we must admit uncertainty. The glottonym is not attested in ancient extrabiblical sources; and therefore its occurrences in the Hebrew Bible are our earliest evidence for it. Of these, the oldest texts in which it appears must be 1 Kgs 18//Isa 36, where it refers to the language of the kingdom of Judah. While specific dates for this account are elusive, there is good reason to believe that the original episode was composed in the seventh or early sixth centuries B.C.E., so that this usage of יהודית likely reflects the terminology of monarchic Judah.[78]

Similarly, I would argue that the origin of the term is to be sought in the monarchic period. Epigraphic data from Palestine demonstrate that several consistent differences obtained in the orthography of Hebrew in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel.[79] These can be taken to indicate that a different standard dialect prevailed in each. For instance, in the standard Northern dialect, the diphthongs *aw* and *ay* were contracted, whereas they were retained in the standard Southern dialect.[80] In driving and maintaining such standardization, the primacy of the royal courts, operating through the centralized offices of the state, can hardly be doubted, as Sanders and others have argued.[81] Thus, the kingdom of Judah was responsible for the emergence of a distinctive, standardized variety of Hebrew. It is natural to think that the

---

[77] As noted in Chapter 1, van Henten argues for the interpretation of this "ancestral language" as Hebrew, rather than Aramaic; van Henten, "Ancestral Language of the Jews," 53–68.

[78] For a fuller discussion of the Rabshakeh episode, including questions of dating, see Chapter 5.

[79] See, e.g., Christopher A. Rollston, "Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: The Old Hebrew Epigraphic Evidence," *BASOR* 344 (2006): 47–74, at 65.

[80] See, e.g., *PMBH* 96.

[81] So, e.g., Sanders, *Invention of Hebrew*, 113–20.

glottonym יהודית was coined within Judah for just this variety (thus making יהודית an endonym).[82] I am, therefore, inclined to agree with Block when he accounts for יהודית as follows: "The name is derived from the name of a geopolitical entity, which in turn originated with the name of the tribe occupying it."[83]

Block further notes that the glottonym יהודית contains within it an implicit contrast: "Judaean" is the language of Judah, not the language of all Israel.[84] We may hypothesize that the standardized variety of Hebrew that arose in the Northern Kingdom was also known by a specific glottonym (Israelite? Ephraimite? Josephite?), although that name is not attested.[85] The distinction between Israel and Judah, in the arenas of religion, politics, and territory, is a prominent theme in the Hebrew Bible, and it is important to note that a distinction was also perceived and represented also in the realm of language. However, a differentiation by name does not imply any particularly strong degree of linguistic difference. Glottonyms operate to conceal (Chinese; Arabic) or accentuate (Dutch vs. Flemish) linguistic difference. There is no *prima facie* reason to believe, then, that the distinction between Judaean and "Israelite" that the name יהודית implies arose because of a perceived degree of linguistic (dialect) difference; rather, the distinction may have been made in the absence of linguistic considerations, and reflect primarily a political boundary. Any differences in these standard dialects must

---

[82] In the words of Max Weinreich, "a language is a dialect with an army and a navy."

[83] Block, "National Identity," 329; compare also Weinberg, "Language Consciousness," 53. In contrast, Schniedewind does not emphasize the role of the state in the origin of the name: "language is an important basis for kinship affiliation . . . *Judean* . . . is derivative of the tribal and geographic name Judah"; Schniedewind, *Social History*, 96. We must admit that the monarchic origin of יהודית is not proved.

[84] Block, "National Identity," 330. This point stands whether or not יהודית arose specifically as the name for the standard language of the kingdom of Judah.

[85] It is possible, as Peter Machinist has suggested (private communication), that the absence of a glottonym for the Northern dialect of Hebrew is a result of deliberate action (either through avoidance or deletion) on the part of the Southern tradents of the texts that form the biblical canon.

therefore be convincingly demonstrated on a case by case basis, and in this effort epigraphic evidence must be primary.[86]

A general term for Hebrew that does not express a distinction between north and south is only attested much later. As Schorch has illustrated, Εβραϊστὶ in the translator's prologue to the Greek version of the Wisdom of Sirach is our earliest evidence of the use of "Hebrew" to designate a language (132 B.C.E.); and it is not until the 3–5th centuries C.E. that we have evidence of the Hebrew term עברית, *ʿibrît*, being used in this sense.[87] By contrast, in the Hebrew Bible the designation עברי does not appear to have a linguistic dimension.[88]

ii. ארמית, *ʾărāmît*, "Aramaic"

Aramaic is mentioned by name five times in MT: twice in the accounts of the Rabshakeh episode (2 Kgs 18:26; Isa 36:11); twice in one verse in Ezra (4:7), which concerns the sending of a letter of complaint against the Judaeans to King Artaxerxes; and once in Dan 2:4, where it introduces the direct speech of the Chaldeans.

This name for the language is known from other ancient sources. In the Aramaic documents from Elephantine, ארמית is attested once,[89] and in Neo-Assyrian Akkadian, the form *armītu* is

---

[86] Gary Rendsburg has worked extensively on isolating differences between the southern Judaean dialect, evidenced in Standard Biblical Hebrew, and the northern "Israelian" one. In this project, Rendsburg's primary method has been to identify linguistic peculiarities in biblical texts that he regards as northern in origin; see especially Gary A. Rendsburg, "A Comprehensive Guide to Israelian Hebrew: Grammar and Lexicon," *Orient* 38 (2003): 5–35. However, many of Rendsburg's findings must be considered quite uncertain. See Ian Young, "The 'Northernisms' of the Israelite Narratives in Kings," *ZAH* 7–8 (1994–1995): 63–70; and William M. Schniedewind and Daniel Sivan, "The Elijah-Elisha Narratives: A Test Case for the Northern Dialect of Hebrew," *JQR* 87 (1997): 303–337.

[87] Schorch, "Pre-Eminence of the Hebrew Language,"43–48.

[88] Cf. Ullendorff, who suggests that the absence of a linguistic use of עברית from the Hebrew Bible is purely accidental; Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 330.

[89] *TADAE* B1.12 line 4.

found.[90] It is not likely, then, that the name originated independently in Hebrew; it may rather have originated among the Aramaeans as an endonym and spread.[91]

The question of what kind of identities this work evokes in Hebrew, then, is perhaps less appropriate than it was for יהודית, which probably arose within Israel. Indeed, the relevance of Israel's encounters with Aram and Aramaeans (especially the city-state Aram-Damascus) seem largely irrelevant to the biblical occurrences of ארמית. As Block has pointed out, none of the biblical occurrences of ארמית involves any of the biblical "Aram" regions or ethnic Aramaeans.[92] Rather, the biblical occurrences present Aramaic in its role as an imperial regional lingua franca in: Neo-Assyrian warfare (2 Kgs 18:26; Isa 36:11; the Rabshakeh declines to use it, however); Neo-Babylonian domestic affairs (Dan 2:4); and the Achaemenid provincial administration (Ezra 4:7).

These depictions surely convey a general truth about Israel's experience of Aramaic. We have increasing epigraphic evidence, beginning in the seventh century, of the use of Aramaic alongside Akkadian in Neo-Assyrian administration,[93] and Neo-Babylonian practice was largely continuous in this respect.[94] Later, Aramaic was the chief international administrative language of the Persian empire, from Egypt in the west to Bactria in the east.[95] The biblical references to Aramaic make good sense in light of this history of the use of that language in the region.

---

[90] *CAD* at *armû*, A2 293b–294a. Elsewhere, *aḫlamû* "Aramaic," and *aḫlamatti* "in Aramaic [script]" are found; *CAD* A1 192b–193a.

[91] On the emergence of Old Aramaic standard varieties in Syria the early first millennium B.C.E., see Gzella, *Cultural History*, 57–77.

[92] Block, "National Identity," 329.

[93] See, e.g., Gzella, *Cultural History*, 124–34. The Rabshakeh story presumes this knowledge of Aramaic on the part of the Assyrians already in the late eighth century.

[94] Ibid., 134–39.

[95] Ibid., 168–77.

Because of the imperial character of the biblical occurrences, Block writes that the original association between Aramaic and Aram/Aramaeans had been lost: from the Israelite point of view, Aramaic "ceased to be a national language."[96] This may be largely correct, but it is not entirely true, for we do encounter one Aramaean associated with the Aramaic language in the Hebrew Bible. In Gen 31:47, Laban utters an Aramaic phrase, as part of a treaty he concludes with Jacob. In this case, the name of the language is not mentioned, though it may be said to be implied, since Laban is frequently referred to as הארמי, "the Aramaean" in the context (Gen 31:20, 24).

iii. אשדודית, *ʾašdôdît,* "Ashdodite" (Neh 13:24)

"Ashdodite" is mentioned in Neh 13:24, as the language spoken by half of the children of the mixed Judaean-Ashdodite marriages. The language is not mentioned in other ancient texts, and has been variously supposed to be Phoenician, Aramaic, Philistine, or a southern Canaanite dialect. The identity of this language will be the subject of discussion in Chapter 7, but here it may be mentioned that alone among biblical glottonyms, "Ashdodite" takes its name from a city, "a rather limited toponym," as Block notes.[97]

2. Glottonyms of the Form "Language of X"

Two names of languages are attested in the form of a construct phrase of two elements: word meaning language + specifying name: שפת כנען *śəfat kənaʿan*, "language of Canaan" (Isa 19:18); and לשון כשדים, *ləšôn kaśdîm,* "language of the Chaldeans" (Dan 1:4). As Block notes,

---

[96] Block, "National Identity," 329.

[97] Ibid., 330.

this construction is not widely attested in other ancient Semitic sources.[98] Nevertheless, this construction is intelligible. It is comparable to construct phrases found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible such as כלשׁון עמו, "the language of his people" (Esth 1:22), or the use of שׂפה/לשׁון with pronominal suffixes. In both cases, the construct phrase is the direct object of a verb (דבר, Isa 19:18; למד, Dan 1:4).

i. שׂפת כנען, *śəfat kənaʿan*, "Language of Canaan"

In Isa 19:18, an oracle foretells a time when "there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan [שׂפת כנען] and swear allegiance to Yahweh of hosts." This seems to be one of a set of additions to an earlier oracle against Egypt (19:1–15).

In Isa 19:18, it is not clear to what language (or languages) "the language of Canaan" refers. On the one hand, "the language of Canaan" seems like an appropriate description for linguistic situation of the Southern Levant. Epigraphic evidence has permitted scholars to distinguish several languages (or dialects) used in the Southern Levant, including Phoenician, Moabite, and Hebrew.[99] These languages are closely related, form a distinct branch ("Canaanite") within Northwest Semitic languages (over against Aramaic, Amorite), among which a high degree of mutual intelligibility is likely to have obtained.[100] In light of this similarity, a reference to "language of Canaan" is quite intelligible. As Block writes, "the

---

[98] Ibid., 327. Block cites one Akkadian example from Sennacherib's annals: "a portico patterned after a Hittite palace, which they call a *bit hilani* in the Amorite language [*ina lišāni Amurri*], I built in front of their (i.e. the palaces') gates." The syntax of this phrase is unclear, however: the final vowel on *lišāni* suggests that this word is not in construct with *Amurri*; but if, alternatively, *Amurri* is an adj., it does not agree with fem. *lišāni*. For other examples of unusual Akkadian construct forms, see *GAG* §64.

[99] The boundaries of the land referred to as Canaan in Egyptian, biblical, and other sources do not appear to have been fixed; see Philip C. Schmitz, "Canaan," *ABD* 1:1243–46, at 1245.

[100] See especially Randall W. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000–586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 229–35.

language of Canaan" may thus refer to the "general linguistic category that included not only Hebrew, but also Moabite, Edomite, and Ammonite,"[101] and, we might add, Phoenician and the language of the Deir Alla text. In technical terminology, "the language of Canaan" would thus be a *Dachsprache*,[102] a name that provides a "roof" over related languages/dialects including, presumably, Judaean.

On the other hand, as was pointed out earlier, linguistic similarity and difference are only one factor, of variable significance, in the demarcation of languages through names. Actually, "the language of Canaan" is surprising in the biblical context, and three reasons in particular may be noted. First, Canaan is frequently presented in the Hebrew Bible as a territory comprised of many peoples. In the literature describing the early period of Israel's settlement in Canaan, these peoples include Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Hivvites, Girgashites, Jebusites, and so on (see, e.g., Exod 3:7; Deut 7:1; Josh 3:10). In the monarchic period, the Hebrew Bible refers to numerous polities in Canaan, including Israel and Judah, the Phoenician and Philistine city-states, and the Transjordanian states of Ammon and Moab. Thus, the reference to a single "language of Canaan" is not expected based on the biblical picture of Canaan as a multiethnic and multinational land, as it defies the association of people/nation and language that we find elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

Secondly, texts in the Hebrew Bible imply or assume the existence of linguistic differences among the inhabitants of Canaan. We read in Deut 2:10, 20, that the giant Rephaim were known to the Ammonites as Zamzummim, and to the Moabites as Emim, and in the next

---

[101] Block, "National Identity," 327. This seems preferable to Ullendorff's related proposal that the "language of Canaan" refers to an additional, unattested Canaanite language variety, "a Canaanite *lingua franca* which . . . remained in oral use but was obviously excluded from written sources"; Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 455.

[102] This term was coined in Žarko Muljačić, "Standardization in Romance," in *Bilingualism and Linguistic Conflict in Romance*, vol. 5 of *Trends in Romance Linguistics and Philology* (ed. Rebecca Posner and John N. Green; The Hague: Mouton, 1993), 77–116.

chapter the Sidonian and Amorite names for Mount Hermon are given (Sirion and Senir respectively; Deut 3:9). Furthermore, in Judg 12:6, a difference in the pronunciation of sibilants between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites is recorded. And as mentioned above, the glottonym יהודית, "Judaean," implies a linguistic distinction between the languages of Judah and those of the surrounding polities, including Israel. In this way, the overall biblical picture of Canaan is not one of a linguistically unitary region, so that the term "language of Canaan" is surprising.

Finally, the authors of the Hebrew Bible generally take great pains to distinguish Israel from the peoples of Canaan (including Canaanites). Israel's genealogy and geographical origins are presented as distinct from that of the Canaanites (e.g., Gen 10;[103] Gen 11:10–32), and this is a distinction that the Israelites are told they must maintain, especially in the domain of religion (Lev 18:3). In cases where Israel is linked with the Canaanite peoples, the intent is usually to criticize Israel (e.g., 1 Kgs 4:24; Ezek 16:45). But in Isa 19:18, most scholars have imagined that "the language of Canaan" is not intended to exclude the language that the Judaeans speak (even if it is not precisely the same thing as "Judaean").[104] Indeed, the speaking of this language in Egypt follows from Judah's terrorizing of Egypt through Yahweh (Isa 19:17; whether this refers to military conquest is unclear). Such an association between Judah and any Canaanite cultural item, without a hint of reproof, is highly unusual in the Hebrew Bible.

These three considerations indicate the various respects in which "the language of Canaan" is a surprising glottonym in the Hebrew Bible. To account for its use in Isa 19:18, then, various explanations have been offered. Ullendorff and Csaba Balogh imagine that the oracle is

---

[103] Israel is not mentioned in this genealogy, but Shem, the ancestor of the Israelites, Shem. The Canaanites descend from Shem's brother, Ham.

[104] Block, "National Identity," 327; Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 456; Csaba Balogh, *The Stele of YHWH in Egypt: The Prophecies of Isaiah 18–20 concerning Egypt and Cush* (OtSt 60; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 297.

worded with an Egyptian audience in mind: "this is how Egyptians referred to the language spoken by Judaeans."[105] This is possible, but this name is not attested in Egyptian sources, and the audience of the oracle is Judaeans rather than Egyptians. Block proposes that the issue is one of scale: "in the context, [the language of Canaan] may have been intended as a counterpart of Egyptian."[106] That is, Canaanite is a suitable match or rival of Egyptian, since both are languages spoken across wide areas; perhaps in high-level international affairs, it would be parochial to refer to the "Judaean" language. But there is no particular indication in the text that this is the intent of using "the language of Canaan," and "Judaean," after all, is used in the Rabshakeh episode, in the context of high-level international relations.

In the explanations offered by these scholars, we see examples of how setting may have influenced glottonymy. As was indicated above, glottonyms exist in specific domains of discourse, and carry corresponding meanings and associations. This may indeed be the direction in which an explanation of "the language of Canaan" should be sought, but unfortunately the biblical evidence is not sufficient to resolve the issue.

Can we know anything about when and where the term שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן originated? The date of the Isaianic oracle in which "the language of Canaan" is mentioned is extremely uncertain, beyond the fact that it does not appear to belong to the earliest material in the book (thus, seventh century B.C.E. or later).[107] It does not seem likely, however, that the term originated within Israel or Judah; at least, it would surely not have originated among the circle of Israelites and Judaeans who emphasized the Israel/Canaan distinction, and whose attitudes are reflected throughout Hebrew Bible. Among the other nations in the region, but no unified or extensive polity went by the name Canaan. Thus "the language of Canaan" did not

---

[105] Quotation from Balogh, *Stele of YHWH*, 297; similarly, Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 456.

[106] Block, "National Identity," 327.

[107] See the further discussion of Isa 19:18 in Chapter 3 on the dating the oracle.

originate as a glottonym as "Judaean" may have, according to the explanation I offered

above.[108] Rather, as Block points out, the name appears to derive from a "geographic rather

than an ethnic" or geopolitical entity.[109]

As for the idea of regional linguistic similarity conveyed by "language of Canaan," it is most

applicable to the linguistic situation of the land before the Assyrians and Babylonians in the

eighth–sixth centuries B.C.E. extensively depopulated the region, and resettled foreign

peoples there (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 17:24–41), peoples who presumably spoke non-Canaanite

languages.[110] It is possible, then, that the name originated before this time. Alternatively, the

name may date to a later period, and reflect an attempt to refer to the speech of Canaan at a

time when well-defined polities like Judah, and their associated standardized languages, had

come to an end, and when therefore the differences between various dialects of Canaanite

might have been less apparent. Thus we must admit that we do not know when and among

whom this term originated.

ii. לשון כשדים, *ləšôn kaśdîm*, "Language of the Chaldeans" (Dan 1:4).

The instruction of Jewish youths in the writing and language of the Chaldeans sets the scene

for the action of the book of Daniel. The identity of this language, which has been thought to

be Aramaic, Akkadian, or the native language of the ethnic Chaldeans (a language probably

distinct from Aramaic), will be considered in depth in Chapter 7. Here it suffices to note the

double significance of the ethnonym כשדי in this context. On the one hand, כשדי is used

---

[108] An origin in the Late Bronze Age is intriguing, during the period of Egyptian hegemony over the area frequently referred to as *Kinaḫḫa*, "Canaan" in the Amarna letters (EA 38.15; 148.46). However, this predates the biblical attestation of the glottonym by at least half a millennium.

[109] Block, "National Identity," 327.

[110] See Chapter 7 for the effects of such deportation and resettlement on the linguistic situation of the land.

elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as an ethnic/national designation for the people of Babylonia. This usage is especially common in Jeremiah and other texts concerned with Nebuchadnezzar II's empire (e.g., 2 Kgs 25:10; Jer 21:4). In Dan 1:4, then, the "language of the Chaldeans," in the explicit setting of Nebuchadnezzar's court, clearly evokes this ethnic valence. In the larger context of Daniel, however, כשׂדי has another, more frequent, use to indicate a class of skilled diviners (Dan 2:2; 4:7; etc.). We have, in other words, a technical or professional nuance in the use of the phrase לשׁון כשׂדים in Daniel.[111]

3. Glottonyms Synthesis: Language and Peoplehood, and the Question of the Language vs. Dialect

This overview of the biblical names of languages has particular relevance for the question of the relationship between language and ethnicity in the Hebrew Bible. As Block observes, no straightforward relationship between ethnicity and language is discernible in the use of glottonyms in the Hebrew Bible.[112] For one thing, the entities from which the names derive are quite heterogeneous: a city (Ashdod), a geographical region (Canaan), a tribal kingdom (Judah), and two people-groups, which themselves have tribal characteristics (Aramaeans and Chaldeans). In addition, those presented as speaking these languages do not always come from the associated entities: Judaean is put in the mouth of an Assyrian; Canaanite will be spoken by Egyptians; and Judaeans use Aramaic, Chaldean, and Ashdodite.[113] Thus, these glottonyms encapsulate no single or distinctive way in which language corresponds to, forms,

---

[111] The relationship between the ethnic and the technical/professional meaning of "Chaldean" will be discussed in Chapter 7.

[112] Block, "National Identity," 339.

[113] Only in Neh 13:24 is the mismatch between a speaker's ethnicity (Judaean) and language spoken (Ashdodite) explicitly criticized in the Hebrew Bible, apparently as likely to undermine ethnic identity.

or contributes to identity. This is a clear contrast to the relationship that is presumed to exist in the frequent use of לשון and שפה alongside גוי and עם in non-specific cases. Put another way, these biblical glottonyms demonstrate that the particulars of language distribution in the real world cannot be accounted for by a simple people::language schema.

In addition, we may, for the last time, raise the issue of language and dialect in the Hebrew Bible. Two different names, "Judaean" and "Canaanite," can be accurately applied to the language spoken by Judaeans. Our scholarly explanation of this duality—basically that Judaean is a subdivision of Canaanite—involves distinguishing between orders of language (language vs. dialect), and asserting kinship of various degrees to exist among the members of these orders (e.g, that Moabite and Judaean alike are varieties of Canaanite). However, this glottonymic duality for Hebrew is not explicitly acknowledged in the Hebrew Bible, nor is any attempt is made to explain it.[114] Thus, though we must acknowledge that the glottonyms attested in ancient Hebrew provided the opportunity for reflection on orders of language and kinship among languages, if such reflection occurred in ancient Israel it is not recorded in the biblical corpus.[115]

IV. Expressing Foreign Language: לעז, "Speaking Unintelligibly" (Ps 114:1)

Of the terms most commonly used to express "foreignness" in the Hebrew Bible—נכרי, "foreign," זר, "strange," and אחר, "other"—only אחר is applied to a language in the Hebrew

---

[114] Ullendorff was perhaps too pessimistic about discovering an awareness of a dialect/language difference in the Hebrew Bible. He wrote: "the mental operation and intellectual insight required to discover linguistic kinship are of a high order . . . we may well doubt that such recognition obtruded itself upon their conscious minds"; Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 458–59.

[115] The Shibboleth incident in Judg 12:6 will be discussed in Chapter 4. This episode makes use of what we would call a dialectal difference; however, that difference is not categorized or expressed in such terms in Judg 12; see Chapter 4.

Bible, and only once (לשׁון אחרת; Isa 28:11). However, לעז, a verb that in later Hebrew means "to speak a foreign language,"[116] occurs in Ps 114, and may therefore be considered in this discussion of terms and names for languages in the Hebrew Bible.

Psalm 114 is a short hymnic poem which describes, in highly metaphorical terms, the response of the natural world (hills, mountains, sea, and rivers) to God's delivery of Israel from Egypt. At the opening of the psalm, we read:

> When Israel went out from Egypt, the House of Jacob from a *lōʿēz* people [בית
>   יעקב מעם לעז],
> Judah became his sanctuary, Israel his dominion (Ps 114:1)

The use of לעז here is probably a reference to linguistic difference, although commentators are divided as to its precise significance. I shall therefore investigate the likely meaning of this word, and the significance of its use in this context.

A. Textual Issues

Because the root לעז is a hapax legomenon in Biblical Hebrew, Mitchell Dahood proposed an emendation to MT here.[117] Dahood suggested a revocalization of the text: לְעָז, understood as the adjective עז, "strong, mighty, fierce," with asseverative *lamed*.[118] Dahood cites support from the broader biblical context, by noting that Egypt is much more consistently depicted as

---

[116] Jastrow לעז, 714a.

[117]Dahood, *Psalms*, 3:134.

[118] On the emphatic or asseverative *lamed*, see GKC §143 e; *IBHS* §11.2.10; and especially John Huehnergard, "Asseverative **la* and Hypothetical **lu/law* in Semitic," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 569–93.

cruel (e.g., Exod 1), than as speaking a foreign language.[119] Dahood also notes that the root is

only attested in Semitic languages much later than the biblical text (first in the Mishnah), so

he considers it a "late" root not at home in Biblical Hebrew.

Against Dahood's suggestion, we may note that there is no manuscript evidence in favour of

his distinctive vocalization. Moreover, all the ancient versions appear to understand לעז as

describing Egypt's linguistic otherness: LXX: βάρβαρου (Aquila: ἑτερόγλωσσου, "other-

tongued"); Vulg.: *barbaro*; Tg..: ברבראי; Syr.: *lʿwz* (adj., "speaking indistinctly"). Nor is

Dahood's linguistic argument valid. The Hebrew Bible, as a severely limited corpus, contains

only a fraction of the ancient Hebrew lexicon; it is likely that the apparent "lateness" of

words first attested in postbiblical texts should often be attributed to the scarcity of evidence

for earlier periods. And while Dahood is correct that Egypt is more frequently depicted as

cruel than as an alloglot, this observation does not warrant a textual emendation.

For these reasons, it is best to reject Dahood's emendation, and to interpret MT as it stands.

B. Meaning of לעז

In MT לֹעֵז is vocalized as a Qal active participle (m. sg.). The participle is here used

attributively: "a *lʿz*-ing people."[120] The root לעז is a hapax legomenon in biblical Hebrew, and

does not appear in the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Later Hebrew usage, cognate

languages, and context are therefore our sources for its meaning in Ps 114:1.

---

[119] Perplexingly, Dahood's own translation "barbaric," obscures this distinction, since "barbaric" connotes linguistic otherness as well as brutal behaviour. See the discussion below.

[120] *IBHS* §37.5. The modifying *active* ptc. with attributive adjectival function is rare (though common with pass. ptc.); more often, a modifying act. ptc. performs a relative function.

In this case, it may be noted that context does not clearly suggest a meaning for לעז. The "people" described as לעז are clearly Egypt, given the parallel structure of Psalm 114:1a: ישׂראל is paired with בית יעקב, and מצרים with עם לעז.[121] But there is no further mention of Egypt in the psalm that would indicate the particular aspect of this nation that the psalmist is trying to convey. In the broader biblical context, no single attribute of Egypt is emphasized to such an extent that we could infer that it was being mentioned in this passage. Elsewhere, we find descriptions of Egypt's harshness towards the Israelites (Exod 1:11–14), as well as its unreliability as an ally (2 Kgs 18:21; Isa 30:2–5). Occasionally its linguistic otherness is assumed or hinted at (Gen 42:23; Isa 19:18; perhaps Ps 81:6), without being emphasized. Thus, the fact that לעז refers to Egypt does not greatly assist us in reconstructing its meaning.

Another contextual clue might come from the narrative arc of the psalm. After quitting Egypt, Israel's fortunes improve greatly: "Judah became his [sc. Yahweh's] sanctuary, Israel his dominion" (Ps 114:1b). Indeed, some commentators have seen לעז as the antithesis of the new situation that Israel finds itself in. For instance, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger write: "When v. 1 localizes Israel/the house of Jacob in a hostile world of strange language, it characterizes Israel as homeless and threatened. This condition was ended when Israel, through the first and second exoduses, from Egypt and from Babylon, became Yнwн's sanctuary and the place of his royal rule—from which Yнwн will then give the nations a new language as well."[122] This "new language" is a reference to Zeph 3:9: "At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a purified speech [שׂפה ברורה], that all of them may call on the name of Yahweh and serve him with one accord." These suggestions are intriguing, but since they assume the meaning of לעז as "speaking a foreign language," they must be put

---

[121] The verb is elided in the second clause, as frequently occurs in Hebrew poetry; see Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), 83.

[122] Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 194.

aside for the moment; they cannot be said to be evidence from context concerning the meaning of לעז. What the context most clearly depicts is a replacement of the entity who has dominion over Israel: the people are no longer under Egypt's control, but Yahweh's. The role of language in this movement is not especially emphasized in the psalm.

We may next consider the weight of comparative Semitic evidence. In Mishnaic and later Hebrew, לעז is well attested in verbal, nominal, and adjectival forms, with two meanings: to speak a foreign (that is, non-Hebrew, non-Aramaic) language, especially Greek; and to speak ill of, to slander.[123] Beyond Mishnaic Hebrew, cognates occur in Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic.[124] In Jewish Aramaic texts, we find a similar dual usage of לעז as in Mishnaic Hebrew: to speak a foreign language; to speak ill of, to slander.[125] In Syriac, these meanings are also attested, and the root is also used of the singing of a bird, and of murmuring or whispering.[126] In Arabic, *l- ġ-z* has two meanings: "to speak ambiguously or enigmatically, to speak in riddles;" and "to provide [a burrow] with side tunnels" (apparently unrelated).[127] A meaning related to speech is thus common in the cognate languages. Further, we may say that this speech does not belong to the typical mode of everyday communication; it is speech that cannot readily be understood, because of how it sounds (murmuring; Syriac), because it is ambiguous or equivocal (Arabic), or because it belongs to another language (Mishnaic Hebrew, Aramaic).

---

[123] Jastrow 714a. Rabbinic tradition cleverly explains this root as an acronym of לשון עם זר, "language of a strange people."

[124] There is no clear cognate in Akkadian. *AHw* suggests that the rare *lezû* means "to stutter"*; AHw* 548b. Geller connects this with Hebrew לעז, by metathesis of *z* and ʿ, and subsequent loss of ʿ in Akkadian; Geller, "Imagery in Ps 114," 191 n. 29. However, *CAD* L 163a translates *lezû* as "continue, persist."

[125] Jastrow 714a.

[126] Sokoloff, *Syriac Lexicon*, 694.

[127] Lane 2264–5. The *ġ* in the Arabic word suggests the Proto-Semitic root was *l-ġ-z*.

Despite the fact that the attestations in these languages postdate Psalm 114 by several centuries (even if, with most commentators, we assume that this is a postexilic text),[128] this similarity in meaning is significant, and should be seen as providing good evidence for the meaning of לעז in the psalm. Though the evidence of later Hebrew, where the root means specifically "foreign language," should be given strongest weight, yet in light of the comparative evidence it is most prudent to read here the more widely attested general meaning "unintelligible speech" (gibberish, jabbering, nonsense, which could be applied equally to the speech of a foreigner, infant, lunatic, or animal). Thus I favour BDB's definition "to talk indistinctly, unintelligibly," to *HALOT*'s "to speak an uncomprehensible [sic] language, speak a foreign language," and certainly to *DCH*'s "speak a foreign language, *be foreign*."[129]

The question of the connotative meaning of לעז, that is, of the word's associations in the minds of ancient readers, is very difficult to answer. Modern translators and commentators have, however, speculated concerning the ancient connotations of לעז. One particular locus of reflection is the root לעג, "to mock, deride; (perhaps also) to stutter," due to graphic and phonetic similarity to לעז, and its use in related contexts.[130] Now, Stephen Geller is correct to point out that in the Hebrew Bible "foreign speech is portrayed as the result of an impediment."[131] This seems to be the case in Isaiah, where the root לעג is used to liken foreign speech to stuttering (28:11; 33:19), and in Ezekiel (3:5–6).[132] However, Geller

---

[128] So Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 193; Gerstenberger, *Psalms and Lamentations*, 281.

[129] BDB 541b; *HALOT* 533a; *DCH* 4:555b (emphasis added).

[130] The extent of the phonetic similarity is unclear. The value of ע as ʿ or ġ in לעג is not determinable, because its cognates in Semitic languages other than Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac are not extant.

[131] Stephen A. Geller, "The Language of Imagery in Psalm 114," in *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran* (ed. Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard and Piotr Steinkeller; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 179–94, at 192.

[132] See Chapter 6 below for a full discussion of these passages, and an examination of the meaning of לעג in Isa 28:11; 33:19.

overstates the evidence when he speaks of the "partial semantic merging" of לעג and לעז,[133] as does Gottfried Glaßner when, following Kraus, he translates לעז in our psalm as "stammelnd" on the grounds that it is a "Nebenform" of לעג.[134] The attestations of לעז—once—and לעג in the meaning "stutter"—twice—are insufficient to support such a reconstruction of an overlap in the words' meanings. Specifically, there is nothing in Ps 114, or, indeed, in later Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac, that supports the meaning "stutter" for לעז. We should not admit more, then, than that an association of the two roots in ancient times was possible, given the phonetic and graphic similarity, the use in related contexts, and the practice of allusive wordplay among the biblical authors.[135] But this possibility is not an essential item in understanding לעז in Ps 114:1, and "stuttering" should certainly not enter into a translation of this text.[136]

The other major connotative aspect that modern scholars attribute to לעז concerns cruelty or savagery. Geller translates "cruel strangers," which he justifies by claiming that a pun on עז is intended in this word.[137] But while this is possible, it is not certain, and should not form the basis for a translation. Another line of interpretation is favoured by Artur Weiser, Robert

---

[133] Geller, "Imagery in Ps 114," 192.

[134] Gottfried Glaßner, "Aufbruch als Heimat," *ZKT* 116 (1994): 472–9, at 472. *Stammeln* means primarily "stutter," and to this extent it is misleading, though it can also mean "babble," which is more pertinent to לעז. Glaßner explicitly intends both meanings; ibid., 474 n. 6. Kraus also uses "stammelnd"; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 370.

[135] For an overview of the forms of paronomasia, or wordplay, in the Hebrew Bible, with an up-to-date bibliography, see Scott B. Noegel, "Paronomasia," *EHLL* 3:24–29. See also the recent in-depth study by Jonathan Greenlee Kline, "Transforming the Tradition: Soundplay as an Interpretive Device in Innerbiblical Allusions" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014).

[136] It should be mentioned that it has frequently been observed that triliteral Semitic roots beginning with the same two consonants often (though certainly not always) overlap semantically; consider, for example, פרר, "to split," פרד, "to divide," and פרק, "to tear apart." Such a situation may be at work in the case of לעז and לעג. These semantic similarities may be attributable to the ultimate origin of these roots as modified biliteral roots, although this view is problematic; see *PMBH* 188–89.

[137] Geller, "Imagery in Ps 114," 179, 191.

Alter, and certain modern published translations of the Hebrew Bible.[138] These render לֹעֵז with a word such as "barbarous," "barbaric," and "barbarian," related to Greek βάρβαρος, "non-Greek, foreign … especially of language; … brutal, rude."[139] The intended effect appears to be to convey both linguistic otherness and also brutality. Alter writes: "The Hebrew *lo'ez* corresponds exactly to the Greek term from which 'barbarous' and 'barbaric' are derived. Both indicate the utterance of unintelligible sounds instead of the articulate speech of a *civilized* people."[140]

There are two issues here. Firstly, do the Hebrew and Greek terms correspond? Secondly, are "barbarous, etc." appropriate English translations of לֹעֵז? In answering the first question, we should point out once again that the single attestation of לֹעֵז, without significant clarifying contextual information, is insufficient to inform us about the whole texture of the word in ancient Hebrew, or in this verse in particular. βάρβαρος and לֹעֵז approximately correspond insofar as the two indicate linguistic difference. I say "approximately" because βάρβαρος is an onomatopoeic word that conveys the sound of a foreign language to the hearer, whereas this does not seem to the case for לֹעֵז. But in the matter of brutality, we must be very cautious. As mentioned above, in the Hebrew Bible Egypt is indeed depicted as treating the Israelites harshly; thus if לֹעֵז, like βάρβαρος, had such a behavioural connotation, it would be an appropriate way of describing the Egyptians. But this is not the same as saying that לֹעֵז did have such a connotation, and that this connotation is being activated in Ps 114:1. Of this we

---

[138] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (trans. Herbert Hartwell; London: SCM, 1962), 710; Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), 405. As noted above, Dahood also translates "barbaric," though it is not clear whether he intends the connotation of "linguistic otherness" that belongs to this word's etymology; Dahood, *Psalms*, 3:134. Among English translations, the REB uses "barbaric." Douay-Rheims uses "barbarous," probably under the influence of the Vulg.

[139] LSJ *ad loc.* See Chapter 6 for a fuller account of the Greek concept of "barbarity," and its history and relation to ideas in the Hebrew Bible.

[140] Alter, *Psalms*, 405. Emphasis added.

do not have clear evidence. Thus the range in meaning of Greek βάρβαρος exceeds what we can claim to know of ancient Hebrew לעז.

These considerations aid us in answering the second question, whether "barbarous, etc." are appropriate English translations of לעז, "speaking unintelligibly." But while linguistic otherness belongs to the etymology of "barbarous, etc.," the primary meaning in contemporary usage is "brutal, uncivilized, savage," which we cannot attribute to לעז. Thus, "barbarous, etc." are highly misleading translations of לעז,[141] and I would argue they are best avoided.

C. The Use of לעז in Ps 114

Having established a broad meaning for לעז, we may now ask what the effect of using it in Psalm 114:1 is. What is intended or achieved by describing Egypt as "a people speaking unintelligibly" in this context?

We may first point out that עם לעז seems to express both the perspective of the psalmist, and the experience of the Israelites delivered by Yahweh at the exodus. The main point is not that, to the psalmist writing in his own age, the Egyptians are a people who speak unintelligibly; rather, it is that the psalmist thinks that the Israelites who underwent the exodus considered the Egyptians an עם לעז. In this way we see how עם לעז is less a claim about the inherent nature of Egypt's language than an attempt to convey Israel's subjective experience of that tongue. That is to say, Egyptian is not really nonsense, but, according to the psalmist, it certainly seemed so to the "house of Jacob."

---

[141] Alter's own translation, "barbarous-tongued folk," attempts to highlight the specific connotation of linguistic-otherness of the English word; Alter, *Psalms*, 405.

According to some commentators, this description was an especially apposite one for how Hebrew speakers perceived the (non-Semitic) Egyptian language, because of the relatively greater differences between these two languages than between Hebrew and other Semitic languages.[142] That is, the Egyptians stand out as a "jabbering people" because they spoke a language that was *particularly* alien to the Israelites. This suggestion is credible, but if we accept it, we should be aware that it involves making assumptions about the knowledge of the psalmist, and of his audience. For this observation to have occurred to the psalmist (or be relevant to his audience), he (and they) would need some real exposure both to the Egyptian language, and to other Semitic languages. And while this is absolutely possible in most periods of Israelite history, it should not be overlooked that it is not a given.

Whether or not לעז is used to depict a particularly extreme degree of linguistic difference, or simply linguistic difference of some kind, the chief effect of describing the Egyptians as speaking unintelligibly, as most commentators have pointed out, is to convey aspects of Israel's experience in Egypt. Feelings of disorientation and discomfort, alienation, and powerlessness may be evoked by drawing attention to Egypt's unintelligible speech (although the context does not elaborate on these).[143] This may be more than simply an act of artistic sympathy on the part of the psalmist, but rather describe an experience that resonated particularly with the psalmist and his original audience in their historical circumstances, as Hossfeld and Zenger propose. They attribute Ps 114 to the postexilic period, detecting in this text dependence on motifs from Isaiah 40–55 (e.g., mountains, hills, seas, and rivers responding to Yahweh's deliverance; water springing from dry land), where Israel's

---

[142] Ullendorff, "C'est de l'hébreu," 132; John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 394.

[143] E.g., Eaton, *Psalms*, 394; Geller, "Imagery in Ps 114," 192–93.

liberation from Babylon is described.[144] Consequently, Hossfeld and Zenger suggest that through mentioning the exodus from Egypt, the psalm simultaneously "or primarily looks back to the second exodus, from Babylon." Hossfeld and Zenger thus believe that "it is very probable that the Babylonians are meant by the expression 'people of strange language.'"[145]

We must agree with Hossfeld and Zenger that the psalm could hardly have failed to resonate with the experience of Judaeans during and after the exile, whether deported or left behind, since their linguistic situation was fundamentally changed after the defeat of the kingdom of Judah.[146] But in our assessment of the intent of the psalm, we should not dismiss the fact that this text explicitly sets out to describe the exodus from Egypt, not Babylon, and the wondrous entry into Canaan across the Jordan (Ps 114:3–4; cf. the procession of the ark across the wondrously divided Jordan in Josh 3–4). In the absence of clearly-late historical references, the date of this text is uncertain. Thus I would not go so far as to claim that Psalm 114 is "primarily" about the second exodus.

Another effect of using לֹעֵז in this psalm is to imply its opposite. As mentioned above, the first verse of this psalm expresses a dramatic reversal: Israel moves from being Egypt's captive to Yahweh's sanctuary (קׇדְשׁוֹ) and dominion (מַמְשְׁלוֹתָיו). This structure of reversal leads the reader to suppose that the unintelligible talk that characterized life in Egypt also drops away in the new situation, along with any accompanying alienation and unease. In this way, the psalm seems to allude to a feeling of security one may have in a monolingual environment that can only be fully appreciated with reference to the opposite situation: to be

---

[144] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 199.

[145] Ibid., 194. Similarly, John Goldingay, *Psalms* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006–2008), 3:321. It might be noted that Israel's linguistic distance from the Babylonians (speakers of Akkadian or, more likely in the sixth century B.C.E, Aramaic) was not as dramatic as its distance from the Egyptians.

[146] See Chapter 7 for a fuller discussion of this topic.

in one's homeland, surrounded by speakers of one's native language, is comfortable in a way that is most keenly felt on returning.

Once again, this is a sympathetic or compassionate observation on the part of the psalmist, but its significance has been overemphasized. In Ps 114, the new linguistic situation for the Israelites that arises after the exodus is not specifically mentioned, nor clearly contained in the references to Yahweh's "sanctuary" and "dominion." For these reasons, I regard as far-fetched the supposition shared by Geller and Hossfeld and Zenger, and mentioned above, that Israel's new linguistic situation in the psalm contains some universal significance. There seems to be no indication in Ps 114 that Israel's departure from Egypt results, or will eventually result, in a universal language, the "pure speech" of humanity alluded to in Zeph 3:9, of the kind that reverses the divisions established at the overthrow of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9).[147]

Rather, what this psalm does point to is the reality that different nations speak different languages. Specifically, implicit in the description of exodus-era Egypt as a "people speaking unintelligibly" is the view that the Hebrews, during their slavery, spoke a language other than Egyptian. In the Hebrew Bible, Ps 114:1 is the only allusion to this view, although it does not identify the language of the Israelites.[148] In rabbinic Jewish thought this assumption becomes standard,[149] and, at least in part, serves to answer the question, How did Israel maintain its identity during its period of servitude among a foreign people? The book of Exodus suggests that it was not Israel's continued worship of its god that defined them. But according to

---

[147] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, 194; Geller, "Imagery in Ps 114," 193–4.

[148] This psalm does not express this view if the description of Egypt as a jabbering people reflects the psalmist's perspective, rather than the exodus group's. This is a possible interpretation of the psalm.

[149] See, e.g., *Lev. Rab.* 32.5, which claims that Israelites "did not change their language [לֹא שִׁנּוּ לְשׁוֹנָם]," citing Exod 5:3: "the God of *the Hebrews* has revealed himself to us" (emphasis added). In Ridley Scott's recent Hollywood blockbuster *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, the Israelites in Egypt are even shown using their own script (the Palaeo-Hebrew script).

traditional interpretation, language was one of the cultural elements of peoplehood that the Israelites maintained, linking them to Abraham "the Hebrew."[150]

Now, Ps 114:1 appears to pave the way for this line of thought. But it would be implausible to claim that this identity-preserving function of the Israelites' language is exhibited by the psalm. For the specifically Israelite language (in contrast to which, Egyptian is gibberish) is not identified here nor expressly referred to. Furthermore, the psalm does not stress the idea of linguistic continuity in Israel, even if we might suspect that it presumes it. It is not indicated that that language of the "house of Jacob" in Egypt is the same as that of Jacob's ancestors or distant descendants. Thus, Ps 114:1 should be identified as a likely first attestation of the idea that the Israelites spoke their own language during their time in Egypt, but the ramifications of that idea are at most only latent within it.

Overall, then, the use of לעז in Ps 114 is suggestive and succinct: it presumes that the Hebrews maintained their linguistic difference from the Egyptians during their bondage, and perhaps indicates a perception about the great distance between Hebrew and Egyptian; and it conveys a feeling of alienation in a multilingual setting, and the reversal of that feeling, by referring to a (mytho-)historical period that may have resonances with the psalmist's own circumstances. Arguably the complexity of this usage illustrates that the presence of לעז in Ps 114:1 is the result of considered reflection on the meaning of linguistic diversity.

---

[150] *Lev. Rab.* 32.5. Similarly, this midrash asserts that the Israelites clung to other items of their cultural heritage, including their names.

D. The Egyptian Language in Ps 114 and Elsewhere

Although no name for the Egyptian language is attested in the Hebrew Bible, I regard this as largely accidental, since there are a several clear indications in the Hebrew Bible beyond Ps 114:1 of the linguistic otherness of the Egyptians.[151] Set before the period of Israelite servitude, the Joseph story contains such references. Acting as a high Egyptian official, Joseph uses an interpreter (מליץ) during negotiations with his Israelite brothers (Gen 42:23).[152] Joseph also receives an Egyptian name (צפנת פענח, *ṣāpənat paʿnēaḥ*; Gen 41:45), and what is perhaps an Egyptian word, אברך, *ʾabrēk* (Gen 41:43) is found in the narrative. The prediction in Isa 19:18 about the speaking of the "language of Canaan" in five cities of Egypt also presumes that in normal circumstances Egypt is linguistically other than Canaan. But the language of the Egyptian masters is not a standard element in biblical retellings of the oppression in Egypt and the flight therefrom, including in the book of Exodus.[153] This theme apparently was not an especially vivid or productive one in Israel's cultural memory.

V. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the three words for "a language" used in the Hebrew Bible were seen to have overlapping ranges of meaning. Some diachronic distinctions may be apparent in their distribution—לשון being found in all periods, and שפה being found in pre-exilic and exilic

---

[151] The Egyptians referred to their language as *r n kmt* and *mdt kmt*, "the language of Egypt," or otherwise simply as "the language of men"; see Uljas, "Linguistic Consciousness," 2, 3. No name for this language is found in Akkadian, but in Aramaic, מצרית with the meaning "in Egyptian" is attested in two documents from Elephantine; *TADAE* B3.7,10. Another use of *mṣryt* to refer to this language may be found in a Nabataean text dated to 36 B.C.E. from a trade post in Egypt; see Richard N. Jones et al., "A Second Nabataean Inscription from Tell esh-Shuqafiya, Egypt," *BASOR* 269 (1998): 47–57, at 48, with discussion at 51, 52.

[152] The meaning of the term מליץ will be discussed in Chapter 7, in the context of a detailed discussion of linguistic diversity in the Joseph story.

[153] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the other case (also a psalm) in which the language of the oppressing Egyptians may be mentioned, Ps 81:6.

texts—and the use of these words suggests a close relationship between language and ethnicity. In contrast, the names of particular languages attested in the Hebrew Bible do not seem to be derived in any straightforward way from ethnic groups. Thus, these texts do not attest to a consistent or systematic presentation of the relationship between language and peoplehood. In addition, we saw in this chapter that the distinction between language and dialect is not clearly stated in the Hebrew Bible, although observations pertinent to the issue are made. Finally, rather than specifically "to speak a foreign language," the verb לֹעֵז (Ps 114:1) appears to mean "to speak unintelligibly" in reference to the Egyptians, and was used succinctly in that psalm to great effect.

Chapter 3

The Past and Future of Linguistic Diversity

I. Introduction

This chapter continues to investigate some of the concerns of Chapter 2—the relationship between people and language, and the role of language in establishing distinctions. In this chapter, I move to a discussion of texts that depict the beginnings of linguistic and national diversity, and those that may envisage the future removal of boundaries between languages and peoples.

To begin, the question of the origins of linguistic diversity will be addressed, through a consideration of the Table of Nations (Gen 10) and the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11:1–9), in light of potentially relevant comparative evidence. The joint presentation of linguistic and ethnic diversity in these texts will be explored, and the perspectives of the two texts contrasted. I shall also examine Yahweh's role in confusing the language of humanity in the Babel episode, and the story's possibly negative evaluation of the world's linguistically diverse condition.

Corresponding to this discussion of the origins of linguistic diversity, I shall examine several prophetic texts which may predict a change in the world's linguistic situation in the future (Zeph 3:9; Isa 19:18; Zech 8:23). These texts invite us to consider the question of whether the Hebrew Bible expresses an idea that some particular language has a specific or unique religious function. Finally, through an analysis of Ps 81:6 I shall discuss the issue of whether in the Hebrew Bible a boundary exists between the divine realm and the human with respect

to language: is a divine language, the speech of heaven, distinguished from terrestrial human language by the biblical authors?

II. The Origins of Linguistic Diversity: The Table of Nations (Gen 10)

Two texts in the Hebrew Bible address the the history of the distinction between languages, and the associated distinction between peoples. The perspectives of these accounts appear to be contrasting, but have often been related. In this section, I shall examine the role and meaning of language, and the distinctions associated with it, in these two texts separately, before exploring the relationship between them.

A. The Table of Nations (Gen 10): Language, Clan, Land, and Nation

Following the conclusion of the flood narrative, and the episode of Noah's drunkenness, the so-called Table of Nations presents, in three sections, the genealogy of Noah's sons, Japheth (vv. 2–5), Ham (vv. 6–20), and Shem (vv. 21–31). The conclusion of each genealogy is in the following form (with minor variations): אלה בני חם למשפחתם ללשנתם בארצתם בגויהם "These are the descendants of Ham, by their clans, their languages, in their lands, their nations." (Gen 10:20; cf. 5, 31).[1] I shall here consider the role language plays as a boundary marker in this text.

---

[1] NRSV modified. The singular "language" appears in v. 5, in the distributive phrase איש ללשנו, "each by its language." This verse also contains a variant order of the elements, though retains the prepositional usage of vv. 20, 31. The whole Table concludes with a comparable formula that lacks reference to language: "These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their genealogies, in their nations"; v. 32.

1. Form

According to traditional source-critical analysis, the Table of Nations is a composite text.[2] A unit from the Priestly source (P) provides the structure and is primarily genealogical. Entries are of the form: "The descendants of Shem: Elam, Ashur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. The descendants of Aram: etc." (vv. 22–23). Notably for our purposes, the three closing formulae that contain references to "languages" are assigned to P (vv. 5, 20, 31). Into this unit have been inserted two extended portions of J material (Gen 10:8–19, 24–30), which is more heterogeneous, including narrative elements (the feats of the empire builder and proverbial hunter, Nimrod; vv. 8–12),[3] territorial notes (e.g., v. 19), and a name explanation (of Peleg, "in whose days the earth was split [provided with canals?; נפלגה הארץ]"' v. 25).[4]

Despite the composite nature of this text, there is a coherent structure in Gen 10, which moves through the descendants of each of Noah's sons with little repetition (although another list of Shem's descendants [Gen 11:10–26; P] is given after the Tower of Babel episode). Moreover, the typologically significant number of names listed in MT, seventy, suggests that a clear rationale pervades the whole.[5]

---

[2] See, e.g., Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:499.

[3] On possibilities for the identity of the biblical figure of Nimrod (as a human or divine Mesopotamian figure), see Yigal Levin, "Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad," *VT* 52 (2002): 350–66; and also Karel van der Toorn and Pieter W. van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible," *HTR* 83 (1990): 1–29.

[4] For further discussion of Peleg, see the discussion below on the relationship between the Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel episode.

[5] LXX has seventy-one. On the significance of the number seventy in the Hebrew Bible, see Göran Friberg, "Numbers and Counting," *ABD* 4:1579–88, at 1587–88.

2. לְלִשֹׁנֹתָם "By their languages": Language as One Factor in Ethnic Boundaries

The Table of Nations claims to list the clans, nations, and territories of Noah's sons' descendants, "each by its language [אִישׁ לִלְשׁנוֹ]."[6] In this repeated formula, we find language associated with several other terms emphasizing different dimensions of the world's human communities: מִשְׁפָּחָה, "clan, family," which focuses on communities structured by kinship bonds; גּוֹי, "nation, people," denoting a large human community with connotations of political organization; and אֶרֶץ, "land, country" which specifies the territory occupied by a community. The contribution of לָשׁוֹן is in raising the issue of the distinctive mode of speech in which the members of a group communicate among each other.

The formula in the Table of Nations is thus comparable to the Aramaic phrase כֹּל עַמְמַיָּא אֻמַּיָּא וְלִשָּׁנַיָּא, "all peoples, nations, and tongues," found in Daniel (e.g. 3:4, 7, 29). In that phrase, as was discussed earlier, לָשׁוֹן has the meaning "linguistic community" rather than "language." I do not, however, see good reason for understanding לָשׁוֹן in Gen 10 in this way. It is not that we here have various types of communities referred to—clans vs. nations vs. countries vs. linguistic communities; rather, the formula is pointing out that human beings are bound together by several types of bonds into overlapping communities.

Among these different forms of diversity among communities, however, language is apparently not primary. For the familial structure of relationships between peoples that the Table presents does not correspond to the family tree of languages that modern linguistics constructs. This is despite the fact that linguists have applied the Table's names—Hamitic, Japhetic, and, especially still, Semitic—to large branches of that family tree. This disparity

---

[6] For the use of the *lamed* preposition with the meaning "according to, after, by," see BDB לְ, 510a–518a, at 516a.

may be seen, for instance, in the situation of Elam and Canaan, as Nahum Sarna points out.[7]

We may suspect that factors of regional and cultural similarity are at work in the presentation

of Elam as a son of Shem and brother of Ashur and Aram, despite the fact that Elamite is a

language isolate. Conversely, the Canaanites, the closest linguistic (and cultural) neighbours

of the Israelites, are clearly separated from Israel as part of a wide-reaching identity polemic

in the Hebrew Bible: Israel is a descendant of Shem, through Eber and Abraham, whereas

Canaan springs from Ham, and is brother to Egypt and Cush (Nubia).[8] Thus, it appears that a

confluence of several disparate factors are at work in structuring the Table of Nations, and

that similarity of language is neither necessary nor sufficient to establish the kinship of

peoples here.

3. The Languages of Gen 10

Nevertheless, the formulaic phraseology of vv. 5, 20, 31, "each according to its language,"

does suggest that there is a straightforward correspondence between ethnicity and speech:

languages and nations exist in a ratio of 1:1. Yet the seventy nations listed in the Table vastly

exceed the number of languages to which the Hebrew Bible refers. Moreover, we could not

expect the authors/redactors of this text to have been familiar with the languages of more than

a few of peoples listed in Gen 10. In that respect this text appears to be displaying schematic

or systematizing intent, assuming rather than demonstrating an abstract principle of

correspondence of language to people. As Claus Westermann and others have noted, this is in

---

[7] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 68.

[8] Canaan here consists of the Phoenicians (Sidonians), Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, etc. Others of Israel's close neighbours in the southern Levant are elsewhere presented as close Semitic kin of Israel: Ammon and Moab are the sons of Abraham's nephew Lot (Gen 19); and Edom/Esau is the brother of Jacob/Israel brother (Gen 25). The Philistines are said to be descendants of Ham, through Egypt (Gen 10:14).

accordance with the Priestly author's ordered presentation of other phenomena in the

Pentateuch.[9]

In fact, strictly speaking, no glottonyms are given in the Table, of the form we encounter

elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible—"language [לשׁון/שׂפת] of X" or "ethnonym + *ît* suffix"

Instead, the Table contains a mixed list of ethnonyms and toponyms, presented for the most

part as eponymous ancestors.[10] But since it contains such people- and place-names, it is

natural that this list includes names associated with distinct ancient languages. Among this

list are several nations or territories associated elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible with a

particular language: Aram, Canaan, and Egypt.[11] The list also contains reference to ancient

peoples/places whom we know to have had distinct languages: Elam, Akkad,[12] Javan

(Greece), etc.[13] The ancestor of the Hebrews, Eber, is, of course, mentioned although, as

discussed above, this name is not given to the Hebrew language in the Hebrew Bible.

However, despite the fact that we can associate a number of these peoples with known

languages, we cannot know how many of these languages the biblical authors were aware of.

---

[9] Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; 3 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984–1986), 1:501–3.

[10] For identifications, with greater or lesser degrees of certainty, see, e.g., Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:504–28. In the material attributed to J, some groups are listed as gentilic pl. forms, e.g., פלשׁתים, "Philistines" (Gen 10:14).

[11] Arpachshad (ארפכשׁד) should perhaps be added to this list, if the name is to be associated with the Chaldeans (כשׂדים); see John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1910), 210–20. The two other peoples/places that are clearly associated with languages in the Hebrew Bible are not present here: Ashdod and Judah. The origins of Judah and the other sons of Israel are described much later in Genesis.

[12] *Akkadû(m)* is the Akkadian word for the Akkadian language, though the geographical and ethnic use of "Akkad" and "the Akkadians" in Akkadian literature varies through time; *CAD* A1 *akkadû* at 272a–273a.

[13] Shinar (שׁנער) may belong among these if it is related to "Sumer", Akk. *Šumeru(m)*, but it is more likely that the name is related to the Mesopotamian region/people referred to in cuneiform documents as *Šanḫara*, Eg. *Sngr*; see Ran Zadok, "The Origin of the Name Shinar" *ZA* 74 (1984): 241–4.

4. Accounting for and Evaluating Linguistic Diversity in Gen 10

In the multinational world depicted in the Table of Nations, linguistic diversity receives no special explanation. Such diversity accompanies the dispersion of peoples after the flood—that is, linguistic difference is associated with geographical separation of kin groups. But the process by which each people came to possess its own territory and language is not envisaged. In this sense I regard J. Severino Croatto as incorrect in stating that this text "explained [linguistic diversity] by way of genealogy."[14] Gen 10 simply presumes the existence of various languages in the world.

Since Gen 10 lacks an explanation of that diversity, it is also devoid of information on which we might base an assessment of how it evaluates the multilingual status of the world. To ascertain this, scholars have looked to the relationship between Gen 10 and the flood story. Bill T. Arnold writes that the Table of Nations exhibits "a positive appraisal of human dispersion," because it fulfils God's postdiluvial blessing on Noah's family, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen 9:1, 7).[15] This renews God's blessing bestowed upon all humanity at creation (Gen 1:28), both texts exhibiting distinctively Priestly characteristics. But while this seems the correct way to understand the dispersion of humanity in Gen 10, is not clear that linguistic diversity per se is a manifestation of this blessedness. Genesis 10 does not say as much. Since this is uncertain, we do not know whether to describe as positive the evaluation of the earth's multilingualism in Gen 10. And for sure, "linguistic diversity as boon" is not an emphasized or central theme of the text. Therefore, it seems safer to say

---

[14] J. Severino Croatto, "A Reading of the Story of the Tower of Babel from the Perspective of Non-Identity: Genesis 11:1–9 in the Context of Its Production," in *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), 203–223, at 219.

[15] Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 119.

merely that Gen 10 presents linguistic diversity as a fact of life, and one that is intimately linked with mankind's ethnic and territorial distinctions.

B. The Tower of Babel Episode (Gen 11:1–9)

Besides Gen 10, the following unit, Gen 11:1–9, is the other text that we should examine on the subject of the origins of multilingualism. In the story of the building of the city and tower of Babel, we find a mythical exposition of the phenomenon of linguistic diversity. This account explains linguistic diversity as arising out of an interaction of conflicting human and divine motives. This tale is the most extended reflection on the topic in the Hebrew Bible, and the only biblical narrative which has linguistic diversity as a primary focus. The text thus merits detailed attention in a consideration of attitudes towards linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. In this section, I shall consider the meaning and significance through several topics, in particular: the unity of Gen 11:1–9; the idea of language in this text, including the terminology שפה and דברים אחדים; the attitudes towards linguistic unity and diversity in the text, including the question of sin and punishment in this story; a possible Sumerian parallel to the story; and finally the relationship between the Tower of Babel episode and the text just discussed, the Table of Nations.

1. Gen 11:1–9

וַיְהִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ שָׂפָה אֶחָת וּדְבָרִים אֲחָדִים: ² וַיְהִי בְּנָסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּמְצְאוּ בִקְעָה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר ¹
וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: ³ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ הָבָה נִלְבְּנָה לְבֵנִים וְנִשְׂרְפָה לִשְׂרֵפָה וַתְּהִי לָהֶם הַלְּבֵנָה לְאָבֶן
וְהַחֵמָר הָיָה לָהֶם לַחֹמֶר: ⁴ וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָבָה נִבְנֶה־לָּנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה־לָּנוּ שֵׁם
פֶּן־נָפוּץ עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: ⁵ וַיֵּרֶד יְהֹוָה לִרְאֹת אֶת־הָעִיר וְאֶת־הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם: ⁶
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהֹוָה הֵן עַם אֶחָד וְשָׂפָה אַחַת לְכֻלָּם וְזֶה הַחִלָּם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה לֹא־יִבָּצֵר מֵהֶם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יָזְמוּ
לַעֲשׂוֹת: ⁷ הָבָה נֵרְדָה וְנָבְלָה שָׁם שְׂפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ: ⁸ וַיָּפֶץ יְהֹוָה אֹתָם
מִשָּׁם עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וַיַּחְדְּלוּ לִבְנֹת הָעִיר: ⁹ עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ בָּבֶל כִּי־שָׁם בָּלַל יְהֹוָה שְׂפַת
כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וּמִשָּׁם הֱפִיצָם יְהֹוָה עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ:

1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. **2** And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. **3** And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. **4** Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall spread abroad upon the face of the whole earth." **5** Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower, which the humans had built. **6** And Yahweh said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they plan to do will now be impossible for them. **7** Come, let us go down, and mix their language there, so that they will not understand one another's language." **8** So Yahweh spread them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. **9** Therefore it was called Babel, because there Yahweh mixed the language of all the earth; and from there Yahweh spread them abroad over the face of all the earth.[16] (Gen 11:1–9)

2. Textual Issues

The text of Gen 11:1–9 is largely secure. The only major variant to MT occurs in v. 8 of LXX and SP, where a third reference to the tower is found at the end of the verse: "they left off building the city <u>and the tower</u> [καὶ τὸν πύργον = המגדל ואת*]." This may have been omitted in MT through homoioteleuton, since the first word of v. 9, על, ends in *lamed*, like מגדל. Alternatively, it may have been added in SP and LXX in order to harmonize v. 8 with vv. 4, 5, where city and tower are mentioned together.

3. Context

The Tower of Babel episode immediately follows the Table of Nations , and is followed by a genealogy, from Shem, of Terah and his son Abram (Gen 11:10–32).[17] The Tower of Babel is thus the final narrative episode in the Primaeval History (Gen 1–11). This is the last story in

---

[16] NRSV modified.

[17] The relationship between Gen 10 and Gen 11:1–9 will be discussed at the end of this section.

which Yahweh is shown interacting with humanity as a whole; after this point, the narrator focuses on Yahweh's relations with a single man and the people that springs from him. Gen 10 and 11 lay the groundwork for the election of Abram, by depicting the break-up of the original unity of mankind.

4. Form: The Unity of Gen 11:1–9

As it stands, Gen 11:1–9 displays a clearly-structured progression: after the narrator sets the scene (v.1–2), the human beings plan and undertake a course of action, which is conveyed to the reader through direct speech (vv. 3–4); next, Yahweh assesses and responds to the plans of the humans, which is also conveyed to the reader through direct speech (vv. 5–8); finally, the narrator closes the story with a note of broader significance (v. 9). As Umberto Cassuto pointed out, this structure is augmented by frequent alliteration of *bet, lamed,* and *nun*, as in נלבנה לבנים (v. 3), נבלה (v. 7), and בלל, so that the name "Babel" echoes throughout the tale.[18]

Yet despite these indications of structure, Hermann Gunkel and, more recently, Christoph Uehlinger have argued that Gen 11:1–9 shows signs of being a composite text. Gunkel proposed that Gen 11:1–9 is composed of two originally distinct accounts, later combined by the author of the Yahwistic Pentateuchal source (J).[19] In one episode, the "tower recension," humanity begins to build a mighty tower in Shinar as a measure against spreading across the earth, but Yahweh spread them nonetheless. In the second episode, the "Babel recension," the humans intend to make a name for themselves by building a great city, but their city acquires

---

[18] Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II: From Noah to Abraham* (trans. by Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 232–33.

[19] Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997; trans. Mark E. Biddle, with foreword by Ernest W. Nicholson; trans. of the 3d German ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 94–98.

the ironic name Babel after Yahweh inflicts linguistic diversity upon them.[20] Uehlinger's theory posits only a single original account, stemming from the Neo-Assyrian period and addressing Sargon II's imperial policies. This first account was subject to three redactional phases, including one that reoriented the tale to the circumstances of the reign of the Neo-Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar II.[21] The primary evidence for both scholars in dividing the account is the duality they detect in the story: two building projects (tower vs. city), two motives by humans (to avoid dispersing vs. to make a name), two descents of Yahweh, two responses by Yahweh (scattering people vs. mixing languages).

If either of these theses were correct, they would be highly pertinent to our understanding of the role of language in this story, since they seek to separate the idea of the spread of humanity from the notion of mankind's linguistic diversity. These source/redaction-critical analyses, however, may be challenged. Joel Baden has argued that the traditional principles of source criticism cannot be used to demonstrate multiplicity in this text.[22] For one thing, only a single divine name, יהוה, is used to refer to the Israelite god. Moreover, there are no contradictions within the story that would be explained through the combination of sources. In particular, Baden points out that the apparent doublets can be convincingly explained as original to a single literary composition.[23] Yahweh's dual descent, for example, is clearly explained in Gen 11: Yahweh first comes down to earth "(in order) to see" the status of the city and the tower (v. 5), whereas the purpose of his second descent (vv. 7–8) is to sabotage the project. As for the pair עיר ומגדל, "city and tower" (vv. 4, 5), Westermann has indicated

---

[20] A convenient division of Gen 11:1–9 into the two accounts that Gunkel reconstructs may be found in Joel Baden, "The Tower of Babel: A Case Study in the Competing Methods of Historical and Modern Literary Criticism," *JBL* 128 (2009): 209–24, 210.

[21] See Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 291–338.

[22] See Baden, "The Tower of Babel," 217–18.

[23] Westermann attributes any other relics of multiplicity in the story to its preliterary history; Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:537.

that this should be seen as hendiadys, expressing a single concept: a certain type of city is meant, a fortified city, or a city with an acropolis.[24] Whereas Hebrew עיר can refer to human settlements of varying magnitudes, including rural towns, only a metropolis could serve as a landmark for all humanity, and to establish their reputation.[25]

Thus, we lack good indications that Gen 11:1–9 is a composite text,[26] and the episode should therefore be interpreted as a unity. For our purposes in particular, this will mean treating the spread of humanity across the earth together with the notion of humanity's linguistic diversity. Before turning to an interpretation of the text, however, let us consider a potentially illuminating parallel from Sumerian literature.

5. "The Spell of Nudimmud": A Sumerian Parallel to Gen 11:1–9?

A Sumerian text has been cited as providing a parallel to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. The text is the so-called "Spell of Nudimmud," a short section of an epic composition, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*. This text is attested in tablets from the Old Babylonian period, but describes a much earlier age in which the ruler of Uruk, Enmerkar, is engaged in a long conflict with the lord of Aratta, a polity somewhere in the Iranian highlands, in which Enmerkar benefits from his guile and from the favour of the goddess Ishtar.

---

[24] Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:534. This would explain the absence of מגדל in MT v. 8: the tower is included in the reference to the city.

[25] A strong current in scholarship on the Tower of Babel account identifies the influence of the monumental ziggurats of southern Mesopotamia in the reference to the "tower" in this story. See, for instance, John H. Walton, "The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications," *BBR* 5 (1995): 155–75, at 155. For arguments against this identification, see, e.g., Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 231–36. This matter does not greatly affect my interpretation of the Tower of Babel account.

[26] Ronald Hendel and Peter Harland give further arguments against the redaction-critical analysis of Uehlinger; see Ronald S. Hendel, review of Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und "eine Rede": eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Gen 11, 1–9)*, *CBQ* 55 (1993): 785–87; Peter J. Harland, "Vertical or Horizontal: The Sin of Babel," *VT* 48 (1998): 515–33, at 517–19.

Since its initial translation and interpretation by Kramer,[27] the Spell has been the subject of

numerous studies, disputing major and minor points of its interpretation.[28] A translation by

Thorkild Jacobsen is included here:

> In those days, there being no snakes, there being no scorpions,
> There being no hyenas, there being no lions,
> There being no dogs or wolves,
> There being no(thing) fearful or hair-raising,
> Mankind had no opponents
> In those days in the countries Subartu, Hamazi,
> Bilingual Sumer being the great country of princely office,
> The region Uri being a country in which was what was appropriate,
> The country Mardu lying in safe pastures,
> (In) the (whole) compass of heaven and earth the people entrusted (to him)
> Could address Enlil, verily, in but a single tongue.
> In those days, (having) lordly bouts, princely bouts, and royal bouts
> (Did) Enki, (having) lordly bouts, princely bouts, and royal bouts
> Having lordly bouts fought, having princely bouts fought, and having royal bouts
>   fought,
> Did Enki, lord of abundance, lord of effective command,
> Did the lord of intelligence, the country's clever one,
> Did the leader of the gods,
> Did the sagacious omen-revealed lord of Eridu
> Estrange the tongues in their mouths as many as were put there
> The tongues of men which were one. (*ELA* 135–55)[29]

According to Kramer's interpretation, the story presents an original ideal "golden age" for

humanity, when linguistic diversity had not yet entered the world; Enki (called Nudimmud in

---

[27] Samuel N. Kramer, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta: A Sumerian Epic Tale of Iraq and Iran* (Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Philadelphia, 1952). Kramer had previously published the Spell portion separately (idem, "Man's Golden Age"), and supplemented this when additional fragments came to light (idem, "'Babel' of Tongues").

[28] See especially Jacob Klein, "The So-Called 'Spell of Nudimmud' (ELA 134–155): A Re-Examination" in *Studi sul vicino oriente antico dedicati alla memoria di Luigi Cagni* (ed. Simonetta Graziani; Naples: Instituto universitario orientale, 2000), 2:563–84; H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "Another Attempt at the 'Spell of Nudimmud.'" *RA* 88 (1994): 135–54; Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Spell of Nudimmud," in *"Sha'arei Talmon": Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 403–416.

[29] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps that Once…: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 289–90. Jacobsen's translation in *COS* 1:547–48 differs at several points, but not in ways that affect the understanding of the story for the purposes of a comparison with Gen 11:1–9.

his capacity as creator) introduced linguistic diversity, perhaps because of some rivalry between him and Enlil, evident in other myths though unstated in this context; and this story fits into the narrative as an explanation for why international diplomacy must be carried out. However, there are many points of great uncertainty in interpreting this text. I shall mention only four that are relevant to assessing the pertinence of this text to Gen 11:1–9.

Firstly, the temporality of the Spell has been disputed; Vanstiphout and Black interpret the final line as a reference to the present—"the tongue of mankind is truly one."[30] Secondly, it is not clear whether linguistic diversity really enters the world for the first time here, since we have a reference to "bilingual [perhaps: harmonious; eme ḫamun] Sumer" in the introduction.[31] Thirdly, this does not seems to be a story about the whole world, but about Mesopotamia in particular, as the specifying place names suggest (Sumer, Subartu, Mardu, Uri); this region may, however, stand for the whole world in this case. Fourthly, the "single tongue" may not refer to the human communication system in general, but to the prayers of humanity in "address [to] Enlil."

It should be apparent that the relevance of the Spell as a parallel to Gen 11:1–9 is greatly reduced if, on even one of these points, Kramer was mistaken. For the major supposed commonalities between the texts—unity of human language in the period of myth, and subsequent division by a divine agent—are subject to doubt. The setting of both in Mesopotamia is shared, but this is not alone does not show that the Spell of Nudimmud is helpful in understanding the Tower of Babel episode. In fact, the Spell contains none of the clearly Mesopotamian elements of Gen 11:1–9—the great plain, the use of bitumen, the

---

[30] Vanstiphout, "Spell of Nudimmud," 141; *ETCSL,* "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta," line 155.

[31] The interpretation of the Sumerian phrase eme ḫamun, which appears to be able to express both "harmony" and "opposition" is disputed. A discussion of the various opinions that have been offered for its meaning in this context and elsewhere is found in Klein, "Spell of Nudimmud," 567–68 n. 26. The phrase will be discussed further at a later point in this chapter.

baking of brick, urbanism, monumental structure—and an explanation should be sought for them other than familiarity with the events referred to in the Spell.[32] Thus, I do not regard the Spell of Nudimmud as relevant here, beyond serving as a fairly general cross-cultural parallel as a story that explains the emergence of diverse languages.[33] To this theme in the Babel story I shall now turn, beginning with an analysis of the terminology used.

6. "Language" in Gen 11:1–9: Terminology

i. שָׂפָה: Unity and Diversity of Language

שָׂפָה is a keyword in Gen 11:1–9, expressing one of the episode's central themes. The word occurs five times in the narrative in the following phrases: שָׂפָה אֶחָת, "one language/speech" (v. 1, 6); שְׂפָתָם, "their language/speech" (v. 7); אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ, "each other's language/speech" (v. 7); שְׂפַת כָּל הָאָרֶץ, "the language/speech of the whole earth" (v. 9). The noun is always in the singular, and occurs in the narrator's framework and in the speech of Yahweh. There are several interpretative difficulties involving the use of שָׂפָה in the narrative. I shall first consider a small syntactic difficulty, then a more pervasive semantic one.

Firstly, the opening sentence of the episode presents a minor syntactic difficulty: כָּל הָאָרֶץ appears to be the subject of וַיְהִי; thus literally "the whole earth *was* one language/speech."[34] But what does this mean? Of course, humans cannot be "languages" in the sense of "communicative verbal systems," but as discussed above, they can be "linguistic

---

[32] Even if no genetic relationship exists between the Spell and the Babel episode, the Spell might be useful in providing a typological parallel. However, the obscurity of the action and sense of the Spell reduces the text's usefulness in this regard.

[33] Many such parallels could be cited; see Theodore H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament: A Comparative Study with Chapters from Sir James G. Frazer's* Folklore in the Old Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), at 132–38.

[34] So Baden, "Tower of Babel," 217.

communities." However, it would be odd to find this usage for שׂפה in Gen 11:1: while לשׁון, under the influence of Aramaic, does mean "linguistic community" in a few late biblical texts, שׂפה, as we have seen, is not used in this way. Instead, v. 6 makes it clear what the intended sense of v. 1 is: that the whole earth *had* a single language (ושׂפה אחת לכלם), which is how this verse is usually translated. Perhaps the phrase שׂפה אחת in v. 1 is adverbial:[35] they were "of or in one language/speech."

Next we should consider the issue of the semantic value of שׂפה in this narrative. Croatto and Uehlinger have argued that in Gen 11:1–9 the word does not mean "a particular language," which they regard as solely expressed by לשׁון in biblical Hebrew; rather it means more generally "speech," *Rede*.[36] Thus, the purpose of the story is not (simply—so Uehlinger; at all—so Croatto) to explain the diversity of the world's languages, but rather the fundamental disunity of human discourse, whether carried out in one or many individual languages. Uehlinger states that שׂפה אחת here expresses "nicht nur 'Einsprachigkeit' in einem linguistischen Sinne, sondern darüber hinaus auch 'Einstimmigkeit' im Sinne der geeinten, gemeinsamen Intention."[37] For Croatto, what arises out of Yahweh's confusing of humanity's conceptual unity is "the negation of all communication," rather than the diffusion of various languages.[38]

However, there is good reason, to favour the interpretation of שׂפה as "a particular language" over "speech." Firstly, we should point out that, contrary to these scholars' arguments, שׂפה can indeed, like לשׁון, mean "a particular language" in the Hebrew Bible. This is made most

---

[35] For parallel constructions, see, e.g., *IBHS* §10.2.2.

[36] Uehlinger, *Weltreich,* 348; Croatto, "Tower of Babel," 202. Croatto uses this to support his argument that the Babel story does not depict the multiplication of human languages.

[37] "not only 'monolingualism' in a linguistic sense, but furthermore also 'unanimity' in the sense of a united, common intent"; Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 349.

[38] Croatto, "Tower of Babel," 219.

clear in the reference to שׂפת כנען, "the language of Canaan" in Isa 19:18.[39] It is also the

natural interpretation of שׂפה when used in parallel with לשׁון meaning "a language" (e.g., Isa

28:11; 33:19; Ezek 3:5–6).

Secondly, the use of שׂפה alongside עם makes the meaning "a particular language, a national

idiom": הן עם אחד ושׂפה אחת לכלם, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one

language."[40] As Block has pointed out, the general relation "ethnic group : : language (עם/גוי :

לשׁון or שׂפה)" is commonly expressed throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Gen 10:5; Deut

28:49; Ezek 3:5–6; Esth 1:22).[41] In contrast, the link of "ethnic group : : discourse/ideology"

is not so explicitly or frequently made. Thus, when we see שׂפה together with עם it is natural

to understand it as "a particular language." [42]

Finally, the meaning "a particular language" is perfectly intelligible throughout. All the earth

had one language; that is, they called everything by the same names, and translation and

interpretation were not required (vv. 1, 6). Yahweh confuses this language (vv. 7, 9), in that

he introduces division and diversity into it, with the result that several distinct languages

arise.[43] As a consequence, no one understands the language that anyone else speaks (v. 7),[44]

so that global cooperation is no longer possible. In contrast, the action of the story is harder to

---

[39] Uehlinger disputes this; Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 348. See above for a discussion of his position and arguments in favour of mine.

[40] Berlin remarks that in this verse the parallelism (עם אהד ושׂפה אחת) serves to link these ideas especially closely; Berlin, *Biblical Parallelism*, 42–43.

[41] Block, "National Identity," 328. Block claims that it is "indisputable" that this same association is being made in Gen 11:6.

[42] We might also note that in Gen 11:1–6, שׂפה must denote something countable (humanity has *one* of them). This is clearly the case if שׂפה means "a particular language," but less so if it means "speech"/*Rede*.

[43] Alternatively, in vv. 7 and 9 we may be dealing with the meaning "speech" (rather than "a particular language"), referring to "the sum total of whatever the humans spoke": the sum total of human speaking becomes a mixed-up jumble, because it now consists of several distinct languages.

[44] Here we may compare the distributive construction לא ישׁמעו אישׁ שׂפת רעהו, "they will not understand one another's language," to two usages in the book of Esther: עם ועם כלשׁונו, "to every people in its own language" (Esth 1:22; 3:12; 8:9); and כל אישׁ . . . מדבר כלשׁון עמו, "every man should . . . speak according to the language of his people" (Esth 1:22).

grasp if the meaning is "speech": the earth had one set of ideas (did it have a single language to express them in?), and Yahweh caused people to have divergent discourses (how does this relate to the claim that they could not no longer understand each other?); as a result there is disunity of action and purpose in the world. This is a less intelligible and compelling story.

For these reasons, שׂפה should be understood as meaning "a language" in Gen 11:1–9. While Uehlinger and Croatto are correct to detect an original unity of purpose among the humans, this is not expressed through the semantic value of שׂפה. Strictly speaking, the function of the "single language" in the plot is as the precondition for collective human thought and action. It allows them to decide to build the city, and to build it. Yahweh removes this precondition by diversifying language, rendering agreement impossible to ascertain, and cooperation impossible to achieve, rather than directly creating discord among the intentions of humanity.

Croatto's and Uehlinger's detection of a relationship between, on the one hand, ethno-linguistic unity, and singleness of purpose and action in this narrative is not mistaken, however. It is not simply that shared language facilitates the unanimous formation and implementation of a plan in Gen 11:1–9. It is also that we expect a group bound by kinship and language to have one set of interests, and to work together to achieve them. And we expect discord to arise when humanity is divided into distinct ethno-linguistic groups, and so Yahweh's dispersion of humanity probably does imply the emergence of strife, even if the text does not state this. But we read the Tower of Babel story in this way because of our understanding of how nations or peoples function, not because of a specific semantic value of שׂפה as "unanimity." In other words, linguistic and ethnic unity are proxies, markers, or correlates of unity of purpose and action; but they are not identical with that unity.

ii. דברים אחדים, *dəbārîm ʾăḥādîm*

The meaning of the phrase דברים אחדים, *dəbārîm ʾăḥādîm*, which appears only in v. 1, is disputed, and scholars are divided as to the interpretation of both elements. It is clear that דבר here has a meaning related to its first chief sense "word, utterance" rather than its second, "thing, matter." This is apparent from the broad linguistic theme of the story, and specifically from its use in conjunction (or parallel) with שׂפה, "speech, language," in this verse.[45] But the specific value of דבר is less clear. As for אחדים, scholars have generally been in agreement that Gen 11:1 does not contain the meaning most often attested for this plural form—"few, not many," as in Gen 29:20: "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days [כימים אחדים] because of the love he had for her" (so also Gen 27:44; Dan 11:20).[46] This meaning may be rejected because the claim that the builders had a limited stock of words does not have clear relevance for the story. However, scholars differ as to what meaning to attribute to it instead. I shall now consider the various proposals for understanding the phrase that have been made. Three understandings have been proposed: 1) דברים אחדים as "the same vocabulary"; 2) דברים אחדים as "one language"; and 3) דברים אחדים as "a pair of dialects."[47] I shall consider these in turn.

---

[45] Nevertheless one ancient midrash takes the word to mean "things," so that דברים אחדים means "property held in common": "What this one held in his possession was held in the possession of the other"; *Gen. Rab.* 38.6.

[46] The understanding of אחדים as "few, not many" in Gen 11:1 does appear in ancient sources, however. For instance, *Gen. Rab.* regards this verse as giving paratextual information: the "generation of the division" (דור הפלגה) had "few words" in the sense that only nine verses were devoted to their tale in the book of Genesis; *Gen. Rab.* 38.6.

[47] *Tg. Neof.* and *Tg. Ps.-Jon.* contain reference to the "single counsel" (עיטא חדא; עיצה חדה) of humanity, apparently understanding דברים as referring to the "words" that the humans spoke to one another when deciding to build the tower (Gen 11:3,4).

a. Westermann's Proposal: The Same Vocabulary

Westermann exhibits the most typical interpretation of דברים when he translates it as *Vokabel*, "vocabulary."[48] That is, דברים is taken as a true plural, "words," here referring to the total set of words in a given language—that is, its vocabulary. The use of דברים in parallel with שׂפה would be explicable if underlying it were the basic and intuitive idea that a language is made up by its lexis.[49] Thus, by referring to a language's vocabulary, the biblical author is referring to the language as a whole: there is but one language, having the same words for all of its speakers.[50] Now it should be noted that the pertinent meaning "an individual word, a vocable" is fairly rare for דבר in the singular and plural; דבר much more frequently refers to a larger unit of spoken or written discourse—to an utterance, statement, promise, report, claim, and so on.[51] But "a word" is certainly one meaning of דבר, and thus it is possible to understand דברים as "vocabulary."

In this interpretation אחדים seems initially difficult, for it is hard to know how many words can be described as "one(s)." As already indicated, however, the understanding of אחדים that is generally favoured in this reading is as "the same."[52] In the Hebrew Bible, אחד can be used to indicate numerical identity—"(one and) the same."[53] Consider the following examples: "They both dreamt, each his own dream, on the same night [בלילה אחד]" (Gen 40:5); "Did not

---

[48] Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:533.

[49] This fundamentally lexical theory of language is of course insufficient. It fails to take account, for instance, of syntax, as well as inflection. Frits Staal has noted that ancient conceptions of language often committed this error; Frits Staal, "Oriental Ideas on the Origin of Language" *JAOS* (1979): 1–14, at 2–3.

[50] On the interpretation of as אחד as "the same" see the next paragraph.

[51] See BDB דבר, 182a–184a. Thus when we read of עשׂרת הדברים, we understand by it "ten statements" and not "ten words."

[52] Uehlinger uses German *einerlei*, "all the same," to translate אחדים in this sense, retaining the etymological connection; Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 359–60.

[53] BDB 25a–b, at 25a.

This is distinct from qualitative identity, or exact resemblance, as in "those shoes are the same."

he who made me in the womb make them? And did the same [אחד] fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15).[54] Indeed, this seems to be the meaning of אחת in the parallel phrase שׂפה אחת in Gen 11:1: "the same language." Thus, in דברים אחדים, the adjective occurs in a plural form because it modifies a plural noun, and the meaning is not problematic: "the same words."[55] That is, there was at this time one set of words shared by the whole of humanity.

b. Cassuto's Proposal: One Language

Cassuto offers a different explanation for the plurality of the phrase דברים אחדים in Gen 11:1. He argues that דברים here is a *plurale tantum*: a form that is morphologically plural but with a singular meaning: "the noun דברים means *language*"; "דברים is synonymous in this verse with שׂפה."[56] Cassuto argues for this synonymy from the parallelism of the two words in this verse and in Ezek 3:6, where the plural of דבר occurs in parallel with שׂפה and לשׁון:[57] Yahweh tells the prophet, "you are not sent to many peoples of obscure speech [שׂפה] and difficult language [לשׁון], whose words [דבריהם] you cannot understand" (Ezek 3:6).[58] Cassuto's interpretation allows him to deal straightforwardly with the form אחדים: though morphologically plural (conditioned by the plural form of דברים), the meaning is the standard meaning of the adjective, "one"; thus "one speech and one language." Cassuto compares cases where אלהים, "God," takes a morphologically plural adjective, for example אלהים חיים (Deut 5:23) and

---

[54] This meaning is difficult to detect when אחד is used in the singular, because the translation "one" is usually also suitable.

[55] This is also the understanding of אחדים in Gen 11:1 offered in GKC §97 *h* ("*iidem*").

[56] Cassuto, *Genesis II*, 239.

[57] Cassuto, *Genesis II*, 239.

[58] A comparable parallelism of לשׁון and דבר is found in Jer 5:15, though דבר here appears in a verbal form: "a nation whose language [לשׁנו] you do not know, nor can you understand what they say [מה ידבר]."

אלהים קדשים (Josh 24:19).[59] We may also note that, in this interpretation, Cassuto has the support of the ancient versions: LXX renders דברים אחדים as φωνὴ μία, "one speech, language";[60] *Tg. Onq.* has ממלל חד, "one speech."

Cassuto is surely correct that שׂפה אחת ודברים אחדים contains a parallel structure that is indicative of the meaning of the whole. Specifically, the form of parallelism used here highlights the adjective אחת/אחדים and encourages us to seek a single understanding of its use in both cases. Adele Berlin writes with regard to this verse: "the use of the same or similar adjectives in different number emphasizes the adjective and yields a morphologic parallelism."[61] However, the parallel structural device does not require total (semantic) synonymy, and is thus weak evidence for it: the two cases in which דברים is parallel to שׂפה are not proof that דברים was considered to be a noun with a singular meaning "language." Since other evidence for this claim is not forthcoming, we should be hesitant to accept it. And if we do not accept that דברים has a singular meaning, it also follows that אחדים cannot mean "one."

c. Shaffer's Proposal: A Pair of Dialects

Aaron Shaffer offered a provocative explanation of the phrase דברים אחדים which differs substantially from those yet examined.[62] He translates the phrase as "a pair of modes of speaking, dialects," and argues that "these 'dialects' refer to Sumerian and Akkadian."[63] The

---

[59] In addition to the remark about humanity's "single counsel," *Tg. Neof.* and *Tg. Ps.-J.* also contain the phrase ממלל חד. These texts therefore seem to contain a dual translation of דברים אחדים.

[60] LSJ at φωνή.

[61] Berlin, *Biblical Parallelism*, 48.

[62] Shaffer, "Tower of Babel."

[63] Ibid., 35.

following discussion of Shaffer's proposal is more extensive than of the previous ones, since evaluating his argument involves considering comparative cultural and linguistic evidence, and a potential biblical analogue to דברים אחדים.

α. Akkadian and Sumerian: The Language of Harmony

In דברים אחדים, understood as "a pair of dialects," Shaffer detects "an echo of the Mesopotamian view of language," which, he argues, conceived of Sumerian and Akkadian as languages ideally compatible, correspondent, or matching with one another. This relationship is expressed in Akkadian through the phrase *lišān mitḫurti*, "language of correspondence," and the Sumerian eme ḫamun, "harmonious language," which we have already met. Now, since Akkadian differs greatly from Sumerian, especially as compared to the other Semitic languages in the region, these two languages might not strike us as particularly naturally suited to one another. Nevertheless, Shaffer notes that this conceptualization of the relationship likely grew out of the long tradition of written (and oral) bilingualism in Mesopotamia, and perhaps specifically the scribal practice of arranging bilingual lexical lists in parallel columns, in which Sumerian words faced, or corresponded to, their Akkadian counterparts.[64] The correspondence of these languages was regarded as established and guaranteed by the gods, including Nabu, *sāniq mitḫurti*, "the verifier of correspondence,"[65] and Shamash, who "set[s] aright the languages of compatibility as if they were one and the same."[66] Shaffer even proposes that "the Mesopotamians regarded Sumerian and Akkadian as

---

[64] Ibid., 26.

[65] Examples listed under *mitḫurtu*, *CAD* M2 137b–138a. This title is also applied to Nergal and Ninurta.

[66] In the Shamash series (3 line 40) of *bīt rimki* ritual texts. For references, see Thorkild Jacobsen, "Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article," *JNES* 5 (1946): 128–52, at 148.

two expressions of one and the same language and that this is the ideological basis which for them ma[de] exact translation possible."[67]

β. Plausibility of a Biblical Attestation of this Concept

Shaffer's elucidation of the Mesopotamian situation is extremely valuable, and the possible appearance of these notions in the Hebrew Bible is intriguing. But before examining Shaffer' arguments in relation to the interpretation of דברים אחדים as "a pair of dialects" in Gen 11:1, we would do well to address the following question: How plausible is it that we would find in the Hebrew Bible a reference to this particular Mesopotamian concept? Shaffer notes only that finding such a reference in Gen 11:1–9 would be "entirely in keeping with the thoroughly Mesopotamian milieu of the whole Tower of Babel episode."[68] Indeed these Mesopotamian elements of this story (bitumen, baked brick, the mighty tower, the great plain, etc.) are undeniable, but they are of a general nature and could possibly have been transmitted as part of common lore about Babylonia's landscape and architecture. In contrast, it might be claimed that the notion of the ideal-correspondence of Akkadian and Sumerian is a highly learned tradition, intelligible to those at home in the context of bilingual Mesopotamian scribalism, but obscure to those outside it. It is in an advanced school text, for instance, that we find the claim that Sumerian is the *tamšilu*, "replica" of Akkadian."[69]

In response, however, we may note that the *lišān mitḫurti/*eme ḫamun concept, or a reflex of it, was current in the first millennium B.C.E., in texts of the kind that the biblical authors may have known. For example, one of the texts cited by Shaffer is the Sargon II cylinder

---

[67] Shaffer, "Tower of Babel," 27.

[68] Ibid., 35.

[69] Examenstext A line 20; Åke W. Sjöberg, "Der Examenstext A," *ZA* 64 (1975): 137–77.

inscription concerning Dūr-Šarrukīn (ca. 707 B.C.E.). In this document, the conquered

peoples who have been resettled in the king's new city are described as having previously

spoken languages that are *lā mitḫarti* "not (mutually) correspondent," before Sargon went

about making them *pâ ištēn*, "(of) one mouth."[70] This text suggests that the ideal-

correspondence notion was incorporated in some way into Neo-Assyrian imperial ideology,

and it is apparent from other biblical texts that some Israelite authors were familiar with, and

critiqued, items of Neo-Assyrian thought and rhetoric.[71] Therefore, the premise of Shaffer's

proposal is plausible: we should be open to the possibility that the Mesopotamian concept of

linguistic ideal-correspondence is addressed in the Hebrew Bible.

γ. דברים אחדים as "a Pair of Dialects" in Gen 11:1

Let us now turn to an examination of Shaffer's arguments concerning the interpretation of

דברים אחדים as "a pair of dialects" in Gen 11:1. Firstly, we may consider Shaffer's

understanding of דברים as "modes of speaking, dialects." Shaffer's interpretation should be

distinguished from that of Cassuto, mentioned above, since rather than understanding the

plural דברים as a *plurale tantum* meaning "language," Shaffer takes it as a genuine plural,

"modes of speech, dialects." In this respect, Shaffer appears to be comparing דבר to Akkadian

atwû (*atmû*), a noun meaning both "word, utterance" and "speech, manner of speech."[72] *Atwû*

is occasionally found alongside *lišānu*, referring to national and technical/professional

---

[70] For the Akkadian of this text, and a translation, see Peter Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 719–37, at 732.

[71] See, for example, Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image." Shaffer also cites an omen text of the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon in which he detects the concept; Shaffer, "Tower of Babel," 29.

[72] *CAD* A2 *atwû* 497b–498b.

languages,[73] and in this usage Shaffer translates *atwû* as "dialects," as he does דברים in Gen 11:1.[74] In the Hebrew Bible, דבר can indeed indicate "type or manner of speech," as in, for instance, דבר כזב, "lying speech" (Prov 30:8).[75] With the possible exception of Gen 11:1, however, this usage is not attested in contexts of linguistic diversity—דבר is not used elsewhere to specify the mode of speech of a particular people or nation, and דברים is not used to indicate several of such modes. Thus while Shaffer's proposed understanding of דברים as "dialect" is not unfeasible, it does not strongly suggest itself.

Next, we may turn to Shaffer's understanding of אחדים as "pair, set of two."[76] In this, Shaffer relies on two pieces of comparative evidence: the use of אחדים in Ezek 37:17; and the meaning of Akkadian *ištēnūtu*. I shall consider the relevance of these in turn.

δ. Evidence from Ezekiel

In Ezek 37:16–17, Yahweh commands Ezekiel as follows: "Mortal, take a [עץ, wooden object] and write on it, 'For Judah, and the Israelites associated with it'; then take another [עץ, wooden object] and write on it, "For Joseph (the [עץ, wooden object] of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with it"; and join them together into one [עץ, wooden object], so that they may become *'ăḥādîm* in your hand [והיו לאחדים בידך]." Shaffer explains the context of this verse as follows: "We have here the description of how Ezekiel is to take two wooden tablets and write letters to Israel and Judah. I propose to you that אחדים here means

---

[73] See *CAD* A2 *atwû* 497b–498b for examples.

[74] Shaffer, "Tower of Babel," 27.

[75] BDB דבר, 182a–184a.

[76] Cyrus Gordon also affirms that אחדים and Ugar. *'ḥdm* mean "pair"; see Cyrus H. Gordon, "אחדים = *iltênûtu* 'Pair'" in *Sefer Segal: mugash likhvod Mosheh Tsevi Segal* (ed. J. M. Grintz and J. Liver; Publications of the Israel Society for Biblical Research 17; Jerusalem: ha-Ḥevrah le-ḥeḳer ha-Miḳra be-Yiśra'el 'al yede hotsa'at Ḳiryat sefer, 1964), 5–9.

'set', or 'pair' and what Ezekiel is told to do is to make a diptych, a hinged, two-leafed tablet used for writing in ancient times."[77] This is an ingenious explanation for one of Ezekiel's often obscure symbolic acts. However, I regard this suggestion as unlikely to be correct, on linguistic and contextual grounds.

Firstly, אחדים in this passage appears to be a purely morphological plural with the meaning "one" (precisely the explanation that Cassuto gave for the form in Gen 11:1). The meaning "one" seems clear from a parallel expression two verses later (Ezek 37:18–19) in which the singular אחד is used. Here Yahweh declares: I will take Israel and Judah "and make them one [wooden object], in order that they may be one in my hand [והיו אחד בידי]." Similarly, for Ezekiel's act to be an effective symbol, complete unification, not association, of the two wooden objects is required. Israel and Judah are not to become a "set" or "pair" of peoples, like a diptych, but "one nation in the land . . . and one king shall be over them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms" (Ezek 37:22). The explanation for the plural form אחדים used of the wooden objects is that the subject of the verb היו is plural, but this does not affect the meaning.[78]

A second argument against Shaffer's diptych proposal is that the use of עץ here to denote specifically a writing tablet would be unique in the Hebrew Bible.[79] Elsewhere in Ezekiel we find the more standard לוח, "tablet, slate, board" used to describe flat wooden objects (Ezek 27:5). Rather, עץ here is more naturally interpreted as bearing one of its standard meanings "a

---

[77] Shaffer, "Tower of Babel," 34.

[78] Thus the form אחדים has apparently a total of three explanations in Biblical Hebrew: "few" (Gen 29:20; 27:44; Dan 11:20), "one" (Ezek 37:17), and "the same" (Gen 11:1). The question remains as to why two distinct forms of אחד are used in such similar contexts in Ezek 37, but this may simply be an example of spontaneous and natural linguistic variation, without semantic significance.

[79] See BDB at עץ, 781b–782a.

length of wood, stick,"[80] with the prophet making use of the common biblical metaphor of "kin group = tree." Since Ezekiel refers to the "Joseph" subdivision of Israel, as "the stick [עץ] of Ephraim" in this passage, this metaphor appears to be at play. We may compare words like מטה and שֵׁבט, both of which have the dual meaning "staff, rod" and "tribe."

One final point may be noted against Shaffer's interpretation of Ezek 37:17. It is hard to see how the inscriptions on the עצים could be interpreted as letters to Judah and Israel, as Shaffer proposes. Ezekiel is to write "For Judah, and the Israelites associated with it," and "For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with it" (Ezek 37:16). These short phrases, which lack predicates, are not messages, but rather labels or tags, visibly indicating and realizing the specific symbolic referents of the sticks.

Thus Shaffer's diptych proposal for Ezek 37 cannot be substantiated, and therefore it should not be used to support an interpretation of אחדים as "pair" in Gen 11:1.

ε. Evidence from Akkadian *ištēnūtu*

Shaffer's second piece of comparative evidence is Akkadian *ištēnūtu*. He writes: "The word 'one' in Akkadian, *ištēn*, has a plural *ištēnūtu*, which has precisely [the] sense" of "a pair or set of things which can or do go together. . . . This semantic parallel from Akkadian offers strong support for a proposed translation of אחדים as 'pair.'"[81] Shaffer's comparison, however, is not straightforward, as I shall now demonstrate.

---

[80] BDB at עץ, 781a.

[81] Shaffer, "Tower of Babel," 34–35. In Shaffer, *CAD* I/J and *AHw*, no example of *ištēnūtu* is cited in which the word refers to the "pair" of Mesopotamian languages.

With regard to a plural of *ištēn*, "one," *CAD* lists several, in forms related to *ištēnūtu*.[82]

However, the meaning of these plurals does not seem to be "pair or set"; rather the plural of

ištēn here is assigned two functions. Firstly, when modifying *pluralia tantum*, it is a purely

morphological plural with the meaning "one": thus, *1-ni-[ia]-tu šuršurrātu siparri,* "one

copper chain (?)."[83] Secondly it has an indefinite pronominal usage, meaning "some,

several": thus, *i-si-nu-te ittalkuni . . . i-si-nu-te-ma udina la uṣûni* "some have gone . . . some

have not yet left." These two usages are comparable to the cases of אחדים in the Hebrew Bible

discussed above: והיו לאחדים, "they will become one" (Ezek 37:17); כימים אחדים, "like a few

days" (Gen 29:20). Neither, however, is parallel to the meaning "pair, set" that Shaffer

proposes for אחדים in Gen 11:1.

For the meaning "set," we must look to a lexeme *ištēnūtu* treated as distinct from *ištēn* in

CAD and *AHw*. This *ištēnūtu* is a singular noun formed by affixing the abstract suffix *-ūt* to

ištēn.[84] According to *CAD* and *AHw*, this word has two meanings: 1) "set (consisting of

several objects)," *Satz, Garnitur*; 2) "(undivided) unit," (*unteilbare*) *Einheit*. In *AHw* and

CAD, it is under this lexeme that the examples Shaffer lists are classified: *anṣabātu,*

"earrings"; *sariyam* (fem. pl.), "armour"; and a declaration of "unity" between the kings of

Ugarit and Siyanni.[85] But this analysis of *ištēnūtu* as a singular noun does not offer a parallel

to the plural form אחדים; rather it is closer to the Modern Hebrew אחדות, *ʾaḥdût*, "unity."

Clearly we are dealing here with a complex issue in Akkadian lexicography, and I do not

claim the requisite competence to adjudicate between, on the one hand, *CAD* and *AHw*'s

---

[82] *CAD* I/J 277b.

[83] *AHw* differs slightly in the analysis of such usages, listing them rather as plural forms of the adjective *ištēnû*, "single"; *AHw* 401a.

[84] *CAD* I/J 282a; *AHw* 401b. *CAD* I/J 282a distinguishes yet another lexeme with the same form *ištēnūtu*, meaning "for the first time; once," attested in texts from Nuzi and Amarna.

[85] Shaffer, "Tower of Babel," 34–35.

twofold explanation of *ištēnūtu* and, on the other, Shaffer's apparently singular understanding of the form.[86] In considering this issue, we should also bear in mind that ancient Akkadian speakers may have been unaware of the etymological or semantic distinctions we are making, instead using the single form *ištēnūtu* with the variety of functions discussed. Thus, even if *CAD*'s and *AHw*'s accounts are correct, so that *ištēnūtu* and אחדים are not etymologically comparable, nevertheless Shaffer's point that *ištēnūtu* as "set" is in some sense parallel to Hebrew אחדים may not be invalidated. However, we should recognize that the complexity of this issue, and the accompanying uncertainty of how to analyse *ištēnūtu* undermine the confidence with which we can accept Shaffer's proposal concerning אחדים.

One final semantic point on the topic of *ištēnūtu* should be made, relevant to Shaffer's understanding of Gen 11:1. Shaffer detects in דברים אחדים a reference to the partner-languages Akkadian and Sumerian, in part because he understands אחדים as "pair," in light of *ištēnūtu*. And indeed *ištēnūtu* is applied to sets consisting of two members, like shoes and earrings, where the English translation "pair" is appropriate. However, as Uehlinger points out, *ištēnūtu* is also applied to sets with more than two members, like items of bed-linen, and the garments making up a suit of armour,[87] in which cases it cannot mean "set of *two*, pair," but rather means, more generally "set."[88] Likewise, there is nothing in the two proposed etymologies of *ištēnūtu* that indicates specifically two-ness. Uehlinger is correct in affirming, then, that whether the word be analysed as the plural of *ištēn* (so Shaffer), hence "ones," or as an abstracting formation from *ištēn* (so *AHw*), hence "one-ness, unity," duality is not involved. Therefore, we should treat this word as meaning "set," without reference to the

---

[86] We may presume that Shaffer was aware that he was differing from *CAD* and *AHw* at this point. The relevant volumes of both works had appeared more than a decade before this lecture was given. Shaffer does not, however, mention this particular difference in analysis, although he does elsewhere in the lecture openly (and humbly) dispute *CAD*'s interpretation of *mitḫurtu* as "opposition."

[87] For these and further examples, see *CAD* I/J 282a; *AHw* 401b.

[88] Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 359.

number of that set's members.[89] For this reason, if we were to accept that a parallel exists between אחדים and *ištēnūtu*, this should lead us to render Gen 11:1 as "the whole earth had one language, and a set of dialects." But this "set of dialects," as opposed to a "pair" of them, does not suggest nearly as forcefully the idea of Akkadian and Sumerian as partner languages. Correspondingly, the persuasiveness of Shaffer's proposal is reduced.

ζ. Final Evaluation Shaffer's Proposal

Overall, then, I do not believe that there is strong evidence for translating אחדים in Gen 11:1 as "pair." In combination with my earlier finding that it is unlikely that דברים is to be interpreted as "dialects," I am thus inclined to reject Shaffer's proposal that דברים אחדים, here, refers to Akkadian and Sumerian, and that Gen 11 "miraculously preserves for us an echo of the Mesopotamian view of language."[90] As noted above, it is entirely possible that some version of this Mesopotamian view of language was known to biblical authors, and the arguments I have presented here do not prove otherwise. In general, it is extremely valuable to be informed about the attitudes of cultures in the ancient world beyond Israel towards linguistic diversity, for the sake of developing a broader perspective on these issues. But in the case of Gen 11:1–9, it seems best not to detect the particular ideas just discussed, and instead to interpret the text in its own terms.

---

[89] Because of the relationship of usage to a word's meaning, *ištēnūtu* may well have acquired the specific meaning "pair" through frequent application to sets of two. We do not, however, have evidence that indicates the development of this specific nuance.

[90] Shaffer, "Tower of Babel," 35.

d. Summary of דברים אחדים

The strongest proposal for דברים אחדים understands this phrase as meaning "the same words." According to this understanding, דבר and אחד have values from among their standard ranges of meaning. "The same words" is readily intelligible as a way of referring to the initial shared language of all humanity envisaged in the Tower of Babel episode. In addition it is possible that it indicates a conception of languages as primarily constituted by their lexis.

iii. The Question of Diversification in Gen 11:1–9: Mixing (בלל) and Scattering (פוץ)

According to the standard interpretation of the Tower of Babel episode, Yahweh creates ethnic and linguistic diversity when he sees the humans building the city and the tower. Yahweh does this by "mixing" or "confusing" human language (נבלה, v. 7; בלל, v. 9; from בלל) and "scattering" the people across the earth (ויפץ, v. 8; הפיצם, v. 9; from פוץ). However, Croatto, as we have noted, opposes this understanding of the story. He argues that "Gen 11:1–9 has nothing to do with the emergence of the different languages of the earth . . . . with the division of humanity into tongues and peoples."[91] Because of their potential relevance to understanding the role of language in establishing boundaries in this story, Croatto's arguments deserve consideration.

Croatto argues that there is no clear reference to multiplication or diversification in Gen 11:1–9, and therefore no account of the division of peoples and languages. For one thing, we have reference only to a single people, עם אחד (v. 6), with a single speech, שׂפה אחת (vv. 1, 6), in these verses, unlike the many languages and nations (pl.) of Gen 10. In addition, the action

---

[91] Croatto, "Tower of Babel," 219, 221. Croatto's own interpretation of nature of Yahweh's action was discussed above.

Yahweh takes against this people is not such as to bring about diversity: "'[t]o mix/to confuse' (*balal*) is not the same as to diversify, to generate, to multiply."[92] Likewise, "'[d]ispersion' is not equivalent to the division of peoples."[93] This is in contrast to the Table of Nations, where it is clearly stated that Yahweh "divided, separated" the nations (נפרדו, Gen 10:5). Thus, Croatto detects no reference in the Tower of Babel story to the multiplication of peoples.

In response to these arguments, we may first note that it is clear in v. 6 that the unity of the human nation and language is judged by Yahweh to be a grave problem that must be addressed: "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do." If this situation does not change, then "nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (v. 6), which is, apparently, an intolerable situation to Yahweh.

We must assume, then, that Yahweh's solution to the problem will change this situation—that is, it will bring an end to the state of affairs in which precisely one people with one language exists. But this could be done in one of only two ways: by dividing humanity into multiple peoples; or by rendering humanity a non-people, a לא עם (Deut 32:21), a mass of bodies lacking kinship or culture, representing the end of all human community.[94] In the context, the former understanding is preferable. The tone and context of the story do not prepare us to expect Yahweh to destroy human community altogether. Rather, Yahweh once and for all channels the flow of human history in a specific direction, away from a

---

[92] Ibid., 220.

[93] Ibid., 220.

[94] In Deut 32:21, the לא עם, "non-people," may lack, not a unifying kinship and culture, but wisdom or proper behaviour, given the parallelism with גוי נבל, "foolish/immoral nation."

particularly risky extreme. Thus, we should imagine that multiple languages and peoples result from Yahweh's act of confusing and scattering.

We may now consider the terminology used to describe this division. In the case of בלל, it is true that its use here is unusual. This verb most often appears in cultic texts and describes the mixing together of flour and other ingredients with oil (e.g., Exod 29:40; Lev 2:5; Num 7:13).[95] Evidently the desire to offer an etymology of בבל, "Babel, Babylon" in Gen 11:9 has exerted an influence on the particular wording of the story. Yahweh's "mixing" of the speech of humanity creates a jumble, then, in which communication is not possible. We might compare English "confuse," which has the dual meaning of mixing and bewildering. Croatto is correct that this is not strictly a description of a diversifying act: בלל is not a claim that Yahweh created the many languages of the world, but that he disrupted mankind's communication. But "mixture" is an apt description for what most interpreters have imagined to be the means by which Yahweh achieves this disruption at Babel: the diversification of languages. A polyglottic situation in which many speakers speak many languages is a "mixture," just as the image of the "melting pot" can be applied to a multicultural situation.[96]

Likewise, Croatto is correct to point out that by Yahweh's "spreading, scattering" (from פוץ) of humankind is not presented in terms that emphasize this as a structuring, ordering act. In fact, פוץ is often used to describe the fundamental destabilizing of some group of people, as of a routed army (1 Sam 11:11) or the exiled population of a nation (Ezek 11:17). However, as with בלל, פוץ is not inappropriate in the context of the formation of the various nations of the earth. In Gen 10:18, for instance, פוץ is used to describe the initial spreading of the Canaanite peoples into their territories, and in Gen 9:19, a text, like the Babel episode,

---

[95] The related noun, תבל, is used to refer to transgressive sexual relations; Lev 18:23; 20:12.

[96] English "babble" is an attractive wordplay with "Babel" in this context, though it is more specific than בלל, in referring particularly to a jumble of voices or sound.

commonly attributed to J, the related verb נפץ is used to describe how, after the flood, נפצה כל הארץ "the whole earth was peopled," from Noah's sons.[97]

Thus Croatto's arguments that division of languages and peoples is not envisioned in Gen 11:1–9 are not convincing. We should recognize, however, that Croatto *is* correct in his emphasis. Yahweh's confusing and scattering are not depicted as *positively creative* acts, aimed at producing diversity, but *destructive* ones, intended to eliminate unity. We are not dealing, here, with the establishment of explicitly good or beneficial diversity or multiplicity, in contrast to the distinctions that God establishes in P's creation account (Hiphil of בדל; Gen 1:4, 6, etc.), or to the multiplicity with which God blesses humanity in that account (רבה, פרה; v. 28). Nor does Gen 11:1–9 emphasize any kind of order arising from the division of peoples. This is in contrast to the act of division of peoples as presented, for instance, in the Song of Moses:[98] "When the Most High apportioned the nations, when he divided humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods.[99] Yahweh's portion was his people, Jacob his allotted share" (Deut 32:8). This act is constructive or active: the Most High is clearly depicted as establishing territorial and ethnic boundaries. Moreover, it produces an ordered division of peoples, not a chaotic one: a principle or logic, the number of divine beings, underlies ethnic/national divisions.

The difference in perspective between these texts and Gen 11:1–9 is significant. However, this difference should not lead us to reject the basic fact that the Table of Nations, the Tower of Babel, and the Song of Moses are reflections upon the same fundamental fact of human existence. This is rightly recognized in ancient interpretation. For instance, *Targum Pseudo-*

---

[97] The root נפץ may have arisen as a back-formation from the Niphal of פוץ, as in נָפֹצוּ (Gen 10:18). See BDB at נפץ, 659a.

[98] The Table of Nations also imagines the division of people as ordered, but God's role in establishing this order is not stated.

[99] Reading בני אלים or בני אלהים, with LXX and Qumran manuscript evidence, instead of MT's בני ישראל.

Jonathan to Gen 11:8 links the Tower of Babel, the Table of Nations, and the Song of Moses traditions. Combining the idea that the total number of nations is seventy (Gen 10) with the idea that each nation has its own tutelary divine being (Deut 32), the Targum specifies that God was assisted by seventy angels at Babel, whom he addresses in the "we" of "let us go down" and "let us mix" of 11:6, 7; together, God and these angels divided humanity into seventy nations with seventy languages. But by combining these traditions, the Targum eliminates the distinctive perspective of each, and in particular erases the disorderly implications of the Babel episode.

7. The Ills of Linguistic Unity: The Question of Anti-Imperialism in Gen 11:1–9

Underlying Croatto's arguments, we may identify a particular motive at work that makes it difficult for him to admit that the Hebrew Bible might be attributing multiplicity in human culture to a destructive act. Croatto expresses a characteristically postcolonialist preference for diversity and difference: "Unity is bad; division, as an expression of diversified and enriching cultures at all levels, is positive."[100] Furthermore, he writes positively of the "blessing" that is "the incredible cultural diversity represented by the different languages of humanity," and laments the "denigration of suffocation of aboriginal languages."[101] My suspicion is that for Croatto, then, it seems unthinkable that such a great human good as the division of the earth into many peoples could be presented in a negative light, as confusion and scattering.

Croatto's makes these claims as part of an analysis of the Tower of Babel story in light of what he regards as its original contextual goals. In Gen 11:1–9, Croatto, like Ephraim

---

[100] Croatto, "Tower of Babel," 222.

[101] Ibid., 222.

Speiser, detects a counter-myth, "the Founding and Exile of Babylon," deliberately opposed to native Babylonian traditions concerning Babylon's illustrious origin, such as are found in *Enuma Elish*.[102] This myth is anti-imperial in the sense that it depicts Yahweh halting a human "megalomaniacal project" that, like all such projects, made use of a "univocal linguistic code" to impose its "dominant ideology."[103] Yahweh's measure against Babylon—scattering, that is, exile—is ironic for the original exilic audience of the story, because exile was one of the Neo-Babylonian empire's tools of oppression.

Uehlinger has detected similar goals in the story, though he focuses more closely on its resonances with Neo-Assyrian rhetoric.[104] In particular, Uehlinger believes that the ideology displayed in Sargon II's efforts to construct the city of Dur-Šarrukin is targeted in this episode. An inscription of Sargon's, mentioned above, describes this project as a colossal building effort, involving diverse conquered peoples, relocated to the Assyrian heartland. Upon these peoples, the king imposes a single linguistic and behavioural code: Sargon establishes *pâ ištēn,* "one mouth," that is, a single accord among them, which consists of "revering god and king," the central items of the Assyrian value-system. The Tower of Babel, according to Uehlinger, depicts Yahweh's disapproval of a similar project, and his nullification of it. By contrast, Yahweh sanctions cultural and ethnic difference. Thus the text can be said to be an anti-imperial piece of literature.

According to both Uehlinger and Croatto, then, the Tower of Babel episode presents the unity of language as negative: "Gen 11:1–9 problematizes the unity of language, from the point of

---

[102] Ibid., 222; see Ephraim A. Speiser, "Word Plays on the Creation Epic's Version of the Founding of Babylon," *Or* 25 (1956): 317–23.

[103] Croatto, "Tower of Babel," 221.

[104] Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 425–44, 514–45. Uehlinger attributes the especially Babylonian elements of the story to the work of a redactors in the Neo-Babylonian period; ibid., 546–71.

view of human hubris or excess, as an instrument of oppression."[105] However, there are reasons to doubt that the specific anti-imperial themes detected by Croatto and Uehlinger are intended in Gen 11:1–9.

Now, clearly Gen 11:1–9 is anti-Babylonian, in some respect—an attitude that the text has in common with much biblical prophetic literature. The text presents the city's beginnings as abortive, and the divine realm as opposed to, not supportive of, its construction. Likewise, the explanation of the name of the city through בלל, "mixing, confusion," is certainly derisive. The text thus stands in opposition to Babylonian traditions that aggrandize the city's origins, although we must admit uncertainty about allusions to particular traditions, like *Enuma Elish* here, since a direct literary relationship is very difficult to establish.[106]

However, the specific note of anti-imperialism that Croatto and Uehlinger postulate is harder to detect. For as Bernhard Anderson has pointed out, the organization or administration of the human endeavour in the Tower of Babel episode does not display the character of the imperial projects.[107] The narrative presents the unity of human purpose as spontaneous and not dictated: "Come, let us build . . ." Similarly, the unity of action appears to be voluntary, not imposed by a hierarchical authority. Further, the good that will arise—making a name and not being scattered—apparently benefits the community in an unmediated way; it is not that the community only benefits in relation to the welfare of the imperial identity which that community constitutes (the kingdom or its symbols, e.g., its king and gods).

---

[105] Croatto, "Tower of Babel," 222.

[106] However, by locating the origins of Babylon in the age of myth, Gen 11:1–9 does not differ from these opposing traditions in according Babylon a fundamental role in the history of humanity.

[107] Bernhard W. Anderson, "The Tower of Babel: Unity and Diversity in God's Creation," in his *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 165–78, at 172.

Thus, the imperial nature of the building of the city and the tower is not evident in Gen 11:1–9. And in fact, as Anderson notes, this is in clear contrast to the presentation of Babylon in Gen 10:8–12. There, the city forms part of the great kingdom of the warrior Nimrod, which encompassed both Babylonia and Assyria. But while ancient interpretative tradition blends these accounts—Josephus, for instance, presents the building of the tower as a project conceived and tyrannically directed by Nimrod—we should separate them if our attempt is to interpret the Tower of Babel episode on its own terms.[108] Therefore, we should recognize that a strictly anti-imperial sentiment is not apparent in in Gen 11:1–9. Consequently, I do not see good grounds for understanding the disruption of the unity of language in the episode as a critique of the typically imperial imposition of a dominant ideology on a subject people, or the suppression of unique and distinctive cultural identities. Unity of language per se is not presented in a negative light in this text.

8. The Ills of Human Linguistic Diversity: Confusion as Punishment or Sabotage?

The text's portrayal of unity of language, therefore, stands in contrast to its portrayal of the diversification of language. As was noted above, the diffusion of languages and peoples is conveyed as a destabilizing, chaotic event, and to this extent the Babel episode depicts linguistic diversity in a negative light. However, it has been further claimed that this episode presents the existence of diverse tongues in the nature of a curse or punishment, like humanity's pains in childbirth and toil in farming (Gen 3:16–19). Gerhard von Rad, for instance, argued that the Tower of Babel episode fit into the sin-punishment-grace cycle of stories in the Primaeval History—the fruit in the garden, Cain's fratricide, divine-human sexual congress, the widespread violence that precipitated the flood—except that the Babel

---

[108] *Ant.* 1.4.2. Later traditions note that Abraham refused to take part in this scheme.

account contained absolutely no note of grace.[109] However, detecting a sin-punishment theme in this passage, and hence an evaluation of linguistic diversity as a curse, relies on regarding the acts of the humans as wicked or sinful. But this issue is not straightforward, as Theodore Hiebert, among others, has shown.[110]

Language of condemnation, curse, or punishment is entirely absent from Gen 11:1–9: the humans are not declared to be wicked or evil (רע, רשׁע; cf. Gen 6:5), nor are they cursed (ארור; cf. Gen 3:14; 4:11). Despite this fact, sin has been detected in almost every element of the humans' action and intent in the history of interpretation of Gen 11:1–9. Among ancient interpreters, the great height of the tower was taken to indicate that the humans intended to climb into heaven (e.g. *Jub*. 10.19).[111] But the expression ראשׁו בשׁמים, "with its head in the heavens" appears to be a standard literary expression of great height, found elsewhere in Israelite and Mesopotamian literature, and it is not therefore sufficient justification for imputing a heaven-scaling intent to the builders.[112] Moreover, the tower has been regarded as a cultic structure and a site of idolatry (e.g., *Tg. Ps.-Jon.* and *Tg. Neof.*to Gen 11:4), which is also implied or asserted in modern comparisons of the tower with the monumental ziqqurats of southern Mesopotamia.[113] However, even if this gigantic tower is related to the tradition of building ziqqurats (and this is disputed by, among others, Uehlinger),[114] there is no absolutely

---

[109] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; OTL; rev. ed.; London: SCM, 1972), 146–49.

[110] Theodore Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures," *JBL* 126 (2006): 29–58, at 33–41.

[111] So also Gunkel, *Genesis*, 98.

[112] So, e.g., Ephraim Speiser, *Genesis* (AB; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 75–76; Sarna, *Genesis*, 82–83.

[113] John Walton, for instance, claims that "the tower, as a ziggurat, embodied the concepts of pagan polytheism as it developed in the early stages of urbanization"; John H. Walton, "The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications," *BBR* 5 (1995): 155–75, at 155.

[114] Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 231–36.

no indication that the structure in Gen 11:1–9 is intended as a place of worship, and furthermore this story is equally about the building of a city as of a tower.

In general, modern interpreters have preferred to find wickedness in the intent of the builders. The builders are reckoned to be disobedient for refusing to obey God's command to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28), instead proposing to dwell together in a single location (so, e.g., Sarna; Walter Brueggemann).[115] But while this understanding arises in the current context of the story in Gen 1–11, it seems unwise to base our understanding of this tale in J on a text from P, as Gen 1:28 is. Alternatively, the builders are considered prideful and vainglorious for setting out to "make a name" for themselves (so, e.g., Cassuto; André Lacocque).[116] However, as Hiebert and Jacob Wright have pointed out, the goal of establishing one's name is regarded as a normal and often noble human motivation elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[117]

Probably the most persistent and prevalent reading imagines that the builders are guilty of having superhuman pretensions, of wanting to be like gods, that is, of hubris (so, e.g., Anderson; Peter Harland).[118] And certainly, it should not be doubted that the distinction between man and god is of central importance to this story. As knowledge and immortality are battlegrounds for the separation of god and man in Gen 2–3, and Gen 6:1–4, so is power in the Tower of Babel episode. This seems to be conveyed in Yahweh's prediction in v. 6: "nothing that they plan [or: scheme] to do will be impossible for them [לא יבצר מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות]." In the book of Job, this attribute is presented as a mark of Yahweh's supreme divinity, in terms clearly allusive to Gen 11:6. Job confesses to Yahweh: "I know that you

---

[115] Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Shocken, 1966), 72; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*. (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 99. This position is already found in Josephus; see *Ant.* 1.4.1.

[116] Cassuto, *Genesis II*, 225; André Lacoque, "Whatever Happened in the Valley of Shinar? A Response to Theodore Hiebert," *JBL* 128 (2009): 29–41, at 34.

[117] Hiebert, "Tower of Babel," 39–40; Jacob L. Wright, "Making a Name for Oneself: Martial Valor, Heroic Death, and Procreation in the Hebrew Bible," *JSOT* 36 (2011): 131–62.

[118] Anderson, "Tower of Babel," 173; Harland, "The Sin of Babel,"

can do all things, and that no plan is impossible for you [לֹא יִבָּצֵר מִמְּךָ מְזִמָּה]" (Job 42:2). In Gen 11, Yahweh ensures that such power does not fall to mankind, who are repeatedly referred to as בני האדם "humans, mortals" in this text. Thus, the division of humanity into nations of various languages ensures that the divine/human distinction is maintained. That is, Yahweh protects one boundary by establishing a new one, or more precisely, by creating a whole new kind of boundary–the ethno-linguistic one.

However, as Gowan has pointed out, the hubristic nature of the humans' intention in Gen 11:1–9 is at most muted.[119] The humans are not said to be motivated to become like gods. Rather their motives are clearly stated—to make a name and not be scattered—and these are not condemned, unlike the wicked intentions of the generation of the flood (Gen 6:5). Furthermore, it is not clear that Yahweh sees anything particularly objectionable in the humans' intention to build, and the actual building of the city and the tower. Yahweh's purpose in Gen 11:6–7 is to restrict the dangerous *future potential* of humans, of which the city is an indicator. Thus hubris too should not be seen as the sin of the humans.

We may say, then, that Gen 11:1–9 attributes no particular fault or guilt to the humans.[120] Correspondingly, we should seek an explanation of Yahweh's actions other than as a merited punishment or curse. For it seems likely that the common conclusion that what Yahweh does in Gen 11 is a punishment arises out of a conviction in divine justice: since Yahweh acted against humanity, and since Yahweh is just, humanity must have done something to provoke Yahweh. Thus these sin-punishment interpretations serve as theodicy, demonstrating how

---

[119] Donald E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God: Humanism and* Hybris *in the Old Testament* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975), 25–29.

[120] Hiebert claims that this was also apparently noted by ancient interpreters; Hiebert, "Tower of Babel," 41, quoting *Gen Rab.* 38.6: "while the deeds [מעשׂה] of the generation of the Flood were spelled out, the deeds of the generation of the Dispersion were not spelled out"; *Gen. Rab.* 38.6. (Hiebert understands מעשׂה as referring specifically to deeds of an *evil* nature.) However, this midrash should not be interpreted as claiming that the builders of the tower were blameless, but rather that the nature of their sin is not explicitly stated in Gen 11:1–9.

Yahweh's act to have been just. This theological motivation, however, is not a sound hermeneutical principle, and if we are to see divine justice at work in this text, it must be discovered rather than presumed.

To understand Yahweh's motive in dividing humanity into peoples and languages in this text, Yahweh's twofold response to the first humans' eating of the fruit in Eden provides a useful comparison (Gen 3:16–24). The text clearly distinguishes between the punitive measures Yahweh imposes upon the pair on the one hand—pain in childbirth, toil in food production (Gen 3:16–19)—and a further preventative measure that Yahweh takes to ensure that humanity does not obtain immortality—ejecting them from the garden (Gen 3:22–24). In the Tower of Babel episode, Yahweh's intent is much more clearly of this preventative kind. Yahweh decides to sabotage the building of the city and the tower so that the humans cannot go on to achieve all of the projects that they might in future decide to undertake (Gen 11:6).

Precisely why Yahweh must prevent this is only hinted at in the text (v. 6). Westermann may be correct that Yahweh sounds fearful of the humans' power, so that his measure seems "defensive" of the interests of the gods (cf. Gen 3:5, 22–23).[121] But his further claim that Yahweh benefits humanity also seems to presume ahead of time divine justice. In contrast to von Rad, who claimed that this story contains "no word of grace," Westermann regards Yahweh's policing of the divine-human boundary as ultimately beneficial for humanity: Yahweh benevolently establishes a multinational, multilingual way of life for humanity, within which it can fulfil its proper nature as creatures.[122] Similarly, Harland writes "The J version of the primeval history stresses that humans must remain within the restrictions

---

[121] Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:550.

[122] Von Rad, *Genesis*, 1:149; Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:555.

which have been given to them by God. Only then can human existence find fulfilment."[123] But such interpretations are eisegetical. Yahweh's concern for man's welfare is not apparent in Gen 11:1–9. The only thing we may be certain of is that Yahweh regards it as imperative that the divine-human boundary be upheld, by the establishment of new boundaries internal to the humans.

9. Language and Languages in Gen 11:1–9

Thus, linguistic diversity is not presented as a curse inflicted upon mankind as a result of its sin. Consequently, there is no particular reason to think that living with linguistic diversity is an inherently negative experience, unlike, as previously mentioned, the pain of childbirth or toil in farming. In this respect, the Tower of Babel does not seem to present the situation of linguistic division as especially lamentable. What is primarily emphasized is that it hinders human cooperation; that is, it is extremely inconvenient. In addition, as mentioned earlier, there may be a recognition here that diversity of language contributes to or facilitates disagreement and strife, by providing the context in which differing identities, and thus conflicting interests, can be cultivated. But it is not as if the mere fact of being divided in speech brings about suffering for humanity.

On the other hand, this passage is not especially positive about linguistic diversity. As discussed above, the use of בלל and פוץ conveys that there is something messy about the diffusion of peoples and languages across the world. This is not, however, a judgement about the negative experiential quality of a life lived with linguistic diversity (that it involves suffering), but an aesthetic one about the situation considered as a whole (that it is not

---

[123] Harland, "The Sin of Babel," 525.

orderly). If we were to say that the text is positive about language in any respect, it would be as an affirmation of great power of the human faculty of language in general. Our capacity to communicate verbally makes cooperation possible, and if such communication could occur on a global level, there is apparently no limit to what might be achieved.

C. Relationship between Gen 10 and Gen 11:1–9

The Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel episode are thus both aimed at the same phenomena that are fundamental to human existence: ethnic and linguistic diversity. However, tension arises from the juxtaposition of these two texts in the book of Genesis. For linguistic diversity is presented as established in Gen 10, but global monolingualism is the starting point for Gen 11:1–9. If, then, the Babel episode is thought to be set after the peopling of the earth has already occurred, we have a clear contradiction.[124]

This tension has been resolved or explained in number of ways throughout the history of interpretation.[125] The author of the second-century B.C.E. *Book of Jubilees* appears reticent to refer to linguistic diversity in both of these texts.[126] But rather than disappearing from the Tower of Babel, as in Croatto's interpretation, in *Jubilees* the theme of linguistic diversity drops out of the Table of Nations. In the work, it appears that reference to the לשנות, "tongues," of Gen 10, is preserved, but not in connection with linguistic entities. Rather, the

---

[124] For Croatto this tension is another reason for rejecting the diversification understanding of the Tower of Babel; Croatto, "Tower of Babel," 221. I have given reasons above, however, against Croatto's position.

[125] For a recent examination of the ancient Jewish interpretations of Gen 11:1–9, see Phillip M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower Translated: Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation* (Biblical Interpretation Series 117; Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[126] For issues of dating the composition of *Jubilees*, see James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 17–21.

"tongues" mentioned eight times in *Jubilees* refer to geographical realities—bays and

peninsulas—in keeping with another meaning of לשׁון mentioned above.[127]

Indeed, the structuring of *Jubilees* serves to harmonize the two biblical presentations of

national and linguistic diversity yet further. The section of *Jubilees* that corresponds to the

Table of Nations is in fact depicted as Noah's *allotment* of territories to his descendants as an

inheritance; and as would be expected the descendants do not appear to take possession of

these allotments until after Noah's death. *Jubilees* closely associates Noah's death with the

Tower of Babel episode (*Jub.* 10.15–18), and the dates given in the text indicate that the

building of Babel began during Noah's lifetime. Thus, the text presents a single dispersal of

mankind across the earth that derives both from Gen 10 and from Gen 11:1–9.

To justify this dating of the tower building, *Jubilees* makes use of an enigmatic aside in Gen

10 about the figure Peleg (*Jub.* 10.18–19), in whose lifetime, according to the Table of

Nations, "the earth was split [נפלגה הארץ]" (Gen 10:25). Within Gen 10, the meaning of the

verb פלג is quite unclear. If it is interpreted as a notice of cultural innovation, like Tubal-

Cain's metallurgy (4:22), or Noah's viticulture (9:20), it may refer to the invention of

artificial irrigation of farmland, the noun פלג meaning canal or channel.[128] In *Jubilees*,

however, the association of Peleg with the tower of Babel indicates an interpretation of the

earth's "splitting" as the scattering of peoples from Babel in Gen 11:1–9. *Jubilees* is the first

ancient Jewish text that attests this tradition, which later gives rise to the rabbinic designation

of the builders of the tower as דור הפלגה, "generation of the splitting."[129] Subsequent

interpreters thicken the network of associations between Gen 10 and Gen 11:1–9. For

---

[127] *Jub.* 8.13, 14; 9:4, 11 (4x), 12.

[128] See Sarna, *Genesis*, 79.

[129] As in, e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 38.6.

instance, as mentioned above, Josephus presents Nimrod as the orchestrator of the great building project.[130]

In contrast to these traditional interpretations which seek to find unity in the biblical text, modern critical approaches have tended to emphasize the basic duality of the presentations of linguistic diversity. As has already been mentioned, according to standard source-critical analyses, the Tower of Babel is a text belonging to the J source in the Pentateuch, whereas references to language in the Table of Nations are assigned to P.[131] While the position of language in the narrative—after the flood—in the two accounts appears to be the same in both sources, the two accounts may be contrasted in various ways. For one thing, terminological differences are evident. For whereas Gen 11:1–9 speaks of the single "people," עם, with a single "lip," שׂפה, Gen 10 describes various "clans," משׁפחות, and "nations," גוים, and their "tongues," לשׁנות. The two accounts differ in genre and in perspective. P's genealogy presents a purely terrestrial situation in which the divisions of peoples are shown to be ordered. In contrast, J's myth portrays linguistic diversity as a matter of disorder, and a result of divine agency.

What a strictly source-critical analysis fails to address, however, is the meaning that results from the combination of these two sources. And surely an understanding of the so-called canonical, or final form, of the text should form part of its interpretation, if only for the simple reason that that form is the result of deliberate editorial activity. In the case of Gen 10 and Gen 11:1–9, such editorial activity appears to have juxtaposed two accounts precisely because they reflect on the same human reality.[132]

---

[130] *Ant.* 1.4.2.

[131] Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:499, 536–7.

[132] So, e.g., Block, "National Identity," 337.

Firstly, in the matter of the sequence of events, we may note that the interpretation of Gen 11:1–9 as a resumption of a theme earlier laid out in Gen 10 is quite natural. The Table of Nations presents the result of the dispersion of humanity across the earth, while the Babel episode accounts for how it arose, with a particular focus on linguistic diversity. In this respect, the interpretations of *Jubilees* and Josephus are certainly not wrong-headed, although the specific ways in which they integrate these texts go beyond what can be found Genesis.

Secondly, we may consider the question of the varying perspectives of the two texts. For one thing, the texts are unified in the important realization that language and peoplehood are closely related, and in affirming that geographic distance sustains the distinctions between ethno-linguistic groups. Yet it is true that the Table of Nations associates the spread of humanity across the earth with blessing, whereas the Tower of Babel episode is more negative in its assessment (though I have argued above that it does not see it as curse or punishment). Here, then, there may be an editorial effort, as Harland has suggested, to present a balanced picture which highlights both the good and the bad in human diversity. Mankind has multiplied and taken possession of the furthest reaches of the earth, in fulfilment of its creator's wish, but this spread of humanity involves distinctions that may be regrettably divisive.[133]

It is also interesting to note that both Gen 10 and Gen 11:1–9 pay particular attention to Mesopotamia in describing the fundamental situation of mankind.[134] This is quite intelligible, given the enduring and formidable cultural influence of that region across the Near East, including in the realm of language. It is also understandable as a reflection of the repeated

---

[133] Harland, "Sin of Babel," 527–33.

[134] Though this may not be a similarity that bridges the source distinction, as the Nimrod interlude in Gen 10 (vv. 8–12) is commonly ascribed to J.

encounters of Israel and Judah, at various points in those nations' history, with Assyrians and Babylonians.

In these respects, Gen 10 and Gen 11:1–9 function effectively together in their canonical arrangement; and an acknowledgement of their composition history certainly does not warrant establishing a strict dichotomy between the two texts.

III. The Future of Language: Linguistic Diversity and the Religious Community of Yahweh

In several prophetic passages, the issue of language is, or may be, raised in connection with a future change in the boundaries of the community consisting of Yahweh's worshippers. In these passages, where non-Israelites come to worship Israel's god, the theme of language and linguistic diversity is treated in various ways. I shall examine these passages in order to determine whether, for the biblical authors, language, and in particular the language of Israel, defines the boundaries of Yahweh's community. These passages are Zeph 3:9; Isa 19:18; and Zech 8:23.[135]

A. "Purified Speech": Zeph 3:9

> "At that time I will change [the speech of] the peoples to a purified speech [אהפך
> אל עמים שפה ברורה], that all of them may call on the name of Yahweh and serve
> him with one effort [שכם אחד]."

---

[135] In the the Judaean-Ashdodite marriages (Neh 13:23–24), language is involved in maintaining, rather than changing, the boundaries of Judah, conceived primarily, in my opinion, as an ethnic community rather than a religious one; this issue will be further explored in Chapter 7.

1. Textual Issues

The unusual syntax of this verse, literally "I will change to the peoples a purified speech," may be slightly eased slightly if we correct MT's אל to על, in line with LXX and the Hebrew Minor Prophets Scroll from Wadi Murabba'at.[136] Here, על may express the locus of the particular item that is transformed, as in Dan 10:8 "my complexion was transformed" [והודי נהפך עלי].

For MT's ברורה, LXX has εἰς γενεὰν αὐτῆς. As Hubert Irsigler points out, LXX appears to be reading *בדורה, "in its generation," here.[137] LXX is otherwise unsupported in this reading, and the sense of MT is more readily intelligible.

2. Context

This structure and relation of the oracles of Zeph 3, which contains several introductory formulas ("on that day," "at that time") are somewhat obscure, as Marvin Sweeney has pointed out.[138] Our verse makes most sense in the immediate context of vv. 8–10 which describe the gathering of scattered peoples and kingdoms to receive Yahweh's judgement. The relation of this to the partial judgement visited upon Jerusalem (vv. 1–7, 9–13) is not clear, but the overall impression is not that Jerusalem will be rejected in favour of Gentiles.

---

[136] Mur 88 col. XXI.

[137] Hubert Irsigler, *Zefanja: Übersetzt und ausgelegt* (HTKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002), 369. Marvin Sweeney's suggestion that LXX reads a form of ברא here, implying a link to the original unity of language at creation, is unlikely; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary* (Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 168, 184.

[138] Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 182.

3. שׂפה ברורה, "Purified Speech"

In attempting to understand the force of שׂפה ברורה in this verse, we may first note that there is no compelling reason *within the passage* to understand שׂפה as "a language" over against the common meaning "speech" more generally: it does not occur with a demonym or toponym (as in שׂפת כנען), or in parallel with לשׁון meaning "a language"; nor is it enumerated as in Gen 11:1, 6. Therefore, שׂפה may be interpreted as "speech" in Zeph 3:9, for the moment.

We may now consider the meaning of ברורה in this context. The verb ברר is used to describe polished metals (e.g., Isa 49:2; Jer 51:11), as well as ceremonial purity (Isa 52:11), and righteous behaviour and character (e.g., 2 Sam 22:7). It is used of sincere speech in Job 33:3. In the text under consideration, Zeph 3:9, the purity appears to be of a cultic nature: what the purification results in is the invocation of Yahweh's name, and service, that is, worship, of Yahweh among the peoples. The mechanism by which this purification comes about is not stated explicitly in the verse, but the context implies a purging through Yahweh's anger imagined as fire. Yahweh declares "my decision is to gather nations . . . to pour out upon them my indignation, all the heat of my anger . . . the fire of my passion" (Zeph 3:8).

Two parallels from other prophetic books are instructive in understanding this purified speech. Firstly, Milgrom and others have pointed out the thematic similarity of Zeph 3:9 to the cleansing of Isaiah's lips in that prophet's throne vision.[139] On seeing Yahweh, Isaiah exclaims "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips [אישׁ טמא שׂפתים], and I live among a people of unclean lips [עם טמא שׂפתים]" (Isa 6:5).[140] Subsequently, a seraph applies a hot coal to Isaiah's mouth, and declares "your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out [וסר עונך וחטאתך תכפר]" (Isa 6:7).

---

[139] Jacob Milgrom, "Did Isaiah Prophesy during the Reign of Uzziah?" *VT* 14 (1964): 164–82, at 172.

[140] NRSV modified.

In both Isa 6 and Zeph 3, we see the recognition that ordinary profane human speech is inappropriate for communication with the divine realm; and moreover that fire is a powerful symbol or metaphor of purgation (חרון, אֵשׁ; Zeph 3:8). But in Isa 6:5–7, apart from the use of שׂפה (here in the dual rather than the singular), we do not find significant similarities in wording to Zeph 3:9. Thus the relationship between these passages is not a direct one, but one of broad themes and concepts.

Secondly, we may also consider the following verses from Hosea: "On that day, says Yahweh, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My master [בעלי].' For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more" (Hos 2:18–19).[141] Here, the title by which Israel addresses Yahweh is altered, in order to eliminate the names of gods other than Yahweh from Israel's speech. Given that the outcome of purifying the nations' speech in Zeph 3:9 is calling on *Yahweh's* name, we might similarly imagine that the purification involves expunging the names of other gods from the lips of the nations.

In addition to these specifically cultic considerations, "purified speech" may also indicate ethical uprightness. Several verses later in Zeph 3, we read: "the remnant of Israel shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall deceitful talk [לשׁון תרמית] be found in their mouths" (Zeph 3:13). Thus, a purified speech may be one which does not contain deliberate falsehoods. Since it is stressed elsewhere in the prophetic literature that righteousness is a precondition of acceptable cultic service (e.g., Isa 1:10–20), these two types of purity of speech—cultic and righteous—may well be related.

These passages lead us to understand the "purified speech" as a manner of speech with which it is appropriate to worship Yahweh. And in that Yahweh bestows this upon many nations,

---

[141] NRSV modified.

who will serve him with "one effort [שְׁכֶם אֶחָד]," [142] we may, with Uehlinger, speak of a widespread *Kultgemeinschaft*, or cultic community, in this verse. [143]

4. Relationship to Gen 11:1–9

Several scholars have detected a relationship of some kind between Zeph 3:9 and the Tower of Babel episode. Sweeney and Geller argue that Zeph 3:9 contains an intentional reversal of the diversification of languages at Babel, and in this they agree with a long exegetical tradition. [144] If this were correct, we would have good reason to understand in Zeph 3:9 as "a (particular) language," as in Gen 11:1–9, rather than simply "speech." I shall now consider whether there are grounds for detecting a relationship between these texts.

According to those who detect a direct relationship to Gen 11:1–9, the transformation (the verb הפך) of the peoples' speech in Zeph 3:9 is a reversion to the original monolingual condition of mankind. Geller translates: "I shall change the peoples *back* to pure speech." [145] The purification (ברר) of the speech reverses the mixing (בלל) of humanity's speech, and here Geller detects deliberate wordplay. [146] Moreover, Sweeney indicates that the dispersion of humanity depicted in Gen 11:1–9 is undone in Zeph 3, since "From beyond the rivers of Cush, my suppliants, my scattered ones [בַּת פּוּצַי], shall bring my offering." [147] Thus, both

---

[142] The image of the unified "shoulder" may be drawn from draught animals; cf. LXX, Syr, which translate שְׁכֶם as "yoke."

[143] "Cultic community"; Uehlinger, *Weltreich*, 349, n. 22; similarly, Irsigler, *Zefanja*, 376.

[144] See, for instance, *Tg. Neb.* at Zeph 3:9, which expansively translates שׂפה as מֵמְלַל חַד, "one speech," echoing the Targumic translations of שׂפה אחת in Gen 11:1.

[145] Geller, "Imagery in Ps 114," 193, emphasis added.

[146] The duplicated final root consonants in both words make this a morphological as well as a phonetic wordplay.

[147] Sweeney, *Zephaniah,* 183.

Yahweh's scattering and confusion at Babel are undone in Zeph 3. We may also add that the passages contain several specific verbal similarities that appear to tie them together: עם, "people," in connection with שׂפה, "speech/language"; כלם, "all of them"; a form of אחד, expressing unity; שם, "name"; כל הארץ, "the whole earth"(Zeph 3:8–9). The direction of this relationship is in keeping with the dates traditionally assigned to these texts: Gen 11:1–9, as a text from J, would date to early in the monarchic period, while the prophecies of Zephaniah are dated to the second half of the seventh century B.C.E. (Zeph 1:1).

In response, we may firstly note that the strength of the specific verbal links is not overwhelming, given that most of these are extremely common words in the biblical corpus, although their appearance *together* in both texts does increase the weight of the argument for a relationship between these texts. As for the themes that are supposedly common between these two texts, we may point out that they appear quite differently in Zeph 3 from Gen 11. The unity of the peoples in Zeph 3:9 is in their worship of Yahweh with a common speech; however, as I pointed out in my analysis of Gen 11:1–9 above, that text does not appear to have a cultic interest—the structure is not a religious one, and the single language of humanity is not a single language of worship. Further, while peoples and nations are indeed gathered together in Zeph 3:8, the text does not state that they will be unified into a single *people*, whereas Gen 11:1–9 is extremely concerned with the question of ethnic unity/diversity. Finally, while Zeph 3:10 does imagine the reversal of scattering, it is of Yahweh's worshippers specifically, rather than of all the peoples of the earth. The image may be compared to that found in Zech 10:9–10 and Isa 56:8, where dispersed *Israelites* are gathered from the far reaches of the earth. Thus, we cannot talk of the reversal of the Babel event in this respect.

In sum, there is not a sufficiently close thematic or verbal correspondence between Zeph 3 and Gen 11:1–9 to indicate a close relationship, and so the idea that Zeph 3:9 represents a reversal of the confusion of language at Babel should not be accepted.[148] As such, there is no strong reason for understanding שׂפה to mean "a language" in this verse, and the meaning "speech" discussed above can be seen to suffice.

5. Hebrew as the Purified Speech?

An exegetical tradition arose that identified the "purified speech" of Zeph 3:9 with Hebrew, the "holy language." For instance, 4Q464, a composition about the patriarchs, uses שׂפה ברורה together with לשׁון הקודשׁ in connection with the life of Abraham, who in many retellings, knew or learnt Hebrew (e.g., *Jub.* 12). It seems unlikely that the intent of שׂפה ברורה in Zeph 3:9 is to indicate that Hebrew will become the universal language of liturgy, but we may note in particular two reasons why this tradition may have arisen.

Firstly, in Late Biblical and postbiblical Hebrew, ברור can mean "chosen, selected; elite" (e.g., Neh 5:18; 1 Chr 7:40; so understood in *Tg. Ps.-J. ad* Zeph 3:9). As Irsigler has noted, an understanding of שׂפה ברורה as "a chosen language" (e.g., *Tg. Ps.-Jon.* ממלל חד בחיר) may have facilitated the identification of this with the holy language.[149] However, this connotation of "selection" for ברור is not clearly intended in Zeph 3:9, which stems from the period of Classical Biblical Hebrew.

---

[148] Uehlinger and Irsigler do not imagine that a "single language" is in view in Zeph 3:9, but they support some kind of indirect relationship between this text and Gen 11:1–9; Uehlinger, *Weltreich,* 349, n. 22; Irsigler, *Zefanja,* 376. But if the nature of this relationship is thus attenuated, it is not clear to me what significance it should be given in interpreting either text.

[149] Irsigler, *Zefanja,* 369.

Secondly, the identification of the "purified speech" with Hebrew may also have been facilitated by an association of Isa 19:18 with Zeph 3:9. In Isa 19:18, in five Egyptian cities where שׂפת כנען "the language of Canaan" will come to be spoken, people will "swear allegiance to Yahweh of hosts." The content of this verse, describing non-Israelite peoples' worship of Yahweh, is similar to Zeph 3:9, and there appears to be a close relationship between Zeph 3:8–10 and the oracles concerning Egypt in Isa 18–19.[150] Thus, it is an understandable interpretative step to identify these two "speeches." But it is far from certain that Zeph 3:9 intentionally alludes to Isa 19:18, and so it is safest not to identify the "purified speech" with Hebrew, or any other particular language, in our interpretation.

6. Summary

שׂפה ברורה in Zeph 3:9 appears to indicate a manner of speech fit for worshipping Yahweh, rather than a particular national language. In addition, Zeph 3:9 does not appear to envisage a reversal of the linguistic or territorial distinctions established at Babel.

B. The Language of Canaan in Five Cities of Egypt: Isa 19:18

> "On that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan [מדברות שׂפת כנען] and swear allegiance to Yahweh of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun."

1. Textual Issues

MT identifies the city mentioned as עִיר הַהֶרֶס. The noun הֶרֶס is a hapax legomenon in Biblical Hebrew. Preferable is the reading עיר החרס of 1QIsaᵃ and 1QIsaᵇ, supported by Tg., Syr., and

---

[150] For the similarities between these passages, see Sweeney, *Zephaniah*, 182–85.

Vulg. חרס is a rare noun meaning "sun" (e.g., Job 9:7). This Egyptian city would therefore be the one referred to elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as און/אן "On," Egyptian *iwnw*, known to the Greeks as Ἡλιούπολις, "sun city, Heliopolis," in accordance with the prominence of the god Ra's cult there. Instead of הרס, LXX reads ασεδεκ here (Heb. הצדק), which may be an interpretative reading.

2. Context and Date

This verse is one of five short prophecies concerning Egypt that are introduced by the phrase ביום ההוא (vv. 16–25). These prophecies focus on the victory of Judah over Egypt (vv. 16–17), the worship of Yahweh in Egypt (vv. 19–22), and relations among Egypt, Assyria, and Israel (vv. 23–25). These follow an extended oracle of judgement against Egypt (vv. 1–15). The five ביום ההוא prophecies are generally regarded as a secondary addition to the chapter, but their relationship to one another is not clear. Joseph Blenkinsopp represents perhaps the standard scholarly position when he writes that "these five editorial addenda have been attached *serially* to 19:1–15."[151] In contrast, Balogh treats these verses as a single addition expressing a unified vision.[152]

The historical circumstances reflected in the verses are also the subject of debate. Reference to cultic worship of Yahweh in Egypt has been associated with communities of Judaeans attested in Egypt from the 6th century on, as at Elephantine and Alexandria (so Blenkinsopp).[153] On the other hand, the topic of Assyrian-Egyptian relations, and particularly a possible reference to Esarhaddon's invasion of Egypt (v. 23), points to a 7th century setting

---

[151] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2000), 317.

[152] Balogh, *Stele of YHWH*, 296–302.

[153] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 318.

(thus Balogh).[154] In our particular verse, "City of the Sun" apparently reflects the Greek name of On/Heliopolis. The implications of this for dating are not straightforward, since the Greek name Ἡλιούπολις was in use well before the Hellenistic period.[155]

3. *Interpretation*

What does it mean to prophesy that five Egyptian cities will speak the language of Canaan?

We may first address the issue of what it means for ערים, "cities," to speak a language. Elsewhere this ability is attributed to individuals or nations, and clearly עיר in Isa 19:18 is used not to refer to a location, but in the sense of "the inhabitants of a city as a group." Though only here in the Hebrew Bible is עיר the subject of the verb דבר, other verbs of speaking are elsewhere similarly predicated of עיר (e.g., ענה, "answer," Deut 22:10; זעק, "cry out," 1 Sam 4:13).

The speaking of Canaanite in these cities must therefore be of such a kind that it can be attributed to these entire cities. This might be appropriate if the language of Canaan became the "official" language of these cities— the language of the rulers of these cities or that in which administration was carried out; or it might be appropriate if Canaanite were the language of commerce, or that spoken by the majority of citizens. However, it does not seem an appropriate description of a city with an ethnic enclave of Canaanite speakers, and thus I do not agree with Blenkinsopp and others that the specific mention of "five cities" refers to "a federation or network of Jewish communities" in diaspora in Egypt.[156] Surely some kind of

---

[154] Balogh, *Stele of YHWH*, 302.

[155] For instance, Herodotus uses the name in the 5th century; *Hist.* 2.7–8.

[156] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 319.

transformation of the five Egyptian cities is envisaged, which will change the linguistic situation within them.[157]

It is important that this transformation is both a linguistic and a religious one, for the cities will also "swear allegiance to Yahweh of hosts [נשבעות ליהוה צבאות]." The cultic worship of Yahweh in Egypt is emphasized in the surrounding verses: an altar and a pillar (מצבה) to Yahweh will be set up (v. 19), and sacrifices, grain offerings, and votive offerings will be made (v. 21).[158] Perhaps here Canaanite is the precondition for such service of Yahweh. After all, swearing an oath to a god named יהוה צבאות involves using Canaanite/Hebrew: צבאות at least is a Hebrew word; and the name יהוה might also be regarded an item in that language.[159]

In another respect, we might focus on the political connotations of the image of Egyptians using the religion and language of Judaeans. Religion and language are pieces of a nation's cultural property; to this extent, the two claims, that Egypt will take up Judah's religion *and* its language, reinforce a single idea: that Judah will achieve dominance over Egypt (as in vv. 16–17). This is apparently Balogh's interpretation: "the adoption of the Canaanite language should . . . be seen as a political necessity after YHWH, the Canaanite speaking overlord, has conquered and subdued the country."[160] If this is correct, Balogh is astute to observe that this passage contains an analogue of biblical prophecies that tell of Israel having to hear a foreign language on the lips of invading nations (Isa 28:11; 33:19; Jer 5:15; Deut 28:49). Egypt will

---

[157] That is not to say that the transformation could not build on something already existing—the author of this verse might be envisaging that certain existing Canaanite-speaking enclaves will achieve new prominence in their host cities.

[158] See Balogh for a discussion of the significance of the מצבה, which may also (or primarily) function here as Yahweh's royal victory stele; Balogh, *Stele of YHWH*, 258–260.

[159] This is not to say that יהוה was analysed as anything but a proper noun by the biblical authors, although scholars have proposed a verbal origin for the term; see Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 1–3.

[160] Balogh, *Stele of YHWH*, 255. It may be noted, however, that Canaanite/Judaean/Hebrew is not clearly presented as the language of Yahweh elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

likewise suffer this fate at the hands of Judah. In this understanding, the worship of Yahweh in Egypt is primarily conceived of as the service due from a vassal to a suzerain, and this appears to be conveyed in the use of שׁבע, "swear," in our verse, a term that can expresses political fealty in the language of international relations.

It should be noted, however, that these verses do not present an unmixed image of Egypt's subjugation: Yahweh raises up a "saviour" for Egypt (Isa 18:21), "strikes and heals" it (v.22), and, and calls it "my people" (v. 23). Some scholars, including (tentatively) Hans Wildberger, have for this reason considered vv. 17–23 to contain a salvation oracle for Egypt and intimations of universalism.[161] If the Canaanite language (which I argued earlier is used to refer to the continuum of languages and dialects in Canaan, including Judaean Hebrew) is involved in this salvation, however, it is apparently merely instrumental or secondary; Egypt's salvation certainly does not consist in its adoption of Canaanite. In addition, there is no sense in this passage that Canaanite will be extended universally or even beyond the "five cities" to all of Egypt.

C. Ten Men from All the Linguistic Communities of the Nations: Zech 8:23

> Thus says Yahweh of hosts: In those days ten men from all the linguistic communities of the nations [עשׂרה אנשׁים מכל לשׁנות הגוים] shall take hold of the garment of a Judaean man [אישׁ יהודי], saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'[162]

---

[161] Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah: A Continental Commentary* (3 vols.; trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991–2002); 2:281–82.

[162] NRSV modified. For the translation "linguistic communities" in this verse, see the discussion above. There are no textual difficulties in this verse.

1. Context and Date

This is the final verse of Zech 8, and therefore the close of the so-called First Zechariah, Zech 1–8, a prophetic collection with different style and focus from Zech 9–14. It appears in the context of predictions of universalistic worship of Yahweh (vv. 20–22). However, the short oracle of v. 23 is generally regarded as a secondary addition to the collection, in light of the separate introductory formula (כה אמר יהוה, "Thus says Yahweh of hosts") and separate specification of time (בימים ההמה).[163] This verse must therefore postdate the composition of Zech 1–8 (very late 6th century, at the earliest), but otherwise the date cannot be determined. The addressees of this oracle must therefore be the postexilic Judaean community.

2. Interpretation

The situation of Zech 8:23 is presented differently from Isa 19. The universalism in this Zechariah passage is clear, with people coming from across the world to seek Yahweh. Moreover this turning to Yahweh is voluntary, and does not involve the theme of submission that could be found in Isa 19. And the form of this worship is vague: in the surrounding verses the terms בקשׁ, "seek," and חלה פנים, "entreat the favour of" (vv. 21 and 22), are used, and cultic apparatus and offerings are not mentioned.

In this passage, the linguistic identity of these foreign communities does not appear to be a strong theme. In the preceding verses of Zech 8, we have reference to people groups by other terms: we read of the "inhabitants of many cities [ישׁבי ערים רבות]" (v. 20) and "many peoples and strong nations [עמים רבים וגוים עצומים]" (v. 22), who will likewise come to entreat Judah's

---

[163] So Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 440; Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, 318.

god. Thus לשׁון may simply be a stylistic variant of other words for people groups, as it appears to be in Isa 66:18, where the worship of Yahweh by many nations is also in view.

However, the reference to the linguistic difference of these foreign peoples may be in deliberate focus. We may note, for example, that the name of the Judaean god, Yahweh, is not used in the words attributed to these communities, and instead we find the non-specific אלהים, "God." As Meyers and Meyers point out, this may be an authorial representation of cultural or religious difference through language, a recognition that Yahweh belongs specifically to the religious language of Judah.[164] The same principle seems to be at work in the use of אלהים in Pharaoh Neco's message to Josiah (2 Chr 35:21).[165]

If language is at issue in this passage, the designation יהודי may be deliberately used with a linguistic connotation: Judaeans may represent a גוי לשׁון, an ethnic community with its own distinctive language, alongside those that will come to seek God. Consequently, the special access to God that a Judaean can provide may have a linguistic dimension; perhaps it is through the Judaean language in particular that Yahweh can be sought and entreated. This latter point, however, is not emphasized. Indeed the issue of what medium of communication the foreigners use to communicate with the Judaean is not addressed in this passage. There is certainly no implication that Judaeans, as Petersen suggests, must possess a "phenomenal linguistic competence" in order to be able to understand the "myriad of tongues" in which the nations will address them.[166] Thus the universal worship of Yahweh by peoples of all languages does not, apparently, result in the eradication of linguistic boundaries in the world.

---

[164] Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, 442.

[165] It should be pointed out, however, that the nations use the name Yahweh in Zech 8:21; but, as noted, these verses may come originally from different hands.

[166] Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, 319.

3. Summary

From an analysis of these passages, no consistent or systematic relationship can be detected between the community of Yahweh's worshippers and a particular language. Isaiah 19:18 contains the strongest indication of a relationship between the worship of Yahweh and the language spoken by Judaeans (and their neighbours, Canaanite), without, however, connotations of universalism. The worship of Yahweh among linguistically diverse peoples is envisaged in Zech 8:23, but this verse does not indicate a change in the world's linguistic situation. A linguistic change is envisioned in Zeph 3:9, but this purification of language is not of the kind that removes diversity. Thus, the idea of the religious significance of Hebrew in particular does not emerge as a strong theme in the Hebrew Bible.

IV. A Divine Language? The Unknown Speech of Ps 81:6

Ps 81:6 may contain reference to a language that reflects an important distinction: a distinctively divine language that differs from the language used by humans. The interpretation of the relevant portion of this verse, שְׂפַת לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶשְׁמָע, "I hear a speech/language I did not know" however, is unclear, and will now be examined. Here is the verse in some context. The traditional subdivisions of v. 6 are indicated in superscript:

> [4] Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our festal day.
> [5] For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
> [6] [a]He made it a decree in Joseph, [b]when he went out against the land of Egypt. [c]I hear speech I did not know
> [עֵדוּת בִּיהוֹסֵף שָׂמוֹ בְּצֵאתוֹ עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם שְׂפַת לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶשְׁמָע].
> [7] I relieved his shoulder of the burden; his hands were freed from the basket.
> [8] In distress you called, and I rescued you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah."[167]

---

[167] NRSV modified.

A. Textual Issues

LXX has third person singular verbs—ἔγνω, ἤκουσεν— for MT's ידעתי and אשמע. This does not necessarily attest a difference in LXX's *Vorlage*, however, since the translator may have been trying to make sense of the confusing sequence of speakers and referents in this psalm (see below).

B. Context

The structure of the psalm is relatively clear (see Kraus; Hossfeld and Zenger),[168] although the point of transition from the first section to the second is disputed, as will be discussed further. After an introductory call to worship spoken by a member of the community (vv. 2–6[b]), Yahweh recounts the events of the exodus ([6c–]7), and lays down the commandment to have no strange god (8–10). Next, Yahweh rebukes the community for disobedience, and exhorts Israel to return to him (vv. 11–16).

C. Interpretation of שׂפת לא ידעתי אשמע

The meaning of שׂפת לא ידעתי אשמע (Ps 81:6c) is disputed. There are four major points of disagreement among scholars: 1) the identity of the speaker of this stich, and thus the referent of the two first person singular verbs; 2) the meaning and referent of שׂפה; 3) the syntax of שׂפת לא ידעתי. Each of these issues is relevant in understanding שׂפה in this psalm, and so I shall consider all of them.

---

[168] Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 146; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 320.

1. The Speaker of Ps 81:6c

There are two ways of fitting v. 6c in the structure of the psalm. The stich may be taken as the last words of the human who summons Israel to worship, and thus as the conclusion of the introductory, call-to-worship section (vv. 1–6b).[169] In this interpretation, the caller is seen to be speaking from the point of view of the exodus community, recounting an experience they had: "I heard [or: hear] [Yahweh's] speech which I did not know." Alternatively, v. 6c may be understood as the first words of Yahweh's description of the exodus (so Dahood), and thus the beginning of the "oracle" that runs to the end of the psalm.[170] In this interpretation, Yahweh mentions the initial circumstances which led him to redeem Israel: "I heard [Israel's] speech which I did not know."

In favour of Dahood's Yahweh-as-speaker interpretation, we may note the distribution of first-person verbs in the psalm. The two verbs in v. 6c, ידעתי and אשמע, are the first verbs in the first person in the psalm,[171] and they are followed by a sequence of twelve first-person verbs that characterize Yahweh's direct speech until the end of the psalm. In this respect, ידעתי and אשמע most naturally belong within Yahweh's speech. To believe the opposite, that these two verbs are spoken from the perspective of the human speaker of vv. 2–5 would involve seeing in this psalm a strange and abrupt change of direction: this four-word clause, שׂפת לא ידעתי אשמע, would contain a perspective that is unique in the psalm—a human speaker recounting his own experience—and one that disappears immediately, since, for the

---

[169] So Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 320.

[170] Dahood, *Psalms*, 2:264–65.

[171] Though in LXX and Syr. they are 3 sg.

remainder of the psalm, only Yahweh's voice is heard. Such a switch is, as Charles Briggs noted, "improbable."[172]

In defence of the human-speaker interpretation of v. 6c, Hossfeld and Zenger write that v. 6c "confronts us with the 'I' of the person speaking the psalm, who had been included in the previous call to praise within the group's 'we': cf. 'our strength' [עוזנו] in v. 2 and 'our feast' [הגנו] in v. 4."[173] Moreover, in biblical poetry we fairly frequently encounter switches of speaker or person that strike us as jarring or out of place, but seem to be the correct textual readings. We may also support the human-speaker interpretation by noting that Israel appears as the subject of the verb שמע four times in the rest of the psalm (v. 9, twice; v. 12; v. 14) with the meanings "to hear" and "to obey." Thus it would be natural that the community's representative, the caller-to-worship, would also be the subject of "hearing."

2. Meaning and Referent of שפה

In Ps 81:6, it is clear that שפה does not bear the anatomical meaning "lip": since שפה is the object of שמע, a verb of hearing, a meaning must be sought for שפה in the realm of auditory perception rather than anatomy. The two meanings of שפה that fit this criterion are "speech" generally, and, more narrowly, "a language."[174]

In Dahood's Yahweh-as-speaker interpretation, שפה would mean "speech," because the alternative, that this passage depicts Yahweh as being ignorant of some human language, is very implausible. It would be a statement of a unique kind in the Hebrew Bible, and a

---

[172] Charles A. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906–1907), 2:211.

[173] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 321.

[174] It may be noted that LXX apparently understands שפה as "language" here, rendering it γλῶσσαν.

theologically problematic one. Rather, Dahood takes שׂפה as "speech." This speech is the desperate plea of the Israelites: Yahweh heard this, and was prompted to deliver them. This plea is mentioned in v. 8 of this psalm (בצרה קראת ואחלצך, "in distress you called and I rescued you") and in other accounts of the exodus (Exod 2:23–24; 3:7, 9), and in this respect, Dahood's interpretation fits the immediate and broader biblical context.

Among interpretations which see Ps 81:6c as spoken by the human caller-to-worship, שׂפה is variously taken as either "speech" or "a language." Hossfeld and Zenger prefer "speech," and understand it as referring to Yahweh's oracle in vv. 7–17, which they imagine to have been received by a cult prophet who is the speaker of the psalm.[175] Alternatively, we might understand this "speech" as one located in the past: as Yahweh's communications with the Israelites at the time of the exodus. For the Exodus accounts depict Yahweh speaking directly to Moses (Exod 3–4 etc.), Aaron (4:27), and all Israel (at Sinai; Exod 19:16, 20:22; Deut 4:33; 10:4). Taking שׂפה as referring to the speech of Yahweh, either at the exodus or in cult prophecy, has the advantage of linking the occurrences of שׁמע throughout the psalm: Israel (or: the prophet) once heard and obeyed Yahweh words (v. 6, 9), and, despite some failures in obedience (v. 12), is enjoined to heed them still (v. 14). And as T. Booij has pointed out, obedience, expressed through שׁמע, is a major thematic element in this psalm.[176]

Against this understanding, שׂפה is interpreted as "language" by Block, Ullendorff, Weinberg, and others.[177] In favour of this interpretation, we may note that both ידע and שׁמע are used in the Hebrew Bible to express knowing a language: ידע in this usage means "to know (be able to understand and/or speak) [a language]" (Deut 28:29; Jer 5:15); and שׁמע idiomatically

---

[175] Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 324.

[176] T. Booij, "The Background of the Oracle in Psalm 81," *Biblica* 65 (1985): 465–75.

[177] Block, "National Identity," 332; Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 464; Weinberg, "Language Consciousness," 57.

refs to receptive ability, "to be able to understand [a language]" (e.g., Gen 42:23; 2 Kgs 18:26). In Ps 81:6, the use of these words with שָׂפָה as their apparent direct object suggests that they carry their linguistic senses, and hence that שפה means "language." Block, Ullendorff, et al. differ, however, as to the identity of this language, the referent of שפה being either the Egyptian language or the language of Yahweh.

Ullendorff and, following the JPS translation, Weinberg hold that the language in question is the Egyptian language,[178] the land of Egypt having just been mentioned in v. 6b. In support of this interpretation, Ullendorff and Weinberg cite Ps 114:1, discussed above, in which Egypt's linguistic otherness is referred to: "When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people speaking unintelligibly [מעם לעז], Judah became his sanctuary, Israel his dominion." By thus mentioning Egypt's linguistic otherness in the context of the exodus, Ps 114 would provide a close parallel to Ps 81:6c, as understood by Ullendorff and Weinberg. The effect of referring to the Egyptians' language here is to set the scene for Israel's subjection in an alien land, before Yahweh's deliverance. It should be noted, however, that Egypt's foreign language is not again raised in Ps 81.

In contrast, according to Block, "the unknown language is not that of foreigners, but divine . . . a divine language differing from that of humans."[179] Block does not elaborate on the function of this concept in Ps 81. We might imagine that it is used to emphasize the starkness of the encounter between Israel and its god at the exodus. Block does, however, support his interpretation with reference to a study by Johannes Friedrich, in which Friedrich claims that the idea of a divine language distinct from human language may be found in bilingual

---

[178] Ullendorf, "Knowledge of Languages," 464; Ullendorff, "C'est de l'hébreu," 128; Weinberg, "Language Consciousness," 57. This is also the interpretation of Ibn Ezra *ad* Ps 81:6.

[179] Block, "National Identity," 332 n. 44.

Hattic/Hittite texts. In assessing Block's reading of Ps 81:6c, I shall consider the Hattic/Hittite evidence, as well as the idea of divine language elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

i. Divine Language among the Hittites

Friedrich pointed out that certain bilingual Hattic/Hittite ritual texts distinguish between, on the one hand, the names or epithets by which humans invoke some god, and, on the other, the names or epithets by which the gods know that god.[180] In one of these texts, for instance, we read: "to mankind you are Tašimmetiš, but among the gods you are Ištar the queen."[181] Friedrich compared this with a practice found on several occasions in the *Iliad* (e.g., *Il.* 14.290) and *Odyssey* (e.g., *Od.* 12.61), in which the poet contrasts "human" and "divine" words for certain items (birds, plants, cliffs, etc.). While Friedrich in his analysis of the Hattic/Hittite texts pointed out that "[e]in ausdrücklicher Hinweis auf die Sprache der Götter und Menschen kommt nicht vor,"[182] he nevertheless concluded that it was appropriate to describe these references as evidence for a concept of divine language—*Göttersprache*—as distinct from human language—*Menschensprache*—in ancient Asia Minor.

However, as Calvert Watkins has indicated, a notion of divine and human languages cannot be inferred from the Hattic/Hittite texts, since "[a]ll the examples of this figure concern the names or epithets of deities; we never have reference to any ordinary lexical item being

---

[180] Johannes Friedrich, "Göttersprache und Menschensprache im hethitischen Schrifttum," in *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung: Festschrift Albert Debrunner gewidmet von Schülern, Freunden und Kollegen* (Bern: Francke, 1954), 135–39.

[181] KUB 8.41 II 8–9. The translation I use here is taken from Calvert Watkins, "Language of Gods and Language of Men: Remarks on Some Indo-European Metalinguistic Traditions" in *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans: Studies in Indo-European Comparative Mythology* (ed. Jaan Puhvel; Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1970), 1–17, at 7.

[182] "An explicit reference to the language of the gods and humans does not occur"; Friedrich, "Göttersprache" 138.

assigned to the language of men or to the language of gods"; rather the practice is "more akin to the Greek hymnic tradition of invoking a divinity by a number of different names or epithets," a tradition, we might add, that is also attested in ancient Mesopotamian religion (see the list of Marduk's fifty names, *Enuma Elish* 6.123–7.146).[183] As in *Enuma Elish*, the ascription of many names to the gods in the Hattic/Hittite texts may be related to complicated processes of cultural assimilation, as Alfonso Archi has suggested.[184] Thus the practice is not clearly aimed at establishing a distinction between registers of the language, unlike the Homeric texts and certain Old Norse and Sanskrit parallels analysed by Watkins. In those cases, the "divine" word for some item is indisputably a word in Greek (or Old Norse or Sanskrit), although it belongs to a marked register of the language (archaic or poetic), and is opposed to the standard unmarked "human" term.[185]

Therefore, although a difference exists in the names by which the gods are known among the gods, there is insufficient evidence to claim that there was a concept of a separate divine language among the Hittites, and hence these Hattic/Hittite texts do not provide a parallel that supports identifying the שׂפת לֹא ידעתי of Ps 81:6c with a divine language.[186]

---

[183] Watkins, "Language of Gods," 8. In fact, Watkins goes further and denies that the Hattic/Hittite texts are even "comparable" to the Greek examples. However, the similarity of phrasing in the texts ("to/for/among humans . . . to/for/among gods . . . ") suggests a relationship of some sort, as Friedrich maintained; Friedrich, "Göttersprache," 138. In addition, Staal points out that many ancient cultures conceived of language as chiefly a system of naming, and failed to distinguish between proper and common nouns; therefore the distance between these practices may not be as great as first appears; Staal, "Origin of Language," 1–2.

[184] Alfonso Archi, "How a Pantheon Forms: The Cases of Hattian-Hittite Anatolia and Ebla of the 3rd Millennium B.C.," in *Religionsgeschichtliche Beziehungen zwischen Kleinasien, Nordsyrien und dem Alten Testament* (ed. Bernd Janowski, Klaus Koch, and Gernot Wilhelm; OBO 129; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993) 1–19, at 3–4.

[185] Watkins gives an English analogy of "horse" (unmarked) and "steed, mount, charger" (marked); Watkins, "Language of Gods," 5.

[186] A parallel closer in history, geography, and culture to the biblical sources that may suggest a difference between divine and human speech comes from Ugarit. Dennis Pardee writes that in the attested Ugaritic literature, "discourse from or about the divine sphere usually takes poetic form," including, of course, the Baal Cycle; Dennis Pardee, *The Ugaritic Texts and the Origins of West Semitic Literary Composition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 123–24. Such "god-talk," as Pardee calls it, is thus marked off from other topics through formal, lexical, and syntactic features. While the significance of this feature of Ugaritic literature

ii. Divine Speech in the Hebrew Bible

While the language of God is a topic of speculation in postbiblical Jewish texts,[187] the evidence from the Hebrew Bible for the concept of a specifically divine language is slim. And while a detailed investigation of this subject lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, some relevant evidence may be presented.

Several biblical texts clearly envisage speech among the divine beings, generally in the context of the "divine council" (e.g., Pss 29:1; 82; 89:5–8; 103:19–21; Job 1:6–12; also probably Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7). Nevertheless, these texts do not make a claim about a particular language in which the business of heaven is carried out. Moreover, when humans are present at the divine council (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:19–22; Isa 6; Zech 3:1–5), they do not fail to understand god-talk, though the purgation of Isaiah's lips in Isa 6:5–7 suggests a difference in holiness between divine and human speech.[188]

Outside the context of communication among heavenly beings, Yahweh's speech clearly differs from that of humans. In Ps 29, the great power of Yahweh's voice, presented as a destructive force of nature, is meditated upon, while Elijah's encounter with the voice is of a gentler nature (1 Kgs 19:11–12). Yahweh's word of prophecy is effective in a way that human speech is not (Isa 55:10–11; Amos 3:8). Yahweh is said to have "lips full of

---

requires further examination, Pardee suggests that its function is to distinguish between spheres of literary discourse (divine and profane), without, however, claiming that it sets up an opposition between the languages used by gods and humans; Pardee, *Ugaritic Texts*, 33.

[187] *Jub.* 12.25–27. According to early rabbinic interpretation of the Sabbath commandment in Exod 20:8 and Deut 5:12, divine speech is polyphonic or multivalent: "'Remember' [זכור] and 'observe' [שמור] were both spoken at one utterance . . . . This is a manner of speech impossible for creatures of flesh and blood" (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Bahodesh* 7:55–60); translation from Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 2:327. That is, one speech act of God's is heard by a human as two distinct words; in support of this, the midrash cites Ps 62:12: "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God." This tradition is contained in a Qabbalistic hymn still sung in the Sabbath liturgy of Judaism: שמור וזכור בדיבור אחד.

[188] The purification of Isaiah's lips in Isa 6:5–7 suggests that the *content* of ordinary human speech is not fit for the divine assembly, as it has rendered Isaiah's lips unclean. The passage does not suggest that humans' *mode* or *form* of speech, human language as a whole, is unfit for heaven.

indignation" and a "tongue like a devouring fire" (Isa 30:27). These and many other passages clearly establish a difference between Yahweh's speech and human speech, but without indicating that Yahweh uses a distinctively divine system of communication.

Therefore if, as Block suggests, שְׂפַת לֹא יָדַעְתִּי of Ps 81:6 refers to a specifically divine language, this verse would be making a statement unparalleled in the Hebrew Bible. Since there are other viable options for interpreting this verse, it seems wisest not to accept Block's suggestion.

3. The Syntax of שְׂפַת לֹא יָדַעְתִּי

Interpreters of this psalm are in agreement that שְׂפַת לֹא יָדַעְתִּי should be analysed as a noun in the construct state followed by a clause that modifies it, a structure that is generally restricted to poetic texts.[189] The clause following the construct noun functions as a relative clause though it is not introduced by a relative pronoun.[190] Such constructions permit two understandings.

The first is illustrated by Jer 48:36: "my heart moans like a flute for the people of Kir-heres; for the riches they gained have perished [עַל־כֵּן יִתְרַת עָשָׂה אָבָדוּ]." Here יתרה, the subject of אבדו, occurs in the construct state before a qualifying relative clause (cf. Isa 29:1; Ps 65:5).[191] In general, interpreters of Ps 81:6 have understood שְׂפַת לֹא יָדַעְתִּי in this way—"a speech I did not know"—the nature of this ignorance depending on the interpreter's particular understanding

---

[189] So Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 324; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 150. See Gen 1:1, בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא, for a likely example of this construction in prose; cf. also Hos 1:2.

[190] GKC §130 *d*; Joüon §129 *q*. In other cases the relative pronoun is present after the noun in the construct, e.g. Gen 39:20; Ezek 6:13.

[191] The interpretation of Jer 48:36 is not, however, unproblematic, since, according to the interpretation offered here, the singular noun יתרה is the subject of the plural verb אבדו; so Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

of the "speech." For Ullendorff and Weinberg, the language of the Egyptians is unknown to Israel because it is a foreign language. For Block, Yahweh's language is unknown to Israel because it is a distinctively divine mode of communication. For Hossfeld and Zenger, Yahweh's prophetic word is a new revelation for the recipient of the oracle. These various proposals may be said to be relatively plausible.

The second understanding of the syntagm construct noun + clause may be seen in Job 29:16: "I championed the cause of one I did not know [וְרִב לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי אֶחְקְרֵהוּ]."[192] Here רב is modified by לֹא ידעתי; however, the thing/person that is not known appears to be an indefinite person ("one, him, the man, the person"), which is elided and must be provided in translation (cf. Exod 4:13; Job 18:21; Lam 1:14). In fact, Job 29:16, if this is the correct understanding, provides a particularly good parallel to our verse, since both contain the following elements: sg. noun in const. + לֹא + ידעתי + 1 sg. impf. verb.

Dahood contends that Ps 81:6c exhibits this second type: שְׂפַת לֹא ידעתי אשמע, "the speech of one I did not know, I hear." Dahood identifies this "one, someone" as Israel, and argues that this interpretation also makes contextual sense in the setting of the exodus story: "'Before its election Israel was 'unknown' to God."[193] Dahood cites Amos 3:2, where Yahweh's unique knowledge of Israel ("You only have I known [or: come to know] of all the families of the earth") is placed in the context of the exodus (cf. also Exod 33:17). But while this may show that Dahood's interpretation of the ignorance in this verse is possible, it is not especially compelling. For the theme of Yahweh's coming to know Israel through the exodus is not one that is repeatedly emphasized.

---

[192] NRSV modified.

[193] Dahood, *Psalms*, 2:265.

Even if the speaker of Ps 81:6c is human, we may uphold this reading of שׂפת לֹא ידעתי: "the speech of one I did not know I heard." In this case, the ignorance would be Israel's unfamiliarity with Yahweh while in Egypt. This accords very well with Israel's experience of coming to know Yahweh through the events of the exodus, as described in the book of Exodus and elsewhere. For before the exodus, Israel did not know Yahweh's name (Exod 3:13–15; Exod 6:2–3), nor had it experienced the marvellous and knowledge-conveying signs and saving acts, through which "you/they shall know that I am Yahweh" (Exod 7:5. 17; 10:2; 14:4, 18; 16:12). Thus the understanding of Ps 81:7c as "the speech of one I did not know I heard" makes good sense in the broader biblical context.[194]

D. General Assessment

Overall, of the various interpretations that have been offered of Ps 81:6c and examined here, only one was rejected: Block's suggestion that שׂפת לֹא ידעתי refers to a divine language. The other interpretations offered—the שׂפה as Yahweh's cult-prophetic oracle, as Yahweh's speech with the Israelites of the exodus, as the distressed pleas of the Israelites, or as the Egyptian language—were seen to be largely plausible, though each was attended by its own difficulties. In most of these interpretations, שׂפה meant "speech," and in only one would it plausibly have the meaning "language," namely, in Ullendorff and Weinberg's Egyptian language understanding.

I would favour an interpretation combining elements from several of these interpretations. Dahood's suggestion for analysing the syntax of the verse as "I heard the speech *of one* I did not know" is strong if the speaker is Israel (as Ullendorff imagined) and the speech is

---

[194] In this respect, I accept Dahood's grammatical analysis of the verse, but disagree with his identification of the "one" who is not known (Israel).

Yahweh's (as Hossfeld and Zenger hold). This interpretation conforms with compositional features within the psalm (the repetition of שׁמע), and makes sense in the context of other biblical retellings of the exodus (Israel's initial unfamiliarity of Yahweh).

The likelihood that שׂפה refers to a divine language in Ps 81:6, then, is slim, and an alternative understanding as "speech" seems preferable. More widely, the idea of a distinctively divine language appears to be absent from the Hebrew Bible.

V. Chapter Summary

While the presentation of the origins of linguistic diversity in the Tower of Babel episode could not be said to be positive, Yahweh's action to mix the languages of humankind is not per se depicted as a curse. The juxtaposition of this account with the Table of Nations does not produce an extremely stark contrast, but the theme of blessing implicit in Gen 10 does offer another perspective on ethnic and linguistic diversity. Both of these accounts confirm the close association noted in the previous chapter between language and ethnicity. In the prophecies examined, the worship of Yahweh in Egypt in the language of Canaan (Isa 19:18) provided the strongest evidence for a conception that the language spoken in Judah (if this is the correct identification) is a language with a unique religious function. Otherwise no particular language was prioritized as the most sacred. Finally, while the interpretation of Ps 81:6 is uncertain, it does not appear to refer to a distinctively divine language, nor can this idea be clearly discerned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 4

The Representation of Foreignness through Style-Switching

I. Introduction

Linguistic diversity is at issue in texts in which normal Hebrew style is altered in order to convey the foreignness of some scene or character. Scholars have argued that this device, a type of "style-switching," is present in numerous biblical books, including Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Judges, 1 Kings, Isaiah, Job, Proverbs, and Ruth. Such passages function because they presume that language differs from place to place, and therefore that foreignness can be conveyed through deliberately strange-sounding language.

In this chapter I shall examine how the operation of this device may be detected in the Hebrew Bible, and, after presenting and analysing several examples, consider what it reveals about the the conceptualization of linguistic diversity in ancient Israel. Firstly, though, I shall outline the sociolinguistic concept of "style-switching."

II. Style and Switching in Sociolinguistics

Style is an important concept in sociolinguistic attempts to relate language variation and change to social factors like age, sex, ethnicity, race, wealth, education, profession, etc. As Eckert and Rickford explain, a "style" is a particular variety of a language with social

significance.[1] In being a variety, a style is a "set of co-occuring variables," which can be described through traditional linguistic categories (lexis, phonology, morphology, syntax, etc.). These variants have social significance in that they are not distributed at random within a society, but are instead associated with particular communities, age groups, sexes, social contexts (home, workplace), or discourses and practices (politics, religion, art, science). A dialect may be thought of as a style. A dialect's particular social context is the group that speaks it, and its prestige is related to the place of those groups within a society. Styles are thus embedded in a "socioeconomic matrix," and prestige and stigma are attached to a style by members of a society in accordance with that style's place within the system.[2]

The description of styles and their social settings requires significant empirical observation, to identify variants and their distribution in various contexts. In this regard William Labov's wide-ranging study of English in New York is exemplary.[3] What this study revealed, and many more have confirmed, is that individual speakers use elements (lexis, phonology, morphology, syntax, etc.) from various styles in their speech—that is, they switch or shift among styles.[4] Moreover, this occurs frequently among all speakers, and should be regarded as a normal part of language use: since speakers have at their disposal forms from various styles, they must choose between them in any interaction. These choices are goal-driven; in light of the social dimensions of a particular interaction (interlocutor's age, sex, class, etc.), speakers act on judgements regarding the effect of using a certain style and of thereby

---

[1] Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford, "Introduction," in Eckert and Rickford (eds.), *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*, 1–18, at 5.

[2] Eckert and Rickford, "Introduction," 2.

[3] William Labov, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1966).

[4] Speakers also switch among several languages ("codes") in a single discourse, in a practice known as code-switching. The manifestation of this phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible is touched upon in this chapter with reference to Gen 31:47, but will treated further in Chapters 5 and 7. At this point we may note that code-switching and style-switching appear to be used by speakers to achieve similar effects.

invoking its social meaning.[5] In this way, "style is the locus of the individual's internalization of broader social distributions of variation."[6]

In normal speech, these choices are made and executed very rapidly, but they achieve a wide variety of goals. In general, a choice can bring the speaker closer to his audience ("convergence") or distance him from them ("divergence"). A related but separate distinction can be made between marked or unmarked switches, to use the terminology of Myers-Scotton.[7] An unmarked switch is one that could be expected given contextual factors, and therefore does not stand out; for instance, a switch between styles is expected when conversational topics or settings change. A marked switch, in contrast, is unexpected in the circumstances and therefore stands out, as in a shift to an informal style in a formal context.[8] Through convergence and divergence, and through marked and unmarked switches, a speaker can achieve a vast array of goals. He can show or withhold respect, indicate familiarity or formality, assert superiority or seniority, convey humour or imitation, and so on. In these respects, Myers-Scotton describes switching as a "skilled performance."[9] An additional element of this skilled performance is the fact that speakers are often unaware that they are engaging in switching, as John Gumperz points out.[10] In this sense, much of spoken style-switching may be described as un- or semi-conscious, although the practice should be regarded as purposeful or intentional, in the sense that it achieves a variety of complex discursive goals.

---

[5] Romaine, *Language in Society*, 75–79.

[6] Eckert and Rickford, "Introduction," 1.

[7] Myers-Scotton, *Social Motivations*, 151–52.

[8] A divergent switch, by distancing speaker and audience, will usually be marked, but in some cases this distance is expected, so that the switch is unmarked; for instance, an actor on stage is expected to speak differently from her audience, but only during the performance.

[9] Myers-Scotton, *Social Motivations*, 6.

[10] John J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 62–64.

The usual focus of sociolinguistic research is spoken language, but written language also exhibits switching, such as the switch between a prosaic or a poetic style, or between an archaic and a contemporary one.[11] The range of linguistic features that are switched in these instances will be more limited than in spoken language, since written language tends to omit many features of speech, such as prosody. But as with speech, textual switches are also likely to be purposive or goal-driven. In fact, a writer is more likely to be conscious of his switching than a speaker, because the greater time involved in writing over against speaking allows for a greater amount of reflection on a text's precise wording and stylistics. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that literary style-switches, like spoken ones, are employed unconsciously, or only semi-consciously. This does not mean, however, that they occur by chance or accidentally, since they form part of a goal-driven discursive strategy. It is in this latter sense that I shall describe cases of literary style-switching as "deliberate" throughout this chapter.

The range of goals achieved through literary style-switching is comparable to those achieved through spoken style-switching; through style, a text can conveying formality, age, sex, class, ethnicity, and so on. But the device in literature achieves these goals in slightly different ways. For one thing, a text does cannot react to its reader in a way that a speaker reacts to his dialogue partner: the switches of style contained in a text are fixed. Thus to speak of a text diverging from or converging with its reader means something different, and should probably be thought of as whether the text conforms to or differs from the style prevalent among of the text's intended readership. And to judge whether a literary switch is marked or unmarked we will need to consider the conventions of the literary style used in the text.

---

[11] See, e.g., Marianne Stølen, "Codeswitching for Humor and Ethnic Identity: Written Danish-American Occasional Songs," in *Codeswitching* (ed. Carol M. Eastman; Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1992), 215–28;, Solveig Pauline Tweet Zempel, "Language Use in the Novels of Johannes B. Wist: A Study of Bilingualism in Literature" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1980).

III. Style-Switching in the Hebrew Bible to Represent Foreignness

Clearly there are significant variations in style throughout the Hebrew Bible. This is most apparent between works of different genres (narrative, hymns, prophecy, etc.), but it is also clear *within* biblical books, where it has often been explained through source-critical hypotheses. This variation is a result of the composite nature of the Hebrew Bible, but is distinct from the deliberate authorial shifting of style that I have just discussed. Genuine style-switching has been detected in the Hebrew Bible by a number of scholars, where it has been considered to fulfil a particular purpose: the representation of foreignness. By deliberately diverging from an expected or usual style, and in particular by using recognizably foreign forms, an author can convey the otherness or foreignness of a character or setting. As stated above, this relies on the recognition that people speak differently in different places; and by putting this linguistic otherness on the page, foreignness is conveyed.

Earlier studies discerned this device in a range of texts. In an examination of Isaiah's oracle concerning Dumah (Isa 21:11–12), Rabin concluded that the several peculiar forms (תִּבְעָיוּן, בְּעָיוּ, אֵתָיו) and lexemes (בעה, אתה) were being used deliberately by the prophet in imitation of the language of the people addressed.[12] Avi Hurvitz (1968) was not specific about the occurrences of this device, but remarked on its significance for dating biblical texts: "one cannot automatically ascribe to the later period the Aramaisms which are connected with the description of *foreign nations and foreign peoples....* in these cases we are not dealing with actual loan words, or forms, but rather with unique stylistic devices of a particular author or composition."[13] Greenfield, in an overview of the significance of several Aramaic sources for

---

[12] Chaim Rabin, "An Arabic Phrase in Isaiah" in *Studi sull'Oriente a la Bibbia Offerti al P. Giovanni Rinaldi nel 60° Compleanno da Allievi, Colleghi, Amici* (Giovanni Rinaldi; Genoa: Studio e Vita, 1967), 303–9.

[13] Avi Hurvitz, "The Chronological Significance of 'Aramaisms' in Biblical Hebrew," *IEJ* 18 (1968): 234–40, at 236–37.

the study of the Hebrew Bible, suggested a similar explanation for certain unusual linguistic features of Jacob's flight from, and pursuit by, Laban (Gen 31): the potentially formulaic combination of the verbs נצל and נתן (v. 9); the verb דבק with the meaning "reach, catch up with" (v. 23); and the verb נטשׁ with the meaning "permit" (v. 28).[14] Greenfield described these as intentional Aramaisms on the part of the author, designed to evoke the Aramaean setting.

It was Kaufman who described this device, quite appropriately, as "style-switching" in an article on the relation between Hebrew, Aramaic, and related languages and dialects in light of the Deir Alla texts.[15] Like Hurvitz, Kaufman brought this concept into a discussion of the chronological significance of Aramaic features in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, he postulated that the Aramaic-like features (e.g., ברי, "my son" [Prov 31:2]; יאתה, "he will come" [Job 37:22]) in the speech of certain characters that are presented as Transjordanians (Lemuel in Prov 31; Elihu in Job 32–37; Balaam in Num 23) are deliberate style-switches that do not suggest a late date.

A more in-depth and wide-ranging discussion of the phenomenon has been offered by Rendsburg who attempts to classify the uses of style-switching to convey foreignness in the Hebrew Bible.[16] When this device is used in direct speech to portray that character's foreign language, he calls it "language representation,"[17] which he argues applies in Gen 29–32, Num 23, Job, and Prov 31. When style-switching is used in a text addressed to a foreign nation

---

[14] Greenfield, "Aramaic Studies," at 129–30.

[15] Kaufman, "North West Semitic Dialects," 55.

[16] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor." Rendsburg has also devoted several studies to the specific texts mentioned in his "'Foreign' Factor": idem, "*Kabbîr* in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for Style-Switching and Addressee-Switching in the Hebrew Bible," *JAOS* 112 (1992): 649–51; idem, "Some False Leads in the Identification of Late Biblical Hebrew Texts: The Cases of Genesis 24 and 1 Samuel 2:27–36," *JBL* 121 (2002): 23–46; idem, "Aramaic-Like Features in the Pentateuch," *HS* 47 (2006): 163–76.

[17] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 180.

(often in prophecy), Rendsburg calls it "addressee switching," and he finds this used in one-off cases in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Joel.[18] Rendsburg argues that these uses of style-switching achieve particular sociological and theological effects, and provide evidence that ancient Israel understood itself as distinctive in its environment. I shall examine Rendsburg's proposals in greater detail below.

In a dissertation supervised by Kaufman, Brian Bompiani undertook to examine the speech of Aramaean and Transjordanian characters in biblical narrative for the presence of style-switching, and to the list of cases previously detected by scholars he adds Gen 24 (Abraham's servant in Aram), 1 Kgs 20 (King Ben-Hadad of Aram Damascus fights Ahab of Israel), 2 Kgs 5, 6, 8 (stories involving Aram).[19] Bompiani also discerns the device in Exod 18 (Jethro's advice to Moses), a conclusion that Mordechay Mishor had previously reached in a study of this passage.[20] Bompiani makes an effort to understand the literary dynamics of style-switching, and draws several conclusions, which I shall mention below when discussing specific cases. He also stipulates several useful methodological principles for detecting style-switching, which I shall elaborate upon.

Before moving away from this summary of previous scholarship, let me clarify a point of terminology. In the account given above, style-switching, in spoken or written language, is a general sociolinguistic phenomenon that can be used to achieve many ends; it is not limited to the representation of foreignness. It was in this sense that Kaufman first applied the term to

---

[18] Ibid., 184. Rendsburg also uses "style switching," without qualification, to mean his "language representation" and contrasts this with "addressee switching"; ibid., 184. However, it is more accurate to describe addressee-switching as a particular form of style-switching, or rather, as a label for style-switching when conditioned by a particular context and purpose.

[19] Brian A. Bompiani, "Style Switching: The Representation of the Speech of Foreigners in the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012). A revised part of this dissertation has been published in idem, "Style Switching in the Jacob and Laban Narrative" *HS* 55 (2014): 43–57.

[20] Mordechay Mishor, "On the Language and Text of Exodus 18" in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives* (ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz; Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 225–29. Bompiani appears to be unaware of Mishor's study.

the biblical cases: "[t]he Biblical authors apparently did not hesitate to use 'style switching' to reflect differences in the speech of their characters."[21] In the work of Rendsburg and, subsequently, Bompiani, "style-switching" has become shorthand for the specific use of style-switching most frequently detected in the Hebrew Bible, namely style-switching as used to convey foreignness.[22] This is convenient, and I shall generally follow the convention in the rest of this chapter; but it should be noted that style-switching in the Hebrew Bible is not limited to conveying foreignness. For instance, in his commentary on the book of Ruth, Robert Holmstedt has detected style-switching at work in the speech of Naomi (e.g., the unusual 2 fem. sing. perf. forms, וירדתי and ושכבתי [Ruth 3:3, 4, Kethib]) and in the speech of Boaz (e.g., תַּעֲבוּרִי, 2 fem. sing. impf. [2:8]).[23] In these cases, Holmstedt supposes that style-switching conveys the ancient setting of the story, rather than the foreignness of the characters.

A. Methodological Difficulties

These studies presume that style-switching can be detected in the Hebrew Bible and correctly interpreted as representing foreignness. Now, there can be no doubt, as Bompiani observes, that "biblical writers could stylistically represent the speech of Aramean characters."[24] This is proved by the unambiguous use of Aramaic in Gen 31:47; here, the clearly Aramaic יגר

---

[21] Kaufman, "North West Semitic Dialects," 55.

[22] E.g., Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 184; Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 5. Rendsburg is aware that style-switching is a technical term from linguistics describing a practice of spoken language, and he calls what Kaufman points out specifically "literary style-switching"; Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Strata of Biblical Hebrew," *JNSL* 17 (1991): 81–99, at 92 n. 63. However, Rendsburg most often uses "style switching" to designate the representation specifically of foreign language; he writes "style switching or language representation (I am content to use the terms interchangeably)"; idem, "'Foreign' Factor," 181.

[23] Robert D. Holmstedt, *Ruth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010), 47–49.

[24] Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 14.

שׁהדותא is given as Laban's term for the "heap of witness" that Jacob calls גלעד. Bompiani is correct, then, when he continues: "Thus, it is not a question of if [biblical authors] used this technique in their narratives, but only of where and of how often." There are, however, significant obstacles to determining where and how often this device is used. In light of this, before beginning a search for style-switching, it needs to be established how it might be conducted, and how claims that style-switching appears in some passage should be assessed. I shall now elaborate on some of these obstacles, and then consider some methodological controls that mitigate their effect.

Firstly, a prerequisite to detecting style-switching is a proper knowledge of standard, unmarked, "unswitched" Hebrew style. This unmarked style serves as the base with which to compare some apparently unusual feature that we suspect is deliberately strange or "switched," and for this an account detailing the typical lexicon, phonology, morphology, syntax, and other features of that style, is needed. But here we must first note that there is no single unmarked Hebrew style against which unusual forms can be compared, because the Hebrew Bible contains texts of diverse genres written over several centuries. Different genres have different conventions of linguistic usage, which is to say, different styles, and stylistic conventions change over time, so that we must distinguish diachronic styles within each genre. Thus the search for style-switching must rely on a robust account of the various styles represented in the Hebrew Bible.

Such an account is a goal towards which many scholars have long been contributing, but which must be considered far from complete. In general, our ability to delineate these styles is limited by the size of the corpus and the uncertainty of any date assigned to a biblical text, and as yet, no neat diachronic scheme of the styles of biblical genres can be constructed. For, on the one hand, analyses of *poetic* texts in the Pentateuch and Former Prophets form the

basis of descriptions of Archaic Biblical Hebrew;[25] but, on the other, *narrative* texts inform

the distinction between Classical (or Standard) Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew

that has been specified by, among others, Hurvitz.[26] Apart from this primarily chronological

distinction, Polak, among others, has attempted to specify the syntactical and discourse-

structural features of Hebrew prose styles, including epigraphic Hebrew.[27] A diachronic

account of Hebrew poetic styles, however, is highly elusive.[28] Difficulties in describing the

various biblical styles satisfactorily is therefore a significant obstacle to detecting style-

switching; for if we do not know what the unmarked style of some text is, it is impossible to

notice when that style is switched.

But even an exhaustive description of the styles present in the Hebrew Bible and in

epigraphic texts will not completely describe these styles as they existed in ancient Israel. For

our data are incomplete; our corpus is small, and it does not fully reflect any style it

contains—consider the various blank spaces in our tables of verb grammar for weak verbs in

derived stems. This is problematic for the search for style-switching since it focuses on words

---

[25] For the sources and features of Archaic Biblical Hebrew, see Frank Moore Cross, Jr., and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (new ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich. Eerdmans, 1997); David A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* (Missoula, Mont..: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972); Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (ed. Raphael Kutscher; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 79–80; Angel Saénz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (trans. John E. Elwolde; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56–62; Schniedewind, *Social History*, 51–72. Difficulties in distinguishing between historical dialects of Hebrew are discussed in depth in Ian Young and Robert Rezetko, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (2 vols.; London: Equinox, 2008), esp. 1:45–110.

[26] See, e.g., Avi Hurvitz, *A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Innovation in the Writings of the Second Temple Period* (VTSup 160; Brill: Leiden, 2014), 1–13. Robert Polzin offered an early outline of methods in distinguishing Late Biblical Hebrew from Standard Biblical Hebrew; Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Towards an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (HSM 12; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976). For general descriptions of the sources and features of Late Biblical Hebrew, see also Kutscher, *History of Hebrew*, 81–85; Sáenz-Badillos, *History of Hebrew*, 68–75; Schniedewind, *Social History*, 169–83; Hurvitz, *Late Biblical Hebrew*.

[27] See, among others, Polak, "The Oral and the Written"; and idem, "Sociolinguistics." Polak detects three prose styles, corresponding to what he regards as three historically distinct biblical corpora ("Medial," "[monarchic] Judaean," and "Achaemenid").

[28] It is of course an oversimplification to reduce the genres of the Hebrew Bible to prose and poetry; a satisfactory account of biblical styles would distinguish tales, fables, histories, oracles, hymns, proverbs, prayers, etc.

or forms that are judged to be rare, and therefore are thought to reflect "marked" stylistic choices. But this judgement of rarity is essentially a claim that, in the extant evidence, these words or forms appear infrequently. It is quite possible, however, that some word or form was really an *unmarked* feature of the relevant ancient Hebrew style, but is, by chance, not widely attested in the extant evidence. Indeed, it is a familiar oxymoron of biblical studies that rare words and forms are common in the Hebrew text. That is to say, *hapax* (and *dis* and *tris*) *legomena* occur often. But the apparent rarity of many of these words is surely due to the fact that our limited evidence is not wholly representative of ancient Hebrew. It is thus insufficient to rely on the rarity of a form in trying to establish style-switching, because that rarity may only be apparent.

A further difficulty in detecting style-switching arises from the logical constraints of the device itself, what Holmstedt calls "the principle of immediate intelligibility": the degree to which an author may distort or colour his characters' speech is limited by what his readers can be expected to understand, if the text is not intended to be incomprehensible.[29] As Holmstedt notes, this will generally mean that switched forms, while unusual, will nonetheless be a part of some style of Hebrew which the reader could be expected to understand—perhaps an archaic or regional dialect, or the style of a different literary genre.[30] That is, these forms may bear a close relationship to standard Hebrew forms, making them hard to spot; and they may be attested elsewhere in the ancient Hebrew corpus (but perhaps in a text of a different style), making it difficult to tell whether they really are rare and marked.

Holmstedt's observation is broadly correct, but he fails to note an important point relevant to our discussion. Holmstedt assumes that for a text to be intelligible to an ancient Israelite

---

[29] Holmstedt, *Ruth*, 46.

[30] A similar point is made by Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 178–80.

audience, it must contain only forms available (or closely resembling those available) in some variety of Hebrew. But this only follows if we presume that the ancient Israelite audience was strictly monolingual, which is certainly not the case for all periods of Israelite history. The officials of Jerusalem in the late eighth century were apparently trained in Aramaic (see 2 Kgs 18:26), and we have no reason to believe that this was an unusual circumstance in the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (see also Jer 10:11). In the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods, knowledge of Aramaic appears to have been widespread in Yehud, and is evidenced biblically, in the Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible (Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Dan 2:4–7:28), and epigraphically, in seal impressions, ostraca, and letters.[31] Thus, if the readers of the biblical texts could be expected to understand items from another language, authors could use those items, and still create intelligible texts.[32] In fact we can expect this when style-switching is used to represent foreignness, and thus we should be prepared to find intrusions from languages known to the ancient Israelites in the Hebrew Bible.

A final obstacle to the study of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible bears on the interpretation of instances of style-switching. As pointed out above, styles are varieties of language with social significance. Thus using some style, or switching to or from it, is a way of invoking a set of values related to the social context associated with that style. But while literary analysis may be able to define the contours of the styles of ancient Hebrew, it cannot provide the social context of those styles. The latter is the task of sociolinguistics, which requires evidence from beyond the text itself to recreate the *Sitz im Leben* of the style—its

---

[31] See, e.g., Oded Lipschits and David S. Vanderhooft, *The Yehud Stamp Impressions: A Corpus of Inscribed Impressions from the Persian and Hellenistic Periods in Judah* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 1–22; *TADAE* A4.7–8.

[32] An audience need not be fully bilingual for this to be possible, just as a modern English author can use *danke*, *merci* and *gracias* and expect his audience to understand him, without that implying that the audience is bilingual. A particular society's circumstances, and an author's familiarity with his audience's knowledge, inform the judgement as to how many foreign items, and of what kind, can intelligibly be incorporated into a text.

origins, history, functions, the social standing of the group who made use of it, and so forth.

A sociolinguistics of Hebrew has been the particular project of Schniedewind, who has deftly assembled and organized the extant evidence, and has presented the prevailing theories about the social history of Hebrew.[33] But Schniedewind has also highlighted the vast lacunae in our evidence in his "prolegomena" to a sociolinguistics of ancient Israel.[34] Rich data of the kind that a survey of native informants can elicit, as Labov could collect for New York English, are unavailable, and so a sociolinguistics of ancient Hebrew will be limited. It will also be skewed towards those styles that we have in the Hebrew Bible, because our account of the styles of Hebrew must omit a range of styles that we can safely hypothesize existed. Among written styles, we have, for instance, very few Israelite letters, and no royal inscriptions; and spoken Hebrew styles are strictly inaccessible to us. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, we should imagine that the kingdom of Israel had its own system of written and spoken styles which differed at least in some respects from those of Judah. But even if there are some traces of these in the Hebrew Bible (as Rendsburg contends), they are mostly unrecoverable.[35]

Thus, while we may be able to detect cases of style-switching, interpreting them will be difficult. For our purposes, we would like to know what social significance was attributed, at various points in Israel's history, to styles that were used to represent foreignness. Let us consider the example of an Aramaic-sounding style. To understand what a biblical author achieves by switching to an Aramaic-sounding style, we need to know about the associations that Aramaic had in ancient Israel during the pertinent historical period. We may say, for one thing, that Aramaic was associated with Aramaeans, but how did Israelite society regard that people group in various respects (ethnic, political, cultural, etc.)? In addition, as discussed in

---

[33] Schniedewind, *Social History*.

[34] Schniedewind, "Prolegomena," § 4.1–4.

[35] See Chapter 1.

Chapter 2,[36] Aramaic was not only associated with Aramaeans, even in the monarchic period; so we would ideally also know who else used it in Israel (e.g., diplomats and courtiers), for what purposes, and what their social standing was. Answers to these questions would inform our understanding of the social meaning of Aramaic in ancient Israel, and hence the significance of an Aramaic-sounding style used in Hebrew literature. To gather this information as best we can would require a substantial historical investigation (and in fact our chances of succeeding in such an investigation are slim, given that much of the requisite evidence for the social significance of Aramaic in ancient Israel is lacking).[37] A similar investigation is required for any style that seems to be used to represent foreignness in the Hebrew Bible. This is another impediment to our attempts at understanding style-switching in the Hebrew Bible.

B. Procedural Controls

While some of the difficulties in detecting style-switching outlined in the foregoing are insuperable without further evidence, or without detailed investigations that are beyond the scope of this study, others can be obviated (or at least, their significance mitigated), if certain controls are put in place to guide the study of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible. I shall here discuss four such controls introduced into this discussion by Bompiani,[38] and add one of my own, using examples to illustrate their use. Bompiani's controls are adapted from those

---

[36] And see esp. Block, "National Identity."

[37] In this particular case, recent attempts to reconstruct to a multidimensional history of Aramaic and Aramaeans in the region help us to gain access to the biblical authors' experience of this language and people; see Gzella, *Cultural History*; and Niehr (ed.), *Aramaeans in Ancient Syria*.

[38] Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 5–12.

that govern Hurvitz's search for features of Late Biblical Hebrew,[39] and which Rendsburg

has used in his quest to identify the features of Northern ("Israelian") Hebrew.[40]

1. Distribution

For a supposed case of style-switching to be considered strong, it must be rare within the

specific Hebrew style of the larger passage in which it is found. This is because a switch is a

departure from normal usage within a style, and thus it must be rare. As discussed above, our

ability to discern this relies on a detailed characterization of Hebrew styles (which is

problematic), but when this is done as best it can be, we can make claims about the frequency

with which certain features occur in any given style. The less frequent a feature is in that

style, the more reason we have to believe that it is an example of style-switching. In this way

the deliberateness of the unusual feature is strongly suggested; this strange form did not just

appear in the text by chance, but was intentionally selected.

For example, אֶתְהֶם appears thrice in the Pentateuch, each time in prose, as the form of the

definite direct object marker with a 3 masc. pl. suffix (Exod 18:20 [Jethro's speech]; Gen

32:1 [describing Laban]; and Num 21:3 [the defeat of the King of Arad]). In contrast, the

regular forms אֹתָם and אוֹתָם occur hundreds of times. This is a meaningfully rare distribution

of the kind that can be used to support a claim of deliberate style-switching.

A corollary of this principle is that a form may still be considered style-switching in some

context even if it is attested in other styles of Hebrew, because of the differing conventions of

various styles. Thus, for instance, in Exod 18:9, a form of the verb חדה appears: "Jethro

---

[39] Hurvitz, *Late Biblical Hebrew*, 9–11.

[40] Gary A. Rendsburg, *Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 15.

rejoiced [וַיִּחַדְּ].'' Now, חדה is not a lexical *hapax legomenon*; the verb also appears in Job 3:6

and Ps 21:7. But these additional occurrences, in two poetic texts, are not sufficient to show

that חדה is unremarkable in Exod 18, because of the differing stylistic contexts in each case.

For one thing, different stylistic conventions govern Hebrew poetry and prose. Hence, the

regular occurrence of a word or feature in poetry does not show that that feature is expected

or natural in prose, or vice versa, and indeed, we can draw up lists of distinctively poetic

Hebrew vocabulary that we do not expect to see in prose contexts.[41] Moreover, the style of

the book of Job is unique in extant Hebrew literature, and hence the use of a rare word like

חדה in that book is not good evidence that this word is unexceptional when it appears in other

Hebrew texts. Thus we are justified in regarding חדה as striking in Exod 18. Once again, in

determining whether some feature is a style-switch, we will gain greater certainty if we can

be specific about the styles involved (the unmarked style of the surrounding context in which

the unusual feature occurs, and the style from which we suspect that the unusual feature is

drawn).

2. Opposition

The criterion of "opposition" states that for a feature to be considered an instance of style-

switching, it must clearly contrast with some more usual Hebrew expression that could have

been expected in the circumstances. This applies in the case of lexical differences (a strange

lexeme must be opposed to a more usual one), as well as in the case of other types of

difference, such as morphology (a peculiar verbal or nominal form must contrast with a more

usual one). This criterion seeks to establish the deliberateness of an unusual word or form: it

---

[41] For such a list see, e.g., Donald Broadribb, *An Attempt to Delineate the Characteristics of (Biblical) Hebrew Poetry* (Bakers Hill, Australia: Bookleaf Publishing, 1995), 98–110.

shows that an author had at his disposal a standard Hebrew word or form, which he nevertheless shunned in favour of an unusual one. This criterion does not, however, establish the intent behind the use of an unusual feature (i.e., whether it is being used to convey foreignness or to some other end). The example of אֶתְהֶם given above is a clear case of this: it contrasts strongly with the standard form אתָם. Since it is unlikely that the author did not know the more usual form, we may suppose that it is a deliberate stylistic choice where it does occur. Nevertheless, the recognition that a choice was involved at this point does not *ipso facto* explain why this form was chosen.

This criterion can be used to exclude cases: if we see that a word expresses something for which there is no other conventional Hebrew expression, we should not entertain the idea that it is an instance of style-switching, no matter how rare that word is. For instance, Rendsburg suggests that maritime words in Ezek 26–28 were "associated by Hebrew speakers with [the language] Phoenician."[42] But since texts about seafaring are rare in the Hebrew Bible, we do not have the standard Hebrew lexicon for this arena of life; thus we cannot contrast that lexicon with Ezekiel's terminology to determine style-switching. That is, the words in Ezek 26–28 are indeed rare, but they are not *relevantly* rare. Here once again we see that rarity is not sufficient to indicate style-switching.

When a usage can be thus opposed to a more common Hebrew expression, we may say that it stands in passive opposition or contrast to normal usage. But Bompiani has argued that the some biblical authors actively used these contrasts to highlight the style-switching that they were engaged in.[43] He lists a number of cases where texts appear to establish a deliberate opposition between two usages (lexemes or forms), one usual and one unusual, with the

---

[42] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 186.

[43] Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 31–34, 88–89.

unusual usage appearing in conjunction with some foreign element. The contrast may be between the direct speech of an Israelite character and that of a foreigner; or between the narrator's language and the speech of characters acting a strange land; or between the same character's usage in two contexts. We may call this device *active* contrast or opposition.[44]

This is certainly at work in Gen 31:47, where Jacob's Hebrew name for the heap of witness is clearly contrasted with Laban's. Bompiani likewise detects it in Gen 24, where the encounter between Abraham's servant and Rebekah is twice recorded, once as it happened in Aram-naharaim (vs. 1–27), and once as the servant's report of the event (vs. 34–48).[45] A comparison of these accounts shows up several differences in wording which are in themselves of doubtful significance, because neither word in each pair is exceptionally rare in usual Hebrew prose; for instance, שבועה (v. 8) vs. אלה (v. 41), "oath"; and נערה (v. 14) vs. עלמה (v. 43), "young woman." More suggestive, however, is the contrast between הַגְמִיאִינִי (v. 17) and הַשְׁקִינִי (v. 43)—both "give me [water] to drink." The former appears on the servant's lips when he speaks to Rebekah for the first time; the latter in the servant's report of the incident. The verb גמא appears elsewhere only once in the Hebrew Bible (Job 39:24),[46] and is attested in postbiblical Aramaic (e.g., *Tg. of Job* 39:30; *b. Pesaḥ.* 74b). Thus, in any Hebrew occurrence, this word would stand in passive contrast to the standard biblical expression for the meaning "to give to drink," the Hiphil of שקה; but this contrast is made active, and thus more clear, by the use of השקיני later on in the chapter to describe the same event (Gen 24:45). Additionally, Bompiani points out that הגמיאיני is the first word uttered by the servant after arriving in Aram. In this Bompiani follows Alter in regarding "the initial words spoken

---

[44] In this respect, Bompiani acknowledges the influence upon him of Alter in attempting to discern significance in any repetition in biblical narrative, though this is a truly ancient exegetical principle; see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (rev. and updated ed.; New York: Basic Books, 2011), 23.

[45] Bompiani, "Genesis 24," 412; idem, "Speech of Foreigners," 21–27.

[46] Here it may in fact derive from a homophonous root; see BDB גמא, at 167b.

by a personage" as "revelatory ... constituting an important moment in the exposition."[47]

Here, the jarring effect of the strange first word would be revelatory: to convey the alienness of the setting, and the idea that the dialogue was being conducted in Aramaic. This and the other cases of active opposition described by Bompiani appear to indicate that several biblical authors intentionally sought to emphasize their use of style-switching.[48] By setting up a clear contrast between expected usage and a switched form, they highlighted their use of the device, and consequently heightened the sense of foreignness present in the text.

3. Concentration

Bompiani writes: "a concentration of unusual grammatical features or rare lexemes in a narrative that has a foreign setting may strengthen the case for style-switching in that narrative."[49] This is an understatement. A concentration of such features and/or lexemes greatly increases the likelihood that style-switching is at work. For while one strange usage may plausibly have explanations other than deliberate choice (such as transmission error, or our incomplete knowledge of Hebrew styles), the chances that alternative explanations account for two such usages are significantly lower, and even lower for three unusual usages, and so on.

This is illustrated in Exod 18, a chapter which relates Jethro and Moses' encounter after the exodus. Mishor detects nine uncommon usages (phonological, morphological, lexical, semantic, and syntactic) within fifteen verses, eight of which occur in Jethro's direct

---

[47] Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 74.

[48] Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 31–34, 88–89.

[49] Ibid., 11.

speech.[50] These features in Jethro's speech are: מן בקר, with unassimilated *nun* (v. 14); נצב, in contrast to the more common עמד (v. 14); וַעֲשֹׂהוּ, an unusual inf. consr. with suffix (v. 18); אֶתְהֶם, an unusual form of the direct definite object marker (v. 20); the rare verb זהר, apparently meaning "to instruct" (v. 20); asyndeton in הדרך ילכו בה (v. 20); חזה, possibly meaning "select" (v. 21); and על מקמו יבא, with unusual prepositional usage (v. 23). In addition, outside direct speech we find the rare verb חדה, "rejoice" (v. 13). This is a noteworthy concentration, and one that Benno Jacob (1992: 51) also observed. In other books, the unusual usages are more widely dispersed or are not clearly so closely related. For instance, in Gen 29–31, a much longer text, Greenfield, Rendsburg, Bompiani and others have explained between ten and twenty examples of unusual usages through style-switching. These include the following rare lexemes: גד "fortune" (30:11), זבד "provide" (30:20), לוז "almond" (30:37), דבק, here "reach" (31:23). In addition, unusual morphological features are exhibited in the following words: ויחמנה, a 3 fem. pl. impf. form (30:38); and גְּנֻבְתִי, "what was stolen" (31:39). These usages appear in a diverse range of settings, including the speech of Laban, Rachel, and Jacob, and the narrative framework. As such the reinforcement that each case offers the others must be considered to be attenuated, and depends on the distance between the unusual features and the diverse narrative settings in which they occur. For instance, גד (30:11) and זבד (30:20) are closely comparable: both are examples of rare lexemes; both words appear on Leah's lips; both form part of explanations of the names she gives to her children by Jacob; both occur within the same defined narrative unit (29:31–30:24) intended to account for the birth order, maternity, and names of Jacob's children. Therefore, purely in terms of concentration, we can say that גד and זבד lend strong support to one another as candidates for style-switching. However, לוז, "almond" (30:37), in comparison appears isolated: unlike most of the other proposed cases of style-switching in these chapters,

---

[50] Mishor, "Text of Exodus 18."

it occurs not in a character's speech, but in the narrative framework; and it is of quite a different nature from the other closest proposed instance of style-switching, ויחמנה, an unusual morphological form. Thus, in assessing the strength of an apparent concentration of proposed style-switches, one must bear in mind the precise nature of the switches, their proximity, and the likeness of their literary contexts. This consideration is extremely relevant in poetic, and especially prophetic texts, where it is often difficult to discern the limits of literary units.

As with "opposition," this criterion does not indicate the purpose for the style-switches that it highlights (whether to represent foreignness or not). In addition, it cannot strictly be used to exclude cases, since there is no requirement for an author to use more than one style-switch at a time. This is evident in the Shibboleth episode (Judg 12:6), where there can be no doubt that a switch takes place (between *shin* and *samekh*), even though it is the only one in the passage. However, this case is unusually clear. Most other putative instances of style-switching are not explicit, and in practice, arguments based on a single word within a passage will rarely be convincing. This is true for many of Rendsburg's proposals; for instance, לְקַח (rare Qal impv. masc. sg. form) in Ezek 37:16; תבטחו (rare 3 fem. pl. impf. form) in Jer 49:11; and היכל (Joel 4:5) with the rare meaning "(human) palace."[51]

The three criteria just described—distribution, opposition, and concentration—each suggest that a stylistic element is a deliberate choice, but, as we have noted, they do not indicate that the purpose of that switch is to represent foreignness. This is indicated, however, by two final methodological principles that I shall describe.

---

[51] See Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 186–87.

4. Attestation in Non-Hebrew Sources

According to this principle, an unusual word or form is more likely to be an instance of representing foreignness through style-switching if it is attested in an ancient Near Eastern language other than Hebrew. While this is true, it requires significant qualification.

As discussed above, the catalyst for current efforts to detect style-switching in the Hebrew Bible was the increasing knowledge of Aramaic and other Northwest Semitic languages. Since Greenfield and Kaufman discerned features from these languages in the Hebrew Bible, arguments that a text displays style-switching conventionally include the claim that the words or forms under discussion are attested in a language other than Hebrew. This is thought to show that the biblical author knew and was successfully imitating a particular item from the specified language. From the ubiquity of the examples offered in the scholarly literature, it appears that this claim is taken as important to demonstrating that style-switching is at work.

In some cases, the value of the presumed examples of this claim is obvious. For instance, in Prov 31:1–9, within the words that Lemuel's mother taught him, peculiar forms appear: בר/ ברי, "son/my son" (v. 2) and מלכין, "kings" (v. 3). From our wider knowledge, these forms are readily understood as Aramaic features, and in this respect "attestation in non-Hebrew sources" is helpful. The context suggests that they constitute deliberate stylistic variation, as the rest of the passage is not especially linguistically strange, and the normal Hebrew מלכים appears twice in it (v. 4).[52] As Kaufman pointed out, this should therefore be considered a style-switch related to the ascription of the sayings to "the king of Massa" (v. 1).[53] In this case, because these features are simple, basic, and widespread in Aramaic (as our Aramaic

---

[52] בני, the standard Hebrew pl. const. of בן, also appears (vv. 5, 8), but this is also the pl. const. of Aramaic בר.

[53] Kaufman, "North West Semitic Dialects," 55; Massa is a son of Ishmael in Gen 26:14.

sources show), we can reasonably maintain both that the author knew and successfully

imitated them, and also that he could expect his audience to know them.

In other cases suggested by scholars, however, the evidence drawn from non-Hebrew sources

cannot be said to show or even suggest as much. Sometimes the non-Hebrew attestation

adduced is at a great temporal remove. For instance, Talmudic Aramaic is cited by Bompiani

with regard to הגמיאיני in Gen 24:17,[54] and Rendsburg similarly cites sources that significantly

postdate the composition of the Hebrew Bible to support his contention that the unusual form

of the passive participle גֻּנַּבְתִּי (Gen 31:39, twice) is an Aramaism.[55] While not completely

irrelevant, such attestations are poor guidance as to what we can suppose that the ancient

Hebrew author (and his audience) knew. In other cases, unsound use is made of the non-

Hebrew attestations. Rendsburg notes that רבע, "dust cloud" (Num 23:10), "is more common

in Aramaic (Akkadian and Arabic too)."[56] But in fact the word's attestation in these four

Semitic languages, which represent several distinct branches of the language-family,

undermines its significance as evidence of style-switching; for this widespread attestation is

equally evidence for the position that that word might be expected to be attested in Hebrew

(the fact that it is rare notwithstanding). Finally, in yet other cases, Hebrew sources are

presented as attestations of non-Hebrew usage, in an unconvincing fashion. In an effort to

show that Jacob's use of נצל with נתן (Gen 31:9) derives from Aramaic, Greenfield asserts

---

[54] Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 25.

[55] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 183. Rendsburg interprets גֻּנַּבְתִּי as a pass. ptc. inflected in the 1 per. sg.: "I was robbed"; Gary A. Rendsburg, "Morphological Evidence for Regional Dialects of Ancient Hebrew," in *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (ed. Walter R. Bodine; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 65–88, at 82–84. Such a construction is only attested in Middle Aramaic; for references see Gustaf Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdischen-palästinischen Aramäisch* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 284. However, the context makes it more likely that גֻּנַּבְתִּי is a Qal fem. sg. pass. ptc. in the construct: "of my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night [גנבתי יום וגנבתי לילה]"; the *hireq yod* ("*hireq compaginis*") may be a relic of a case ending and/or indicate the construct state; see GKC § 90 *k–l*. This form may, however, qualify as style-switching by the distribution and opposition criteria, because it is not the usual form of the construct, and because the *hireq compaginis* is generally a feature of poetic style; see *IBHS* 127.

[56] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 184.

"that there can be no doubt about this use of *ḥnṣl* may be seen in the words of Hosea, a prophet whose language is replete with Aramaisms."[57] Greenfield's point is that נצל in Hos 2:11 may be an Aramaism, because of the other Aramaisms in the book. This is possible, but it is uncertain, and any argument built upon this suggestion will be correspondingly weak. Rendsburg argues in a similar way, with respect to the relatively rare uses of the prophetic נאם with a human subject (Prov 30:1; Num 24:3–4), writing: "Neither of these...can be labelled specifically Aramaic, but they are identifiable as IH [Israelian Hebrew] traits; and IH, of course, shared many more isoglosses with Aramaic than did JH [Judaean Hebrew]."[58] But it is quite unconvincing to use Hebrew texts as evidence of Aramaic usage in this way.

In these and other ways comparative evidence has been used with limited success in style-switching discussions, and should be used with caution. And in fact, the importance of showing attestation in non-Hebrew sources has been overestimated. That is because efforts to show such attestation assume that style-switching to represent foreignness is an essentially imitative exercise: that a biblical author is accurately replicating some real non-Hebrew form. Greenfield, for one, clearly indicates this when he speaks of the "Aramaic *Vorlage* behind the words put into the mouths of Aramaic speakers or used in conversation with them."[59] If style-switching is conceived thus, it is natural to seek evidence of these unusual forms outside Biblical Hebrew, and this has really been useful in some cases.

But there are good reasons to believe that style-switching when used to represent foreignness will not be exclusively, or perhaps even, primarily imitative. Firstly, Holmstedt's principle of immediate intelligibility suggests this: imitation of foreign usages is a barrier to a reader's understanding of the text; and it is not suggested by any of the scholars who have written on

---

[57] Greenfield, "Aramaic Studies," 130.

[58] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 181.

[59] Greenfield, "Aramaic Studies," 129.

this topic that the biblical authors intended to confuse their readers. Thus, any foreign forms

imitated are likely to be similar to Hebrew and/or basic and general (like בר and מלכין), such

that anyone could be expected to know them. Secondly, imitation implies that the author

knows the language imitated. But it is unreasonable for us to posit such knowledge on the

part of the biblical authors for all of the peoples supposedly represented through this device.

Do we really think that the author of Exod 18 knew Midianite? (See below for a fuller

discussion.) Finally, imitation of any specific foreign style is not strictly necessary for the

representation of foreignness through style-switching. That is, an author does not need to

know the specific details of the language a character is presumed to be speaking, in order to

be able to convey that character's linguistic otherness. This linguistic otherness can be

conveyed by the use of features perceived as "foreign," such as certain substitutions of

vowels or consonants, or a specific order of words; and while such features will probably

have come to be regarded as foreign because they are indeed real features of specific foreign

languages, these features can be mixed and combined in various ways into a generally

"foreign" style that does not match any specific language.[60] Thus, strict imitation of the

features of some particular foreign language is not necessary in style-switching. Indeed, this

was intimated by Hurvitz in the early stages of the modern search for this feature, though it

was largely ignored: "in these cases we are not dealing with actual loan words, or forms, but

rather with unique stylistic devices of a particular author or composition."[61]

Thus, because imitation is not assured in cases of style-switching, it is not necessary to show

that some unusual feature suspected of being style-switching occurs in a non-Hebrew text.

Furthermore, if the case made by a scholar that some style-switched word *is* attested in non-

---

[60] So Mishor, "Text of Exodus 18," 226. In this sense, the switch *out of* normal Hebrew style is probably more important than the switch *into* a particular foreign style.

[61] Hurvitz, "Chronological Significance," 236–37.

Hebrew sources seems unduly strained (as was true for some of the examples mentioned above), it may be disregarded, especially since, if a feature is an imitated one, it is most likely to be a general and basic feature in the imitated language, and not obscure. Proving non-Hebrew attestation is therefore less important than its ubiquity in the modern scholarly literature would suggest; and the weight that an extrabiblical attestation can lend to some possible case of style-switching will depend on a variety of factors, including the specificity of the parallel, its distribution or prevalence in various Semitic languages, and its proximity in time and location to the biblical authors.

Finally, I should make a note about terminology. The criterion I have just discussed appears as "Extra-biblical sources" in Bompiani, and this description is understandable.[62] The Hebrew Bible is our primary source for ancient Hebrew usage, and is a predominantly Hebrew corpus; therefore, in order to establish usage in languages other than Hebrew, we will most frequently turn to texts outside the Hebrew Bible. But labelling this criterion "extrabiblical sources" is imprecise, for it conflates "non-Hebrew sources," our evidence for reconstructing non-Hebrew usage, with "extrabiblical texts," a broad corpus including Hebrew and non-Hebrew literature. Such conflation should be avoided for two reasons.

Firstly, there are relevant non-Hebrew texts that can be called "biblical": the Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament. Like other Aramaic and Greek texts, these "biblical" texts can provide evidence of Aramaic and Greek usage, and they could therefore be used to support a proposed case of style-switching. Indeed, in style-switching discussions, Bompiani, Mishor, and others do refer to the Aramaic texts in the Bible in order to establish Aramaic usage, and thus show that some unusual Hebrew feature constitutes

---

[62] Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 7.

style-switching.[63] But strictly speaking, these Aramaic and Greek biblical texts would be excluded if we described this criterion as attestation in "extrabiblical sources." For this reason, "non-Hebrew sources" is more appropriate, as it does not exclude such texts.

Secondly, the title "extrabiblical sources" is inappropriate because it includes ancient Hebrew texts that, since they are Hebrew, could not be used to demonstrate non-Hebrew usage. Consider epigraphic material from ancient Israel and Judah, or the Hebrew text of Sirach, or the sectarian documents from Qumran. These are certainly "extrabiblical sources," but if they are to enter a discussion of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible, it would not be to show that some feature is alien to Hebrew, but to serve as further evidence for the variety of native ancient Hebrew styles. Hence, describing the criterion under discussion as "non-Hebrew sources" is more fitting for picking out the texts that are in fact relevant for the aim of this criterion.

5. The "Foreign Factor"

We would not suspect a text of trying to convey foreignness through style-switching if it did not contain some foreign element. Thus what Rendsburg calls the "foreign factor" should be considered a necessary element of proposed cases. This can take many forms, including, but as we have seen, by no means restricted to the use of foreign languages. The forms can involve the presence of non-Israelite human or divine characters, the setting of the action in a land beyond Israel, reference to or discussion of non-Israelites, or, as Rendsburg emphasizes, an imagined foreign audience for the text in question ("addressee switching"). However, the presence of a foreign element is not a meaningful control on the search for the representation

---

[63] Bompiani, "Jacob and Laban Narrative," 48; Mishor, "Text of Exodus 18," 227.

of foreignness through style-switching, for it actually excludes very little material. Israel's relationship to other nations is one of the primary concerns of the Hebrew Bible, and very few texts are completely oblivious to foreigners and foreignness.

Thus the presence of a foreign element is not sufficient to support a claim of style-switching. The force of this consideration can be strengthened, however, if there are signs in the text that the author is conscious of the foreign element, and is trying to communicate this to the reader. This might be evidenced by use of the names of specific foreign people or lands, or of words indicating foreignness more generally (e.g., זר, נכרי, אחר); if these words or names are repeated in a passage, we can be more confident that an author is emphasizing the foreign element.

However, caution is necessary even in this respect, because, as was seen in Chapter 2 above, there is no simple correlation in the Hebrew Bible between being a non-Israelite and speaking another language; being a foreigner is not the same as being an alloglot. For instance, there are no explicit indications in the text that the Philistines spoke a different language from Judah and Israel.[64] We cannot assume, therefore, that just because an author thought of some character as foreign, he also thought of that character as an alloglot. Conversely, style-switching can also be used to represent the varieties of speech of Israelites, since Israel is not presented as linguistically monolithic (see, e.g., Judg 12:6). These considerations are particularly relevant in considering potential style-switching on the lips of characters from among Israel's near neighbours. For as was discussed in Chapter 2 above, there is evidence that the "speech of Canaan" (Isa 19:18) was considered a unity in the Hebrew Bible. Thus we should not assume that the biblical authors perceived the same linguistic differences that we do.

---

[64] In the Persian period, "Ashdodite" is recognized as different from Judaean (Neh 13:24). See Chapter 7 below for a discussion of the identity of the language "Ashdodite."

Thus, a foreign element in a text will be more relevant or significant to establishing the use of style-switching when we have good reason to believe that the author conceived of that foreign element as at the same time linguistically other. The evidence for this could be drawn from the biblical context at large: if one or more other biblical texts conceive of some nation as alloglot, the author of the text in question may well have done so too.[65] But a yet stronger indication will be if this linguistic otherness is by some means made plain in the very text under discussion.

The presentation of Laban in Gen 31 is illustrative here, as it displays all of the characteristics outlined in the foregoing paragraphs. The clear switch from Hebrew to Aramaic (יגר שהדותא, v. 47, technically a "code-switch"),[66] establishes, from within this very text, that Laban is an alloglot, the speaker of a foreign language. Furthermore, the wider biblical context supports this, since Laban comes from the people whose language, Aramaic, is, along with Judaean, most often named in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, it is clear that the author is conscious of Laban's foreignness and is attempting to communicate it, as it is emphasized through repetition of the designation הארמי (vv. 20, 24). Finally, a general word indicating foreignness is also present in the chapter (נכריות, v. 15). These factors combine to provide strong support for an argument that unusual words and forms in this chapter should be explained as style-switching. Unfortunately, however, it must be admitted that Gen 31 is unusually clear on this front.

---

[65] See Chapter 2 for the languages of the ancient Near East named in the Hebrew Bible.

[66] See Chapter 5.

IV. Case Studies

I have thus outlined five principles that should control the search for the use of style-switching to represent foreignness: rare distribution of an unusual feature in the relevant Hebrew style; opposition to normal stylistic usage; concentration of unusual features; attestation in non-Hebrew sources; and the presence or emphasis in the text of a factor that is foreign, or, more specifically, linguistically other. In accordance with these principles, then, I shall now discuss five texts in which style-switching to represent foreignness has been detected by scholars: Gen 31; Exod 18; Judg 12:6; Isa 21:11–12; and the book of Ruth. These texts are drawn from a variety of genres, and illustrate the range of forms and functions that scholars have attributed to style-switching in the Hebrew Bible. Further, they are all texts for which the hypothesis that style-switching is present merits serious consideration. Nevertheless, as I show below, the degree of certainty that can be attributed varies from case to case, and weaknesses in the reasoning used to establish the presence or meaning of style-switching in these texts will be illustrative. Together with the preceding discussion, these analyses will be informative when I subsequently consider the phenomenon of the conceptualization of linguistic diversity as it is attested through style-switching.

A. Genesis 31

In Genesis 31, Jacob and his family depart Paddan-Aram secretly, in fear of Laban. When Laban discovers this, he pursues Jacob into Gilead, and the two air their grievances (about dishonest wages, missing household gods, and so on). Jacob and Laban agree to go separate ways, and set up a cairn to memorialize their covenant, swearing not to cross into each other's territory for ill. Jacob calls this cairn גַּלְעֵד (Hebrew), and Laban calls it יְגַר שָׂהֲדוּתָא

(Aramaic), both meaning "heap of witness" (v. 47). As already noted in brief, Greenfield identified three unusual features in this chapter which he regarded as deliberate Aramaisms.[67]

In v. 28, Laban, asks Jacob, "Why did you not permit me [נטשתני] to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell?" Greenfield argues that this is a semantic style-switch: this use of the root נטש, usually in biblical Hebrew "to leave, abandon," to express the notion "permit" (in contrast to the more usual נתן) is unique. He suggests that this usage can be explained as a calque on Aramaic שבק, which has this range of use. Here Greenfield's reference to non-Hebrew sources is intriguing, but cannot be regarded as conclusive since the author does not, in fact, use שבק.[68]

In v. 9, Jacob tells Laban "God has taken away [ויצל] the livestock of your father, and given [ויתן] them to me." Greenfield regards this sequence of נצל and נתן of as a technical formula, where נצל has the force of "seize, confiscate," making this a switch of a syntactic-semantic nature. This pair does not appear elsewhere together in the Hebrew Bible in this usage. To demonstrate that this is an Aramaism, Greenfield adduces a parallel in a legal document from Elephantine.[69] However, Greenfield weakens the strength of his hypothesis that this usage is distinctively or clearly Aramaic by comparing this to the *našû-nadānu* formula found in Akkadian texts at Ugarit.[70] Similarly, Greenfield points to a usage in another Hebrew text, Hosea 2:11, which he regards as drawn from this same technical-terminological field:

---

[67] Greenfield, "Aramaic Studies," 129–30.

[68] שבק is not attested in biblical Hebrew, but it appears in Mishnaic Hebrew, a variety of the language that displays extensive Aramaic influence. In biblical Aramaic, שבק is, however, attested, with the meaning "leave" (Dan 2:44; 4:12, 20, 23) and "let alone," perhaps "permit" (Ezra 6:7), as Greenfield supposes in the Hebrew of Gen 31:28.

[69] CAP 8.19.

[70] See Casper J. Labuschagne, "The *našû-nadānu* Formula and Its Biblical Equivalent" in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament: Studies Presented to Professor M. A. Beek on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (ed. Matthieu S. H. G. Heerma van Voss, Philo H. J. Houwink ten Cate, and N. A. van Uchelen; Assen: Van Gorcum & Co., 1974), 176–80.

"Therefore I [Yahweh] will take back [אשוב ולקחתי] my grain in its time, and my wine in its season; and I will take away [הצלתי] my wool and my flax." This parallel is not exact, because it lacks mention of these goods being giving away again to someone else (נתן), but the broad similarity in fact suggests that this is an expression at home in Hebrew. This undermines Greenfield's contention that what we have in Gen 31:9 is an attempt to indicate to the reader through style that this dialogue is taking place in Aramaic. This possible example of style-switching, therefore, is intriguing but again uncertain.

Finally, in 31:23, we read that, after Jacob fled, Laban "pursued him for seven days until he caught up [וידבק] with him in the hill country of Gilead." Greenfield notes that דבק is only found rarely in biblical Hebrew with the meaning "to reach, catch up with" (otherwise in Judg 18:22; 20:42).[71] With this meaning דבק is attested in Imperial Aramaic, and it is the common translation in the Targums of the Hebrew term more commonly used for "reach, catch up with," נשׂג, making this a lexical switch. דבק here stands in contrast with the more standard Hebrew נשׂג, and in the passage this contrast is made "active," in the terminology described above, for נשׂג is used two verses later (Gen 31:25).[72]

How strong is Greenfield's case overall? As discussed earlier, the "foreign factor," and specifically the linguistic otherness of Laban, is made clear in this passage. In addition, Greenfield successfully identifies three usages that stand out from expected Hebrew narrative style, fulfilling the "distribution" criterion laid out above. He demonstrates that two of these usages (נטשׁתני and וידבק) are "opposed" to normal Hebrew equivalents, but fails to do this for the third (ויצל...ויתן). As pointed out in each case, the use of non-Hebrew sources is not

---

[71] Greenfield calls the use in Gen 31:23 a hapax legomenon, which is correct, insofar as the other cases differ in tense and number. However, this description does not seem to add additional support to his argument.

[72] Greenfield does not discuss the possibility that דבק conveys a different sense or nuance from נשׂג, which is of course possible, though since דבק is used so infrequently in this sense in Hebrew, it is hard to know. It is possible that the two words are synonymous, but drawn from different lexical fields or arenas, as Rabin suggested may be the case with מחץ and מחק in Judg 5:26.

overwhelmingly persuasive. Finally, these examples gain mutual support from their proximity to one another, and especially from their proximity to the unambiguous switch to Aramaic (יגר שׂהדותא, v. 47), though Greenfield does not mention this code-switch in his article.

Overall, then, I judge Greenfield's case to be fairly strong, but it is not indefeasible, which may be problematic for some commentators. In fact, to speak purely comparatively, the argument that style-switching is used to represent foreignness in Gen 31 is one of the strongest biblical cases, and in the scholarly literature functions as something of a parade example. It may be thought that this does not bode well for other cases, but in Greenfield's defence, it should be remembered that the "principle of immediate intelligibility," discussed above, means that we must expect cases of style-switching to be dubitable: so as to be intelligible to the audience, style-switched words and forms will resemble normal Hebrew in various ways.

I am thus content to proceed on the assumption that Greenfield is probably correct. We may then ask a question that Greenfield does not pursue in depth, namely, how does this device of style-switching work, or rather, how is it used in the passage? Two points may be made. Firstly, it is not simply a way of conveying Laban's foreignness by making Laban's speech sound peculiar. For though Laban does appear to use a style-switched form (31:28), so also do Jacob (v. 9) and the narrator (v. 23).[73] Instead the device should be seen as arising from or indicating the presence of non-Israelite elements more generally, including the characters (Laban and his posse, Jacob's wives, etc.) and the setting (at the border with Aramaean

---

[73] Because of this I am unconvinced by Bompiani's suggestion that there is significance in the distribution of אני (31:44, 52—in the speech of Laban) and אנכי (31:5, 13, 38, 39—in the speech of Jacob and Yahweh); Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners,"17.

territory).[74] Any claims beyond this must be considered speculative. It is certainly interesting to entertain suggestions such as that when Jacob and Laban conversed, their conversation was conducted in Aramaic (so Greenfield),[75] or that Jacob's own speech was Aramaized by his years abroad (so Rendsburg);[76] but these suggestions cannot be proved.

Secondly, while the unambiguous code-switch of יגר שהדותא in v. 47 alerts us to the presence of style-switches, it does not do so until the end of the interaction between Jacob and Laban. The cumulative effect of these style-switches may thus have been felt by the reader, but their nature may not have been clear. Through their strangeness they may have "defamiliarized" the reader, but in an indefinable way, as the translation theorist Lawrence Venuti describes the effect of including in a translation non-native usages that reflect the *Vorlage*.[77] This strangeness may even have been lingering over the narrative since earlier than Gen 31, since Rendsburg and others also find style-switching in chs. 29 and 30.[78] Then in 31:47 the denouement effectively uncovers the source of this strangeness to the reader, in a way that parallels the narrative arc of the story: just as the lives of Jacob and Laban become disentangled with the agreement made in the highlands of Gilead, and their respective territories are separated and defined, so their languages are finally and conclusively distinguished.

---

[74] Cf. Zempel, "Bilingualism in Literature," 21: "[t]he use of dialect as a stylistic device tends to be most frequent in the dialog …. Passages in indirect speech … will show fewer features of the dialect, while passages of narrative will show the least influence, although they too may be colored by features of the dialect or dialects used in the dialog."

[75] Greenfield, "Aramaic Studies," 129.

[76] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 183.

[77] Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (2nd ed.; New York: Routledge, 2008).

[78] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 182–83; Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 27–30.

B. Exodus 18

In Exodus 18, following the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, Jethro, priest of Midian, visits his son-in-law Moses, bringing his wife and children. Jethro acknowledges Yahweh's mighty works, but, on seeing how resolving the disputes of the Israelites is burdening Moses, Jethro encourages him to deputize some of his responsibility to trusted Israelites, and thus create a judicial system. In this chapter, which contains a great deal of Jethro's direct speech, peculiar words and forms have been detected and studied by Benno Jacob, Edward Greenstein, Mishor, and Bompiani.[79] Mishor and Bompiani explain these as deliberate stylistic representations of Jethro's foreignness (though Mishor does not use the term "style-switching").

I shall here focus on several of the unusual features presented by Mishor, but first describe his method. Mishor was alerted to the unusual usages of the passages through comparing the Samaritan Pentateuch of Exod 18 with MT. SP appears to "correct" MT at several points in this chapter, and Mishor judged that these were points where MT did not use the expected Standard Biblical Hebrew forms (examples below). We may immediately note that through this method Mishor establishes that these MT forms are "opposed" (passively) to standard Hebrew forms.[80]

Firstly, Mishor notes an unusual phonological form in MT, מן בקר (v. 14). The non-assimilation of the *nun*, except before the definite article, only occurs five other times in the

---

[79] Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus* (trans. Walter Jacob; Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1992), 507; Edward L. Greenstein, "Jethro's Wit: An Interpretation of Wordplay in Exodus 18" in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes* (ed. Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winter; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 155–71; Mishor, "Text of Exodus 18"; and Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 65–73.

[80] Mishor does not suppose that SP corrected towards SBH; he writes, "this is a result of a revision according to the 'modern' Mishnaic Hebrew standard"; Mishor, "Text of Exodus 18," 225. However, the forms preferred by SP overlap with SBH forms in the cases discussed here, against MT Exod 18.

Pentateuch.[81] This occurs in the speech of Jethro, and appears to be actively contrasted with

the usage in the narrative framework, מן הבקר. The latter, where the unassimilated *nun* occurs

before a definite article, is an unremarkable form.

Next, two unusual morphological forms presnt themselves. In v. 18, we find the form עֲשֹׂהוּ as

the Qal infinitive construct of עשׂה with a 3 masc. sing. suffix; this is unique, and stands in

contrast to the usual form עֲשֹׂתוֹ.[82] In addition, in v. 20 אֶתְהֶם appears as the form of the definite

direct object marker with a 3 masc. pl. suffix, instead of אֹתָם. This unusual form occurs only

four other times in the Hebrew Bible,[83] which is remarkable given that אֹתָם (and אוֹתָם) occur

hundreds of times.

Furthermore, Mishor notes two syntactic peculiarities. In v. 20 Jethro tells Moses "you shall

tell them the way they shall walk [הדרך ילכו בה]," where אשר introducing the relative clause is

omitted. While asyndetic relative clauses are frequent in poetry, they are extremely rare in

prose after a definite noun. In v. 23, Jethro ends his speech as follows: "all these people will

come to their place [על מקמו יבא] in peace." As Mishor notes, however, the verb בוא

commonly takes the preposition אל, as in v. 15 of this chapter, rather than על.

In all of these cases, SP "corrected" MT to the more usual form. Mishor additionally notes

other unusual features of Exod 18 that were not removed by SP. Thus, the sole occurrence of

the verb זהר in the Pentateuch is found in v. 20: וְהִזְהַרְתָּה, "you shall instruct (them)."[84] One of

only three occurrences of the verb חדה, "to rejoice," and the only occurrence in the

Pentateuch, is found in v. 13: "and Jethro rejoiced [וַיִּחַדְּ] for all the good that Yahweh had

---

[81] מן בני היונה (Lev 1:14 [twice]; 14:30); מן ארם (Num 23:7); מן יקומון (Deut 33:11).

[82] The suffixed form עֲשֹׂהוּ is unique in MT, but it is derived from a by-form of the 3-*He* Qal inf. const., עֲשֹׂה (also עֲשֹׂו), one occurrence of which is in Gen 31:28, in the speech of Laban. The form עֲשֹׂה in turn appears to be related to the standard 3-*He* inf. abs. form עָשֹׂה; see GKC § 75 *n*.

[83] Gen 32:1 (in the speech of Laban); Num 21:3; Ezek 34:12; 1 Chron 6:50.

[84] The verb is common in Ezekiel with the meaning "warn."

done to Israel." [85] Finally, while the verb חזה is not uncommon, its use in v. 21 is noteworthy: "You should select(?) [תחזה] able men from all the people."[86] It bears the meaning "select" only here, if this is the correct interpretation,[87] and Bompiani points out that this is the only occurrence of the verb in a narrative prose text in the Hebrew Bible; all other instances are in poetic or prophetic texts.[88] These words apparently express notions that are not rare in biblical Hebrew, and for which more common words exist (to instruct: הורה; to rejoice: שׂמח; to select: בחר); thus we may say they are "opposed" to normal usage.

Is there a strong case for regarding these various oddities as deliberate stylistic devices to convey Laban's foreignness? The foregoing analysis showed that these words and forms are rare within the specific style, Pentateuchal narrative, in which we find them; thus the "distribution" control is met. It also showed that these words and forms are *relevantly* unusual, in that they are "opposed" to normal equivalents. And there is certainly a very high concentration of these features—eight here described (and others have been put forward) within fifteen verses. On all these counts, the case for Exod 18 is strong, and we may say that we are dealing with style-switching—the deliberate divergence from expected Hebrew style. In contrast to the use of the device in the Jacob and Laban episode, the style-switches in Exod 18 seems clearly to be aimed at characterizing Jethro specifically, since almost all but one of the unusual features appear in his speech, and none of them appears in Moses'.

What is less clear is whether this style-switching is intended specifically to convey Jethro's *foreignness*, which is what Bompiani and Mishor contend. Here, then, we must consider the

---

[85] The others two occurrences Ps 21:7 and Job 3:6.

[86] NRSV modified.

[87] Greenstein suggests that the use of the verb חזה in this context implies selection by divination; Greenstein, "Jethro's Wit," 163. If this is correct (which is difficult to ascertain, given the rarity of this usage), then חזה here expresses a distinctive and particular meaning, beyond simply "select," and is thus not used in contrast to a more common word like בחר.

[88] Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 72.

question of the "foreign factor," and of the attestation of these features in non-Hebrew sources. As to the foreign factor, at the beginning of the episode the narrator mentions that Jethro is the priest of Midian, but Midian is not referred to again by name. The foreignness of Midian appears to be evoked in the explanation of Gershom's name—"I have been an alien in a foreign land [בארץ נכריה]," v. 3—since this name describes Moses' first sojourn in Midian (Exod 2:22); but this is a somewhat indirect reference. At the end of the chapter, it is noted that Jethro returned אל ארצו, "to his land." Thus Jethro's foreignness is established but it is not emphasized. However, Jethro is certainly not explicitly presented in this text as a linguistic other, nor does the wider biblical context support this: Midianites are not portrayed as alloglots elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. We must admit, then, that the case from the "foreign factor" could be stronger.

With regard to relevant non-Hebrew sources, we of course have absolutely no Midianite texts with which to cross-check the unusual aspects of Exod 18. But in any case, we could not reasonably expect the author of this passage to know any Midianite, in order to imitate it, nor imagine that his audience would have realized that the Midianite language was being imitated. For we must surely place a significant historical distance between the last references to the Midianites, in the period of the Judges, and the period in which the author of Exod 18 was writing. This is a distance apparently appreciated by at least one voice in the Pentateuch, since Num 31 describes the extinction of this people in Moses' lifetime.

Nevertheless, some features of Jethro's speech do seem recognizably foreign, as Mishor notes.[89] חזה is the normal Aramaic word for "to see," and חדה and זהר occur fairly frequently in Aramaic; על is the standard preposition meaning "to, towards" in Aramaic; and the *nun* of the preposition מן most often does not assimilate in Aramaic. These are not obscure features

---

[89] Mishor, "Text of Exodus 18," 226–28.

of Aramaic found in a few inscriptions, but well-attested in various periods; it is thus reasonable to suppose that a biblical author could have known and used them, and that his audience would recognize them.

These comments should not be mistaken for the claim that all of the peculiar features in Exod 18 are Aramaic, or that, among Semitic languages, they are distinctively Aramaic; they are not, on both counts. But this is not important once we realize that the author is unlikely to be imitating the actual Midianite language. Rather, Midianite is, we should imagine, an empty linguistic category for the author and his audience. Thus to convey Jethro's Midianite-ness is really to convey his non-specific linguistic otherness—that is, it is important primarily that he sound different from an Israelite, which is what these Aramaic features do. But the same effect is likewise achieved by forms which cannot be explained as Aramaisms, and which may really be rare Hebrew variants, such as עֲשֹׂהוּ.[90]

Thus, some foreign forms are present on Jethro's lips, of the kind that a biblical author and his audience could be expected to know. This makes it quite likely that the intent of the style-switches in this passage really is to convey Jethro's foreignness, and so Exod 18 exhibits the device which is the subject of this chapter.

C. Judges 12:6

Judges 12:6 contains the clearest instance of style-switching to represent linguistic difference in the Hebrew Bible. We may analyse it according to the criteria laid out above, and examine its function.

---

[90] The Aramaic Pǝ'al inf. const. of 3-*He/Aleph* verbs is מבנא, with *mem* preformative, vocalized in biblical Aramaic as מִבְנָא (Ezra 5:2). An archaic form may be preserved in Ezra 5:3, 13: לִבְּנֵא. See Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (6th rev. ed.; Porta linguarum orientalum 5; Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1995), 55.

⁵Then the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. Whenever one of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" When he said, "No," ⁶they said to him, "Then say Shibboleth [אמר נא שבלת]," and he said, "Sibboleth [סבלת]," for he could not pronounce it right [ולא יכין לדבר כן]. Then they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand of the Ephraimites fell at that time. (Jugd 12:5–6)

This episode follows a dispute between the Ephraimites and Jephthah, a Gileadite judge. The Ephraimites accuse Jephtah of failing to summon them when he waged war against the Ammonites (12:1), and they threaten to kill him and his household. In response, Jephthah accuses the Ephraimites of failing to heed his summons to war (vv. 2–3). The Ephraimites also appear to insult the Gileadites, calling them "fugitives from Ephraim [פליטי אפרים]" (v. 4).[91] A battle ensues, in which the Gileadites defeat the Ephraimites (v. 4). The verses quoted above describe how, after this battle, the Gileadites prevent the Ephraimites from escaping, by submitting them to a pronunciation test.

The unusual linguistic feature in this narrative is סבלת, *sibbōlet*, with *samekh* rather than *shin*. Let us first consider its distribution. Two homophones in biblical Hebrew have the form שבלת: "ear of corn" (used fifteen times elsewhere); and "flowing stream" (used three times; Isa 27:12; Ps 69:3, 16).[92] However, the form סבלת is attested only here in the Hebrew Bible. This form is thus rare in all styles of Biblical Hebrew, and the "distribution" requirement is fulfilled.

As for the criterion of opposition to normal Hebrew usage, it is clear that the author of this passage has established an active opposition between the unusual form סבלת and the usual

---

[91] This is the standard interpretation of the insult, although its precise force is unclear, and the speaker is not specified; see Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1–12* (AB; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 453.

[92] Which of the meanings is used in this passage cannot be determined. "Ear of grain" is certainly more common, but the setting at the fords of the Jordan has suggested "flowing stream" to scholars including Rendsburg; see Rendsburg, "Shibboleth," *ABD* 5:1211. In fact, the meaning of שבלת is immaterial in the context of the story; the word functions as a vehicle of phonetic difference, and is not integrated into a sentence in which it has semantic value.

שִׁבֹּלֶת. Both forms are used in the passage, the usual in the speech of the Gileadites, and the unusual in the speech of the Ephraimites. Moreover, their difference is explicitly remarked upon by the author: the Ephraimites said סִבֹּלֶת rather שִׁבֹּלֶת than because they "could not pronounce it right."

Furthermore, a "foreign factor" is evident in this passage, but it is of a different nature from other cases addressed in this chapter. Here, two distinct groups are in view, the Cisjordanian Ephraimites and the Transjordanian Gileadites, who are involved in a military conflict.[93] Both groups, however, belong to a larger group, the people of Israel, which is the subject of the book of Judges. This passage therefore points to linguistic difference *within* Israel. In this situation, then, the linguistic "others," the Ephraimites, have a close relationship of some kind with the group whose speech is not marked as different, the Gileadites. It should be pointed out that the linguistic otherness of Ephraim is not elsewhere highlighted in the Hebrew Bible, except implicitly in the name of the language "Judaean," which distinguishes the language of the tribe/kingdom/diasporic people Judah, from that of other elements within Israel.

With regard to the criterion of concentration, we may note that only a single linguistic difference is at issue in this passage: the variant realizations of the initial phoneme of שִׁבֹּלֶת among the Gileadites and the Ephraimites. In vv. 1 and 4, two short utterances of the Ephraimites do not exhibit peculiar linguistic features. The concentration of strange features in this episode is not, therefore, especially high. This does not significantly weaken the case for detecting style-switching here, however, because of the explicitness with which the author deals with linguistic difference.

---

[93] Unlike Ephraim, Gilead is not generally referred to as one of the "tribes" of Israel, although it is listed in Judg 5 alongside other groups commonly described as tribes (Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar, Reuben, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali). On the changing status of Gilead throughout the Hebrew Bible, see Jefferson M. Hamilton, "Gilead," *ABD* 2:1990–95.

Finally, the question of confirming the style-switch through attestation in non-Hebrew sources is complicated. On the one hand, this linguistic difference occurs within Israel, and therefore (it is presumed) between two dialects of Hebrew, rather than between Hebrew and another language. The style imitated is not, therefore, a non-Hebrew style, and we have no particular reason to believe that the strange linguistic feature picked out here would be attested outside Hebrew literature. However, because the Gileadites occupy the Transjordan, and the Ephraimites the Cisjordan, scholars have generally worked from the assumption that the phonological difference indicated here is a difference between Cisjordanian Canaanite dialects/languages, and Transjordanian ones. In establishing this difference, non-Hebrew evidence could be very relevant. I shall address this issue below when I consider the precise nature of the sound difference indicated in this verse. At this point, we may pre-empt that discussion and note that evidence from relevant non-Hebrew sources for a form like סבלת is not forthcoming.

In sum, the factors in favour of identifying סבלת in Judg 12:5 as a style-switch intended to convey foreignness are: its rare distribution; the fact that it is actively and explicitly opposed to normal Hebrew usage; and the context of a dispute between two distinct people groups. These render the style-switch in this verse very clear, indeed, I would submit, the clearest in the Hebrew Bible.

We may now consider the function of this style-switch in the narrative. Through this switch, a linguistic difference is established between Gilead and Ephraim, reflecting, as Susah Niditch points out, the "'mixed multitude' that constituted the people."[94] It is probably accurate, from the point of view of the modern linguistics, to describe this as a *dialect* difference, that is, a difference between two speech varieties that are both part of the same

---

[94] Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 138.

language. However, we should note that this idea not expressed in this episode: the narrator does not indicate, through words for "a language" or through glottonyms, whether the speech-varieties of the Ephraimites and the Gileadites constituted a single language, or multiple. All that the author affirms is that Ephraim and Gilead could communicate, but their speech was not identical. [95]

In Judg 12:5–6, this linguistic difference is a matter of life and death. It enables the Gileadites to pick out and pick off their routed foe, and the scale of the slaughter is staggering: forty-two thousand Ephraimites die.[96] As Jack Sasson notes, in the immediate context this loss of life serves to condemn the judge Jephthah, and in the broader context of the book, it is attests to the destructive strife that ravaged Israel in the period before order was established through monarchic rule.[97] However, in the opposition between Gilead and Ephraim, the narrator is not simply a neutral observer lamenting the loss of life. At least from a linguistic point of view, the narrator stands on the side of the Gileadites. It is they who use the standard Hebrew pronunciation, whereas the Ephraimites use an aberrant one, described by the narrator as not "right, correct" (כן). This self-positioning of the author with Gilead against Ephraim may tie in with the fact that, as Marc Brettler has argued, the book of Judges overall reflects the focus and interests of the southern kingdom of Judah.[98] Because of this, Brettler suggests that in Judges, Ephraim represents the later northern kingdom of Israel (also known as Ephraim in biblical texts), and that the negative representation of Ephraim is indicative of Judaean antipathy towards the northern kingdom.[99] Judges 12:6 may thus demonstrate that this

---

[95] Commentators have not generally been sensitive to this distinction; e.g., ibid., 138; Sasson, *Judges*, 454.

[96] Ironically, the Ephraimites die because they failed to style-switch.

[97] Sasson, *Judges*, 455.

[98] Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (OTR; London: Routledge, 2002), 111–16.

[99] Brettler, *Book of Judges*, 113.

antipathy between Judah and Israel existed at the level of language, with Israel's linguistic peculiarities being here dismisses as errors.

1. Nature of the Sound Difference Indicated

A significant amount of scholarly literature has been generated to answer the question of the precise nature of the difference in Ephraimite and Gileadite phonology indicated in this verse.[100] This matter is not strictly relevant to the function of סבלת in Judg 12:6: the unusual form indicates that the Ephraimites and Gileadites spoke differently, and that the Gileadites made use of this difference to their advantage. Here we may consider the major difficulties involved in determining this difference, and the weight of relevant comparative evidence.

Firstly, this text is not a primary source for establishing a difference in Gileadite and Ephraimite speech, as, say, inscribed ostraca from the Iron I period would be. Rather, this text amounts to a claim by a historiographer that such a difference existed. This introduces at least two complications for determining the sound difference: 1) the author of this text may simply be incorrect about his characterization of the situation; no such difference may have existed, or it may not have been as he described it. 2) if such a difference did exist, it might reflect the situation obtaining in the author's period, rather than the period in which the tale is set, and several centuries could separate those two, during which time sound changes may have operated.[101]

---

[100] For a good bibliography and summary of previous scholarship, see Rendsburg, "Shibboleth," *ABD* 5:1210–12.

[101] For considerations related to dating the work, see Brettler, *Book of Judges*, 111–116. Brettler notes that the overall focus of Judges on Judah suggests a date of composition/redaction some time after the division of the monarchy (late 10th century).

Secondly, the author of this passage may not have been in a position to analyse accurately the sound difference he detected between Ephraim and Gilead. For familiarity with a sound is required to identify it correctly on hearing.[102] But if the sound made by the Ephraimites was not part of the author's phonemic inventory, he may not have identified it correctly, and therefore represented it inaccurately.

Finally, the Hebrew writing system may have placed constraints on the author, as it does on us. If a distinct grapheme in the Hebrew alphabet did not exist to represent the Ephraimite sound (as perceived), then that sound could not be unambiguously represented in writing. Thus, we cannot determine whether the author of this passage chose to use *samekh* in סבלת because it *precisely* conveyed the sound he had in mind; or because it *approximately* conveyed that difference, and thus conveyed *the fact of difference*, which is the purpose of סבלת in this passage. The writing system also constrains us because the relationship between the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the sounds of ancient Hebrew, is not one-to-one: שׁ in the biblical period has two values, *š* and *ś*, and in Old Aramaic inscriptions this letter was also used to represent *ṯ*. Moreover, the values of the sibilants in spoken Hebrew may have shifted during the biblical period, while Hebrew orthography was largely fixed; thus the sounds indicated in writing by שׁ and ס varied over time.[103]

The historical linguist is thus faced with considerable obstacles in using Judg 12:6 to reconstruct ancient Israelite phonology, and must make a number of assumptions about the date of the passage, the competence of its author, and the nature of the writing system. Moreover, little light is shed by the comparative evidence. Cognates in other Semitic

---

[102] See, e.g., Michael H. Long, "Acquisition of Language" in *IEL*, n.p.

[103] See Kaufman, "North West Semitic Dialects," 56. Given that orthographic practices were generally conservative, the apparently small step taken by the author of Judg 12:6 in representing the speech of the Ephraimites is significant, and requires conceptualizing the alphabet as a somewhat elastic means of recording language.

languages do not support the supposition that proto-Semitic *ṯ* underlies Hebrew *š* in either of the Hebrew homophones שבלת, held by several scholars:[104] the evidence concerning שִׁבֹּלֶת, "ear of corn," is extensive, and confirms that the proto-Semitic consonant of this word was *š*; and while the evidence outside Hebrew for שִׁבֹּלֶת, "flowing stream" is slim, it also indicates original proto-Semitic *š*.[105] Thus, neither שִׁבֹּלֶת nor סִבֹּלֶת should be taken as attempts to represent a pronunciation *ṯibbōlet*.[106] John Emerton is probably correct, then, to claim that the *shin/samekh* distinction here is attempting to represent a difference in pronunciation of sibilants (*š, ś, s*), and not a sibilant/interdental contrast.[107] But as discussed above, the nature of this difference cannot be inferred with precision from the text of Judg 12:6.

For these reasons, then, the precise phonological difference that the author of Judg 12:6 intended to convey in the ס/שׁ contrast remains elusive.

2. Summary

A style-switch in Judg 12:6 is clear, as the application of the criteria elaborated above demonstrates. In the context, it establishes a linguistic difference between Ephraim and Gilead that the Gileadites use to devastating effect. The lamentable loss of life is highlighted in this passage, but the author appears to position himself in the conflict. The nature of the linguistic difference cannot, however, be precisely determined.

---

[104] Among such scholars are Ephraim A. Speiser, "The Shibboleth Incident (Judges 12:6)," *BASOR* 85 (1942): 10–13; and Rendsburg, "Shibboleth," *ABD* 5:1211.

[105] *PMBH* 41.

[106] Thus modern scholarship has moved away from Speiser's hypothesis concerning this passage; see

[107] John A. Emerton, "Some Comments on the Shibboleth Incident (Judges XII 6)," in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Mathias Delcor* (ed. A. Caquot, S. Légasse, and M. Tardieu; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 150–57.

D. Isaiah 21:11–12

In the extremely enigmatic oracle of Dumah (Isa 21:11–12), which occurs in a set of oracles concerning foreign nations (Isa 21), Rabin and Rensburg have detected the use of style-switching to represent foreign speech.[108]

> [11]The oracle concerning Dumah:
> One is calling to me from Seir, "Sentinel, what of the night? Sentinel, what of the night?"
> [12]The sentinel says: "Morning comes [אתה בקר], and also the night. If you [pl.] will inquire, inquire; come back again [אִם־תִּבְעָיוּן בְּעָיוּ שֻׁבוּ אֵתָיוּ].

The unusual items detected in these verses are of two sorts: the lexical items בעה, "inquire," and אתה, "come"; and the verbal morphology of תבעיון, בעיו, and אתיו.

First, we may consider the lexemes. In terms of distribution בעה is extremely rare in the Hebrew Bible, only occurring in three other texts (Isa 30:13; 64:1; Obad 6), and never elsewhere with the meaning "seek, inquire," as here (suggested by the Aramaic cognate); less rare is אתה, but it is not common, and only occurs in poetic texts. In terms of attestation in non-Hebrew sources, the cognates of בעה and אתה are common in Old, Official, and later Aramaic, as the usual words for "seek" and "come" respectively.[109] Moreover, they are opposed (passively in this context) to the more usual Hebrew בקשׁ and דרשׁ, "seek," and בוא, "come."

Secondly, the morphology of תבעיון, בעיו, and אתיו exhibits a feature that is unusual in biblical Hebrew: the retention of the historical root letter *yod* as a consonant in the conjugation of III-

---

[108] So Rabin, "Arabic Phrase"; Rendsburg , "'Foreign' Factor," 182.

[109] *DNWSI* at ʾty 133–35; at bʿyₗ 180–82. Rabin proposes that these words reflect Arabic rather than Aramaic usage, but the cognates he cites are very rare, and the attestations are obviously much later; see Rabin, "Arabic Phrase," 304–6.

y/w verbs. These forms are thus opposed to the expected Hebrew forms without *yod*, though this opposition is not made active in this passage. This feature is not widespread in the Hebrew Bible, occurring mostly in pausal forms and poetic texts.[110] In non-Hebrew sources, similar forms are found in Old and Imperial Aramaic, as well as in Ugaritic and Byblian Phoenician.[111]

The concentration of these features is clearly high. In a single verse, we have two unusual lexemes, both repeated, and an unusual morphological feature, repeated three times. A foreign factor is clearly also at play, although it is of uncertain nature: because of the reference to Seir (v. 11), Dumah has been regarded as a location south of Judah, in Edom,[112] but an Arabian Dumah further south is another possibility.[113] It should be pointed out that neither in the immediate context, however, nor in the broader biblical literature, is Dumah (or Edom, or the Arabs) explicitly presented as linguistically other.

Overall, then, there is a strong case that deliberate style-switching is operating in this passage, quite possibly under the influence of the foreign setting. Rabin explains this as intended to imitate the speech of the foreign nation in view, here, which seems plausible.[114] This is interesting because, in the vast majority of cases, biblical oracles concerning foreign nations do not display style-switching, and this passage thus represents something of a departure. Perhaps what specifically conditions this style-switching is the scene presented in the oracle: the sentinel/prophet is addressed by a voice from Seir in Edom (v. 11); in

---

[110] *PMBH* 252.

[111] *PMBH* 248; Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 182; and Rosenthal, *Biblical Aramaic*, 51, 66.

[112] LXX reads Edom for Dumah at this point, perhaps reflecting a reading influenced by the juxtaposition of "oracle" and "Dumah": משׂא דומה.

[113] For the various options see, with bibliography, Juris Zarins, "Dumah (Person)," *ABD* 2: 235–37; Harold Brodsky, "Dumah (Place)," *ABD* 2:237.

[114] Rabin, "Arabic Phrase," 305.

responding to this foreign speaker, the sentinel/prophet uses a form of Hebrew that is markedly foreign-sounding, perhaps indicating the imagined language of discourse between these two individuals.

E. Ruth

Style-switching appears to be used in the book of Ruth to represent the speech of Naomi and Boaz. In his commentary, Holmstedt has shown that speech of these characters is marked with strange features.[115] Unexpected morphology is found, including gender discord (1:8, 9, 11, 13; only in Noami's speech), paragogic *nuns* (Boaz's speech: 2:8, 9, 21; Naomi's: 3:4, 18). Strange verbal vocalizations are also found, such Boaz's תַעֲבוּרִי, "you will pass" (2:8), and Naomi's unusual 2 fem. sg. pf. forms, וירדתי and ושכבתי (3:3, 4, Kethib). This generally contrasts with the narrator's use of more standard forms (so Bompiani).[116] The intent of these switches, many of which appear to be archaizing, has been described in various ways. Edward Campbell suggests that "our story-teller employs them to indicate the senior status of the two" relative to other characters in the book.[117] Holmstedt differs slightly, writing: "I suggest that the narrator has used marginal—but understandable—language to give the book … archaic (i.e., 'back in those days they talked funny') coloring."[118]

These switches in style are an important reminder that the deliberate manipulation of style can be used to other effects than simply the representation of foreignness.[119] However, since

---

[115] Holmstedt, *Ruth*, 47–49.

[116] Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 78.

[117] Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 25.

[118] Holmstedt, *Ruth*, 47.

[119] Bompiani maintains that these switches are indeed intended to convey foreignness, under the influence of Ruth the Moabite; Bompiani, "Speech of Foreigners," 74–84. This does not seem to be the most likely

these do not indicate foreignness, they fall outside the scope of this chapter, and I shall, therefore, not examine them in depth. I shall, however, consider the suggestion that Ruth's foreignness is conveyed through her speech.

Holmstedt proposes one instance of style-switching in the speech of Ruth.[120] In 2:2, Ruth asks Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among (?) the ears of grain [ואלקטה בשבלים]." According to Holmstedt, this use of the *bet* preposition with the verb לקט is unique in the Hebrew Bible; in all other uses of the verb לקט, the item gleaned is the direct object of the verb.[121] Only in Ruth 2:2 is the item gleaned indicated by the *bet* preposition, and when elsewhere this verb occurs with a noun with the *bet* preposition, it generally indicates time (e.g., Exod 16:21, 22) or location (e.g., Isa 17:5; Ruth 2:3, 8, 17). Holmstedt regards this unusual phrasing in Ruth 2:2 as a deliberate authorial divergence from expected Hebrew style intended to convey Ruth's foreignness: "the slightly different grammar of this clause is, in the mouth of Ruth, a sign of her slightly different dialect or Moabite understanding of Hebrew."[122]

Though Holmstedt goes towards establishing the relatively rare distribution of this usage in the Hebrew Bible, his example fails to meet any of the other relevant criteria. Holmstedt does not convincingly show that לקט with the *bet* preposition is opposed to expected Hebrew prose style. Prepositional usage is a notoriously idiomatic element of languages, and we cannot claim that we know the usage of לקט or of the *bet* preposition sufficiently to say that Ruth 2:2 is a distinctively outlandish usage. Instead, it may be an alternative way of expressing the

---

explanation, however, since they are lacking in Ruth's speech. Here Bompiani appears to conflate the literary device with its most common function; see my comments above on the terminology of this discourse.

[120] Holmstedt, *Ruth*, 47–48, 107–108.

[121] See *DCH* at לקט 4:575b–576a. In the case of שבלים specifically, there are at most only two cases where it is the direct object of a verb of gathering. In Isa 17:5, שבלים appears twice, once as the direct object of קצר, and once following מְלַקֵּט as either a direct object or as the *nomen rectum*.

[122] Holmstedt, *Ruth*, 107–8.

idea of gleaning grain, or may convey a slightly different, perhaps unrecoverable, nuance

from לקט + direct object (e.g., "to glean amongst the ears").[123] Furthermore, this is the only

strange feature Holmstedt detects in Ruth's speech, and it is quite different from the peculiar

morphology found in the speech of Naomi and Boaz. Thus, it is not supported by a relevant

concentration of unusual features.

In failing to show opposition or concentration, we may say that Holmstedt has not shown the

deliberateness of this unusual usage. But even if he had, his inference that it is intended to

convey Ruth's foreignness would be questionable. For one thing, no relevant non-Hebrew

evidence is adduced. In addition, while the foreign factor, Ruth's Moabite-ness, is

emphasized here— she is referred to as המואביה, "the Moabite," eight times— the linguistic

otherness of the Moabites is not stipulated. It is not commented on explicitly in this text, and

the general biblical context is not clear about it. "Moabite" is never used in the Hebrew Bible

as the name of a language, and the single biblical reference to a linguistic difference between

Moabites and Israelites does not establish a thoroughgoing differentiation: "Anakim ... are

usually reckoned as Rephaim, though the Moabites call them Emim." (Deut 2:11). Thus, we

should be cautious in presuming that the author imagined that Moabites spoke a different

language from the Judaeans or Israelites.

It is reasonable to suppose that two assumptions deriving from modern scholarship have

influenced Holmstedt's analysis of Ruth's speech. Firstly, Moabite is the name given by

modern scholars to the language attested in many short, and one extensive (the Mesha Stele),

inscription from the ancient kingdom of Moab; though this language is similar to ancient

---

[123] In his comprehensive work on the *bet* preposition, Ernst Jenni classifies this usage as "Arbeit/Zerstörung an Naturdingen," ("work/destruction of items of nature") a category of two members, comparing it to Zech 11:1: "Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars [ותאכל אש בארזיך]!" Jenni notes that this is an "etwas zufällig angeordneten Rubrik [a rubric arranged somewhat by chance]." The ears would thus be the object of Ruth's action. Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen* (3 vols.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992–2000), 1:272.

Hebrew in many respects, the two are treated as distinct by modern scholars.[124] Secondly, the idea that style-switching is widely used in the Hebrew Bible to convey foreignness has been made prevalent by recent studies, Rendsburg's being chief among them,[125] although it has seldom been noted in these discussions that style-switching, as a literary device, can indicate things other than foreignness, such as a speaker's' age, sex, profession, and so on. Thus Holmstedt, seeing Ruth the Moabite using slightly unusual, but fairly unremarkable wording in Ruth 2:2, interpreted this as a stylistic means of conveying her foreignness. In light of these assumptions, Holmstedt's interpretation is understandable, but it is incorrect, and illustrates the distorting effect that scholarly presuppositions can exert.

We should therefore reject both Holmstedt's identification of ואלקטה בשבלים as style-switching, and the validity of his inference that it is intended to convey foreignness. We should therefore agree with Rendsburg's observation when he writes that "in the words attributed to Ruth in the book of Ruth, I see no evidence for linguistic variation."[126] In this lack of style-switching, however, Rendsburg finds particular significance: "the intent in Ruth is to portray the heroine as joining the people of Israel, and this is accomplished through the use of language as well; her speech is assimilated to that of the other characters (Naomi, Boaz, etc.), so that she no longer is distinguishable."[127] Rendsburg is here raising the interesting point that there may be significance precisely in the *absence* of style-switching from a text, a point to which I shall now turn.

---

[124] So, e.g., Kent P. Jackson: "Yet in spite of the similarities between the language of Moab and those of its neighbors, it must be emphasized that Moabite shows enough distinguishing features to demonstrate that it was a separate language with lexical and grammatical characteristics unique to itself"; Kent P. Jackson, "The Language of the Meshaʿ Inscription" in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (ed. Andrew Dearman; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 96–130, at 130. See also Garr, *Dialect Geography*, 224–9; Gary A. Rendsburg, "ואשב in Mesha Stele, Line 12," *Maarav* 14 (2007): 9–25; and Erasmus Gass, "New Moabite Inscriptions and Their Historical Relevance," *JNSL* 38 (2012): 45–78.

[125] I take issue with this idea in the following pages.

[126] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 184 n. 30.

[127] Ibid., 190.

In considering this issue, we may first ask, what underlies Rendsburg's claim, and allows him to make this inference from absence? Since Rendsburg describes the use of style-switching as "consistent" in the Hebrew Bible, and "a distinctive feature of Israelite literary style,"[128] I imagine that Rendsburg sees style-switching as a standard device within the literary toolkit of an ancient Israelite writer. If that were the case, its absence from *any* text where a foreigner speaks would be significant. And granting this general principle, one could argue that the lack of style-switching in Ruth's speech is significant. For the author of the book of Ruth is clearly well-acquainted with the conventions of Classical Hebrew language and literature, and hence, as the argument would run, he would also have known about this device; its absence from the book would therefore have to be as a result of deliberate choice; and in the deliberateness of this choice, Rendsburg would argue, lies significance.

Rendsburg's characterization of the distribution of style-switching in the Bible, however, is inaccurate. Style-switching to represent foreignness is not common in the Hebrew Bible. It is true that the device is found in several genres of literature—in prose (Gen 31, Exod 18, Judg 12) and poetic texts, including prophecy (Isa 21:11–2) and wisdom (Prov 31). But beyond these five cases, there are very few texts for which there are good arguments for detecting the use of style-switching to represent foreignness.[129] When these are compared with the large number of texts in the Bible that contain the direct speech of a non-Israelite,[130] or with the practically innumerable passages that contain a foreign element of some kind, it immediately becomes clear that the use of style-switching to represent foreignness is not widespread among biblical authors. We cannot even say that it is consistently used by certain biblical

---

[128] Ibid., 189.

[129] The complicated situation of Job has already been mentioned; as previously indicated, Rendsburg also detects the device in the unusual features in the oracles of Balaam (Num 23–24), although discerning such switching in this archaic, poetic text is extremely problematic; ibid., 183–84.

[130] For instance in Gen 12–50, the direct speech of a character not descended from Abraham is recorded in twenty-five chapters, in approximately 193 verses.

authors, for its use is sporadic (which is part of what makes it so hard to detect), and there is little evidence that its use extends beyond fairly small literary units and isolated episodes (e.g., Exod 18).[131]

Thus, inasmuch as style-switching is not the usual biblical way to represent foreigners, we may say that its use, where it does occur, is unexpected; and we can describe the choice to use it as marked. Consequently our default position, when we approach a text in which a foreign element is present, should be to assume that style-switching is *not* operative, and therefore no significance can be attributed *a priori* to such an absence where it is found. We may not say, for example, that Joseph is Egyptianized because his speech does not diverge from that of the Egyptians, nor that David is assimilated to the Philistines because his speech is not different from theirs. These authors did not employ style-switching, but no significance can be found in that fact. Correspondingly Rendsburg may not claim that, from general principles, the absence of style-switching in Ruth is significant.

If meaning is to be found in the absence of this device from some text, it will not be derived from a general principle. Rather, a particular and specific argument will need to be made on some grounds relevant to the text in question. In the case of Ruth, Rendsburg does not offer any targeted arguments for this assumption of deliberateness of Ruth, but Holmstedt does, and his argument is worth considering. Holmstedt argues that, since the author of Ruth employs style-switching in the speech of Naomi and Boaz, that author clearly knows about and is fully capable of using the device. By choosing not to use it in the speech of Ruth (or at least not often, as Holmstedt claims), the author deliberately distinguishes Ruth from Naomi and Boaz: "The narrator sets up a light 'linguistic curtain' with the audience on one side and No'omi and Boaz on the other. The implication is that, while the audience is reminded

---

[131] Gen 29–31 may be the longest unit of text that employs this device; see the discussion of Gen 31 above.

throughout the [sic] Ruth is a foreigner, they are also encouraged, by linguistic means, to identify with her."[132]

Though both Rendsburg and Holmstedt reach the same conclusion, Holmstedt's argument is stronger than Rendsburg's, in that it does not assume that the absence of style-switching is *in general* a deliberate choice in biblical narratives, but rather offers reasons for believing that this holds in the particular case of Ruth. In this way, I agree that the absence of style-switching from Ruth's speech may well be deliberate, and therefore carry particular significance. However, this argument does not establish the precise nature of the significance, and the various options outlined remain viable: Naomi's and Boaz's switched speech may indicate foreignness, archaism, or seniority to Ruth. But in any case, the effect is similar: the audience identifies more closely with Ruth. In the words of Rendsburg, "Linguistic style and literary content merge": a foreigner becomes an Israelite national ancestor; Ruth's story becomes the reader's.[133]

The points arising from this discussion can be generalized. The absence of style-switching in any given passage is not in itself significant in the Hebrew Bible. Because it is so rare in the Hebrew Bible, style-switching to represent foreignness in not expected, and when it does occur it represents a marked choice. If its absence is to be considered significant in some case, particular reasons relating to that case need to be given. The fundamental fact that needs to be shown in such cases is that style-switching could have been expected in this text, such that its absence it noteworthy. Demonstrating this will primarily consist of proving, not only that the author was aware of the device's existence, but that the author typically put it to use in representing the speech of his characters. For Ruth this is considerably easier than for other

---

[132] Holmstedt, *Ruth*, 49. Rendsburg admits that Ruth's speech may be distinguished from Naomi's and Boaz's in lacking the archaisms they contain, but he does not put this to use as evidence of the deliberateness of the absence of style-switching in the way that Holmstedt does; Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 180.

[133] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 190.

texts, since the book is a short but complete unit, probably from the hand of a single author, and it contains just a few characters who appear to display distinct linguistic profiles. But in the absence of conditions like these, for most biblical texts it will not be possible to establish the necessary conditions for assigning significance to the lack of style-switching.

V. Style-Switching and the Conceptualization of Linguistic Diversity

The foregoing examination reveals five concrete biblical cases in which foreignness appears to be represented through style-switching, and one case in which it is not. I shall now bring these cases to bear on a consideration of the role that style-switching plays within the broader phenomenon of the raising of linguistic diversity as an issue in the Hebrew Bible. I shall discuss this in three main areas: the recognition of the mechanical aspects in which languages differ that this device involves; the new information that cases of style-switching can provide for reconstructing Israel's linguistic classification of surrounding peoples; and the relevance for the question of Israel's real and self-perceived distinctiveness in the ancient world.

A. Recognizing the Mechanics of Linguistic Diversity

Examples of style-switching offer us a unique opportunity to examine concrete examples of linguistic difference that biblical authors detected and represented. In style-switching, biblical authors display their recognition of specific differences between Hebrew and other languages, and by extension their recognition of the mechanics of how languages differ. This contrasts with other examples of references to linguistic diversity that I study in this dissertation, which tend not to delve into the mucky business of the inner workings of language, but make more general or abstract observations, about language origins, language and peoplehood, and so on.

I shall now examine these particular recognitions involved in style-switching, and their implications for the treatment in ancient Israel of the idea of linguistic diversity.

Instances of style-switching detected in the Hebrew Bible display recognition, at some level, of the following differences about languages. (These lists are compiled from the examples considered strong candidates in this chapter.)

1. That languages differ from each other in the words they use and in the meanings that they give them. This is shown by the lexical and semantic examples of style-switching across verbs, nouns, and prepositions: גמא (Gen 24); דבק, נטשׁ (Gen 31); חדה, זהר, חזה, על (Exod 18); בעה, אתה (Isa 21); בר (Prov 31).

2. That languages differ in how they form words according to grammatical function. This is shown by the morphological examples of style-switching, which include verbs, nouns, and prepositions: אתהם, עשׂו (Gen 31); אתהם, עשׂהו (Exod 18); בעיו, תבעיון, אתיו (Isa 21); מלכין (Prov 31).

3. That languages differ in how they sound, including how specific phonemes are pronounced and combined. This is shown by the phonological style-switches. מן בקר (Exod 18), סבלֹת (Judg 12).

4. Finally, that languages differ in how they combine words to form sentences. This is shown by syntactic style-switching: הדרך ילכו בה (Exod 18).

When these various forms of difference are considered together, certain patterns become evident. The first is the distribution of the different types of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible. It is clear that lexical/semantic and morphological switches predominate. This may be partly due to observational bias: the availability of lexicons and grammars of Hebrew and other languages makes these switches relatively simple to investigate and confirm. But it

should also be partly attributed to fact that the clearest ways that languages differ from one another are in words and the shape of words, lexis and morphology. Thus, without needing to think in an especially theoretical way about language, a biblical author could recognize that languages differ in these respects. In addition, lexical differences are very straightforwardly represented in writing, making them likely to show up.

Purely phonological differences occur at a much lower frequency, and I would relate this in part to the constraints of the Hebrew writing system.[134] For one thing, the ancient Hebrew writingsystem had a limited capacity for representing vowels, a major locus of phonological difference between languages; correspondingly, an author's ability to engage in vocalic style-switching was limited to the then current level of development of the *matres lectionis*. Vocalic switching, communicated through *matres*, does however appear to be at work in some of the verbal forms in Ruth (where, it should be noted, it does not convey foreignness): וירדתי, וׁשכבתי (3:3, 4); and תעבורי (2:8).[135] In addition, the consonantal value of a letter is not malleable, so that if a phoneme was not already represented in the Hebrew alphabet, an author could successfully convey it to an audience. This is especially relevant because the alphabet lacked distinct letters for several phonemes of the languages of peoples who lived alongside Israel (e.g., *ð, θ, f*),[136] and lacked the further ability to distinguish between the

---

[134] By "purely phonological" I am trying to distinguish these examples from the morphological instances of style-switches, which, of course, differ in sound from the normal Hebrew forms to which they correspond.

[135] Rendsburg suggests other examples of vocalic style-switching, but they must be considered highly speculative; Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 181, 186. It may be noted that the common explanation of enigmatic אֹרְרֵי־יֹום, "day cursers," in Job (3:8) as "sea cursers" (expected אֹרְרֵי־יָם), presumes a vocalic switch, possibly a deliberate one towards Phoenician—that is, if MT's *waw* is not simply a transmission error; see Edward L. Greenstein, "The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function," *JBL* 122 (2003): 651–66, at 654–5.

[136] Though these phonemes were spirantized (fricative) allophones of the Hebrew phonemes *d, p,* and *t*, the alphabet lacked the ability to specify them, as was also the case for the spirantized allophones of *b, d,* and *k*. In the Tiberian vocalization system, of course, *dagesh lene* fulfils this function.

native Hebrew phonemes *ḥ/ḫ*, *ʿ/ġ*, and *ś/š*.[137] These constraints of the writing system limit the scope for phonological style-switching.[138]

Syntactic switches appear to occur with the lowest frequency. This is partly attributable to difficulties in detecting them—though the study of Biblical Hebrew syntax has advanced rapidly in recent decades, it has not historically been a primary focus of Hebrew linguistic research and instruction. Aberrant syntactical features of Hebrew texts are therefore less likely to have been detected by scholars than lexical or morphological ones. It may even be that syntax was an elusive category of linguistic difference for the biblical authors to detect; but certain differences between Hebrew and other languages are clear (e.g., clause-final position of the infinitive in Imperial Aramaic; cf. Ezra 5:3, 9, 13). These could have been easily represented by style-switching, but so far no switches of this kind have been discerned.

How conscious, then, may we imagine the biblical authors were concerning the various linguistic facts listed above that their style-switching indicates? Could an author not represent stylistic differences in a basically automatic and unreflective fashion, much as someone who imitates an accent in speech need not be able to specify the linguistic switches he is making?

Several considerations shed light on these questions. Firstly, as a general point, these are observations of the same kind as those made elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, prophetic texts make use of the fact that foreign languages sound different from Hebrew (e.g. Isa 28:11; 33:19). Similarly, lexical differences between languages are clearly acknowledged in, for instance, Deut 2, in which the Moabite and Ammonite names for the Rephaim are given as Emim (v. 11) and Zamzummim (v. 20), respectively. Thus, with our present

---

[137] See, e.g., *PMBH* 76. The distinction between *ś/ʊ* and *š/ʊ* is also a feature of the Tiberian system.

[138] A logographic system is even more limited in this respect.

linguistic observations, we are not dealing with a level of abstract thought that far surpasses that found in other portions of the Hebrew Bible.

Secondly, a high degree of intentionality is at work in the use of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible, which suggests consciousness of these linguistic observations. The switches of style analysed above were shown to be deliberate, and reflect an author's choice to convey foreignness in some particular context. The placing of the switches is selective, and they are distributed according to a plan or strategy (e.g., within the speech of Jethro, but not Moses, in Exod 18). Moreover, several authors highlight their style-switches with the device dubbed "active opposition" above, namely, using the normal Hebrew form in close proximity to a switched form, to accentuate its strangeness. This suggests not only that the authors were conscious of the differences they were pointing out, but also that they had isolated the precise constituents of these differences.

If, then, it is reasonable to hold that biblical style-switchers were fully conscious of the what they were doing, can we say that the use of style-switching implies that these Hebrew authors were engaged in any form of theorizing about language? Does the practice imply the existence of a linguistic or proto-linguistic theory in ancient Israel? These types of linguistic difference—lexis/semantics, phonology, morphology, syntax—are the principal respects in which natural languages differ from one another, and are indicative of how language works as a mode of communication; they could thus certainly have formed the basis of a general theory of language.

Though this line of thought is enticing, I suspect that the biblical recognitions of linguistic difference do not amount to theorization, and that for two main reasons. Firstly, it is true that, considered together, biblical cases of style-switching make use of various kinds of linguistic difference; however, that is not to say that all of these authors made all of the realizations

outlined above. In fact, most authors only represent lexical/semantic and morphological differences. Exodus 18 is exceptional in this regard, as the only case in which all of the various forms of linguistic difference appear.[139] Thus, in most of these cases, only one or two building blocks of a theory of language are made manifest.

Secondly, the important theoretical step of categorizing these observations is not made in the texts we have. These texts do not group certain types of linguistic difference together in order to bring out the particular point that, for instance, Aramaic and Hebrew differ in phonology.[140] Instead, several types of differences appear in various combinations, giving a general impression of the differences between languages at number of levels. But systematizing observations about linguistic difference appears to be a necessary precursor to the theoretical enterprise of describing, explaining, and relating them. In this respect, these passages are in keeping with the absence in the Hebrew Bible of a developed metalinguistic terminology that would isolate or describe these linguistic differences (as differences in sound, vocabulary, shape of words, or structure of sentences, etc.).[141]

Thus these passages do not provide evidence of a developed linguistic theory among the ancient Israelites. They rather show the important facts that authors of texts from a range of genres were capable of detecting a wide variety of differences between language, and were skilled at representing them.

---

[139] If, in style-switching, we are dealing with accurate imitations of the features of non-Hebrew languages (so Greenfield, Kaufman, Rendsburg, et al.), then we should expect that a diversity in types of linguistic difference would be present. See the discussion of the role of imitation in style-switching above.

[140] Judg 12:6 comes closest to doing this, since it isolates a single linguistic difference and explicitly comments on it.

[141] For a fuller discussion of this point, see Chapter 2. This does not mean that ancient Israelites could not have described or categorized these differences, but simply that, in the Hebrew Bible, they did not.

B. Increasing Our Understanding of Israel's Linguistic Map

Studies of style-switching also have the capacity to increase our knowledge of how certain biblical authors understood the linguistic geography of their region, if such studies indicate that peoples not otherwise depicted as alloglots in the Hebrew Bible are represented as linguistically other through style-switching. Now, as discussed above, the most convincing cases of style-switching representing foreignness will be ones in which the foreign factor, and specifically a character's linguistic otherness, is explicitly stated or made clear in some way other than through style-switching (as with Laban's code-switch). Such explicit passages will already have found their way into existing scholarship on the biblical references to languages and linguistic diversity, such as the articles of Ullendorff, Weinreich, and Block discussed in Chapter 1. Thus, an examination of cases of style-switching is unlikely to vastly extend our understanding of how Israel linguistically divided up the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, in some cases, where linguistic otherness has not been conveyed by other means, the style-switching itself provides evidence of a biblical author's conceived linguistic geography.

For one thing, it is important to note that it is a case of style-switching that provides the sole biblical affirmation that Israel contained within it linguistic diversity: Judges 12:6, in which Gileadite and Ephraimite speech are distinguished phonologically. Now, the existence of internal differentiations of this kind are not surprising, and indeed are to be been expected. Still, it is important to note that Judg 12:6 provides the only explicit evidence that such distinctions were recognized by Israelites themselves.

As for foreign nations, we may note several new pieces of information that can be potentially derived from cases of style-switching. In Exod 18, Jethro, as I have argued above, is presented as linguistically different from Moses and the narrator. This amounts to a statement of the linguistic otherness of the Midianites from Israel (or at least from the ancestors of

Israel), which is a novum since nowhere in the Bible do we have an explicit statement that the Midianites spoke a different language from the Israelites. Now, of course we might have assumed that they did, but Exod 18 is evidence of something slightly different: that this Israelite author imagined that the Midianites spoke differently.

A similar point can be made with regard to other instances of style-switching, but when the identity of the places or peoples involved is uncertain, this observation is, unfortunately, almost devoid of content. For instance, in Isaiah's Dumah oracle, the figures from Dumah are presented as linguistically other, but as discussed above, the location of Dumah is uncertain. Likewise, Elihu the Buzite is quite possibly a linguistic other in the book of Job (as perhaps is the righteous sufferer of the land of Uz himself), but again the precise significance of these toponyms (or demonyms) is elusive. The same may be said for the mother of Lemuel, king of Massa (Prov 31:1). Because the identifications of these people are so uncertain, little is added to our understanding of the Israelite language map of the ancient Near East beyond the general point that the Israelites recognized various other nations as linguistically different from themselves.

We must be cautious, however, in endeavouring to construct an Israelite linguistic geography from these texts. For the chief concerns of many texts may not be such as to require that they convey accurate geographical, ethnic or linguistic information. While Isaiah's oracle, to make sense, should refer to a tangible people or region, I have given reasons above why we should not expect the author of Exodus to have known anything about the language of Midian. In these cases, style-switching heightens a sense of foreignness, and thus reinforces whatever effect that foreignness is intended to achieve (such as the greater wisdom of the East—1 Kgs 4:30). But for this to be achieved, it must merely be held by the audience that it is *plausible* for the foreign nation in question to be alloglots. But the conventions of these genres may

make it clear that the audience is not expected to treat this imputed linguistic otherness as fact, or to leave the text thinking that they had learnt something new about the present or past linguistic geography of their environs. Thus, any attempt to use cases of style-switching as an aid to constructing a linguistic map must be attuned to considerations of a text's genre, purpose, and audience.

C. Israelite Distinctiveness

Lastly, I shall consider the bearing of the use of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible on questions of Israelite distinctiveness. Rendsburg has argued that style-switching should be associated with Israel's distinctiveness in its ancient context in two respects. Firstly, he suggests that this is a distinctively Israelite device; and secondly, he argues that it is an expression of how Israel understood itself as unique among the surrounding nations.

1. Claim 1: Style-switching is a distinctively Israelite device

On the first point, I shall quote Rendsburg at length:

> "Scholars of other ancient literatures (Akkadian, Egyptian, Greek, etc.) may wish to investigate whether other texts utilize language in this fashion. My hunch is that while occasional examples might be identified, no consistent employment of the technique herein described will be found in these corpora. By contrast, the twin devices of 'style-switching' and 'addressee-switching' represent a distinctive feature of ancient Israelite literary style."[142]

Rendsburg does not elaborate on the significance of this claim, but this would certainly be an important observation if it were correct. It would indicate that a, perhaps initially fortuitous, combination of linguistic consciousness and literary device was found especially useful in Israel, and gained a place among the literary devices cultivated by Israelite authors. It might

---

[142] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 189.

even show that Israel, in comparison with its ancient neighbours, had a greater or more developed awareness of language and linguistic diversity.

There are significant problems with Rendsburg's claim, however. Rendsburg's suspicion, for which he does not give a particular reason, is that style-switching will not be widespread in other ancient literatures. It may be objected that in the absence of a thorough search of these literatures for this feature, Rendsburg does not have grounds for suspecting its absence; in fact, there are reasons to suspect the opposite. I noted above that sociolinguists have shown that style-switching is a natural feature of spoken language: speakers constantly alter their style, making use of available variations in language, to achieve various communicative goals. It would be strange if, as Rendsburg suspects, this natural feature of language only rarely found its way into the literatures of ancient peoples. Further, it would be quite peculiar if linguistic otherness were not represented in Near Eastern literatures, given the high degree of language contact which has taken place in the region throughout history.

Rendsburg may respond that his point is specifically about the consistency of the use of style-switching. He suspects that the *consistent* employment of style-switching will not be found in extrabiblical ancient texts, thereby setting up an implicit opposition with the biblical sources.[143] In response, let us be clear: the use of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible is *not* consistent. As discussed above in relation to the book of Ruth, style-switching is only very rarely used to convey foreignness in the Hebrew Bible, when measured against the great number of passages in which foreign characters feature. It is therefore incorrect for

---

[143] Rendsburg's argument here exhibits a pattern that Machinist has described among claims for Israel's distinctiveness, of avoiding absolute differences, but rather finding significance in emphasis and distribution: "Not individual, pure traits, in short, but configurations of traits become the focus of the modern historian, if he wants to understand the distinctiveness of ancient Israel—or of any culture"; Peter Machinist, "The Question of Distinctiveness in Ancient Israel: An Essay," in *Ah, Assyria…: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor* (ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al; ScrHier 33; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 196–212, at 200.

Rendsburg to weigh extrabiblical ancient literature in the balances and find it wanting in this respect, when the Bible itself would fail the test.

And indeed there are clear instances of the representation of foreignness through style-switching in ancient literatures outside Israel. One is found in a ninth century Akkadian text from Uruk, *Ninurta-Paqidat's Dog-Bite* (or, *The Tale of the Illiterate Doctor*), which tells the story of a priest who travels to Nippur to be rewarded for saving a native of that city from a dog-bite.[144] In the priest's exchange with one of the local women, several humorous misunderstandings arise when she speaks to him in Sumerian, still the vernacular language of this ancient Babylonian religious centre, though the priest understands her to be speaking his vernacular, Akkadian. Finally the priest is condemned for his ignorance. Here switching of code and switching of style are blended, since the woman's Sumerian can also be understood as a peculiar and distorted form of Akkadian, though of course with entirely different meaning from what she intends. As Erica Reiner pointed out, this device in context achieves sophisticated literary ends, and shows awareness of the role of language in defining social and religious status, through its associations with high-prestige cultural realities like tradition and literature.[145]

Among classical examples, we may note the representation of the Persian speech of Pseudartabas, the "Eye of the Great King" in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (94–110). In the play, this cryptic speech, difficult for a Greek audience to comprehend, is understood by the protagonist, Dicaeopolis, and conveys important information about the Persians' intentions in

---

[144] For text, translation, and discussion see Antoine Cavigneaux, "Texte und Fragmente aus Warka" *BaghM* 10 (1979): 111–42, at 111–17; and Andrew R. George, "Ninurta-Paqidat's Dog Bite, and Notes on Other Comic Tales," *Iraq* 55 (1993): 63–72.

[145] Erica Reiner, "Why do you Cuss Me?" *PAPS* 130 (1986): 1–6; idem, "The Tale of the Illiterate Doctor in Nippur," *NABU* 2003: 62.

their relations with the Greeks. In this text, Jonathan Hall remarks that switching plays the role of "articulating ethnic and cultural stereotypes."[146]

In light of these and other examples from ancient literatures, where style-switching is used in relation to familiar sociolinguistic patterns and concerns, the distribution and purposes of the device in biblical texts do not seem distinctive.[147]

Thus, Rendsburg's suspicion that the Hebrew Bible's use of style-switching is somehow distinctive or unique cannot be sustained. Consequently no significance, such as Israel's greater or deeper level of language consciousness, can be derived from that supposed distinctiveness.

2. Claim 2: Through style-switching the biblical authors were attempting to demonstrate Israel's distinctiveness among the nations

Rendsburg's second point is about how we should think about the use of style-switching to represent foreignness in the Hebrew Bible. Rendsburg argues that it is to be connected to the wider biblical discourse about Israel's uniqueness or distinctiveness. This discourse is clearly documented in many texts, and the Hebrew Bible's "preoccupation with distinctiveness" has

---

[146] Jonathan M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 113. Another classical example is the *Poenulus* ("The Little Carthaginian") of Plautus. Here, much as in the *Illiterate Doctor*, the Punic phrases spoken by the character Hanno are occasionally mistaken for Latin by Agorastocles (lines 994–1027).

[147] If Rendsburg were, nevertheless, to insist that there is indeed a relative dearth of style-switching attested in extrabiblical ancient literatures, we might point out to him that, even with centuries of study of the Hebrew Bible by legions of scholars, it is only within the last few decades that a meagre number of often dubitable cases of style-switching have been discerned in that corpus. It will be quite some time before each line of text from the enormous volume of Akkadian literature receives as many hours of scholarly attention as each verse of the Hebrew Bible.

been studied by scholars including Machinist, whom Rendsburg cites.[148] Rendsburg writes: "Here, then, we find an explanation for the consistent use of style-switching and addressee-switching in the Bible. The Israelites were so aware of their distinctiveness, especially in the realms of society and religion, that all efforts were made to mark the foreignness of non-Israelites. Even language was brought into this picture."[149]

As discussed above, style-switching to represent foreignness is not common in the Bible, so it seems an exaggeration to say that Israel used "all efforts" to mark the foreignness of non-Israelites. But while I disagree with Rendsburg's particular way of phrasing this point, the point itself is worth consideration. Is this use of style-switching evidence that Israel conceived of its distinctiveness as, at least partly, linguistic? Does it show that the Israelites regarded their language as in some way special?

Firstly, we should note that the use of style-switching does not, in the abstract, convey a claim to distinctiveness. Strictly speaking, style-switching to represent foreignness simply points out the reality of linguistic otherness; it highlights a difference between the "us" of the reader and author, and the "them" of the foreigner. But to point this out is not in itself a claim of uniqueness. After all, all languages differ from one another; Hebrew is not unique in this. A claim of uniqueness would seem to consist rather in the affirmation that Hebrew is different from other languages *in a special or unique way*—that is, that Hebrew is different from, say, Aramaic and Akkadian, but not in the same way that Aramaic and Akkadian are different from one another. This kind of claim to distinctiveness is found, for instance, in postbiblical texts such as *Jubilees*, where Hebrew is presented as Yahweh's language at creation (*Jub.* 12.25–6), and is thus elevated to a uniquely privileged position above all other

---

[148] Machinist, "Question of Distinctiveness." An extensive list of passages that emphasize Israel's distinctiveness is usefully collected at pp. 203–4 n. 22.

[149] Rendsburg, "'Foreign' Factor," 189..

languages. Style-switching, however, does not point to these kinds of differences, but rather to precisely those differences by which, in varying combinations, all languages are separated: lexis, morphology, phonology, syntax, etc., as discussed earlier. Thus, style-switching to represent foreignness does not inherently contain any kind of significant claim to distinctiveness.

Thus if we are to accept Rendsburg's position, there need to be specific reasons why style-switching in the Hebrew Bible should be regarded as part of Israel's distinctiveness discourse. Rendsburg offers just one, and that only implicitly. By describing how the Hebrew Bible presents Israel as unique, and by emphasizing the ubiquity of these uniqueness claims in the corpus, Rendsburg implies that *anything* within the Bible that sets up a distinction between Israel and other peoples must be regarded as contributing to or participating in this discourse. Because that discourse is so overt, the distinction that style-switching points to cannot fail to be viewed in this way by a reader.

This is probably correct from a canon-critical perspective. In light of a great many texts which affirm Israel's distinctiveness in so many ways, it is natural to see the effect of style-switching as setting Israel apart in this way. Indeed, Machinist notes that Israel's distinctiveness was an important and pervasive element of the "world-view of the canonical organizers of the Hebrew Bible," who gave final shape to the earlier sources in which they found affirmations of this distinctiveness.[150]

But these considerations do not show that this note of distinctiveness radically adheres to the individual biblical instances of style-switching. Rather, within the more limited contexts of the books or smaller units of text in which they occur, it still seems possible to differentiate

---

[150] Machinist, "Question of Distinctiveness," 207. Machinist does not claim that these canonical-organizers' concern for their own people's uniqueness was in itself unique in the ancient world.

style-switching from this discourse. For instance, it seems far-fetched to hold that the switching present in the words of Job and Elihu, or of Lemuel's mother, shows that Israel is unique among the nations. Instead the device here imparts to these texts a foreign air, furthering the conceit that these speakers come from alien lands, and perhaps have the wisdom of the East to impart (1 Kgs 4:30).

For other style-switched texts, however, the association with Israelite distinctiveness may run deeper. In particular, affirmations of Israelite distinctiveness occur in close proximity to one of the texts judged to be a strong candidate for style-switching in this chapter. In Exod 18:11, we find an affirmation of Israel's distinctiveness in the speech of Jethro, whose words elsewhere in this same chapter contain style-switches of various kinds (on which, see above). The affirmation of distinctiveness (which does not in itself contain style-switches) occurs in v. 11, when Jethro, on learning the news about the exodus, confesses to Moses, "Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians, when they dealt arrogantly with them" (Exod 18:11). This confession clearly evokes the declarations of Yahweh's incomparability in the song recently sung at the sea (Exod 15:11), and, as Machinist has written, the uniqueness of Israel's god, Yahweh, and of his relationship with his people, lies at the "core of Israel's claim to distinctiveness."[151] Machinist points particularly to Deut 4:33–34 as a passage that clearly presents Yahweh's uniqueness and Israel's as interrelated: "Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation?" In a similar way, Jethro's confession of Yahweh's distinctiveness in Exod 18:11 should be regarded as also an affirmation of Israelite distinctiveness. The following chapter likewise emphasizes this unique relationship: Yahweh

---

[151] Machinist, "Question of Distinctiveness," 205.

promises to take Israel as his "treasured possession out of all the peoples" (Exod 19:5), distinct as "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (v. 6).

This case is intriguing. Is it a coincidence that both style-switching and the theme of Israelite distinctiveness occur in close proximity here? It is possible, but it is also possible that this arose out of a particular sensitivity of the author to distinctions among peoples. In Exod 18, those distinctions are conveyed both through explicit statements about Israel's uniqueness and through a literary device. Here, I interpret the use of style-switching not as a stand-alone claim to Israel's distinctiveness, but rather as a method of underscoring the distance between Israel and other peoples: the author subtly uses a literary device in close proximity to an explicit claim of uniqueness in order to enhance that claim.

This assessment of the function of style-switching in the distinctiveness discourse is more limited than Rendsburg's, but it takes its cue from his arguments. While there is certainly no single common goal that style-switching achieves in the Hebrew Bible, there are indications that it is associated with biblical claims to Israelite distinctiveness in some cases. This does not mean, however, that this association was in any way standard or traditional in ancient Israel, as Rendsburg argues, for this association was only clearly found in one text. Thus, future examinations into the distribution and functions of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible should be alert to the possibility that it may accompany claims to uniqueness; but they should not assume or expect it, for the device can and does achieve a range of effects in the texts in which it occurs.

VI. Chapter Summary

There are significant methodological difficulties involved in identifying instances of style-switching in the Hebrew Bible, and in determining whether their purpose is to convey linguistic otherness. Of the texts examined, biblical authors appear to have used style-switching to this effect in Gen 31, Exod 18, Judg 12, Isa 21, while in Ruth the device appears to be another end (perhaps to convey archaism). The precise forms of the style-switches encountered in these texts reveals something of the biblical authors' conception of the nature of language, and of their linguistic map of the Near East. The use of this device does not appear to be widespread in the Hebrew Bible, however, nor is the Hebrew Bible distinctive among other ancient sources in its use of style-switching to convey foreignness. In general this device is not used to convey a sense of Israel's distinctiveness compared with its neighbours, but this association may be discerned in one case (Exod 18).

Chapter 5

Code-Switching: Jeremiah's Message to the Idolaters and the Rabshakeh Episode

I. Introduction

A phenomenon studied by sociolinguists that is closely related to style-switching is code-switching. Code-switching describes a speaker's use of two or more different languages (codes) during one discourse. A speaker may switch codes between sentences (inter-sentential code-switching) or he may switch back and forth within the same sentence (intra-sentential).[1] In either case, such switching clearly presumes at least a degree of bi- or multilingualism among the speakers involved in a discourse. In a speech community, code-switching may be an acceptable and normal element of discourse, or it may be infrequent and censured.[2]

With regard to the functions or purposes of code-switching, Romaine writes that this practice "is a communicative option available to a bilingual member of a speech community on much the same basis as switching between styles or dialects is an option for the monolingual."[3] That is, codes, like styles, have social values within a speech community according to the role they play in that community. A particular language might serve, for instance, as the proper language of religion, or the official language of the state, or the language of the marketplace, or the language of a minority ethnic group, etc. From these roles and associations, codes

---

[1] Romaine, *Language in Society*, 57.

[2] Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, 68–69.

[3] Romaine, *Language in Society*, 59.

derive their particular social value, which can be invoked by a speaker who engages in code-switching, with the wide range of effects that was described in relation to style-switching in Chapter 4.

In a few cases in the Hebrew Bible, code-switching appears to be in view. Laban's Aramaic name for the heap of witness in Gen 31:47 has already been discussed (Chapter 4); this is a two word intra-sentential switch, which does not presume a great knowledge of Aramaic among the Hebrew speaking audience of the work. The presence of extended portions of Aramaic in the books of Ezra and Daniel will be examined in Chapter 7, in relation to the theme of linguistic diversity in these works more broadly. In this chapter, I shall consider two texts: Jer 10:11, a single Aramaic verse in the context of a Hebrew oracle in a Hebrew book; and the accounts of the Rabshakeh's speech before the wall of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36//2 Chr 32), where the issue of code-switching is raised by the characters involved.[4]

II. Jeremiah 10:11: An Aramaic Message for Idolaters

The presence of a short verse of Aramaic in Jer 10:11 within a Hebrew context (Jer 10:1–16) is an example of inter-sentential code-switching. An examination of the use of this device in this passage can be connected with a specific function of Aramaic in Jeremiah's speech community, and perhaps also an identity discourse within ancient Israel.

---

[4] Some instances of wordplay in the Hebrew Bible may rely on knowledge of two languages, and thus be related to the phenomenon of code-switching. One possible instance is in a question put in the mouth of the king of Assyria in Isaiah: "Are not my commanders all kings [הלא שרי יחדו מלכים]?" (Isa 10:8). In the use of שר, "(subordinate) officer, commander," and מלך, "king," here, Machinist, building on a suggestion of Hans Wildberger, detects an allusion to Akkadian *šarru*, "king," and *malku*, which is used to refer to the rulers of non-Assyrian nations, under the influence of West Semitic; Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image" in the First Isaiah," 734–35. See also Gary A. Rendsburg, "Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible," *VT* 38 (1988): 354–57. A thorough study of this phenomenon is desirable, but lies outside the scope of this dissertation.

כִּדְנָה תֵּאמְרוּן לְהוֹם אֱלָהַיָּא דִּי־שְׁמַיָּא וְאַרְקָא לָא עֲבַדוּ יֵאבַדוּ מֵאַרְעָא וּמִן־תְּחוֹת שְׁמַיָּא אֵלֶּה

"Thus shall you [pl.] say to them: The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth—let these perish from the earth and from below the heavens!"[5]

A. Textual Issues

This verse is present in all textual traditions, including fragments of Jeremiah from Qumran (4QJer[a] and 4QJer[b]). Among the Hebrew manuscript evidence, there is some minor variety in the spelling of כדנה, תאמרון, and להום. 4QJer[b] reads מן ארעא (with unassimilated *nun*), which is more usual in Aramaic and may be a correction.

B. Context

This verse appears with a larger unit, Jer 10:1–16, which has been the focus of much scholarly attention.[6] In these verses, the prophet instructs "the house of Israel" not to follow the "way of the nations" by worshipping powerless idols—the work of human craftsmen. Instead they should affirm Yahweh, praised as the mighty creator of the world. The order of the text in MT (supported by 4QJer[a]) and LXX (supported by 4QJer[b]) differs extensively in these verses: LXX omits vv. 6–8, 10, and places v. 9 between v. 5a and v. 5b. Verses 12–16 are repeated in MT Jer 51:15–19, which perhaps suggests they were originally a distinct

---

[5] My translation. Here, with William Holladay, I read the demonstrative pronoun אלה, "these," as referring to אלהיא, "the gods," and thus as the subject of יאבדו; hence, "let these perish." The position of אלה at the end of the clause is explained by the chiasmus (see below). Alternatively אלה, may modify שׁמיא: "these heavens" (so LXX). See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25* (Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 334.

[6] For an overview of recent scholarship beyond the articles and commentaries mentioned in this section, see Noam Mizrahi, "A Matter of Choice: A Sociolinguistic Perspective on the Contact between Hebrew and Aramaic, with Special Attention to Jeremiah 10.1–16," in *Discourse, Dialogue and Debate in the Bible: Essays in Honour of Frank H. Polak* (ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan; HBM 63; ASBR 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 107–24, at 115–121.

unit.[7] These textual difficulties indicate the complex textual history of Jeremiah, which appears to have circulated early on in (at least) two significantly divergent editions.[8]

C. Structure

This verse shows clear and careful structuring. From אלהיא to the end of the verse, a chiasm is apparent. The four elements are paired as follows: אלה/אלהיא, "the gods/these"; שמיא/שמיא, "the heavens/the heavens"; ארעא/ארקא , "the earth/the earth"; יאבדו/עבדו, "they made, created/let them perish."[9] The central pair of this chiasm displays skilful wordplay between the similar sounding אבד, "perish," and עבד, "do, make." In the subsequent verses, the Hebrew cognates or semantic equivalents of these words occur, giving the impression that this verse is well integrated into its context: עשׂה, "maker, creator" (v. 12); ארץ, "earth" (v. 12); שׁמים, "heavens" (vv. 12, 13); אבד, "perish" (v. 15).

In addition, several scholars have pointed out that our verse is integrated into two literary structures in MT. Meshulam Margaliot has discerned an alternating pattern in the topics addressed in vv. 10–16: now the idols are mentioned (vv. 3–5, 8–9, 11, 14–15), now the true god, Yahweh (vv. 6–7, 10, 12–13, 16). The effect here is to contrast these two opposing realities.[10] In addition, E. Ray Clendenen has detected an extended chiasmus of themes and vocabulary, running from v. 3 to v. 16. At the centre of this stands the Aramaic v. 11, which

---

[7] So Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 328.

[8] See, e.g., Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2d rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 319–26.

[9] For the significance of the orthographic variance between ארקא and ארעא, see below. Lacking a final *nun*, the Aramaic יֵאבַדוּ in Jer 10:11 is jussive, as is recognized in LXX's translation ἀπολέσθωσαν (3 pl. aorist impv.); see Rosenthal, *Biblical Aramaic*, 48.

[10] Meshulam Margaliot, "Jeremiah X 1–16: A Re-Examination," *VT* 30 (1980) 295–308, at 298.

appears thereby to be highlighted.[11] Therefore, if v. 11 is a secondary insertion into this passage, on which see below, it is not a careless one.

D. Date

The date of Jer 10:1–16 is uncertain. In general, these verses have been held to be an addition to the book of Jeremiah from the late exilic or postexilic periods.[12] Of particular relevance here is the thematic and verbal similarity of the idol polemic and praise of Yahweh as creator in these verses to the prophecies of Second Isaiah (dated to the mid to late sixth century B.C.E). A significant minority of scholars, however, downplay these similarities, and regard Jer 10:1–16 as belonging to the earliest phase of the composition of the book (late seventh or early sixth century B.C.E).[13]

But while the historical circumstances of the audience cannot, therefore, be determined with certainty, a *Sitz im Leben* is implied by the oracle's description of the manufacture of divine statuary. The descriptions in Jer 10:1–16 appear to derive from specifically Mesopotamian practices.[14] Thus, we may assume that the prophet is addressing a community in exile in Assyria or Babylonia, but it is unclear whether this community consists of descendants of exiles from the kingdom of Israel, as Margaliot suggests (in light of the reference in v. 1 to

---

[11] E. Ray Clendenen, "Discourse Strategies in Jeremiah 10:1–16," *JBL* 106 (1987): 401–8.

[12] So, e.g., Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1986), 254–55; Allen, *Jeremiah,* 125.

[13] So, e.g., Margaliot, "Jeremiah X 1–16," 304–7; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 329–30.

[14] See Marilyn J. Lundberg, "The *mīs pî* Rituals and Incantations and Jeremiah 10:1–16," in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen* (ed. John Goldingay; LHBOTS 459; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 210–17.

the "House of Israel"), or of the exiles of the kingdom of Judah (or their descendants) in Babylonia, as William Holladay and others suppose.[15]

A secondary issue is whether v. 11 is original to the context, or an addition to (and therefore later than) the rest of vv. 1–16. In support of the verse's originality in this context, Margaliot and Clendenen have argued that v. 11 plays an integral role in the literary structures of MT mentioned above; similarly, Holladay has argued that in LXX, v. 11 represents the essential climax of vv. 1–11.[16] However, since these arguments depend on the distinctive structures found in the two textual traditions of Jeremiah, and not shared between them, they do not inform us about the form of the putative *Urtext* of Jeremiah. What we can note, however, is that v. 11 is present in both of these textual traditions, and so predates their divergence.

In favour of the view that v. 11 is a secondary addition, the use of Aramaic in this verse has been pointed to by Carroll and others.[17] Such scholars argue that since this verse uses Aramaic to address its audience, it was most likely composed at a stage when Aramaic had displaced Judaean (Hebrew) as the primary language of Judaeans (most likely some point in the Achaemenid period).[18] This is not a strong argument, however. An Aramaic-speaking group in Judah among the educated elite is attested as early as 701 B.C.E., as will be discussed below with reference to the Rabshakeh episode. Thus, Jeremiah could have found an audience, though perhaps a slim one, for an Aramaic oracle at any point in his ministry, which is dated to the late seventh and early sixth centuries B.C.E.

---

[15] Margaliot, "Jeremiah X 1–16," 307; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 330.

[16] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 324–25.

[17] So, e.g., Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 256–57.

[18] See Chapter 7.

Noam Mizrahi presents two additional arguments in favour of the view that this verse is secondary to Jer 10:1–16. Firstly, Mizrahi observes that compared to its context it represents "a substantial difference in discoursive mode: while throughout the unit, in all its components, the nations are consistently described 'from afar', this is the only passage that dictates how to address them directly."[19] This is suggestive, but perhaps not probative, since a single author may have here made use of a degree of variation in phrasing and perspective that resulted in this difference.

Mizrahi's second argument is that the mixed Aramaic orthography of v. 11 suggests a date in the fifth century B.C.E.[20] In v. 11, "the earth" is spelt first with *qof*, וארקא, and then with *'ayin,* מארעא. The spelling with *qof* is more typical of Old Aramaic, where it represents *ḍ*; the spelling with *'ayin* represents a sound change of *ḍ* to *ᶜ*, and is commonly found in Imperial Aramaic. The spelling with *qof* appears, however, to have been retained beyond the completion of the sound change, and this situation is reflected in the use of both spellings in a single document from Elephantine from the fifth century.[21] Mizrahi supposes that Jer 10:11 reflects the same period of orthographic flexibility, and therefore rejects Margaliot's suggestion that the orthographic variance in v. 11 is deliberate, and that the variance points to two different stages in the verse's compositional history.[22]

But while the parallel from Elephantine supports Mizrahi's dismissal of the rhetorical significance of this variance, it is probably putting too much weight upon the evidence to use it to determine the date of this verse with specificity. For the sound change *ḍ* to *ᶜ*, and

---

[19] Mizrahi, "Matter of Choice," 121.

[20] Ibid., 122–23.

[21] *TADAE* B2.2 lines 4–6.

[22] Margaliot had suggested that the earlier orthography indicates a quotation from the idolaters concerning their gods' creation of heaven and earth, and taken from their ancient religious tradition. In contrast, the later orthography is used by to reflect the contemporary Aramaic of Jeremiah's audience; Margaliot, "Jeremiah X 1–16," 302.

accompanying orthographic shift of *qof* to *'ayin*, occurred over a long period.[23] Moreover, the orthographic variance in Jer 10:11 may have entered the tradition at a point after the verse's initial composition. We should probably not say more, then, than that Jer 10:11 attests to two diachronically differentiated orthographic practices, with an overlap covering the period in which the prophecies of Jeremiah were delivered, collected, and edited. To this extent I agree with Mizrahi, against Margaliot, that we should not discern authorial intent behind the orthographic variance in Jer 10:11.

E. Code-Switching in Jer 10:1–16

Overall, then, it is not clear whether Jer 10:11 is original in the context of Jer 10:1–16, nor what the historical background of that verse and its context are. Now, this uncertainty does not excuse the commentator from interpreting the switch from Hebrew to Aramaic in this context.[24] At some point in the history of this text (perhaps at the very beginning), a situation arose by the intention of an author/redactor in which a Hebrew text contained a brief sentence of Aramaic, a code-switch. However, being uncertain about the point at which this situation arose does make it more difficult for us to understand the significance of the switch to Aramaic. This is because we cannot be certain of the sociolinguistic circumstances surrounding this switch, and specifically the relative roles and social values associated with Hebrew and Aramaic in the speech community addressed in Jer 10:1–16. The meaning of a switch to Aramaic, a language of international diplomacy, in monarchic Judah of the late seventh century B.C.E., for instance, is dramatically different from the meaning of a switch to Aramaic, an everyday language, in the province of Yehud in the fifth century, because of the

---

[23] See Margaretha L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period: A Study in Linguistic Variation* (OLA 68; Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 63-70.

[24] Cf. Mizrahi, "Matter of Choice," 121 n. 43.

vastly different linguistic situations obtaining for Judaeans in the two periods (on which see further Chapter 7). For these reasons, we are limited in the level of detail and certainty with which we may reconstruct the significance of the code-switch in this passage, but such a reconstruction may be attempted in broad terms.

All interpreters have pointed out that the code-switch in Jer 10:11 is conditioned by the perceived addressees of this verse. Verse 11 is spoken by the prophet, who directs the House of Israel to deliver a message: "Thus shall you [pl.] say to them: . . ." The recipients of the message are not specified in this verse, but in the context they must be the idol-worshipping nations and craftsmen who form and decorate their idols, who are described at length in vv. 2–5, 8–9, 14–15.[25] The message that Israel is to deliver is that the divine effigies that these nations prize so highly do not deserve worship, and should be destroyed: "The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth—let these perish from the earth and from below the heavens!" The function of this code-switch is "addressee specification." According to Gumperz, this is one of the more common uses of code-switching, in which a switch "serves to direct the message to one of several possible addressees."[26] By switching into Aramaic at this point, the prophet implicitly indicates that this is the language that the people should use to address the audience of idol worshippers. This represents a broadening of the imagined audience from the Judaean (or Israelite) addressees of the rest of vv. 1–16: all the nations encountered by the Judaeans must understand it. The fact that Aramaic is the language in which the Israelites should communicate with the idol worshippers seems quite fitting, in light of the role of Aramaic as a lingua franca from the eighth century on in the Near East. In fact, because this function of Aramaic is a long-term sociolinguistic situation, we can be

---

[25] This is preferable to Daniel Snell's interpretation that it is the idols themselves who are addressed in Jer 10:11; Daniel C. Snell, "Why is there Aramaic in the Bible?" *JSOT* 18 (1980): 32–51, at 42. In fact the idols are the subject matter of this verse, referred to in the 3 per.: they are the earthbound "gods" that exist not within but "*under* heaven," as Holladay has pointed out; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 334.

[26] Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, 77.

fairly confident that audience-broadening (or rather, a conscious activation or highlighting of the broader cultural context in which the Judaean audience of the prophecy was embedded) was the intention of Jer 10:11 whatever its specific date of composition or insertion into vv. 1–16.

While this is surely the primary function of the code-switch in Jer 10:11,[27] some scholars have been troubled by the fact that the prophet's introduction to the message to the nations is also in Aramaic: "Thus shall you say to them." Wilhelm Rudolph, for one, pointed out that to switch at this point is premature, if the switch is for the purpose of addressing Aramaic-speaking idolaters.[28] Daniel Snell has also seen this as strange, suggesting that "an over-enthusiastic traditor may have put the beginning into Aramaic too."[29] These points do not recognize, however, that introducing this message in Aramaic itself fulfils a function. When the prophet addresses the "House of Israel" in Aramaic, he places his relationship with them in a larger context, and indicates that they are both part of or involved in the broader Aramaic-speaking world. It is not as if the Israelites are about to head off to distant lands that they have never known to give this message; rather idolatry is a part of the world they regularly encounter, a world through which they and the prophet move. To this world belongs a certain linguistic idiom. Through switching into Aramaic, the author of v. 11 moves the discourse of vv. 1–16 briefly into this world, making it clear in what realm the Aramaic message is to be delivered. At this point, we must admit that our uncertainty about the sociolinguistic situation of the author of v. 11 and his audience is limiting. We cannot be sure of the nature of the shared Aramaic-speaking world to which, according to the prophet, he

---

[27] There may be others. In line with observations from Gumperz, Clendenen notes that this code-switch serves to highlight the message in v. 11, as do the various literary devices described earlier; Clendenen, "Discourse Strategies," 408; Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, 77–81.

[28] Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia* (2d ed.; HAT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958), 71–72.

[29] Snell, "Aramaic in the Bible," 42.

and his audience belong. Is it the elites of the Judaean court, who speak Aramaic, as he does? Is it the community of Israelite and/or Judaean exiles throughout the Near East? Is it the remnant community of Judaeans in Yehud? Without this information, the precise social significance of using Aramaic in the address to the Israelites to evoke this world is lost on us.

In a related fashion, Mizrahi has pointed out that the author's choice to use Aramaic in this passage in like manner renders the use of Hebrew here also optional.[30] In general in the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew is the unmarked medium of discourse; we do not generally think it significant that an author uses Hebrew instead of some other language, for we do not think of the author has having made a choice to write in Hebrew.[31] However, "in a bilingual situation . . . speaking either language becomes a matter of choice, a decision that encodes specific cultural constructs and distinctive social identity."[32] Therefore, in contexts like Jer 10:1–16, where two languages are involved, it is clear that the author made a meaningful choice to use Hebrew at some points and not at others. We are then prompted to reflect on the significance of the choice of the use of Hebrew.

In the case of Jer 10:1–16, Mizrahi points out that Aramaic is associated with a group of outsiders, the undifferentiated idolatrous nations, addressed in v 11. In contrast, Hebrew is the language in which the prophet instructs his community about their god, and in which he denigrates the outsiders; thus Hebrew is the language of the in-group. In this way, an "us" is affirmed by the use of the Hebrew language, over against the "them" of the out-group, the

---

[30] Mizrahi, "Matter of Choice," 123–24.

[31] We do ask, however, why the author chooses to use a certain style or register of Hebrew and not another.

[32] Mizrahi, "Matter of Choice," 124. As Mizrahi phrases this observation, it was a later editor who, by inserting an Aramaic verse into Jer 10:1–16, made the use of Hebrew in the surrounding context into a meaningful choice.

Aramaic-speaking idolaters.[33] In the use of this device, Mizrahi detects a reflection of the change in the status of Hebrew that occurred in the Persian period: "Hebrew began functioning as a minority language, intelligible only to members of a well-defined group and exclusively used by—and for— them in order to convey 'in-group' messages. . . . Judean Hebrew or 'Jüdisch' was turning into 'Yiddish'."[34] However, it may be too much to claim that this single Aramaic verse "encapsulates" that entire historical process. Jeremiah 10:1–16 is an isolated example of the use of Hebrew and Aramaic this way, and it may not represent a general or common rhetorical strategy of the time at which this passage was composed or redacted.

F. Summary

The Aramaic verse Jer 10:11 is carefully phrased, and integrated thematically, verbally, and structurally into Jer 10:1–16, into which it may be a later addition. Uncertainties in the historical origin of the verse and the larger section hamper our ability to understand the sociolinguistic significance of the use of Aramaic here, but it should be related to Aramaic's role as a widely-known regional language. This use of Aramaic highlights the function of Hebrew here, also, and the two languages appear to delineate the boundaries of two communities.

---

[33] For this reason I do not, as Garnett Reid does, detect an idea of universalism in this verse. Reid regards the message that the prophet encourages Israel to deliver to the nations as kerygmatic, apparently intended to bring the nations to the worship of Yahweh; see Garnett Reid, "'Thus Shall You Say to Them': A Cross-Cultural Polemic in Jeremiah 10.11," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 221–38.

[34] Mizrahi, "Matter of Choice," 124. In the Rabshakeh episode, in contrast, the Judaean language is a permeable membrane, through which the foreigner can influence Judah; see below.

III. Code-Switching, Aramaic, and Judaean in the Speech of the Rabshakeh (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36)

The subject of code-switching is explicitly raised in the speech of the Rabshakeh, the envoy of King Sennacherib of Assyria to King Hezekiah of Judah (2 Kgs 18:17–36//Isa 36). Analysing the treatment of this subject in this episode reveals a great deal, in particular about the author's sensitivity to the dynamics of language selection.[35]

A. 2 Kgs 18:26–28 (///Isa 36:11–13)

> [26]Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and Shebnah, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak Aramaic to your servants, for we understand it [דַּבֶּר־נָא אֶל־עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲרָמִית כִּי שֹׁמְעִים אֲנָחְנוּ]; do not speak Judaean with us within earshot of the people who are on the wall [וְאַל־תְּדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ יְהוּדִית בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַחֹמָה.]." [27]But the Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own shit and to drink their own piss?" [28]Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in Judaean, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria!"[36]

B. Textual Issues

The complexity of the transmission history of the episodes duplicated, with minor differences, in 2 Kgs 18–21 and Isa 36–39 is well known. Though there are opposing voices, biblical scholars have generally held that these were first part of the book of Kings, and later came to be included in the book of Isaiah.[37] Nevertheless, at some points the text of Isa 36–

---

[35] Another account of this event, in 2 Chr 32, from a much later period, is discussed below, after the analysis of the 2 Kgs 18/Isa 36 version.

[36] NRSV modified. My citations will, in general, only be to the 2 Kgs account.

[37] For the view that the location in Isa is earlier, see, e.g., Peter R. Ackroyd, "Isaiah 36–39: Structure and Function," in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. Dr. J.P.M. van der Ploeg* (ed. W.C. Delsman; AOAT 211; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker, 1982), 3–12; and Klaas A. D. Smelik, "King

39 is more pristine. For our purposes, we may note that there are no textual difficulties that significantly affect the interpretation of the use of language in this episode.

C. Form and Dating

In 2 Kgs 18–19, King Hezekiah of Judah's relations with King Sennacherib of Assyria are recounted. The background for this material is Sennacherib's campaign in Judah in 701 B.C.E., recorded in that king's annals and in his monumental palace reliefs, which involved the destruction of the Judaean city of Lachish and perhaps a (limited) siege of Jerusalem. The biblical account of these events contains a certain amount of repetition. A short summary of Sennacherib's campaign, and Hezekiah's submission and payment of tribute to the Assyrian king, are reported in 2 Kgs 18:13–16 (absent from Isa 36). Following Bernard Stade, this has come to be referred to as the A account.[38] A second, much longer, account depicts negotiations between the Assyrian and Judaean kings through intermediaries, and the deliverance of Jerusalem from its enemies by Yahweh (2 Kgs 18:17–19:37). While this B account contains material of diverse origins, it has been broadly divided into two episodes, B$_1$ (2 Kgs 18:17–19:9a, 36–37) and B$_2$ (2 Kgs 19:9b–35).[39] Each of these displays a similar cycle: Sennacherib sends a threat to Hezekiah through his emissaries; Hezekiah petitions Yahweh for aid; and Yahweh promises deliverance through the prophet Isaiah.

Hezekiah Advocates True Prophecy," in his *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (OtSt 28; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 93–128, at 97–105. For the view that the location in 2 Kgs is earlier, see, e.g., Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39,* 458–61; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 260–64.

[38] Bernard Stade, "Miscellen. 16. Anmerkungen zu 2 Kö. 15–21," *ZAW* 6 (1886): 156–89.

[39] See especially Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (SBT 3; London: SCM, 1967), 70–103.

The A, B$_1$ and B$_2$ accounts should be thought of as depicting the same events of 701 B.C.E., though their perspectives differ. The shorter B$_2$ account appears to be dependent on B$_1$, but the relation between these and the A account is debated.[40] There are also indications that the speech of the Rabshakeh in B$_1$ is composite.[41] Because of this complex textual history, it is difficult to date the stages of composition and redaction of these texts. Since the brief A account accords very closely with Sennacherib's annalistic report of his campaign, it may be nearly contemporaneous with the events described. Similarly, the B$_1$ and B$_2$ accounts, as Machinist points out, show "a clear knowledge of Assyrian officialdom and techniques of war, and the definite impress of Assyrian power argues strongly that . . . together they belong to a literary process that began within living experience of the Neo-Assyrian empire, and so well before its collapse in the years 614–609 B.C.E."[42] Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the distinctive elements of Deuteronomistic thought that are present in, particularly the B$_2$ account (including the idea of cultic centralization in Jerusalem), suggest an association with the reforms of King Josiah of Judah in the late seventh century B.C.E.[43]

D. Context

The verses quoted above, in which the issue of the Judaean and Aramaic languages is raised, are taken from the B$_1$ account, which begins with the arrival of three high ranking Assyrian officials at Jerusalem, whom Sennacherib had dispatched from his camp at Lachish: the Tartan (Akk. *turtānu*), "Viceroy," the king's second-in-command who occasionally led

---

[40] See, e.g., Childs, *Isaiah*, 260–64.

[41] See, e.g., Jerome T. Walsh, "The Rab Šāqēh between Rhetoric and Redaction," *JBL* 130 (2011): 263–79; and Ehud Ben Zvi, "Who Wrote the Speech of Rabshakeh and When?" *JBL* 109 (1990): 79–92.

[42] Peter Machinist, "The *Rab Šāqēh* at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the Face of the Assyrian 'Other,'" *HS* 41 (2000): 151–68, at 166.

[43] See, e.g., Smelik, "King Hezekiah," 128.

campaigns on behalf of the king; the Rabsaris (Akk. *rab ša rēši*), "Chief Eunuch," an official

who often took command of military forces; and the Rabshakeh (Akk. *rab šaqê*), "Chief

Cupbearer," a high-ranking non-military officer with duties to the king's person.[44] Three

officials from Hezekiah's Judaean court exit the city to parley with these Assyrian officers:

Eliakim the palace steward (אשר על הבית); Shebnah the scribe (הספר); and Joah the recorder

(המזכיר). The Rabshakeh states the message Sennacherib has for Hezekiah: that Hezekiah is

outmatched, and that his confidence in his ally Egypt and his god Yahweh are misplaced (2

Kgs 18:19–25; speech 1). This message is interrupted by the Judaean officials, who request

that the Rabshakeh speak in Aramaic instead of Judaean, so that the people on the walls of

Jerusalem do not overhear (2 Kgs 18:26). The Rabshakeh refuses (v. 27), and takes the

opportunity to address the people directly, attacking their confidence in Hezekiah and

Yahweh, and promising them safety and prosperity in a new land if they submit to Assyria

(vv. 28–35; speech 2). When these messages are reported to Hezekiah, he is dismayed (2 Kgs

18:37–2 Kgs 19:1. Hezekiah consults the prophet Isaiah, who makes known Yahweh's

decision that the Assyrian king will depart from Judah and be slain in his homeland (2 Kgs

19:2–7).

In general, it seems that scholars have been content to grant that this account preserves and

builds from some historical memory of an Assyrian delegation sent to Jerusalem in 701

B.C.E.[45] However, the extent to which the biblical speeches of the Rabshakeh preserve the

historical rhetoric of Sennacherib and his officers is keenly debated. On the one side are those

scholars who hold that the arguments and phrasing of the Rabshakeh's addresses closely

---

[44] See Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1988), 229–30. Only the Rabshakeh is mentioned in Isa 36.

[45] So, e.g., Machinist, "*Rab Šāqēh*," 166–67; Ben Zvi, "Speech of Rabshakeh," 92; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 229–30.

reflect Assyrian practices, as attested elsewhere.[46] On the other side are scholars who argue

that the words of the Rabshakeh are a free composition of the biblical authors, paralleled

most closely elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[47] The issue cannot be deteremined with absolute

certainty, but it should be remembered that these biblical chapters contain a great deal of

historical information that can be externally verified (e.g., the siege of Lachish; the quantity

of Hezekiah's tribute payment to Sennacherib; the patricide of Sennacherib). We should be

open to the possibility, then, that the Rabshakeh's speech contains genuine recollections of

Assyrian rhetoric.

E. The Judaean Officials' Request to Code-Switch, and the Rabshakeh's Refusal

The Judaean officials request to code-switch from Judaean to Aramaic at the juncture of

speech 1 and speech 2, and the Rabshakeh's refuses to do so (2 Kgs 18:26–27). Somewhat

surprisingly this constitutes the only reference to foreign language in the extended historical

narrative from Joshua to 2 Kings.[48] The nature and role of the request-and-refusal appear to

have been carefully designed by the author of this episode, and investigating the request

highlights a number of significant issues.

Firstly, as Ullendorff, Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, and others have pointed out, the

request to switch specifically to Aramaic reflects the function of that language as an

international lingua franca in this period, and in particular as a language in which the Neo-

---

[46] So, for instance, Chaim Cohen, "Neo-Assyrian Elements in the First Speech of the Biblical Rab-Šāqê," *IOS* 9 (1979): 32–48.

[47] Thus Smelik, "King Hezekiah," 123–28; Ben Zvi, "Speech of Rabshakeh," 91–92.

[48] Although other passages in this corpus recognize distinctions *within* the speech of Israelites: Judg 12:6, the Shibboleth incident; and 1 Sam 9:9, the historical-semantic observation that "prophets" were once called "seers."

Assyrian empire carried out affairs.[49] As was pointed out in Chapter 2, from the early seventh century we have increasing evidence of the use of Aramaic alongside Akkadian in Neo-Assyrian administration. The biblical story presents that situation as already existing in the late eighth century, and thus is among the earliest attestations of the use of Aramaic by the Assyrians. The biblical account also supplements our knowledge of the situation in Judah. We do not yet have epigraphic evidence of Aramaic in Judah in this period, but may presume that it was used on the basis of this story.

Next we may note that the Jerusalem officials' knowledge of Aramaic in this case highlights an important social distinction in Judah.[50] For whereas the people of Judah are expected not to understand Aramaic, these important personages do.[51] The officials' knowledge should certainly be associated with their professional roles—these are individuals involved in the operation of the royal court, including foreign relations, for which knowledge of Aramaic is apparently required. But these are not simply technical interpreters; they occupy high roles in the state administration, and have direct access to the king. Thus their knowledge of Aramaic is associated with an extremely elevated social status. This observation accords with the basic sociolinguistic principle that the distribution of language use in a speech community is closely related to social distinctions. It is interesting to see this clearly reflected in this biblical episode.

We may now consider aspects of the request for a code-switch itself, including the preconditions for a switch, the motivations behind it, its consequences, and its phraseology.

---

[49] Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 457; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 232; Tadmor, "Role of Aramaic," 422.

[50] The Rabshakeh's knowledge of Judaean will be discussed below.

[51] Ullendorff is correct to note that the way this linguistic ability is expressed— שמעים אנחנו, "we understand it"—does not necessarily imply that the Jerusalem officials had active Aramaic competence, that is, that they could *speak* it; Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 457. However, this distinction does not appear to be emphasized in this episode.

Firstly, what are the preconditions that allow the Judaean officials to request a switch? Why do they think that the Rabshakeh might consent? The answer to this question lies in the fact that the explicit addressee of the Rabshakeh's first speech is Hezekiah. Speech 1 is a message from Sennacherib to Hezekiah, through their intermediaries; thus: "The Rabshakeh said to [the Jerusalem officials], 'Say to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you base this confidence of yours?'" (2 Kgs 18:19). On this grounds, so the officials of Jerusalem think, the people of Jerusalem do not need to know the content of the message—it is enough if Hezekiah's agents receive it; thus surely the language of the discourse can be switched?

The Rabshakeh's response contradicts the officials' assumption: "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall who are doomed with you to eat their own shit and to drink their own piss?" (2 Kgs 18:27). The point here is not merely that Sennacherib's message is relevance to *all* the people of Jerusalem, since they will all face the consequences of defying Assyria. Rather, the Assyrians' goals of bringing Judah to submission are more likely to result if fear and doubt are sown among the people. The analysis in the parallel account in 2 Chr 32:18 is thus spot on: the Assyrians spoke these words to the people "to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city." Thus, while Hezekiah may be the formal addressee of speech 1, the intended audience includes the people of Judah, and in this respect I agree with Machinist that "the two speeches really belong together as parts, or stages, of the same presentation."[52] A switch to Aramaic is therefore unacceptable to the Rabshakeh.

Secondly, the motivations of the request to code-switch are clear: the Judaean officials do not want the people of Jerusalem to understand the Rabshakeh's terrifying speech, and this will

---

[52] Machinist, "*Rab Šāqēh*," 155 n. 9.

be achieved if he ceases to use Judaean. In other words, the Judaean officials want to redefine the boundaries of this discourse, in order to exclude the people of Jerusalem from it. Thus, as in Jer 10:11, we may note the operation of "addressee specification" in motivating the (desired) code-switch.[53] In this case, the Judaean officials desire that code-switching be used to controlling the membership of a discourse, by excluding certain participants.

It is important to point out that this request involves an acknowledgement of the strength of the Rabshakeh's arguments. It is only because the Judaean officials fear that the Rabshakeh's arguments may succeed that they request the switch. As Sweeney writes, the "response by the Judean officers highlights their helpless situation."[54] Ironically, therefore, these Judaean leaders tip their hand in front of their people; in trying to mitigate the effect of the Rabshakeh's arguments, they validate them through their own fear. In this sense, the request to code-switch may function in the narrative to emphasize the strength of these arguments. This would be in line with the observations of Machinist regarding this passage. Machinist has argued that, in the critique of the "Judaean theology" in the Rabshakeh's speech, the author of this episode pulls no punches, so to speak. Rather this is a "frank, detailed, and apparently cogent critique" of that theology, the effect of which is "dazzling" on both the characters in the narrative and on readers of this text.[55]

Thirdly, in considering the consequences of the request to switch, we may also detect irony. When the officials ask the Rabshakeh to switch to Aramaic, not only does he not switch; in fact, he begins, in speech 2, to address the people directly, instead of Hezekiah, who was the addressee of speech 1. That is, the Rabshakeh switches audience, but not code, and thus in

---

[53] Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, 77.

[54] Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 416.

[55] Machinist, "*Rab Šāqēh*," 156–57. Machinist also explores the ways in which the narrative responds to this critique, on which, see more below.

provoking this change in code, the request of the Judaean officials has an important function in the structuring of the narrative. In his second speech, the Rabshakeh uses a slightly different set of arguments that appeal specifically to the concerns of the Judaean people, as Ehud Ben Zvi has noted.[56] For instance, he assures them that the land to which they will be deported is a fertile one, resembling their homeland (2 Kgs 18:31–32). He also repeatedly warns them not to trust Hezekiah's promises of safety (vv. 29–30, 32). These arguments primarily address not Hezekiah's fears, but the people's. Thus the request to code-switch results in the Rabshakeh deploying arguments that are more direct and persuasive to the people than those given in speech 1, and hence even more likely to lead the Judaeans to submit to the Assyrians. In this way there is a keen irony in the fact that the Judaean officials' request to code-switch achieves the opposite of its intended effect. I hesitate to draw theological conclusions from this narrative device, but in the context of the book of Isaiah, we may detect a resonance here with the repeated theme of the futility of human political scheming, in light of Yahweh's ultimate control of terrestrial events (as in, e.g., Isa 30).[57]

Fourthly and finally, the manner in which the request to code-switch is expressed in 2 Kgs 18:26 is extremely telling. As Polak has demonstrated, dialogue in the Hebrew Bible is often carefully structured and phrased to in accordance with the characters' social relationships (e.g., inferior to superior) and communicative goals (negotiation, etc.).[58] This appears to be the case in the interaction between the Rabshakeh and the officials of Judah, as I shall now describe.

---

[56] Ben Zvi, "Speech of Rabshakeh," 82–83.

[57] On this theme in Isaiah, see, for instance, John Barton, *Isaiah 1–39* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 28–44.

[58] Frank H. Polak, "Forms of Talk."

Through the use of respectful and deferential language, the Judaean officials position themselves as the inferior participants in this discourse. They refer to themselves as the Rabshakeh's "servants" (עבדיך), and as Craig Morrison points out, this usage conveys the "inferior status of the speaker with respect to the addressee and compliment[s] the addressee's status." [59] In addition, the Judaean officials use the particle נא: "Please speak [דבר נא] Aramaic to your servants." As Morrison notes, this particle is "typically understood as softening a command, thus rendering a request more courteous."[60] In contrast, the Rabshakeh's language contains little deference or respect for the Judaeans. Cogan and Tadmor have observed that Hezekiah is never referred to as "king" by the Rabshakeh, while the Rabshakeh uses the respectful and aggrandizing title המלך הגדול, "the great king," (2 Kgs 18:19, 28) to refer to Sennacherib.[61] Indeed, the contempt in which the Rabshakeh holds the Judaean officials is conveyed by his use of crude language in his response to their request. He predicts that the officials, along with the people of Jerusalem, will soon "eat their own shit [חריהם, K] and drink their own piss [שיניהם, K]" (v. 27).[62]

The relative positioning of these characters through respectful and disrespectful language is thus clear in the narrative. Indeed, it is in keeping with language elsewhere in this chapter that implies that Hezekiah (had) stood in some formal relationship of political subordination to Sennacherib: Hezekiah admits that he "sinned, offended" against Sennacherib (חטא, v. 14); this act is described as "rebellion" (מרד, vv. 7, 20) and as a refusal to continue to "serve" (עבד, v. 7). Correspondingly, the Rabshakeh and the Judaean officials, in their interaction with one another, play out the respective roles of their masters.

---

[59] Craig E. Morrison, "Courtesy Expressions: Biblical Hebrew," *EHLL*, n.p.

[60] Ibid. So also BDB at נא 609a–b; IBHS 683–84. The precise function of נא is disputed however, as Morrison notes.

[61] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 231.

[62] The Qere forms are much more polite: צאותם, "their excrement," and מימי רגליהם, "water of their legs."

These roles of superiority/inferiority may also explain the explicit nature of the Judaean officials' request to code-switch. For the most part, as Gumperz points out, a speaker initiates a code-switch without comment and without seeking permission; indeed, speakers are often unaware of having made a switch.[63] However, Romaine notes that code-switching of this kind involves certain interpersonal claims. At the very least, it involves the claim that the speaker has the right to exert control over the (medium of) discourse. It often also involves the creation of a "we" between speaker and audience, that is, the claim that a bond of some kind exists between the speaker and his audience, be it a bond of ethnic kinship, or proximity in age or social status.[64] In making such claims, the speaker exposes himself to risk: the risk that he has misread the terms of the discourse, or the nature of the relationship between himself and his audience. If this gamble fails, the consequences can be severe. Code-switching that is perceived as inappropriate by a speaker's audience can result in severe offence or anger, and thus potentially the failure of the speaker's communicative goals, or worse.[65]

It seems that in the Rabshakeh episode, the Jerusalem officials are unwilling to make any such claims. Rather than simply switching the language of the discourse, the officials seek the Rabshakeh's permission to do so. In this way, they do not presume the right to control this discourse, and thus they do not challenge the superior role that they concede to him when they call themselves his "servants." Nor do they create a "we" with the Rabshakeh by switching into a language that they presume he and they both know. Thus, the Judaean officials reduce the risk of offending the Rabshakeh through such presumptions, and appear to be employing a carefully chosen discourse strategy, in aid of achieving their goal: that the

---

[63] Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, 62–64.

[64] Romaine, *Language in Society*, 60.

[65] See ibid., 61.

Rabshakeh code-switch to Aramaic. The Rabshakeh, of course refuses, and in so doing clearly asserts his control over the discourse. This is in accordance with his general rhetorical stance as representative of Sennacherib, in whose hands lies the fate of Judah and Jerusalem.

Thus, the interaction between the Judaean officials and the Rabshakeh appears to be carefully structured according to strategies of discourse suited to the participants' communicative goals. In particular, the author of this episode, in representing this code-switching request how he does, has paid careful attention to the impact of switching, and the idea of switching, on the dialogue.

F. The Rabshakeh's Knowledge of Judaean

A question that some (though surprisingly few) interpreters of this episode have raised is, How did the Rabshakeh come to be able to speak the language of Judah? This intrigued Ullendorff, who did not suggest an answer, except to the effect that knowledge of Hebrew cannot have been widespread in Assyria, and therefore that the "Rabshaqeh may have been specifically selected for his mission on account of his exceptional knowledge of Hebrew."[66] Tadmor concurs with Ullendorff, but goes further: "The reason why the Rab-shakeh, and not one of the officers higher in rank, addressed the Judeans should be sought in the Rab-shakeh's fluency in the language of Judah. He might even have been of Israelite extraction, from a noble family exiled to Assyria."[67]

---

[66] Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages," 457.

[67] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 230; see further Hayim Tadmor, "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: Historical and Historiographical Considerations," *Zion* 50 (1985): 65–80, at 65–66 [Hebrew]; and idem, "Rabshaqeh," in *Entsiklopedya mikra'it* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1976), 7:323–25 [Hebrew].

Tadmor's tentatively proposed hypothesis is the only answer to this conundrum that is widely entertained, if not supported. It reflects a rabbinic tradition attested in the Babylonian Talmud: רב שקה ישׂראל מומר היה, "The Rabshakeh was an apostate Israelite" (*b. Sanhedrin* 60a).[68] We should note that this Talmudic hypothesis cleverly explains, as Machinist points out, not one but two surprising facts:[69] firstly, that the Rabshakeh knew the language of the Judaeans—this is explained by calling him an "Israelite"; and secondly, that the Rabshakeh knew specific details about the religion of Yahweh—this is explained by calling him an "apostate," one who once followed the faith, but later rejected it. By associating language and religion/theology in this way, the Talmud thus shows sensitivity to the issues involved in the narrative.

In considering Tadmor's modern hypothesis, we must make a clear distinction between history and historiography that has, in this specific matter, not generally been emphasized. Tadmor's hypothesis attempted to answer the historical question: How could an official in the Assyrian empire have come by knowledge of the Judaeans' native language? However, a distinct historiographical question should also be posed: How did the author and redactors of the various retellings of the Rabshakeh episode in 2 Kgs 18//Isa 36//2 Chr 32 imagine that this Assyrian official could speak Judaean, and is this conveyed in these texts? The two questions must of course be brought into relation, but the nature of the evidence and argumentation required to construct answers to each question is quite distinct.

We may first address the historiographical question, which appears easier to answer. I submit that the origin of the Rabshakeh's linguistic knowledge is of no interest to the author/editors

---

[68] The function of this reference in the Talmud is to demonstrate the conditions under which a Jew who overhears blasphemy is required to rend his clothes. According to this tractate, only blasphemy uttered by Jews necessitates such a response. What explains, therefore, the rending of clothes of Hezekiah and his officials when they hear the blasphemy of the Assyrian Rabshakeh (2 Kgs 18:37; 19:1)? Surely the fact that the Rabshakeh was Israelite.

[69] Machinist, "*Rab Šāqēh*," 159–60 n. 23.

of these accounts. In other instances in the Hebrew Bible, individuals do occupy high roles at courts foreign to them, as, for instance, Joseph the Hebrew at the Egyptian court (Gen 41:45), Doeg the Edomite in Saul's Israelite court (e.g., 1 Sam 22:9), and Nehemiah the Judaean in Artaxerxes' court in Persia (Neh 2:1). However, the ethnicity or country of origin of the Rabshakeh is not stated in the accounts of this episode. What is more, only his official Assyrian title is given, and not his name that might have suggested a land of origin to the reader. Thus, the narrative offers no reason, except for his linguistic ability, for us to regard the Rabshakeh as anything other than an Assyrian, let alone as specifically an Israelite.

Outside the narrative itself, there is one potentially relevant contextual indication: in 2 Kgs 18:9–12 the defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.E), and the deportation of its inhabitants to Assyria (and Media), is repeated just before the beginning of the Rabshakeh episode. I imagine it is this that suggested the Israelite apostate hypothesis found in *b. Sanhedrin*'s, but it is far from clear that the Rabshakeh's Israelite origin is implied here. However, it does suggest to the reader that Assyrian interests in the region were longstanding, and that a reader might expect that the Assyrians had developed an infrastructure for interacting with the locals. In any case, this close association of the Rabshakeh episode with the defeat of the northern kingdom is only made in the 2 Kgs 18 telling of this episode; it is not found in Isa 36 or 2 Chr 32. It is not, therefore, widespread in the biblical Rabshakeh tradition, and indeed the point in the complex compositional history of 2 Kgs 18–19 at which this link, if it is one, arose is quite unclear.

For these reasons, I feel justified in repeating that the origin of the Rabshakeh's linguistic knowledge is not of interest to the author/editors of these accounts. That is not to say, however, that it is irrelevant that the Rabshakeh uses Judaean; indeed, the Rabshakeh's use of Judaean invites us to consider the relationship between the content of the speech and the

medium in which it is expressed. As Machinist has emphasized, one of the functions of the Rabshakeh's speech appears to be to present a particular perspective from within Judah. The Rabshakeh casts suspicion over various aspects of the "Judaean theology," and perhaps most notably over Hezekiah's centralization of the cult in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:22). Now, it is very probable that such suspicion was voiced within Judah when Hezekiah (and/or Josiah) demolished the shrines and high places of Yahweh throughout the land. Thus, the effect of putting these arguments in the Rabshakeh's mouth is, as Machinist points out, to externalize those arguments, to associate them with a foreigner. This both highlights these arguments, by associating them with the formidable Assyrians, and it discredits them, since these become, not the opinions of a Judaean or a Yahwist, but rather an Assyrian and an idolater. In this way, by "othering" these attitudes, the narrative polemicizes against them.

It is interesting that in this polemical externalization of an internal Judaean attitude, that attitude is not also linguistically othered. Though spoken by a foreigner, these critiques of Judaean theology are nevertheless expressed in the Judaean language. Now, there is a clear reason in the narrative why the Rabshakeh's speech is in Judaean: so that the Judaean people understand it. But more than this, we may suspect an association between language, on the one hand, and culture and religion, on the other: the Judaean debate is naturally expressed in the Judaean language, even on the lips of an Assyrian. Alternatively, the deviousness or blasphemy of the Rabshakeh's arguments might be heightened by the fact that he uses Judaean to express them; the Rabshakeh intrudes upon a community's discourse that would otherwise be bounded by language, and uses the very language of Judah against that community. As Machinist writes, in the Rabshakeh's arguments the "boundary between insider and outsider is . . . threatened."[70] Thus, while the biblical author/editors do not appear

---

[70] Ibid., 164. Indeed, it may be more than a coincidence that the Judaean officials interrupt the Rabshakeh just after he has made a potentially theologically objectionable claim (on behalf of Sennacherib): "Yahweh said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it'" (2 Kgs 18:25). In asking the Rabshakeh to switch to Aramaic,

to be interested in explaining the Rabshakeh's knowledge of Judaean, the character's use of that language may be associated with some of the chief concerns of the episode.

We may move, now, to the historical question: How could an official in the Assyrian empire have come by knowledge of the Judaeans' native language? At this point, it is unnecessary to explore in depth the arguments for establishing the *possibility* of Tadmor's hypothesis, and it would take us too far from the topic at hand. Broadly speaking, the plausibility of the hypothesis cannot be doubted. Provincial units, including Israelite ones, appear to have served in the Assyrian army in the late eighth century B.C.E., and senior officials in the Assyrian bureaucracy did not always come from the Assyrian heartland.[71] Furthermore, it is clear that there would have been a strategic advantage to Sennacherib's campaign in southern Palestine of bringing along someone with relevant local knowledge. Thus, there seems to be no fundamental objection to the proposal that one Assyrian Rabshakeh was of Israelite stock.

The argument from the Rabshakeh's linguistic competence to his ethnicity should, however, be modified somewhat. The intuition underlying Tadmor's hypothesis seems to be this: the Rabshakeh knew Hebrew; among peoples integrated into the Assyrian empire by the late seventh century, the Israelites spoke Hebrew; therefore the Rabshakeh was an Israelite. However, this train of thought involves a slight blurring of distinctions. For as Cogan and Tadmor observe concerning this episode, "[t]he Hebrew spoken is referred to as Judean, in contrast to the dialect spoken at the same time in the northern kingdom."[72] But as an Israelite,

---

these officials may be motivated to stop the use of the language of Judah to "mock" and "revile" Yahweh (2 Kgs 19:4, 5).

[71] See Tamás Dezső, *The Assyrian Army* (2 vols.; Budapest: Eötvös University Press, 2012–), 1.2: 32–35; and Stephanie Dalley, "Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 31–48. For arguments against Dalley's identification of the "Samarians" mentioned in these texts as Israelites, see Israel Eph'al , "The 'Samarian(s)' in the Assyrian Sources," in *Ah, Assyria…: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor* (ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al; ScrHier 33; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 36–45.

[72] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 232.

the Rabshakeh would have spoken the northern, rather than the southern dialect, Israelite rather than Judaean.[73] If this is the case, we would have to admit that the kernel of the historical memory contained in the biblical Rabshakeh episode is not that the Rabshakeh spoke *Judaean*, but rather that the Rabshakeh spoke a language/dialect *very much like* Judaean, a language intelligible to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, namely Israelite Hebrew.

However, if we are content to admit that the Rabshakeh spoke a dialect closely related to Judaean, the argument from his linguistic ability to his Israelite ethnicity is not strong. For, to be able to argue from this to the Rabshakeh's Israelite identity, it would need to be established that only Israelite and Judaean Hebrew would be understood by the inhabitants of Judah. But this is not supported by the historical evidence. For one thing, as discussed in Chapter 2 above, the category "Hebrew"—being the language of all Israel, of the northern and southern kingdoms—is not attested in the Hebrew Bible or elsewhere in the pre-Hellenistic Near East. Rather, the Hebrew Bible attests two categories: the language of Judah, which is more restricted than "Hebrew"; and the language of Canaan, which is less restricted than "Hebrew." On the other hand, epigraphic evidence does not support extreme dialectal divisions in the languages of southern Canaan, nor does it strongly support the creation of a demarcated category called "Hebrew" as the language of all Israel. That is, the dialects of the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah, which contained clear differences, are not notably more similar to one another than they are to the dialects spoken in Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia.[74] Dialect variants are discernible throughout the region, but a great deal of mutual intelligibility must have obtained.

---

[73] If we suppose the Rabshakeh had some additional competence of specifically *Judaean* Hebrew, on top of his Israelite Hebrew, we are undermining the explanatory force of this argument—the Rabshakeh's Israelite identity was specifically supposed to account for why the Judaeans could understand him; further qualifications render this intuition less and less powerful.

[74] See Garr, *Dialect Geography*, 227–35.

Therefore, the argument cannot run "the Rabshakeh knew Hebrew; therefore he was Israelite," since Hebrew as a concept is anachronistic for this period. The argument must instead be: the Rabshakeh knew a dialect close to Judaean Hebrew, and therefore he was Canaanite of some stripe. Independent reasons must therefore be given for why we should suppose that the Rabshakeh was, specifically, *Israelite*. Here, Tadmor's reference to the deportations from Israel to Assyria in the late eighth century B.C.E. is suggestive. But in this period, the Levantine campaigns of Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, and Sargon II left few, if any, of the Canaanite states untouched, and we must assume that people from these various kingdoms were deported to Assyria. It seems just as possible, therefore, that the Rabshakeh was an Ammonite, Moabite, Philistine, etc., as that he was an Israelite.

Another argument for the Rabshakeh's specifically *Israelite* Canaanite identity might be built from the knowledge of Yahwistic theology that he demonstrates in the speech at the walls of Jerusalem: as a member of the people of Israel, the Rabshakeh would be familiar with this theology, and could therefore use it in his rhetoric. Though Tadmor appears to reject this argument (supposing that the Rabshakeh gained his theological knowledge from Assyrian informants),[75] the Babylonian Talmud, as noted above, appears to reason in this manner. Such an argument is, however, problematic on several grounds.

For one thing, as discussed earlier, the reference to Hezekiah's Deuteronomistic-like centralization of the cult in the Rabshakeh's speech may be a reflection of inner-Judaean debate, rather than an element of the historical Rabshakeh's rhetoric. Thus, it is problematic to take it as evidence in favour of the historical Rabshakeh's Israelite identity. But even if this did appear in the historical Rabshakeh's speech, it does not seem to support his Israelite identity; for in the biblical speech we see a reflection of a distinctively *Judaean* theology,

---

[75] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings,* 231.

which prioritizes the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem, the southern capital. A northerner, however, might not be expected to have exposure to such theology simply *qua* northerner. Thus the Judaean theology in the Rabshakeh's speech does not strongly support the hypothesis of his Israelite identity.

Overall then, it appears that, while it is possible that the Rabshakeh was Israelite, this hypothesis has as much support as that he was from some other Canaanite kingdom. If we now try to relate the history and the historiography, we may note several points. On the one hand, the biblical accounts do not rule out Tadmor's hypothesis; since the Rabshakeh's ethnicity is not stated in these accounts, an Israelite origin is not excluded. As noted, however, they do not support that hypothesis in particular, and, indeed, they seem quite uninterested in explaining the Rabshakeh's knowledge of Hebrew.

It is also true that Tadmor's hypothesis explains an anomaly in the texts, namely, the fact that a largely non-military imperial official, the Rabshakeh, would take part in a campaign in Palestine, and play such a significant role in the negotiations with Judah. The biblical authors do not have any apparent motivation to cast this particular Assyrian official in this role, and indeed they may not even have known the particular function of a Rabshakeh. Thus what would explain his appearance in this story is the brute historical circumstance that there was a Rabshakeh who, perhaps alone among Sennacherib's senior officials, could speak with the Judaeans. In fact, this anomaly is not only explained if the Rabshakeh was specifically *Israelite*; it is also likewise explained if he was from some other people of Canaan.

Another point we may make in relating history to historiography in this episode concerns the distinction between Judaean and other Canaanite dialects. Whether we accept Tadmor's specifically Israelite hypothesis, or a more general Canaanite identity, we would have to admit that during the course of the transmission of this text, the difference between the dialect

of the Rabshakeh and the speech of the Judaeans was obscured. Such a reference to the language of the Rabshakeh by the glottonym "Judaean" may have any number of explanations, including simple terminological imprecision or factual error in recollection.

In sum, a broadened version of Tadmor's hypothesis, that the Rabshakeh was from some part of Canaan, presents one quite plausible explanation of the Rabshakeh's knowledge of Judaean or a related dialect. However, unless further evidence is discovered, the issue will remain undecided, in large part because the relevant biblical texts are more interested in the threatening consequences of the Rabshakeh's knowledge of this language, rather than its source.

IV. Sennacherib's Message in 2 Chronicles 32

The representation of Sennacherib's campaign in Judah in 2 Chr 32:1–23 differs significantly from that in 2 Kgs 18–19//Isa 36–37, upon which it clearly depends.[76] The Chronicler's account is shorter by approximately two thirds, and, as Sara Japhet writes, a great deal of this material is "omitted for the sake of creating a simpler and more unified account": the Chronicler combines elements from the accounts referred to above as B_1 and B_2 into a single episode and eliminates a great deal of repetition.[77] In this process, mention of the code-switching request by the Jerusalem officials has fallen away. Indeed, no mention is made of

---

[76] 2 Chr 32:1–8 contains references to events not mentioned in the 2 Kgs//Isa telling—Hezekiah's fortification of Jerusalem, his stopping of springs outside the city, and an exhortation he delivers to the city's people. The first of these two may make use of earlier source materials that are no longer extant; see Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1993), 978.

[77] Ibid., 977. See also Childs, for a comparison of the 2 Kgs 18–19/Isa 36–37 accounts with 2 Chr 32; Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 106–111. Childs regards the Chronicler's activity here as "midrashic"; ibid., 111.

the Jerusalem officials at all, nor are the titles of the Assyrian officials recorded.[78] The

omission of the reference to code-switching can be related to a number of discernible

concerns in the Chronicler's reworking of the earlier source materials for these events, and of

these concerns I shall here note two major ones and two minor.

Firstly, according to the Chronicler, both Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem were

confident that Yahweh would deliver them. Before Sennacherib's messengers arrive,

Hezekiah delivers a stirring oration to his people, stating that the king of Assyria compares

unfavourably to Yahweh: "with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is Yahweh our God, to

help us and to fight our battles"; and the people were encouraged by this speech (2 Chr 32:8).

As Machinist points out, Hezekiah's response to these circumstances contains, like

Hezekiah's prayer in the B_2 version, "no hint of panic," and, moreover, this reference to the

people's confidence is unique to the Chronicler.[79]

In this context of confidence in Yahweh, the code-switching request from the Jerusalem

officials would be entirely out of place. As was discussed above, this request acknowledges

the power of the Rabshakeh's arguments: they are too dangerous for the people to hear. But

to admit that the Rabshakeh's arguments had weight is not acceptable to the Chronicler, since

Yahweh's unchallenged supremacy is patent and indubitable. As Machinist notes, the

Chronicler's theological position is stated before Sennacherib's messengers have arrived, and

hence the reader is pre-equipped with the counterargument to Sennacherib's claims about

himself. They thus appear as merely empty boasts from the beginning.[80] In a similar way, no

persuasive force is granted to these arguments by the request to hide them from the people of

---

[78] In the case of the titles of the Assyrian officials, Ralph Klein suggests that the Chronicler "may have dropped these terms since he did not understand them"; Ralph W. Klein, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary* (Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 463.

[79] Machinist, "*Rab Šāqēh*," 162–63.

[80] Ibid., 162.

Jerusalem through a switch in languages. The omission of this reference thus contributes to the Chronicler's overall effort to undermine the force of the Assyrians' rhetoric.

Secondly, a reference to the code-switching request would be in conflict with what Japhet has identified as the increased role played by the people of Judah in the Chronicler's account.[81] According to 2 Chr 32:9, Sennacherib's messages were sent both to Hezekiah "and to all the people of Judah." This is in contrast to the 2 Kgs 18–19//Isa 36–37 account, where Hezekiah alone is the intended recipient. In this earlier account, the address to the people (speech 2; 2 Kgs 18:28–35) arises only in the Rabshakeh's extemporaneous and opportunistic response to the Jerusalem officials' discomfort. The Chronicler, however, thoroughly reworks the phrasing of the Assyrian arguments from the B_1 and B_2 accounts. The second person singular verbs are replaced with second person plurals, and Hezekiah is always referred to in the third person. In this way, the people of Jerusalem become consistently the addressees of the entire message. Thus, for instance, "On what are you [pl.] relying, that you undergo the siege of Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you?" (2 Chr 32:10–11).

In this reformulation of Sennacherib's message, the code-switching request from the Jerusalem officials would have been entirely futile from the outset. For, in 2 Kgs 18:26 the request only stands a chance of succeeding because it is Hezekiah, and not the people, who is the formal addressee of the Rabshakeh's message. But in the Chronicler's account, even this (weak) ground for the request is eliminated. The people are the explicit addressees of Sennacherib's message from the beginning, and the Assyrian emissaries could hardly be expected to begin to speak in a language that their intended audience does not understand. Indeed, the Chronicler recognizes that speaking in Judaean is required for the Assyrians to achieve their intended effect, "to frighten and terrify" the inhabitants of Jerusalem (2 Chr

---

[81] Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 986.

32:18). Thus, a request to code-switch would stand out as hopeless and foolish in the Chronicler's account, and run contrary to the increased role played by the people of Judah here.

Two other elements of the code-switch request may have been disagreeable to the Chronicler. For one thing, the inferiority of the Jerusalem officials to the Rabshakeh, implied in the deferential language in which their request is expressed, is incompatible with the Chronicler's scheme. For, as Japhet and Klein point out, the language implying that Hezekiah was politically subordinate to Sennacherib, listed above, is deleted in the Chronicler's retelling.[82] Hezekiah and Sennacherib are thus enemies of equal political status for the Chronicler, and it would not be appropriate for the Jerusalem officials to plead before the Assyrians.

Secondly, it should be pointed out that the logic of the code-switching request relies on a linguistic situation quite different from the Chronicler's and his audience's. In 2 Kgs 18:26, the Jerusalem officials request that the Rabshakeh switch from Judaean to Aramaic so that he will not be understood by the people on the wall. Here, Aramaic is a language understood only by an elite class, in contrast to Judaean, the vernacular of the people of Jerusalem. But in the late Achaemenid or early Hellenistic period when the Chronicler was writing, the linguistic situation of Judaeans was quite different, and perhaps even reversed.[83] For while the learned Chronicler appears to take pride in composing a work in an archaizing form of Judaean/Hebrew, knowledge of Aramaic among the less learned inhabitants of Yehud (or Judaea) may have been more widespread than knowledge of Judaean/Hebrew.[84] Thus, in order to include the Jerusalem officials' request to code-switch, the Chronicler might have felt the need to provide an explanation of how the earlier linguistic situation, reflected in his

---

[82] Ibid., 987; Klein, *2 Chronicles*, 459.

[83] For considerations relevant to dating the activity of the Chronicler, see Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 6–11.

[84] See Chapter 7.

sources from 2 Kgs, differed from his audience's (although any reader could have inferred this from the episode in 2 Kgs 18//Isa 36). This explanation the Chronicler may have been unwilling to give, perhaps because of his desire to abbreviate rather than lengthen this episode; or perhaps because it would have raised an uncomfortable issue for him, namely, the alienation of the Judaean community from what to the Chronicler is clearly an important element of Judaean heritage—Hebrew.

The omission of the Jerusalem officials' code-switching request is thus seen to be entirely in keeping with the Chronicler's concerns in reworking the earlier account of Sennacherib's campaign. Moreover, these concerns resonate throughout the books of Chronicles and form some of the authors' major themes—the supremacy of Yahweh; the role of the people of Judah, and not simply its kings, in the nation's political and theological history; Israel and Judah's status as mighty regional powers; and perhaps also the significance of the Hebrew language. Examining the lack of a code-switch request from 2 Chr 32 thus provides us with a valuable opportunity to observe how the author reshaping his sources in line with these themes.

V. Chapter Summary

The use of the code-switch from Hebrew to Aramaic in the carefully worded message to idolaters in Jer 10:11 can be understood in light of a particular social role of Aramaic as a Near Eastern lingua franca. Uncertainty regarding the precise date of this verse and hence its original audience prevents us from placing this code-switch into a particular sociolinguistic context. However, it appears to be related to the establishment of a group boundary between Israel and the ubiquitous idolaters. In 2 Kgs 18//Isa 36, the Judaean officials' code-switching

request acknowledges the force of the Rabshakeh's arguments, and plays an important role in structuring the narrative. The precise form in which this request is phrased displays the author's sensitivity to the dynamics of language choice. However, the author does not appear to be concerned with the question of how the Rabshakeh came to know Judaean, and we are ultimately unable to ascertain this, though we can entertain reasonable possibilities. In 2 Chr 32, the omission of the code-switching request can be clearly linked to the author's concerns in rewriting Judaean history, and perhaps also to his sociolinguistic context.

Thus, code-switching, or the idea of it, is clearly put to different uses in 2 Kgs 18 and Jer 10. In each case, however, the author has paid careful attention to the significance and possibilities of language choice, and at play in both is the role of language as a boundary distinguishing Israel/Judah from external entities. In particular, in both cases, as might be expected, it is Aramaic that marks the out-group, whereas the in-group is indicated by Hebrew.

Chapter 6

The Invasion of the Alloglot Nation

I. Introduction

In this chapter I examine a theme repeated in biblical prophetic and related literature, that of an invading nation who speaks a foreign language. I dub this the "alloglot invader theme." This theme occurs in Deut 28:49; Isa 28:11; 33:19; Jer 5:15; Ezek 3:5–6. I shall first analyse these passages individually, beginning with the fullest expression of the motif in Jer 5:15, and moving to briefer or more unusual formulations of it, noting similarities and differences throughout. After this, I shall consider the question of the fundamental dynamics of the theme, and the history of this tradition. Finally, I shall address a question which these texts prompt us to consider: Do we find in the Hebrew Bible anything comparable to the ancient Greek concept of barbarity?

II. Jer 5:15

הִנְנִי מֵבִיא עֲלֵיכֶם גּוֹי מִמֶּרְחָק בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם־יְהֹוָה גּוֹי אֵיתָן הוּא גּוֹי מֵעוֹלָם הוּא גּוֹי לֹא־תֵדַע לְשֹׁנוֹ
וְלֹא תִשְׁמַע מַה־יְדַבֵּר

> I am going to bring upon you a nation from far away, O house of Israel, says
>   Yahweh.
> It is an enduring nation, it is an ancient nation,
> A nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say.

A. Textual Issues

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, the Greek text of Jeremiah varies widely from MT. In this passage, omissions and abbreviations seem to have occurred, although these do not require the postulation of a variant Hebrew *Vorlage*.

Firstly, LXX omits גוי איתן הוא גוי מעולם הוא, which, as J. Gerald Janzen notes, may be attributed to haplography, since גוי occurs four times in this verse.[1] Secondly, whereas MT has two clauses about the invader's language, LXX has only one: ἔθνος οὗ οὐκ ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς τῆς γλώσσης αὐτοῦ, "a people the sound of whose language you will not hear." Several factors seem to be involved. Abridgement of parallel phrases is not uncommon in the Septuagint, and William McKane suggests that it is at work here: a composite rendering was created using the noun from the first clause of MT and the verb from the second.[2] The influence of a parallel passage in Deut 28:49 is also clear, where in the LXX we find practically the same wording: ἔθνος, ὃ οὐκ ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ. Finally, the double rendering of לשנו as τῆς φωνῆς τῆς γλώσσης αὐτοῦ may have arisen through association with the parallel in Deuteronomy. Joseph Ziegler suggests that τῆς φωνῆς is secondary, and entered the text as a correction by the scribe according to Deut 28:49.[3]

The Vulgate and Peshitta support MT in this verse.

---

[1] John Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 97.

[2] William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986–1996), 1:123.

[3] Joseph Ziegler, *Beiträge zur Ieremias-Septuaginta* (*NAWG* 1958.2;. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 102–3.

B. Structure and Context

There is carefully structured parallelism in the presentation of the foreigners' language here. The stichs begin with לֹא. This is followed by verbs morphologically and semantically parallel, תדע and תשמע, both 2 masc. sg. imperfects, which express the knowing (תדע) or understanding (תשמע) of a language. לשנו corresponds to מה ידבר, displaying syntactic parallelism of the nominal-verbal kind.[4]

As is unfortunately the case in much of the book of Jeremiah, a definite structure or sense of unity in this chapter is difficult to discern. The immediate context of the verse under discussion is a description of the punishments which Yahweh will inflict on Israel (vv. 15–19), involving the coming of a powerful enemy. This enemy will devour Israel's sons and daughters, and its livestock and agricultural produce, and will assault its fortifications, without, however, utterly annihilating Israel. A description of Israel's crimes is found in vv. 11–13 and Yahweh announces his judgement in v. 14. Thus the context in which this verse should be interpreted is most naturally 5:11–19.

C. Interpretation

According to a standard prophetic trope, the punishments decreed in this section fit the wrongs that Israel had committed. Israel is accused of a complacent, misplaced confidence, expressed in a series of denials which Yahweh will prove false: "No evil will come upon us [תבוא עלינו], and we shall not see sword [וחרב] or famine" (v. 12). Yahweh declares, however, "I am going to bring upon you [הנני מביא עליכם] a nation from far away" (v. 15); the coming of

---

[4] See Berlin, *Biblical Parallelism*, 54–56.

this nation, which devours everything in its path, will lead to famine; and by its sword (בחרב) will Israel's defences be demolished (v. 16).

This careful compositional strategy may also go towards explaining the formulation of the reference to the ancient nation's unintelligible language. In v. 13, Israel denies the validity of Yahweh's prophets thus: "The prophets are nothing but wind, for the word [הַדְּבֵּר] is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them!" Yahweh counters this claim, proving that the prophetic word is not "hot air" by transforming it into ravaging fire: "Because they have spoken [דברכם] this word [הדבר], I am now making my words [דברי] in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them [ואכלתם]" (v. 14).[5] The threefold repetition of the root דבר in this short verse underscores its importance to the passage, and suggests that its occurrence in the following verse is correspondingly significant: "I am going to bring upon you a nation …. whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say [מה ידבר] (v. 15)." This verbal resonance links the language of the foreigners with the prophetic word rejected by Israel and reaffirmed by Yahweh. Likewise, the invaders' voracious appetite, which consumes everything in its path (the root אכל appearing four times in v. 17), connects them with the devouring fire of Yahweh's word.

The effect of this careful patterning is complex. On the one hand, it presents the ancient nation as a physical manifestation of Yahweh's word, perhaps even a personification. This is an extreme variation on a long tradition within Israelite prophecy of presenting foreign armies as tools that Yahweh uses to enact his designs.[6] The invasion of the ancient nation is also hereby portrayed as a fitting punishment for Israel's crime: Israel rejected prophetic speech, wishing it back on the heads of the prophets; in the future it will be assailed by

---

[5] This verse appears to contain an allusion to the description of the "prophet like Moses" in Deut 18:15–19, into whose mouth Yahweh will place his prophetic word; however, in Jer 5:14 Yahweh's word is only destructive.

[6] Perhaps this technique is developed most fully in the prophecies of Isaiah of Jerusalem (e.g., Isa 10:5–19), on which see, inter alia, Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image."

speech that it cannot even understand. As will be shown below, this association of foreign language with the rejection of prophecy is a recurrent element in the texts which form the subject of this chapter.

One further aspect of this verse which merits comment is the juxtaposition of the foreign nation's antiquity with the unintelligibility of its language: "It is an enduring nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say" (v. 15). Rashi explains this joint presentation in the following way: "From days of yore it began to rebel against Me, in the generation of separation [דור הפלגה] in the land of Shinar."[7] Since Shinar is the name of the land where the tower of Babel is built (Gen 11:2), the implication is that the nation described by Jeremiah is the Babylonians, who are heir both to the land and to the habits of the ancient builders. In his comment on Gen 11:1, Rashi portrays the building of the tower as an act of war against Yahweh, in defiance of Yahweh's exclusive ownership of "the upper regions." Like the ancient builders, Jeremiah's Babylonians oppose Yahweh, by warring with his people.

Throughout Jeremiah, Babylonia is the nation which threatens Israel, so the fact that Rashi would identify the unnamed nation in Jer 5:15 with Babylonia is quite natural. A further explanation of Rashi's linking of these two passages may be a specific verbal connexion, namely, the use of שמע in the sense "to understand (a language)" in both (Gen 11:7; Jer 5:15). It is quite possible that this allusion is intended, since others have detected awareness elsewhere in Jeremiah of the tower of Babel episode.[8] By invoking an event from ancient history at this point, Jeremiah may be using a technique which is especially widespread in

---

[7] Rashi's interpretation is noted in passing by McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:124. The "generation of separation" is the standard rabbinic way of referring to the Tower of Babel episode.

[8] So Kline, "Transforming the Tradition," 206–13.

apocalyptic prophetic literature, that is, the likening of the future to the past, the end to the

beginning, which pictures history as one great ring composition.[9]

Thus it becomes evident that the strange speech of the ancient nation in Jer 5:15 is woven

into a text which displays an intricate compositional structure, both at the level of the

individual poetic stich (parallelism) and within the larger unit in which it occurs. The theme

is developed through several prophetic modes, and is employed in service of sophisticated

literary and theological ends.

III. Deut 28:49

יִשָּׂא יְהוָה עָלֶיךָ גּוֹי מֵרָחוֹק מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִדְאֶה הַנָּשֶׁר גּוֹי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִשְׁמַע לְשֹׁנוֹ

Yahweh will raise a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, to swoop
down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand.[10]
(Deut 28:49)

A. Textual Issues

For גוי אשר לא תשמע לשנו, LXX has ἔθνος, ὃ οὐκ ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ. John William

Wevers claims that the translator of LXX Deut failed to notice the reference to foreign

language here.[11] This is because τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ, which he translates as "its voice" or

"sound," is used to translate לשנו; and the idiomatic meaning of שמע as "to understand (a

language)" is not conveyed by ἀκούσῃ (unlike, for instance, *intellegere* in Vulg.). Wevers

---

[9] For the classic exposition of this prophetic technique, see Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895).

[10] NRSV modified.

[11] John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy* (SCS 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 488.

suggests that "the translator took the image of the swooping eagle to refer to the silence of the attack, and so translates the continuation as 'a nation whose voice (or better "the sound of which") they did not hear'; it would be a surprise attack."

I disagree with this assessment for the following reasons. Φωνή, which can mean "speech" and "a (particular) language,"[12] is in fact a very sensitive translation of לשׁון in this usage. In addition, literalness of translation in LXX is not a good indicator of (mis)understanding; LXX Greek is full of calques from Hebrew usage. Thus, the use of ἀκούσῃ in Deut 28:49 (and in Jer 5:15) cannot be taken to imply that the translators misunderstood שׁמע here. Thus Wevers is incorrect to argue that LXX appears to have mistaken the Hebrew sense.

The other ancient versions show no significant textual issues in this verse.

B. Context and Dating

This verse forms part of the curses (vv. 15–68) invoked upon Israel if it disregards the law of Yahweh as laid out in Deuteronomy. These curses are paired with a (much briefer!) list of blessings that Israel should expect if it observes its god's commandments (vv. 1–14). This chapter has a complex editorial history, one probably fairly representative of the processes which the entire book of Deuteronomy underwent. While the blessings saw little expansion, the curses seem to have acted as something of a repository for the many ills that eventually befell Israel, but dating the redactional layers that accrued is made difficult by the absence of names and dates from the vivid curses of this chapter. Though many of these are presumed to

---

[12] See LSJ at φωνή, definition A.II.2.

be *vaticinia ex eventu*,[13] specifics appear to have been avoided by the book's redactors as anachronistic.

Verse 49, with which we are concerned, comes at the head of a stratum which is characterized by a different tone from those which precede it. From v. 47 to v. 57, the curses are presented unconditionally, as if Israel's faithlessness is a done deed, and as if the curses listed will certainly come. Thus Richard Nelson assigns it to a third compositional layer of four, the first being the original curses (vv. 15–19), the second an early expansion of them (vv. 20–46), and the fourth a clearly postexilic addition (vv. 58–68).[14]

This redactional stratum narrates the events of an invasion step by step, and because of this apparent familiarity with military defeat it has been dated to the exilic period by, among others, von Rad.[15] But while this is plausible, it is not certain, as Nelson notes.[16] Conquests and deportations were not limited to a single episode in the history of Israel and Judah, and descriptions like these could have been elicited by any one of the more-or-less destructive campaigns by the Assyrians and Babylonians to the southern Levant from the late eighth to the early sixth centuries. Indeed, as John Thompson points out, images and descriptions which appear in these verses were used throughout this period, such as the eagle (נֶשֶׁר; Hos 8:1; Jer 48:40; Ezek 17:3).[17]

---

[13] So, for instance, Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (trans. Dorothea Barton; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1966), 173.

[14] Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 323.

[15] von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 175.

[16] Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 323.

[17] John A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 276.

C. Interpretation

The curse in Deut 28:49 is related to others recorded in this chapter (and which are generally considered to be earlier): "your sons and daughters shall be given to another people [לעם אחר], while you look on" (v. 32); "a people whom you do not know [עם אשר לא ידעת] shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors" (v. 33); "Yahweh will bring you, and the king whom you set over you, to a nation that neither you nor your ancestors have known [גוי אשר לא ידעת אתה ואבתיך]" (v. 36).[18]

These descriptions are primarily negative. They portray the unknown nation as one with whom Israel has had no prior relationship, and hence about whom Israel knows absolutely nothing, except what these curses describe. The literary effect of such apophasis is to increase tension: the unknown holds greater fear than the known, and these descriptions allow the reader or listener to imagine the very worst about this enemy. In comparison with these earlier descriptions, v. 49, which mentions for the first time the nation's language, introduces a new unknown factor, and thus intensifies the impression, as Jeffrey Tigay has noted.[19]

There may also be a historiographical purpose to describing the unknown nation in these terms. Israel's knowledge of political geography was informed by the normal processes of its foreign relations: trading and warring with close neighbours, turning to Egypt in difficult times, and so on. But the nation described in Deut 28 sits beyond the boundaries of this constructed geography, so extremely distant (גי מרחוק מקצה הארץ) that Israel has had, as yet, no knowledge-building encounter with it. That such a nation should begin to play a part in Israel's history is a statement to the effect that the course of Israel's history will change

---

[18] We may also compare Deut 32:17, "They sacrificed to demons, not God, to deities they had never known [לא ידעם]."

[19] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 269.

dramatically; a new era in the nation's life will begin, of quite a different type from what came before. Such is the significance of choosing to disobey Yahweh's commands. This is effectively conveyed by descriptions of the nation as one unknown to Israel.

In this section of Deut 28, the moulding of threats to the crimes they punish is at work. For example, in vv. 47–48 we read that "Because you did not serve [לֹא עבדת] Yahweh your God … therefore you shall serve [ועבדת] your enemies whom Yahweh will send against you." This device is present also in the reference to foreign language in Deut 28:49, as it was in Jer 5:15. In v. 49, a nation will come "whose language you do not understand [לֹא תשׁמע]." We should connect this with the use of שׁמע in v. 45, which reads "All these curses shall come upon you … because you did not obey [לֹא שׁמעת בקול] Yahweh your God." This paronomasia plays upon the polysemy of שׁמע, "hear," in Hebrew. When followed by בקול or לקול, שׁמע takes on the specific nuance "to obey, heed." In another usage, when a language is the object of hearing, this verb means idiomatically "to understand."[20] Thus the sin of not listening to Yahweh's words will be punished by subjecting Israel to baffling sound of their conqueror's language.

D. Relationship to Jer 5:15–17

The similarities between the curses outlined in Deut 28:47–57 and the judgement pronounced by Yahweh in Jer 5:15–17 have long been recognized. Not only are there specific verbal connexions, but, as Winfried Thiel has commented, the sequences in which the items are presented are also alike.[21] Some relationship is therefore generally accepted to obtain

---

[20] The other instances of this usage are Gen 11:7; 42:23; 2 Kgs 18:26; Isa 33:19; 36:11; Jer 5:15; Ezek 3:6.

[21] Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25* (WMANT 41; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 94–99.

between these texts. The verses we have been dealing with—Deut 28:49 and Jer 5:15—may be used to illustrate this relationship.

Both verses begin with Yahweh's declaration to bring upon Israel a nation from afar, and specific verbal parallels are apparent: עליך (Deut 28:49); עליכם (Jer 5:15); גוי (twice in Deut 28:49, four times in Jer 5:15); מִמֶּרְחָק (Deut 28:49); מֵרָחֹק (Jer 5:15). After this, both texts claim that Israel will not understand (לֹא תשמע) this nation's language (לשׁנו). Other similarities follow, such as the use of אכל to describe the nation's destructive rampage (Deut 28:51; Jer 5:17). Thus we see here specific linguistic connexions as well as a similarity in order.

These similarities are striking enough to show a direct relationship between these passages. That is to say, the author of one these passages knew the other passage in some form. What is difficult to determine is the direction of this relationship, because no simple description of the relationship between the books of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah explains the complex set of textual connections between them. Philip Hyatt, for instance, argued that Jeremiah knew a form of Deuteronomy, but that later additions to Deuteronomy were made with reference to Jeremiah, and that editors inspired by Deuteronomy altered and expanded the text of Jeremiah.[22] Thus, the direction of influence needs to be decided on a case by case basis.

In the case under discussion, the overall brevity of the description in Jer 5 slightly suggests its primacy over Deut 28:47–57. This is emphasized by Ernest Nicholson, and also by Hyatt, who imagines the editor of Deuteronomy to be validating Jeremiah's prophecy through this reference.[23] However Jer 5 is not shorter at every point. For instance, where Deut 28:49 has a single clause describing the language of the foreign nation, Jer 5:15 has two. Because these two clauses in Jer 5:15 contain, broken apart, the entirety of the single clause in Deut 28:49

---

[22] Philip J. Hyatt, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," *JNES* 1 (1942): 156–73.

[23] Ernest W. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1–25* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 62; Hyatt, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," 172–73.

(לא תשמע / לשנו), Robert Althann has suggested that the passage in Jeremiah is later,[24] Jeremiah's reformulation of this expression constituting an allusive expansion of an earlier tradition, associating Israel's sins in the prophet's time with the ancient law of Yahweh and the curses consequent on breaking it.

Internal factors do not therefore clearly demonstrate the direction of influence between Jer 5 and Deut 28:47–57. Moreover, as is often the case in biblical studies, the absolute date of these passages cannot be ascertained with certainty. Therefore, we must admit that the question of priority between these texts is not currently resolvable. It is, however, important to note the closeness of the relationship, which may suggest the origin of them both in a similar historical situation. Because of this uncertainty, we are unfortunately unable to draw conclusions about the development of the alloglot-invader theme through time by comparing these passages. However, this theme constitutes a clear point of contact between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, a point of contact apparently important within these texts themselves, in that it forms a locus of allusion and redaction, and so one valuable to our scholarly understanding of these books.

E. Parallels in Other Ancient Near Eastern Literature

In structure and content, as has long been discussed, Deuteronomy shares many features with ancient treaty documents from Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and the Levant. For instance, one recurring feature in these texts is a historical prologue outlining the relationship between the covenanting parties, which the opening chapters of Deuteronomy resemble. Chapter 28 especially, the blessings and curses consequent upon observing or abrogating the terms of the

---

[24] Robert Althann, *A Philological Analysis of Jeremiah 4–6 in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (BibOr 38; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1983), 157–58.

covenant with Yahweh, has been illuminated by such comparisons,[25] and this holds true also in the case of threats of defeat by a foreign enemy.

Though many texts with general similarities could be adduced, I mention here only two parallels which display particular relevance to Deut 28:47–57. Firstly, among the curses invoked upon perfidious parties in the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon, defeat by a foreign enemy is listed. For instance, "may your sons//[not possess] your house; may a foreign enemy [*nakru aḫû*] divide your goods" (6.429–30).[26] Secondly, in the curses at the close of the Laws of Hammurabi, Ishtar is invoked to punish the one who does not heed Hammurabi's pronouncements as follows: "May she deliver him into the hands of his enemies [*ana qāt nakrīšu*], and may she lead him bound captive to the land of his enemy [*ana māt nukurtīšu*]" (50.92–51.23).[27]

Despite these similarities, no mention is made in these texts of the language spoken by the foreign enemy, and we may thus, with von Rad, regard the curse of the alloglot invader as originating in prophecy, rather than treaty or legal literature.[28] The biblical attestations to this theme, after all, are concentrated in prophetic literature (Jer 5:15; Isa 28:11; 33:19; Ezek 3:5–6), with Deut 28:49 as the only exception. This would be another respect in which Deuteronomy in its current form is related to the Israelite prophetic tradition.[29] This bears on the broader relationship of the curses in Deuteronomy to ancient treaty documents. When Moshe Weinfeld described this relationship, he saw greater influence of the "Levantine

---

[25] See Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 116–146.

[26] Translation taken from D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958), 61–62.

[27] Translation taken from Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (2d ed; SBLWAW; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 139.

[28] von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 175.

[29] For a good survey of the links between Deuteronomy and the prophets, along with one theory explaining those links, see Ernest W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 58 ff.

lifestyle" on the curses in Lev 26 than on Deut 28, the latter being more closely aligned with treaty curses than the Leviticus passage.[30] However, the presence of the alloglot-invader curse in Deut 28 shows that these predictions of doom were also distinctively influenced by Israel's intellectual heritage.

IV. Isa 28:11

<div dir="rtl">כִּי בְּלַעֲגֵי שָׂפָה וּבְלָשׁוֹן אַחֶרֶת יְדַבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם הַזֶּה</div>

> Truly, with stammering speech and with alien language he will speak to this people. (Isa 28:11)[31]

A. Textual Issues

Plural verbs in the LXX (λαλήσουσιν) and Targum (הוו מלעגין) suggest that their *Vorlagen* read *ידברו. As discussed below, both sg. and pl. would make sense in context, and do not significantly change the interpretation of the verse. Otherwise the versions support MT.

B. Context

Chapter 28 begins with the condemnation of the "drunkards of Ephraim" and Israel's religious officials, intermixed with predictions of their downfall, which extends to v. 8. This is followed by a rhetorical question, "Whom will he teach knowledge?," (v. 9) and the notorious *crux interpretum*: צו לצו צו לצו קו לקו קו לקו זעיר שם זעיר שם (v. 10). After v. 11 (the

---

[30] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 57.

[31] NRSV modified.

one relevant for our purposes), an unheeded message about giving "rest to the weary" is recalled, and then Yahweh's word of judgement is stated: first the formula from v. 10 is repeated (v. 13), and a punishment, in the form of an "overwhelming scourge," is decreed for a people who covenanted with death (vv. 14–22).

C. *Meaning of the root* לעג *in* בלעגי שׂפה *(Isa 28:11) and* נלעג לשׁון *(Isa 33:19)*

The root לעג also appears in a similar context in Isa 33:19, in the phrase נלעג לשׁון. I shall discuss this verse in greater detail below, but here I shall consider the meaning of the root in these two verses. The standard modern interpretation of לעג here attributes to it the meaning "to stutter, stammer,"[32] whereas ancient interpretations generally understood the word in its more usual sense in biblical Hebrew, "to mock, deride."[33] Thus the meaning of the root deserves attention.

Firstly, we may consider it established that these usages should be viewed in tandem. Both of the passages in which they occur are concerned with foreign language, expressed in each case through the parallel terms לשׁון and שׂפה. That foreignness is at issue is shown by the use of אחרת, "other, strange" in Isa 28:11 (see below), and seems clear in Isa 33:19 from the reference to עם עמקי שׂפה משׁמוע, "people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend" (with which compare Ezek 3:5–6). In addition, these are apparently the only two uses of לעג in the Hebrew Bible in connection with foreign language, occurring within a few chapters of each other in the book of Isaiah. Thus it is natural to interpret them together.

---

[32] So, for instance, Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 381; Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 13–39* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 234; Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39* (trans. Andrea Spans; HTKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2010), 41.

[33] E.g., LXX φαυλισμὸν, "contempt" (Isa 28:11) and πεφαυλισμένος, "contemned" (Isa 33:19); Tg. תולעבא, "ridicule" (Isa 28:11). The etymological renderings of Isa 33:19 in the Tg. and Syr. make their interpretation unclear.

לַעֲגֵי in Isa 28:11 is the construct plural form of the noun לַעַג,[34] which seems in all other instances of the noun in biblical Hebrew to mean "mockery, derision." Only here does this noun occur in the plural. In Isa 33:19 נִלְעַג is to be analysed as a Niphal masculine singular participle in the construct state. This is the only use of the Niphal of this verb in the Hebrew Bible. The verb is also attested in the Qal (more than ten times) and Hiphil (five times), where it always means "to mock, deride."

Therefore the chief obstacle—and it is a very strong one—to interpreting לעג as "stutter" is the fact that Isa 28:11 and 33:19 would be the only two cases in biblical Hebrew where the root means that. There are factors, however, which speak in favour of this understanding.

Firstly, this meaning is attested in cognate languages. The root לעג in Aramaic (sometimes) and Syriac (regularly) means "to stammer, stutter,"[35] which makes it conceivable that the word in Hebrew may have carried the same sense. The two meanings—"stammer" and "deride"—could indeed be related, as suggested in *HALOT* ("to stammer in someone's face, to deride"; compare English "snigger"), although this must be regarded as speculative.

Secondly, the meaning of "stammer, stutter" fits the context well. In Isa 33:19 "a people … of mocked [perhaps 'ridiculous'] language [נלעג לשון]" is not an appropriate designation of an enemy which is otherwise presented fearfully, but "stuttering of tongue" is, since, as I discuss further below, it is common cross-culturally to liken the sound of foreign languages to speech defects. For the same reason, "with stutterings of speech, with speech-stutterings [בלעגי שפה; Isa 28:11]" makes better sense than "with mockeries of speech." Additionally, in Isa 28, this description seems to be linked to the formula צו לצו צו לצו קו לקו קו לקו זעיר שם זעיר שם (vv. 10,

_____

[34] The form לַעֲגֵי is also attested in Ps 35:16, where it is usually interpreted as an adjective (from *לָעֵג), "mocking" (so BDB and *HALOT*); however, both the reading and the meaning of that verse are uncertain.

[35] Sokoloff, *Syriac Lexicon*, at ܠܥܓ. A cognate in Akkadian, Arabic, or other Northwest Semitic languages is not apparent.

13). Though the semantic value of this string of repeated syllables is very unsure (see below), nevertheless when considered phonetically, it certainly displays the characteristic feature of stuttered speech.

Thus there is sufficient cause for taking לעג to mean "stutter" in these passages.

D. Interpretation

It is not possible here to resolve the interpretative difficulties of Isa 28, of which scholars have offered widely differing opinions in their attempts to discern coherent sense. One interpretation of the central section, vv. 9–13, however, seems to have gained widespread acceptance, and sheds light on v. 11. According to this interpretation, which is accepted by Otto Kaiser, Blenkinsopp, and others,[36] vv. 9–13 contain a dialogue between the prophet and his audience (where changes of speaker are not, unfortunately, indicated). It is the corrupt religious officials of Israel (v. 7) who pose the questions, "Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from milk, those taken from the breast?" (v. 9). By asking these, the officials suggest they regard the prophet's teaching as more properly directed towards infants than themselves, and that the prophet insults them with preaching this message to them. The repetitive formula of v. 10 (צו לצו, etc.) is interpreted as a parody of this infantile message, either because it mimics a baby's babbling or because it is a fragment of a school lesson.[37]

---

[36] Kaiser, *Jesaja*, 243; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 381. This interpretation is not accepted by Ulrich Berges; see Ulrich F. Berges, *The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form* (trans. Millard C. Lund; HBM 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 192.

[37] The alphabetic sequence, and זעיר (perhaps "little one, child") suggested the school context to Ibn Ezra, and has been accepted by some modern scholars; see Kaiser, *Jesaja*, 243.

Verse 11 is interpreted as the prophet's response to these charges. He affirms (the כי is asseverative) that Yahweh will indeed speak to Israel in "stammering speech" (an accurate description of the childish sounds of v. 10); ironically, however, this will not be the way Isaiah's opponents expect. Rather, Yahweh will speak בלשון אחרת, "in an alien language." אחר, "other" is commonly used in the Hebrew Bible in cases where the referent is conceived as foreign, such as "another people" (Deut 28:32), "another land" (Deut 29:27), and the very common "other gods" (e.g., Exod 20:3), and the word is also used substantively to mean "foreigner" (e.g., Jer 6:12). Thus לשון אחרת should be taken as referring to a foreign language, specifically the speech of an invading nation, a nation described in Isa 28:2, 15, 17–19 with the Isaianic metaphors of tempest and flood.

This illuminates v. 13, where the string of syllables from v. 10 is repeated, this time introduced as "the word of the Yahweh … to them [להם]." In light of the "alien language" of v. 11, it appears now to serve a new purpose, that of imitating the gibberish Israel would hear when the invader comes. Here, להם may indicate the subjectivity of Israel's perception: to them, the foreign nation's language seems like nonsense.

Admittedly, this expansive interpretation is somewhat tortuous. Yet it has the advantage of explaining many otherwise curious elements, while also linking them with each other and with the rest of the chapter. Thus it can be (cautiously) affirmed. As for the question of the date of this passage, in general, scholars have attributed it to the oracles of the "First Isaiah," the late eighth-century Jerusalem prophet.[38] However, Reinhard Gregor Kratz has argued that, at least in its current form, Isa 28–31 contains a sophisticated rewriting and

---

[38] Among others, Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 381; Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 3:23; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, 246. According to John Watts, this oracle stems from somewhat later than the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem, the mid to late seventh century, during the waning of Assyria's power; John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 363.

reorganization of original Isaianic material, aimed at highlighting certain important themes.[39] We must admit, therefore, that the date of our verse is uncertain.

E. Verse 11

Within this unit, then, v. 11 fulfils an important function. It acts as a pivot separating the two iterations, and meanings, of the צו formula, and indeed provides the key for understanding the second instance of this formula. It is thus interesting to note how succinctly the notion of the invading alloglot nation is expressed. This is achieved primarily by the implicit reference which this verse makes to threats such as those found in Deut 28:49 and Jer 5:15. The allusion is established by the use of features which belong to this complex of ideas, features which occur in various permutations through this network of passages. In Isa 28:11 these are the keyword לעג (Isa 33:19), the pairing of שׂפה with לשׁון (Isa 33:19; Ezek 3:5–6), and the concept of foreign language (here expressed through לשׁון אחרת; indicated in the other passages in various ways). Unlike these other passages, however, Isa 28:11 does not use a noun to describe the alloglot nation (גוי in Deut 28:49 and Jer 5:15; עם in Isa 33:19 and Ezek 3:5–6), nor does it claim explicitly that Yahweh will bring them, though this is made plain elsewhere in the chapter (Isa 28:2, 15, 17–19).[40] This brevity of phrasing in our passage, then,

---

[39] Reinhard Gregor Kratz, "Rewriting Isaiah: The Case of Isaiah 28–31," in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; LHBOTS 531; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 245–66. Andrew Teeter has argued that the traditions of Isa 28, along with other Isaianic texts, are further reworked and reinterpreted in the book of Daniel; D, Andrew Teeter, "Isaiah and the King of As/Syria in Daniel's Final Vision: On the Rhetoric of Inner-Scriptural Allusion and the Hermeneutics of 'Mantological Exegesis,'" in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam* (ed. Eric F. Mason, Samuel L. Thomas, Alison Schofield, and Eugene Ulrich; 2 vols.; JSJSup 153; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1:169–99, at 180–83.

[40] The pl. verb of LXX and Tg. would most naturally be interpreted as referring to the alloglot nation: "with stammering speech and with alien language *they* will speak to this people." Because the implicit subject here (עם or גוי, collective nouns) can be grammatically sg. or pl., this interpretation could also be true of the sg. of MT: "*it* will speak to this people." This is possible because the subject of MT ידבר, generally assumed to be Yahweh, is not stated. In any case, v. 13 makes it clear that this stammering speech of the foreigner is ultimately

attests to the widespread knowledge of the theme among biblical authors, signalling that it was as a well-established element in the intellectual repertoire of ancient Israel. Indeed, the highly allusive form in which the theme occurs here suggests that the theme was well-developed by the time this oracle was composed, thus perhaps already in the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem, in the late eighth century B.C.E., if indeed Isa 28 is to be dated to that period.

Further similarities to Jer 5:15 can be noted. As in Jer 5:15, foreign language in Isa 28:11 is associated with the rejection of the prophetic word. The religious officials of Israel scorned Isaiah's message, and so Yahweh will send a people of strange language against them. We may note also the use once more of the theme that the foreign language of an enemy, afflicted upon Israel, is a punishment which fits the crime. The prophet's opponents derided his valid warnings as infantile or nonsensical; Yahweh will therefore present his words in a nonsensical form. Furthermore, in Isa 28:11 the foreign nation is in some sense the voice of Yahweh: their "stammering speech" constitutes "the word of Yahweh" to Israel. This is comparable to Jer 5:15, where, as I argued above, the "ancient nation" is depicted as a physical manifestation of Yahweh's word. Yahweh's prophetic word rarely comes to non-Israelites in the Hebrew Bible,[41] so this nonce-association of foreign speech with prophecy may be primarily a poetic, rather than theological, device, but it is noteworthy nonetheless.

Yahweh's word; i.e., both Yahweh and the foreign nation can truly be said to utter the stammering speech. Thus this variant does not impact greatly on the interpretation of the verse in its context.

[41] Balaam, in Num 23, is one exceptional case.

V. Isa 33:19

<div dir="rtl">

אֶת־עַם נוֹעָז לֹא תִרְאֶה עַם עִמְקֵי שָׂפָה מִשְּׁמוֹעַ נִלְעַג לָשׁוֹן אֵין בִּינָה

</div>

> "You will not see the *nôʿāz* people,
> a people with speech too deep to understand,
> with a language so stuttered as to be incomprehensible."[42]

A. Textual Issues

The LXX at this point is confusing, and clearly the translator had difficulty in understanding his Hebrew *Vorlage*. To focus on the points important for our purposes, we may note that MT נוֹעָז is rendered with a verb meaning "to counsel, advise" (συνεβουλεύσαντο), on which, see further below. Each element in the sequence עמקי שפה משמוע appears to be represented (though misunderstood), but no appropriate translation of לשון occurs, though in its place τῷ ἀκούοντι, to be retroverted as *לשומע, appears. Parablepsis may explain the LXX's reading: the translator's eye may have skipped from לשון to משמוע two words earlier. Retroversions of other variants in LXX are not certain. Other ancient witnesses do not show significant variants.

B. Context

This chapter begins with a condemnation of the as yet undestroyed destroyer (v. 1), whose destruction is foretold. Next, a series of fragmented images is presented, marked by desolation and waste (vv. 2–13), followed by something resembling a cultic entrance

---

[42] My translation.

liturgy.[43] The section in which our verse occurs (vv. 17–24) describes a glorious future reality, in which the "king in his beauty" will become apparent, and which is marked by the absence from Jerusalem of various evils. These evils include the "*nôʿāz* people" of v. 19, illness and sin (v. 24), and, curiously enough, sailing ships (v. 21).

C. Interpretation

This chapter contains several shifts of tone, address, and subject matter, as well as some very unusual images, which make any straightforward interpretation difficult. Perhaps the most enlightening explanations connect this chapter with the book of Isaiah at large. Willem Beuken described this as a a *Spiegeltext*, arguing that it presents, in reverse order, the topics of the chapters of Isaiah (up to this point), as a kind of summary inserted by the author of Isa 56–66 (Third Isaiah), as a guide to the work.[44] Hugh Williamson also assigned a special compositional function to this chapter, but in the work of the Second Isaiah (Isa 40–55); this chapter, he argued, was composed by the author of Second Isaiah as a bridge text, to link his work to the earlier Isaianic corpus.[45] In light of this breadth of scholarly interpretation, it is no surprise that the passage cannot be dated securely; the foe mentioned in v. 19 has been variously identified as the Assyrians (Walter Zimmerli), the Babylonians (Williamson), the Persians (Beuken), and the Ptolemies or the Seleucids (Kaiser).[46]

---

[43]Thus originally Gunkel; see Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 244–46.

[44] Willem A. M. Beuken, "Jesaja 33 als Spiegeltext im Jesajabuch" *ETL* 67 (1991): 5–35.

[45] See Hugh G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 185–99. Its distance from Isa 40–55 is explained by later insertion of narrative material (Isa 34–39).

[46] Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24* (trans. Ronald E. Clements; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 137; Williamson, *Book Called Isaiah*, 222; Beuken, "Jesaja 33 als Spiegeltext," 16; Kaiser, *Jesaja*, 342.

D. נוֹעָז

The meaning of נוֹעָז in this verse is not clear. In form, it appears to be a Niphal masc. sing. participle from a root *יעז (*ועז), a root not attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The interpretation of the LXX, συνεβουλεύσαντο, connects the verb with יעץ, "to counsel, advise," perhaps suggesting that *יעז is a by-form of יעץ. The meaning in context of the verb on this interpretation would be unclear ("the people who take counsel you will not see").

Alternatively, an emendation has been proposed. In light of the foreign-language reference in the verse, the editors of *BHS* propose emending this word to a form of the root לעז, "to speak unintelligibly," used to describe the Egyptians in Ps 114:1. However, since לעז is a hapax legomenon in biblical Hebrew, it is not a likely candidate for an emendation. It also has no ancient version or manuscript support.

The translation of the Targum, תקיף, "strong," apparently connects the word with the root עזז, "to be strong, fierce." Since Niphal participles of geminate verbs are rare and show a great variety of forms, we should not be especially surprised when we find an apparently irregular form (the expected form being *נָעֹז [or rarely *נָעֵז]).[47] Alternatively (and this is how the BDB and *HALOT* list it) we could speak here of a root *יעז, being a by-form of עזז. This connection with the root עזז has contextual support, given the violent terms in which this people is described earlier in this chapter. It also makes sense in comparison to other passages that describe an alloglot intruder, since they associate the people's language with its ferocity (e.g., עז פנים in Deut 28:50). Thus interpreting נועז as "strong, fierce" seems prudent.[48]

---

[47] See *PMBH* 258–59.

[48] BDB's "barbarous," which conveys the impression of "strong, fierce," should be avoided because that word in English carries connotations about foreign language (albeit weak ones, as discussed in Chapter 2) that נועז may not; BDB יעז 418a–b, at 418b.

E. Structure

Isaiah 33:19 is composed of parallel phrases modifying עם: עמקי שׂפה משׁמוע (hemistich *a*) and נלעג לשׁון אין בינה (hemistich *b*). The use of שׁמע in hemistich *a* to express (not) understanding a language is familiar from Jer 5:15 and Deut 28:49, except here it is used in a comparative structure: the people speech is "deeper than understanding," that is "too deep to understand."[49] This structure helps us to understand the function of אין בינה "there is no understanding," in *b*. Like משׁמוע, this probably expresses the incomprehensibility of the fierce people's language, rather than, as the Targum would have it, that people's inherent lack of intelligence,[50] or, as Beuken would have it, their lack of "culture."[51] Moreover, just as in *a* the unintelligibility results from the speech being "deep," by analogy the incomprehensibility in *b* likely follows from its being "stuttered, stuttering" (נלעג). Thus "a people … with a language so stuttered as to be incomprehensible."

Like the other passages so far discussed, this text lacks specificity (names, dates) in its description of the "fierce people." But whereas in those passages this element of the unknown contributed tension and terror, that cannot be the case here, because of the imagined situation of the prophecy: this prophecy appears to place itself *after* the invasion of the alloglot nation, since it describes the withdrawal of an occupying force.[52] Thus, the identity of that invader should have been very clear by the time this oracle was proclaimed; the unknown had become the known. What explains this lack of specificity, I believe, is the allusive way in

---

[49] I shall discuss the implications of עמק below, in connection with Ezek 3:5–6.

[50] Tg. reads מדלית בהון סכלתנו.

[51] Beuken, *Jesaja*, 28.

[52] This is especially clear if the שׁקל, "weigher," and the ספר, "counter (of towers)" (v. 18) are understood to be imperial provincial administrators (tax assessors and collectors); this is the interpretation of many modern scholars (e.g., Childs, *Isaiah*, 247–49; Watts, *Isaiah*, 498), who follow Ibn Ezra in this respect. The question "Where are they?" (v. 18) implies the sudden disappearance of this class of officials, as if they had come to be an everyday feature of life in the land.

which this prophecy reverses those previous ones. By staying close to the phrasing of this theme elsewhere, this verse points to these other predictions (whether to the ones preserved in the Hebrew Bible or to others made in similar words by other ancient prophets). The associations of those passages are thus introduced here, even though they are unstated, associations like Yahweh's role in bringing this alloglot nation in the first place. By implying that these prophecies will be reversed, Isa 33:19 affirms that they were fulfilled in the first place: since the alloglot nation is now to leave Jerusalem, it must once have entered the land, which is what the other prophecies foretold. Thus this oracle, through its retention of the vagueness of these earlier predictions, deliberately but subtly situates itself within the tradition of Israelite prophecy, and validates earlier prophecies of an alloglot invader.

The passage in which v. 11 appears, and which describes the glorious Jerusalem of the future, should probably be connected with the trope referred to as the "inviolability of Zion," which is found throughout the book of Isaiah and beyond.[53] It is interesting to note what role language plays in the Zion of days to come. The removal of the deep-speeched, stammering people restores Jerusalem's linguistic integrity, which is a token for the restoration of the national boundaries that invasions and occupations had eradicated. Similar sentiments are voiced elsewhere, as in Isa 52:1: "Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more." Here, circumcision, not language, is the sign used to single out foreigners. Similarly, in Joel we read: "Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers [זרים] shall never again pass through it" (Joel 4:17). Thus we see foreign language here as one element used to depict a Jerusalem-centric, ideal future age.[54]

---

[53] As discussed in the previous note, this passage depicts the reversal of the ill fortunes suffered by Jerusalem, and therefore does not in fact claim "inviolability" for Jerusalem, but does afford the city a special place in Yahweh's dealings with the world.

[54] The particularism exhibited here at times causes discomfort for modern readers. The universalistic biases which underlie this discomfort manifest themselves in interpretations of another potentially linguistic-diversity aware text, Zeph 3:9. See my discussion in Chapter 3.

The removal of the stuttering, deep-speeched people in Isa 33:19 may also involve concerns for absolute bodily integrity in the future age. Described, as they are, with words suggestive of speech defects, such people may be unfit for the new Jerusalem, where "no inhabitant will say, 'I am sick'" (Isa 33:24). We may compare Isa 32:1–5: in an age when "a king will reign in righteousness" (v. 1), then "the tongues of stammerers will speak readily and distinctly [לשון עלגים תמהר לדבר צחות]" (v. 4).[55]

VI. Ezek 3:5–6

⁵כִּי לֹא אֶל־עַם עִמְקֵי שָׂפָה וְכִבְדֵי לָשׁוֹן אַתָּה שָׁלוּחַ אֶל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:
⁶לֹא אֶל־עַמִּים רַבִּים עִמְקֵי שָׂפָה וְכִבְדֵי לָשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִשְׁמַע דִּבְרֵיהֶם אִם־לֹא אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ הֵמָּה יִשְׁמְעוּ אֵלֶיךָ:

⁵For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language [but] to the house of Israel,
⁶not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand.
Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you.

A. Textual Issues

The repetitiveness of MT in these verses has led some scholars to suggest emendations. Zimmerli, for one, makes two plausible deletions.[56]

Firstly, Zimmerli regards אל בית ישראל as a gloss, because in the Hebrew it is syntactically rather stark (the "but" in the English translation is epexegetical), and because without it he discerns a cleaner parallelism. Zimmerli may be correct in this, but the gloss has made its

---

[55] BDB suggests a relationship between עלג and לעג; BDB at לעג, 541a–b.

[56] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 93.

way into all textual traditions, so it is not clear whether this is really a text-critical or a composition-historical issue.

Secondly, Zimmerli deletes the second עמקי שפה וכבדי לשון (v. 6). Doing so creates an elegant, rather than a repetitive, pairing: עמים רבים אשר לא תשמע דבריהם//עם עמקי שפה וכבדי לשון. Indirect support for this deletion is also found in LXX, where the first appearance of the phrase (v. 5) is translated βαθύχειλον καὶ βαρύγλωσσον, "of deep lip and heavy tongue," whereas the second is translated ἀλλοφώνους ἢ ἀλλογλώσσους, "of another speech or another language." These differ significantly, both syntactically (καὶ/ἢ), and semantically (in whether they interpret the Hebrew descriptions physically or figuratively), and these differences could be explained by supposing that the second pair in Hebrew is an addition: LXX originally only contained the first pair, but when the second was added to the Hebrew, the Greek was "corrected" towards it; the correction was, however, carried out by a different translator who rendered the Hebrew in another way.[57] The addition in the Hebrew may have been simple dittography, prompted by the similar עם, עמקי, and עמים.

For these reasons, I would emend MT beginning at כי (v. 5) up to דבריהם (v. 6) to the following: [58]

<div dir="rtl">

5כי לא אל עם עמקי שפה וכבדי לשון אתה שלוח
[אל בית ישראל]
6לא אל עמים רבים אשר לא תשמע דבריהם

</div>

5For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language,
[to the house of Israel]
6not to many peoples whose words you cannot understand.

---

[57] LXX contains a double translation of וכבדי לשון in v. 6: ἀλλογλώσσους and στιβαροὺς τῇ γλώσσῃ ὄντας (being sturdy in tongue). This pays witness to a complex internal Greek textual history

[58] This differs from Zimmerli's reconstruction, as he makes the additional deletion of וכבדי לשון, based on Codex Vaticanus' single adjective in v. 5, βαθύγλωσσον, "deep-tongued." *Pace* John Olley, this appears to be a case of haplography within the Greek (skipping between βαθύχειλον and βαρύγλωσσον), rather than a translation of either עמקי שפה or וכבדי לשון; John W. Olley, *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiēl in Codex Vaticanus* (SepComm; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 249.

I propose one additional emendation. In the form it appears in MT, עִמְקֵי seems to come from an adjective *עָמֵק.[59] However, this form is otherwise unattested, and the normal adjective form of this root is עָמֹק (עֲמֻקָה, etc.). For these reasons, it is best to regard the form in MT in this instance (and in Isa 33:19), as arising due to the influence of כָּבֵד. כָּבֵד is a much more common adjective, and here it appears in a parallel phrase in a very similar construction (וְכִבְדֵי לָשׁוֹן; compare also חִזְקֵי מֵצַח in v. 7).[60] This is preferable to supposing that the root has a second adjectival form used exclusively to describe speech, as the dictionaries seem to do. Thus I suggest emending the pointing of the MT in Ezek 3:5, 6 (and in Isa 33:19), to עֲמֻקֵי.

B. Context

At the beginning of ch. 3, Ezekiel receives a prophetic commission from Yahweh: he is ordered to consume a scroll and then speak in Yahweh's words to Israel. However, Ezekiel is warned that his mission may be futile; Israel, unlike any other nation, will ignore him, because of its hardness of heart. For this reason Yahweh likewise hardens the prophet's resolve, and sends him on his way, miraculously transporting him to the exiles at Tel Abib. The superscription (1:1–2) dates the action of this passage to the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile, that is, 593 B.C.E., though, because of the pessimism the chapter displays about the receptiveness of the prophet's audience to the divine word, we may want to date the composition of the passage to later in Ezekiel's ministry.

---

[59] So BDB and *HALOT* ad loc.

[60] I am grateful to Adam Strich for his observations on this point.

C. Structure

One notable structural device shaping these verses sheds light on the way the theme of the alloglot nation is used here. Verses 5–7 contain three instances of שׁמע: Ezekiel cannot understand (לא תשמע) the nations (v. 6), because of the language barrier; but Israel is unwilling to heed (לא יאבו לשׁמע) Yahweh's instruction (v. 7). These two uses display the meanings of שׁמע discussed earlier, and played upon in Deut 28:49. Between these two occurs one more, where the meaning of שׁמע is not self-evident: "Surely, if I sent you to them, המה ישמעו אליך" (v. 6).

Because these foreigners are being compared, favourably, to rebellious Israel, we naturally hear this clause as "they would heed, listen to you." The presence of אליך here also supports this since שׁמע אל, much like שׁמע בקול, can have a technical meaning "to obey, heed."[61] But coming immediately after, as it does, Yahweh's claim that Ezekiel "will not understand" this nation, our understanding of המה ישמעו is coloured by this other meaning of שׁמע. Thus, ישמעו is, in some sense, polyphonic: its two senses resound at once, in a backward- and forward-facing reference which constitutes an, as yet unnoticed, case of Janus parallelism. In fact, only if this is so would the situation described in these verses make sense. The foreign nation could not heed Ezekiel if it did not understand him (Ezekiel, after all, does not understand them); but even if it did understand him, it might not necessarily heed him (this is Israel's problem); in fact it both understands and heeds, which shows the importance of recognizing the paronomasia involved here. It seems that two meanings of שׁמע, also used effectively in Deut 28:49, were thus a fruitful locus for wordplay in these alloglot nation passages.

---

[61] See BDB שׁמע 1033a–1034b, at 1034a.

D. Understanding כבדי לשון and עמקי שׂפה

The meaning of the phrases עמקי שׂפה and כבדי לשון is not self-evident, and various interpretations have been offered. Determining the meanings of these phrases is complicated by the polysemy of all the words involved. All four words can indicate specific, physical realities: שׂפה and לשון denote body parts (the lip and tongue respectively); עמק is an adjective of spatial dimension (depth); and כבד one of material quality (heaviness). In the context of Ezek 3, the corporeality of these words is suggested by the mention, in just a few verses, of the body parts: mouth, belly, innards, forehead, heart, face, and ear (vv. 1–10). Thus I disagree with Moshe Greenberg when he claims that the meaning of עמקי שׂפה וכבדי לשון here is not intended to be physical.[62] The difficulty lies in trying to assign meaning to these words in combination. What precisely does it mean to call a tongue heavy, or a lip deep?

At this point arguments made by Tigay about similar phrasing in Exod 4 are relevant. At his first encounter with Yahweh, Moses is told to deliver a message to the Israelites. Moses expresses his reticence to complete the mission in these words: "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent …. but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue [כבד פה וכבד לשון אנכי]" (Exod 4:10). With reference to Akkadian medical texts, Tigay has defended a traditional rabbinic interpretation of this verse as referring to a speech impediment.[63] He notes that Akkadian *kabtu* is used with the names of many bodily organs as a *terminus technicus* to describe a range of ailments and dysfunctions.[64] Evidence from the Hebrew Bible also supports this, where כבד is sometimes used analogously to עָרֵל, "uncircumcised," to describe defective body parts. Thus compare "Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears [ואזניו הכבד]" (Isa

---

[62] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 68.

[63] Jeffrey H. Tigay, "'Heavy of Mouth' and 'Heavy of Tongue': On Moses' Speech Difficulty," *BASOR* 231 (1978): 57–67.

[64] *CAD* K *kabtu* 24b–28b, at 26a.

6:10) with "See, their ears are closed [ערלה אזנם], they cannot listen."(Jer 6:10). These considerations render it plausible that כבד denotes an injury, illness, or defect of the tongue in Exod 4:10 and, indeed, Ezek 3:5–6. Unfortunately, as Tigay notes, the precise nature of this defect cannot be determined from the textual evidence, but the context makes clear that it is one of speech production.

In our case, given the use of לעג, "stutter, stammer," in other texts describing foreign language, the idea that כבדי לשון might refer to a speech impediment in Ezek 3 is not surprising (we might suggest "tongue-tied" in English). עמק is another matter, however. The root is not used to describe bodily defects in Akkadian or Biblical Hebrew in this way. Some have suggested that it denotes sounds which come from far back in the vocal tract, that is, "deep" in the throat, sounds we often refer to as "guttural."[65] But it seems unlikely that a speaker of ancient Hebrew, a language with a range of pharyngeal and laryngeal consonants, would remark upon the fact that any foreign speech was "guttural."[66] Rather, if we are to attribute to עמק some physical meaning here, our best guess, from its being paralleled with כבד, is that it indicates some kind of speech impediment about which, however, we are otherwise uninformed.

As noted above, the four words of the phrase in Ezek 3:5–6 are polysemous, and the text gives indications that their other meanings are at play here. In v. 7 Israel is described as חזקי מצח וקשי לב, "strong-browed and hard-hearted." Here, words for body parts are used with their extended meanings, to describe character traits and behavioural dispositions, rather than physical organs. This description resembles the paired phrases we are discussing, עמקי שפה

[65] So Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (CBC; London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 25; and earlier Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 1:39.

[66] Ullendorff points out that Akkadian was in fact "less, rather than more, 'guttural' than Hebrew"; Ullendorff, "C'est de l'hébreu," 129. That is, the Akkadian of the biblical period contained only one laryngeal or pharyngeal consonant, ḫ, compared to Hebrew's four, ע = ʾ, ġ; ח = ḥ, ḫ; see *PMBH*, 32, 76.

and כבדי לשׁון. Indeed, the similarities are morphological and semantic: construct adjective (masc. pl.) + noun (abs. sg); word of physical quality + body part. A major function of this parallelism is to juxtapose Israel and the foreign nations, reinforcing the comparison which governs this section between the hypothetical receptive foreigners, and obstinate Israel. It also indicates to us that, like "strong-browed and hard-hearted," we ought to look out for an extended meaning of עמקי שׁפה וכבדי לשׁון beyond the anatomical.

From the other passages we have been dealing with, the extended meanings of לשׁון and שׁפה are familiar, namely, what is produced by the organs of speech, that is, "speech" and "language." As for the adjectives עמק and כבד, both can express the idea of "difficulty." In several psalms and proverbs, we find that plans, thoughts, hearts, and minds are "deep," in the sense of unfathomable, impenetrable, or unsearchable; that is, they cannot be fully understood (e.g., Ps 64:7; 92:6; Prov 25:3). Similarly, hard tasks in the Hebrew Bible are described as "heavy," as in burdensome or unmanageable: driving chariots through mud (Exod 14:25); one man's being responsible for the entire people of Israel (Num 11:14). Thus, to describe language and speech as כבד and עמק, is to call them "difficult," which is entirely appropriate characterization of how a language is perceived by a non-speaker.

Thus the pair appears to contain two distinct but related meanings, both of which make sense as applied to foreign language, the one indicating the resemblance of the sound of a foreign language to a speech defect ("deep-lipped and heavy-tongued"), the other, its incomprehensibility ("of obscure speech and difficult language").[67] Ezekiel's use of both meanings simultaneously is impressive. It indicates that a degree of thought went into this

---

[67] Unfortunately these two meanings cannot be conveyed at once in translation, but it is interesting to note that the two pairs of translations offered in LXX (see above) approach the two sorts of meanings I have described here, the one physical, the other extended. Perhaps inspired by LXX here, Cooke suggests that MT's repetition of the pair in vv. 5–6 stresses first the physical, and then the extended meaning; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 1:39.

presentation and thus reveals the significance of the theme of foreign language to this passage.

E. Relation to Passages Already Examined

Ezekiel's point in these verses seems clear enough. Israel will not listen to Yahweh's words. This is astounding, since even peoples who speak different languages from the prophet would listen to those words. Compared with these peoples, Israel has no excuse; there is no language barrier, but it still refuses to obey. In making these points, Ezekiel uses concepts, terminology, and associations that we have seen elsewhere. The basic concept is the nation who speaks an unintelligible language, familiar from Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. In addition, Ezekiel employs this concept to criticize Israel's rejection of Yahweh's word, as it was also employed in Deut 28:29, Isa 28:11, and Jer 5:15. In how this concept is expressed, the Ezekiel passage shows close verbal similarities with the others: עם עמקי שׂפה (also Isa 33:19); the pairing of שׂפה and לשׁון (also Isa 28:11; 33:19); and the parallelism of לא תשׁמע with root דבר (also Deut 28:49; Jer 5:15).

However, the way in which this concept is used is very different. The chief difference is that in Ezek 3:5–6, the alloglot nation is not pictured as an enemy. In all the other passages, the nation represented a looming threat (or, in the case of Isa 33:19, a present oppressor), ready to swoop down upon Israel. Instead in Ezekiel, this nation, or rather these many nations (עמים רבים), as this prophet has it, are not presented as interacting with Israel at all. Instead, they serve as a foil for Israel, in a rhetorical device which resembles a parable or thought experiment. Yahweh says that *if* (אם) he sent Ezekiel to these nations, they would listen to

him.[68] But he does not send Ezekiel to them. This mission is purely hypothetical, and the rhetorical point (of disgracing Israel) may in fact be stronger if a mission to the nations would be regarded as unlikely or preposterous.[69] Thus the literary form in which the alloglot nation appears in Ezekiel differs from the predictions found in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

The character of the nations in this passage is also quite different, at least at first sight. Whereas the ferocity of the nation was emphasized in the other passages, here, before a single prophet of Yahweh, the nations are pliant and submissive. This is quite unexpected, and this unexpectedness heightens Ezekiel's rhetorical point. We may assume that the link between foreign-language, and strength and violence was known to Ezekiel and his audience. For one thing, Ezekiel's phraseology shows a close relationship with other expressions of the alloglot-invader theme. What is more, the attestation of this theme in several texts from different periods indicates that knowledge of it was widespread. Given this background knowledge, Ezekiel's claim, that typically aggressive nations would yield before Yahweh's prophet, is extremely stark, and it emphasizes the power of Yahweh's word. By these means is the goal of this passage advanced: for Israel not to heed Yahweh's commands, it must lack even the minutest degree of sensitivity and obedience. [70]

Undoubtedly, the historical circumstances of the exilic age can help to understand these differences from this theme's use elsewhere. For instance, the plurality of the nations (עמים רבים) is a new element in the presentation of this theme. As Zimmerli states, "this must reflect directly the very large number of groups of deportees which were here and there around

---

[68] As in oath formulas, the לֹא in this clause probably serves an asseverative function; so Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 1:39.

[69] The situation imagined in Ezek 3:5–6 finds a parallel in narrative in Jonah's mission to Nineveh; however, that book does not contain reference to foreign language.

[70] This contrast is strengthened if an allusion to the tower of Babel episode is intended in the reference to many peoples in connection with linguistic diversity. (After all, Ezekiel and his compatriots were deported to Babylonia, where some of the action of his book is set.) If rebelliousness characterized those original builders (as Rashi claimed), and infects their multilingual descendants, it is remarkable that they listen to Yahweh's word, and even more remarkable that Israel does not. This allusion, however, is not certain.

Ezekiel's own place of exile."[71] This may also explain why the nations are not spoken of as "distant," unlike in Jer 5:15 and Deut 28:49. But I am hesitant to say that such historical circumstances *explain* Ezekiel's use of the idea of the alloglot nation. For instance, one explanation for why the prophecy is not simply restated is that by Ezekiel's time it could be seen to have come true: one distant, mighty alloglot nation had defeated and put an end to the northern kingdom, and another had conquered and deported the southerners. But as is shown in Isa 33:19, where the prophecy is reversed, the theme could still have force in predictions even after it was thought to have been fulfilled. Ezekiel's choice is to reinterpret the alloglot invader theme creatively in accordance with his own particular aims and purposes.

VI. The Alloglot Invader Theme in Narrative? The Case of the Rabshakeh

It is interesting to consider the Rabshakeh's use of the Judaean language in 2 Kgs 18//Isa 36 in light of the prophecies of the coming of an alloglot invader. In the Hebrew Bible there is no narrative that depicts precisely this reality, at least explicitly; in the many narrative accounts of the invasions of Israel and Judah, the invading nation's foreign language is not mentioned. In the Rabshakeh episode, however, we have an interesting situation. Here, an invading foreign force, the Assyrians, encamps outside Jerusalem, and the people of Jerusalem hear the speech of one of these foreigners—the Rabshakeh, speaking on behalf of King Sennacherib. However, the speech that the people of Jerusalem hear from this foreigner is not in an unintelligible language, but rather it is in their own language, Judaean. Yet, this foreigner's speech still induces fear, like the "obscure speech" of the prophecies. But this fear arises from the content of the speech, which foretells the defeat of Judah because of

---

[71] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 137; similarly Paul Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (LHBOTS 482; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 79.

misplaced confidence, not from the fact that it cannot be understood. Furthermore, in this story it is Judaeans who suggest that the foreigner cease speaking a familiar language, and instead speak a language that is strange and unintelligible to the majority of the population—this occurs when the Jerusalem officials request that the Rabshakeh speak in Aramaic instead of in Judaean. But the request is denied, and unintelligible speech is not uttered; the prophecies are not fulfilled.

The significance of this parallel is unclear. It is possible that the parallel is deliberately intended, and if not by the original author of episode, then perhaps by the editor who included this story in the book of Isaiah. After all, two prophecies that make use of the alloglot invader theme are found elsewhere in Isaiah (Isa 28:11; 33:19), and the Assyrians are the focus of much of that book. Moreover, the inclusion of the Rabshakeh episode in Isaiah involved careful thought. Thematically, the episode is closely linked with the prophecies of Isaiah, as Blenkinsopp has pointed out, since the episode dwells on the Assyrian king's arrogance, the folly of an alliance with Egypt, and Yahweh's protection of Zion.[72] In addition, several scholars have argued that Isa 36–37 serves an important compositional role in the transition between the oracles of Isa 1–35, including the words of Isaiah of Jerusalem, and the prophecies of an exilic prophet contained in Isa 40–55.[73] It is thus entirely possible that the linguistic element of this story, too, intentionally resonates with the alloglot invader theme, and if the parallel is deliberate, the similarities and differences may be meaningful.

Their meanings, however, are elusive. Perhaps we should detect irony: from within Judah comes the request that the Rabshakeh speak a foreign language, and thus effectively that he fulfil one element in a prophecy of Judah's military defeat. But the effect of this irony is

---

[72] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 458–61.

[73] So, for instance, Smelik, "King Hezekiah," 97–105.

unclear. We might also draw a parallel between how this prophecy maps onto the narrative, and the events of the narrative. Just as in the narrative the alloglot invader prophecy is within a whisker of being fulfilled, so also is Judah on the cusp of defeat at the hands of the Assyrians.[74] However, neither, in fact, comes about; only the Judaean language is heard in the narrative (although an imaginative reader will hear the foreign speech of the Assyrian soldiers in the background); and Jerusalem is saved. If there is a parallel to be drawn here, then, we might detect the work of divine providence in the Rabshakeh's refusal to speak a foreign language; just as Yahweh saved Jerusalem from the Assyrians, so also he did not allow the conditions of this destructive prophecy to be met. In these ways the similarities and differences between the Rabshakeh episode and the alloglot invader prophecies are suggestive, but they remain speculative, and the influence of the alloglot invader theme on biblical narrative remains unclear.

VII. Dynamics of the Alloglot Invader Theme

I have now examined the occurrence of the alloglot invader theme in all of the occurrences in which it can be detected in the Hebrew Bible. This examination highlighted the contextual dynamics of this theme as it was presented in these particular passages. I shall now take a more synoptic approach, and consider the issue of the general dynamics of this theme. What overall effects does mentioning a foreign nation's language have, and why is it repeated in these texts?

We should firstly note that the most commonly repeated idea in these passages (beyond foreign language) is the unintelligibility of that language. This is expressed in various ways:

---

[74] That is, at least, in the presentation of these events in 2 Kgs and Isa; in contrast, in the presentation of these events in 2 Chr 32 a favourable outcome for Judah is a foregone conclusion.

through words of understanding (negated): שמע, ידע, בין; and through words which convey the difficulty of the speech for the listener: לעג, עמק, כבד. But the implications of this unintelligibility, that is, why it should be considered a problem, that is, are not stated in these texts. Consequently, commentators have noted various respects in which not being able to understand your invader might be problematic. For instance, in his commentary on the book of Jeremiah, Jerome wrote, "it is a comfort in the face of disaster if you have enemies whom you are able to petition and who can understand your entreaties."[75] Block and McKane reiterate this point about the impossibility of negotiations with such an unintelligible enemy,[76] and Holladay makes a related one: "it is utterly terrifying to be subjected to the barked orders of military invaders which are incomprehensible."[77] What these comments pick up on is the powerlessness that comes with not understanding or speaking a language. Knowledge on which to base one's actions cannot be acquired, nor can one influence the actions of others. Thus almost all control over the future is lost, which is a frustrating, humiliating, frightening, and hopeless experience.

Tigay contributes a rather different observation: in the context of ancient Israel, the claim that an enemy's language will be unintelligible emphasizes the great distance from which the enemy must be coming. "It will come from so far away that its language will be unintelligible, unlike Israel's close neighbors who spoke languages similar to Hebrew."[78] That is, this invader will not be one of Israel's typical opponents in war, the other states in Canaan, but will come from much further away.

---

[75] Michael Graves, trans. *Jerome's Commentary on Jeremiah* (ed. Christopher A. Hall; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 37.

[76] Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012), 658; McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1:124.

[77] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 188.

[78] Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 269.

This theme should also be connected with the violation of national boundaries. As discussed in Chapter 2, in the Hebrew Bible peoplehood is associated (at times closely) with language, as it is with kinship and territory. The threat of the alloglot invader targets one aspect of this complex concept, and by doing so threatens the entire system. That is, the encroachment of speakers of a foreign language into Israel's territory threatens its existence as a people, by loosening the bonds between kin group, land, and language.[79] In this way the alloglot invader theme is used to similar effect as those predictions, found alongside it in these passages, which threaten the institutions of national life. For instance, Deut 28:36 strikes at once at the political, religious, and territorial aspects of Israel's identity: "Yahweh will bring you, and the king whom you set over you, to a nation that neither you nor your ancestors have known, where you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone." Such predictions thus rob Israel and the Israelites of their identity, which is both frightening and humiliating.

The inferences drawn from the alloglot-nation theme in the foregoing paragraphs are all frightening prospects, and could indeed be the original implications of the ancient authors. It should be noted, however, that it may well be deliberate that these ramifications of being invaded by a foreign nation are left unstated in the passages under discussion. By leaving the implications of the invader's strange language unsaid, the reader or listener is invited to draw his own inferences and to fear the worst from this situation. This is in keeping with the element of mystery, discussed above, evoked by the vagueness of these texts: the alloglot nation is named in none of these passages, even those in which the unknown has presumably become the known (Isa 33:19; Ezek 3:5–6). Indeed, because of the persistence, throughout these texts, of such ambiguity, we must see the efforts of scholars to identify the nations

---

[79] Correspondingly, the ejection of the alloglots (Isa 33:19) expresses the hope for the restoration of proper boundaries.

involved as misguided, at best, and, at worst, as likely to obscure an important device in operation here.[80]

VIII. History of the Tradition

We are now in a position to make some observations concerning the history of the alloglot-nation tradition in biblical literature. However, because of the small sample size, and the difficulty in dating the texts involved, these remarks are offered with an appropriate degree of uncertainty.

Apparently the earliest extant attestation to this theme is in Isa 28:11, which is often dated to the ministry of the late eighth-century B.C.E. Isaiah of Jerusalem, although as pointed out above, this dating is disputed. This is also the briefest formulation of the theme, and appears to be highly allusive, presuming the network of associations made in the other passages. From this I would tentatively surmise that already in the late eighth century the theme was widely known, and its major components worked out: the invasion of a powerful nation speaking a foreign language. Isaiah 28:11 forms part of this tradition, but did not originate it. However, the association of this theme with the rejection of Yahweh's word, which is taken up in Jer 5:15, Deut 28:49, and Ezek 3:5–6, may be original to Isaiah.

Next to be considered are Jeremiah 5:15 and Deut 28:49, the fullest expressions of the theme. A relation of dependence seems to exist between these two, although the direction of that

---

[80] Among scholars who identify the foreign nations involved, Eichrodt is perhaps the most confident: "Isaiah threatens them [sc. his opponents] with a message from God, in an unintelligible foreign language, that of their Assyrian conquerors, about the meaning of which there can be no possible doubt"; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 65. In contrast, Brueggemann counsels caution, although for different reasons from mine: "It is futile for us to try to identify the specific army from the general description, because the language is not descriptive but imaginative characterization"; Walter A. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdemans, 1998), 65–66.

dependence cannot be determined. The similarities between these and Isa 28:11 are not indicative of a direct relationship, however, which suggests the theme was still widespread in Israel's intellectual tradition. The Jeremiah passage is likely to be dated to the late seventh or early sixth century B.C.E., and by association this may hold for this section of Deuteronomy.

Ezekiel 3:5–6 represents a departure in the use of the theme, this time not as a threat, but as an element in a rhetorical device emphasizing Israel's wickedness. These verses also seem to show specific, separate, similarities to the passages both in Isaiah and in Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, with which it thus *may* have direct acquaintance. For these reasons and because of the dates generally assigned to Ezekiel, this passage should be dated to the first half of the sixth century B.C.E., probably later than Jer 5:15 and Deut 28:49.

The place of Isa 33:19 in this sequence is uncertain. It is a reversal of the prophecies which involve the theme, and so assumes that this theme was already well developed and widely known; but since this appears to be the case already at the time of the first attestation in Isa 28:11, that fact is not an indicator of date. Since it describes the presence of the alloglot nation in the land, but expresses optimism that that nation will disappear from Jerusalem, it may stem from a time after invasions but before hope was lost for the restoration, in which respect it resembles the outlook of Second Isaiah (mid sixth century B.C.E.).

Thus the theme spans more than 150 years of biblical literature, roughly the "golden age" of Israelite prophecy. As discussed in the previous section, the threat is best suited to a period of Israel's history when a straightforward association between people, language, and land could be thought to be unproblematic. The absence of this theme from later literature may be traced to new historical circumstances. As I describe in the next chapter, life after the exile was marked by regular encounters with foreign languages for the Judaeans. In this period no

straightforward relationship between people, language, and land could be assumed, and exposure to foreign language was taken for granted rather than feared.

In terms of form and genre, in the Hebrew Bible this theme is a clearly primarily a feature of prophetic literature. The descriptions in these passages have been seen by Holladay, Mayes, and others, as part of a "stereotyped" tradition in ancient Israel,[81] although it should be noted that, beyond these passages, we have no direct evidence as to the form of the tradition within Israelite intellectual discourse. These passages certainly display some important element of stereotyping, namely, vagueness or ambiguity, and relation to a larger, widely known set of concepts and terminology. In other ways, however, this description is not helpful. As Thiel notes, to call some text "stereotyped" is often to claim that direct contacts between it and other texts cannot be observed, when in fact among these texts several direct relationships may be discernible.[82]

In ancient Near Eastern literature, the theme is only precisely attested in the Hebrew Bible, but the significance of this fact is unclear. In giving it weight we must consider the paucity of extant non-Israelite prophetic literature from this region in this era. It is certainly possible that we are dealing with a distinctively Israelite tradition, but the circumstances of Israel and Judah's close neighbours in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods were similar enough that this threat would have resonated among them too.

---

[81] Holladay writes "descriptions like this were doubtless traditional stereotypes"; Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 88; compare also Andrew Mayes writing on Deut 28:49, 50: "The expressions used to describe the enemy in these verses are in many cases stereotyped; they could be used of any conqueror. It is the existence of a common tradition and not direct literary dependence which explains the contact" with similarly worded texts; Andrew D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1979), 356–57

[82] Thiel, *deuteronomistische Redaktion*, 97 n. 64.

IX. Barbarity

When commenting on the passages we have been analysing, scholars, in order to characterize these biblical descriptions of alloglot nations, have often used terms derived from Greek βάρβαρος, like "barbarian," "barbarous," "barbaric," "barbarity," and so on,[83] which in Chapter 2 were seen to be inappropriate translations of לֹעֵז (Ps 114:1). The chief sentiments that scholars are apparently attempting to convey when they invoke barbarity in commenting on these Hebrew texts is that foreigners talk funny and they act funny. That is, there is a connexion between the language foreigners speak and the way they act, and neither of those things is "quite right."

From the analysis presented in this chapter, it should be clear this minimal conception of barbarity applies to the texts discussed. Foreigners do not speak "quite right." They stutter (לעג) and display speech impediments (עמקי שׂפה וכבדי לשׁון). Furthermore, I have argued that there is also a strong link between this speech and behaviour here, with the majority of the relevant passages describing (or assuming) that the foreign nation is a strong and violent one.

In other ancient Near Eastern literature, we may detect negative characterizations of foreigners as uncouth at various times and places. One notable example is the description of the Gutians as dogs and apes, uninhibited, unintelligent, and unlike humans in appearance, in the Sumerian Curse of Agade.[84] The characterization of unskilled Akkadian/Sumerian scribes as *ḫurru,* "Hurrian; stupid?" is similarly unflattering.[85] The specific link between these

---

[83] For instance, NJPS translates עם נועז in Isa 28:11 as "barbarian folk." See also, with reference to Isa 28:11: With reference to Isa 33:19, Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 3:304; Watts, *Isaiah*, 496; William H. Irwin, *Isaiah: Translation with Philological Notes* (BibOr 30; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1977), 156; Weinberg, "Language Consciousness," 57. With reference to Ezek 3:5–6: Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 38.

[84] See, e.g., Sally Dunham, "The Monkey in the Middle," *ZA* 75 (1985) 235–64.

[85] See *CAD* Ḫ at *ḫurru,* 252b; discussed in Benno Landsberger, "Scribal Concepts of Education," in *City Invincible: A Symposium on Urbanization and Cultural Development in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Carl H. Kraeling and Robert M. Adams; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960), 94–124, at 117.

foreigners' objectionable behaviour and their foreign language is not, however, generally made. In this respect we may compare Sargon II's cylinder inscription (dated to ca. 707 B.C.E.), discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, in which the king describes the building and settlement of his fortified city, Dūr-Šarrukīn. Regarding the settling of the city, Sargon claims the following: "The people of the four (quarters), of foreign tongue and divergent speech, inhabitants of mountain and plain ... I made them of one mouth and put them in its (= Dūr-Šarrukīn's) midst. Citizens of Assyria, (who were) over-seers and supervisors versed in all manner of culture, I ordered to teach them correct behaviour, to fear god and king."[86]

Here, the link between language and behaviour is clearly made: when the peoples are introduced, they are merely described as speaking several languages; but the "solution" to this problem is twofold, both to teach them one manner of speaking, and to instruct them in proper values.[87] Clearly, then, a difference in social values is implied in the comment that the peoples spoke various languages. Unlike the biblical texts, however, this passage passes no comment on what the foreign languages sounds like. *Aḫû*, "foreign," is a fairly neutral descriptor, and *la mitḫartu*, "not matching, divergent" (perhaps, as discussed above, "not harmonious") describes the relation of the languages to one another, not their inherent properties.

In this passage, the superiority of the Assyrian way of doing things is made clear. The process of incorporating foreign peoples into Assyria involves teaching them language and proper behaviour. The latter is explained succinctly as reverence towards god and king, that is, respect for the religio-political order. In privileging these Assyrian values, this passage is similar to Greek conceptions, on which see below.

---

[86] The translation is taken from Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image," 732.

[87] "One mouth" in this passage may indicate a single authority that is imposed upon these peoples, or unanimity, rather than monolingualism; see Machinist, "Assyrians on Assyria," 95–96.

Thus the association of speech and practice is attested in both biblical and Assyrian sources. However, the Greek conception of barbarity consists of more than strange language and strange behaviour, and it will be worth considering the evidence from Greek sources before deciding whether to detect this notion in the Hebrew Bible.

In relation to the origins and development of the idea of Greekness among the Greeks, Jonathan Hall has studied the concept of barbarity.[88] The word βαρβαρόφωνος in the *Iliad* is the first attestation of root,[89] which shows its early connection with sound. The term βάρβαρος becomes common in the fifth century, particularly in texts about the Persian Wars.[90] It is associated with the absurdity of the Persians' language in many texts, as in, for instance, Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, which contains extended sequences of what is, from a Greek point of view, gibberish.[91] During this period, several aspects of the behaviour of the barbarian became commonplaces. For one thing, the barbarian was primitive, exhibiting ways of life which Greeks had progressed beyond, as Thucydides observes.[92] Moreover, the barbarian was submissive, like a slave or a woman, in contrast to the free Greek, as we see clearly for the first time in Aeschylus' *Persians*. Overall, Hall points out, many of the characteristics of barbarians could be attributed to their lack of the typically Greek virtue σωφροσύνη, "moderation."[93]

---

[88] See Hall, *Hellenicity*, 111–17, and 172–89.

[89] *Il.* 2.867.

[90] For an extensive discussion of the influence and perception of Persia in Greek society and thought of this period, see Margaret C. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[91] *Acharnians* 94–110. It is possible that some real words, phrases, or sentences in Old Persian are recorded in these sequences; see the discussion in S. Douglas Olson, *The Acharnians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xxxi–xxxix.

[92] *Histories* 1.5–6.

[93] Hall, *Hellenicity*, 176.

Hall is careful to point out the various functions that this multifaceted term βάρβαρος played in ancient Greece.[94] Significantly, in providing an antitype to Hellenicity, it aided in the development and spread of that unifying concept. For Greek foreign relations, it provided legitimization for projects of colonization and enslavement. And within Athens, where much of the discourse about the barbarians was carried out, it justified a political order in which only native-born citizens could be enfranchized. Through time the meaning and use of the concept changed so that, for instance, in the Hellenistic period merely to speak Greek and exhibit Greek manners was enough to remove one from the class of "barbarian." This change is naturally linked to the spread of Greek learning and practice into the territories conquered by Alexander.

It is true that read in light of these descriptions certain features of the biblical texts stand out. For instance, the antiquity of the "enduring nation" in Jer 5:15 may at first appearance be reminiscent of the "primitiveness" of the barbarian. However, this antiquity is apparently mentioned in Jeremiah to demonstrate the nation's great staying power, rather than its backwards behaviour. Also, the disrespect shown to the old and the young by the aquiline nation in Deut 28:49 implies a disregard for accepted mores, as in the Greek use of βάρβαρος. In other respects, however, these texts are quite different. Throughout, foreign language is presented as something to be feared, not something to be derided.[95] Jeremiah 5:16 emphasizes the dominance and masculinity, not the servility or femininity, of the alloglot nation: "all of them are mighty warriors [גבורים]." And as to the issue of superiority or inferiority, the foreign nations in Ezek 3:5–6 show a much greater degree of what Israel perceives to be the supreme virtue, obedience to Yahweh, than does Israel.

---

[94] Ibid., 172–89.

[95] That is, unless the characterization of foreign speech as a speech defect is an example of mockery.

These similarities and differences are thus sporadic and do not establish a close equivalence of the Greek and Hebrew concepts. In fact, it should be apparent from the above account of barbarity in ancient Greece that there can be no straightforward equivalence between this concept and any Hebrew one. Barbarity is a highly "indexed" notion, integrated into ancient Greek history and literature. It played important roles in Greek society, particularly with regard to the development of the notion of Hellenicity. In contrast to this, the antitypes against which Israelite identity is defined in the Hebrew Bible, most notably the Canaanite peoples (in Deuteronomy especially), differ from Israel especially in their religious practices; but linguistic otherness is not a part of their difference from Israel. Moreover, the histories of Israel and Greece with regard to "outsiders" are so different that a concept fulfilling a comparable function is not likely to arise. Israel and Judah were not colonizers or major traders; they were rarely able to repel the invasions of the regional superpowers, and never gained the influence Greece and Greek did.

Beyond an extremely minimal and general conception, "barbarity" is therefore not present in these biblical texts, and descriptions of the alloglot invaders as "barbarians" is potentially misleading.

X. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have found that the alloglot-nation theme in the passages in which it occurs is characterized by a web of linguistic and conceptual connexions. Though there are variations in how this theme is expressed and in the purpose to which it is put, I have discerned some shared assumptions which were prevalent, assumptions such as the association of foreign language with a speech impediment, and the link between the foreign

nation's language and its violent behaviour. Nevertheless, I do not agree that these

associations were particularly close to the ancient Greek concept of barbarity. I have argued

that the power of the theme comes from the threat of powerlessness that it contains, as well as

the way in which it jeopardizes Israel's national integrity. I have linked the force of those

threats to their applicability to particular periods in Israel's history. In the following chapter, I

shall outline how changes in Israel's historical circumstances led to a different understanding

of foreign language.

Chapter 7

Translation, Bilingualism, and Linguistic Nationalism in the Books of Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah

I. Introduction

The books of Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah, form a natural grouping on the basis of subject matter, style, language, and date of composition. One element which they also share in common is a degree of thematization of linguistic diversity which far exceeds other biblical texts. In these books references to linguistic diversity occur in a variety of forms. In this chapter I shall first provide evidence for the claim that these books contain a high frequency of references to linguistic diversity relative to other biblical books. I shall then examine the passages in these books that include such references, alongside related passages from other books, through three, overlapping, but nonetheless useful, groupings: translation; bi-/multilingualism; and linguistic nationalism. In these sections I shall relate the forms in which references to linguistic diversity occur to the historical circumstances to which the books refer and in which they were composed in an attempt better to understand these texts.

II. High Relative Frequency of References to Linguistic Diversity in Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah

Relative to other books in the Hebrew Bible, these books display a very high frequency of references to linguistic diversity. This can be shown by two measures: the frequency of words meaning "a language" in these and other biblical texts; and the frequency of names of particular languages in these and other biblical texts.

A. Distribution of Words Meaning "a Language"

1. Hebrew לשׁון and שׂפה

There is a marked trend in the distribution of these terms as applied to languages in the Hebrew Bible. In total, לשׁון is used eighteen times to indicate a particular language.[1] Nine of these occurrences, that is, half of them, are in clearly postexilic texts:[2] Isa 66:18; Zech 8:23; Esth 1:22 (twice); 3:12; 8:9 (twice); Dan 1:4; and Neh 13:24.[3] The books of Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah contain seven of these occurrences, more than a third. שׂפה bears the sense "a language" in ten instances.[4] As was noted in Chapter 2, שׂפה does not occur with this meaning in any text which is indisputably postexilic, including Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah.

---

[1] Gen 10:5, 20, 31; Deut 28:49; Isa 28:11; 33:19; 66:18; Jer 5:15; Ezek 3:5, 6; Zech 8:23; Esth 1:22 (twice); 3:12; 8:9 (twice); Dan 1:4; Neh 13:24. I also pointed out that Ecc 10:11 belongs on this list. See Chapter 2.

[2] By "postexilic" I mean dating from after the end of the exile (ca. 535 B.C.E.).

[3] As will be discussed below, two of these occurrences (the second in Esth 1:22; Neh 13:24) are probably not original in these verses.

[4] Gen 11:1, 6, 7 (twice), 9; Isa 19:18; 28:11; 33:19; Ezek 3:5, 6.

In total, then, a word for "a language" is used twenty-eight times in biblical Hebrew. Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah contain seven of these instances, a quarter. Since these books together only account for approximately a twentieth of the Hebrew text of the Bible, this is a significant deviation in the expected distribution of these terms.[5]

2. Aramaic לִשָּׁן

שְׂפָה, the normal word for "lip" in Aramaic, is not attested in the Aramaic portions of the Bible. Aramaic לִשָּׁן, always meaning "speakers of a language, linguistic community," occurs seven times (only in Daniel).[6] This constitutes a rate or occurrence of once per 37.9 Aramaic verses of the Bible, or once per 1.1 chapters. This is significantly more frequent than in the Hebrew of the Bible, where a word meaning "a language" (i.e., שְׂפָה or לָשׁוֹן) occurs once every 824.1 verses, or once per 51.7 chapters.

3. Hebrew and Aramaic Together

Counting the Hebrew and Aramaic occurrences together, then, there are thirty-five cases in the Hebrew Bible where a word is used to mean "language." Fourteen of those instances, that is, two fifths, occur in the books of Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah, which account for, as stated, only around a twentieth of the biblical text. By this measure, then, these books display raise the issue of linguistic diversity unusually often.

---

[5] These books constitute 5.2% of the Hebrew text of the Bible counting by verses, and 2.9% counting by chapters.

[6] Dan 3:4, 7, 29, 31; 5:19; 6:26; 7:14.

B. Distribution of Names for Languages

A similar trend is observable in the distribution of names for foreign languages in the Hebrew Bible. Thirteen references are made to languages by name, using a total of five different names: יהודית,[7] ארמית,[8] אשדודית,[9] שׂפת כנען,[10] and לשׁון כשׂדים.[11] Seven of those references, more than half, occur in the same twentieth of the Hebrew Bible, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah.[12] Only one of these names, שׂפת כנען, is *not* used in these texts.[13]

These two measures, then, show that the books of Daniel, Esther, and Ezra-Nehemiah show a very high frequency of references to linguistic diversity, in comparison with the rest of the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

III. Translation and Interpretation

Texts which mention translation, both written and oral ("interpretation"), raise the issue of linguistic diversity, since an act of translation assumes the existence of multiple languages.

---

[7] 2 Kgs 18:26, 28; Isa 36:11; 2 Chr 32:18; Neh 13:24.

[8] 2 Kgs 18:26; Isa 36:11; Dan 2:4; Ezra 4:7.

[9] Neh 13:24. The identity of this language will be discussed below.

[10] Isa 19:18.

[11] Dan 1:4. The identity of this language will be discussed below.

[12] Five of the other references to these languages are found with reference to a single event, in the three versions of the presentation of Sennacherib's message to Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:26; Isa 36:11; 2 Chr 32:18).

[13] These figures are different if we include the oblique reference to the language of the Judaeans in Esth 8:9: fourteen total references, and eight in Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah.

Familiarity with translation is evident in passages in Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah seems particularly to arise from the circumstances of postexilic life for the Judaeans. I shall now examine the passages in which translation is depicted, including a discussion of interpretation in Gen 42. I shall deal first with the role translation plays within them, and later with the picture of translation that emerges from these texts considered together, and with the historical factors which contributed to that picture.

A. Gen 42:23

> [22]Then Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." [23]But they did not know that Joseph could understand, since there was an interpreter between them [והם לא ידעו כי שמע יוסף כי המליץ בינתם]. [24]He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes.[14] (Gen 42:22–24)

1. Context

When Jacob's sons come to Egypt seeking to buy grain for their starving families, they must do business with the Egyptian official who oversees the land's granaries, though they are unaware that that official is their brother Joseph whom they had previously sold into slavery. Joseph recognizes his brothers and treats them harshly, accusing them of espionage, and imprisoning them for three days. Joseph agrees to release nine of them, holding one hostage until they bring their youngest brother before him. This situation leads the brothers to speculate that they are being punished for how they mistreated Joseph. Overhearing this

---

[14] NRSV modified. The text of this verse is secure, as LXX and other textual witnesses support MT here. The fem. pl. form בֵּינֹתָם apparently indicates specifically that the division ("between") occurs *within* the group referred to in the suffix. In contrast, the form ביניהם would appear in the fuller construction of the form בינו וביניהם, "between him and (between) them"; GKC §102.2. This distinction is not strictly maintained throughout biblical Hebrew.

speculation, Joseph begins to weep, dismissing the brothers according to the conditions previously stated, though he arranges for the price they paid for the grain to be repaid to them in secret.

2. Date

Scholars generally agree that that the "family history of Jacob" contained in Gen 37–50 is, as it stands is a composite work, incorporating older and younger sources.[15] However, no firm date can be assigned to the work of the redactor responsible for the final novella-like form of these chapters, which focuses chiefly on the turbulent life of Joseph. An early date in the Israelite monarchy was advocated by von Rad, who detected the influence of Egyptian wisdom literature in the story.[16] In contrast, a later date is preferred by Donald Redford and John Van Seters, among others. Redford argues that the references to elements of Egyptian culture in these chapters, apparently aimed at adding a sense of verisimilitude to the tale, reflect a period not earlier than the seventh century B.C.E.[17] Van Seters bases his exilic or postexilic dating of these chapters on a set of significant structural and thematic similarities that these chapters share with books which clearly belong to the latest period in biblical literature, Esther, Daniel, and Nehemiah.[18] Like these books, Gen 37–50 is generally concerned with the life of an Israelite who is prominent in a foreign court, and illustrates the perils and rewards involved in such a life. Specific parallels among these texts may also be

---

[15] See, e.g., Arnold, *Genesis*, 303–7; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 265–69.

[16] See Gerhard von Rad, "Josephgeschichte und ältere Chokma" in *Congress Volume: Copenhagen 1953* (ed. G. W. Anderson; VTSup 1; Leiden: Brill, 1953), 121–7. See also the re-evaluation of von Rad's suggestion in by Michael V. Fox, "Wisdom in the Joseph Story," *VT* 51 (2001): 26–41.

[17] Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50)* (VTSup 20; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 187–243.

[18] John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 311–24.

noted, such as the dual names, one Hebrew, one not, that some of these characters bear (Gen 41:45; Esth 2:7; Dan 1:7). While these and other features do not necessitate any particular date for the Joseph novella, they make it clear that close comparison between it and postexilic texts is warranted. It is thus to be hoped that an analysis of one evident commonality, reference to translation, in this section will prove fruitful.

3. Interpretation: המליץ

The understanding of מליץ, *mēlîṣ*, in this passage as "interpreter" is common to the ancient versions,[19] and standard among modern scholars,[20] but has been disputed by, among others, Maurice Canney.[21] Determining the function of this word in the sentence is important in deciding whether this verse does in fact deal with translation.

מליץ is to be analysed as a Hiphil participle (masc. sg.) of the verb ליץ, in a substantivized usage. In the Qal and the derived stems the verb means "to scorn."[22] The meaning of the substantive is not clearly derivable from the verb. It is used in four other cases in the Hebrew Bible apart from Gen 42:23, where it appears to be applied to intermediaries of various kinds. An embassy is referred to in 2 Chr 32:31 when מליצי שרי בבל, "the *mēlîṣîm* of the officers of Babylon" are sent to Hezekiah to inquire about his miraculous recovery from illness.[23] These individuals clearly serve in a representative function, so the meaning "intermediary,

---

[19] E.g., LXX ἑρμηνευτὴς; Vulg. *interpretem*; *Tg. Onq.* מתורגמן.

[20] Among them is Westermann, *Genesis*, 3:111, who does, however, point out that this is the only case in which the word bears the meaning "interpreter" in Hebrew.

[21] Maurice A. Canney, "The Hebrew מֵלִיץ," *AJSL* 40 (1924): 135–37.

[22] BDB 539 a–b.

[23] In the parallel passages in Isa 39:1–8 and 2 Kgs 20:12–19, King Meradoch-baladan of Babylon sends letters and a gift, the bearers of which are simply referred to as אנשים.

spokesperson" is suggested. This is true also for Job 33:23. The verse seems to describe the

(effective) intercession of a מליץ (paralleled with מלאך) on behalf of an ailing sinner. The

parallelism with מלאך and this intercessory role support the interpretation "intermediary" once

more. The referent in the Job passage may be human or superhuman.

Less clear are the two other occurrences. In Isa 43:27, we read: "Your first ancestor sinned,

and your *mēlîṣîm* [מליציך] transgressed against me." If we accept the meaning "intermediary,

spokesperson" from the previous examples, we can offer one possible explanation of this

verse. It could refer to iniquitous religious officials throughout Israel's history (kings, priests,

prophets, etc.), who, through their roles, are perceived to have acted as go-betweens in the

people's relationship with Yahweh (compare "vicar" in English). The use of the word מליץ in

parallel with שׁופט, "judge, ruler" in Sir 10:2 supports this interpretation. In Job 16:20, the

short sentence מְלִיצַי רֵעָי, is very difficult. Possible interpretations include "my friends are the

ones who scorn me" and "my friends are my spokesmen."[24] The latter is rendered a little

more likely by the use in the previous verse of the words עד and שׂהד, both "one who testifies,

a witness," implying that the passage is concerned with advocacy in some way.

Thus these Hebrew uses can be explained if מליץ is understood to mean "intermediary,

representative, spokesman"; in none of these cases does the meaning "linguistic interpreter,

dragoman" suggest itself. In postbiblical Hebrew, מליץ is also used to mean "one who speaks

on behalf of someone, a defender."[25] Canney therefore argued that we should understand the

use of this word in the Joseph narrative in the same sense. He translates "And they did not

know that Joseph heard them, for the intermediary was between them," explaining "Joseph

---

[24] See, e.g., Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 265–66.

[25] See, e.g., Jastrow 701a.

did not hear them, either because he was separated from his brethren by the intermediary, or because the intermediary, being a talker by profession, drowned their words."[26]

Canney is correct to assert the ambiguity of the cognate evidence.[27] Phoenician *mlṣ* is defined in dictionaries as "interpreter," but in fact the nature of the office to which it refers is not made clear in the scarce attestations.[28] Charles Krahmalkov reasons that since it is modified by what he regards as an ethnically derived glottonym (*hkrsym*), *mlṣ* means "interpreter" as in "interpreter of the Corsic language."[29] However the meaning "spokesperson, representative" would also fit here, as in "ambassador to the Corsi." In fact, it is not clear whether *hkrsym* does refer to a people group, since this is the only occurrence of *krsy* in a Northwest Semitic text.[30]

We may, however, note two contextual factors which argue in favour of regarding מליץ as a reference to an interpreter in Gen 42:23. For one thing, the phrase כי שֹׁמֵעַ יוסף in Gen 42:23 is suggestive of the semantic field of linguistic diversity. As discussed in the previous chapter, שמע can be used as a technical term to denote the ability to understand a language. It appears clearly in this sense in 2 Kgs 18:26, a passage which provides a particularly close syntactic parallel to this one, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it [כִּי שֹׁמְעִים אֲנָחְנוּ]." The predicate-subject word order in both phrases, and the use of present participles of שמע, suggests that the verb is also used technically in Gen 42:23. It follows that, if Joseph's

---

[26] Canney, "The Hebrew מֵלִיץ," 137.

[27] Canney, "The Hebrew מֵלִיץ," 136.

[28] For this definition, and for the attestations, see *DNWSI* at *lyṣ*, 575–6; and Charles R. Krahmalkov, *mlṣ* (I), *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary* (OLA 90; Studia phoenicia 15; Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 290–1.

[29] "The Corsi were a people of northern Sardinia"; Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*, 290.

[30] See *DNWSI* at *krsy*, 537.

brothers naturally converse in a language other than the language of the business transaction (presumably Egyptian), the reason that a מליץ figure was between them and Joseph was to act as an interpreter.

An additional contextual consideration supports the understanding of מליץ as "interpreter." It is extremely important for the brothers to be certain that they cannot be overheard by Joseph, because their safety is at risk if he understands their words, as I discuss below. If, however, the only thing stopping Joseph from hearing them was the chattering of a spokesperson (as Canney suggests), the brothers could not be sure that their discussion would remain private; if the intermediary stopped for some reason, or if Joseph listened very hard, they would be caught out. They can, however, feel certain that Joseph will be oblivious to the contents of their discussion if they are confident that he is ignorant of their language, of which the presence of an interpreter would be clear assurance.

There is good reason, then, to regard מליץ in this instance as denoting an interpreter. It may well be that "intermediary, spokesperson" is the more basic meaning of the term, with "interpreter" being a specific semantic value that the word has acquired through continued application to a specific type of intermediary, namely, the translator.[31] Indeed, the use with the definite article Gen 42:23 suggests that it refers to a recognized position within Joseph's bureau, and whereas "spokesperson" would seem too vague an office to be referred to thus, the dragoman, as Ignace Gelb has shown, was a standard feature of international relations in the Near East from early on.[32]

---

[31] Much as, for instance, מלאך, "messenger," through frequent application to divine emissaries gained the semantic value "angel" in Hebrew, like ἄγγελος in Greek.

[32] Ignace J. Gelb, "Word for Dragoman," 93–104.

We may thus regard it as established that this verse really is talking about translation, and move on to an analysis of the role translation plays in the story of Joseph.

4. Narrative Function

Firstly, a remarkable amount of information is conveyed by the single word מֵלִיץ. At the very least, the reader is made aware: that the Egyptians spoke a different language from the Israelite ancestors (let us call their language "Hebrew," despite the anachronism);[33] that the brothers did not know Egyptian; that the Egyptians, in general, did not know Hebrew; and that there was a system in place to facilitate communication across the language barrier, at least in the business of grain.[34] Additionally, כִּי שֹׁמֵעַ יוֹסֵף informs us that Joseph knows both languages involved, presumably through having spent time in both Egypt and Canaan.

None of this information is surprising, and perhaps could have been inferred by a reader, but this verse confirms any suspicions and speculations. This verse also affects a reader's understanding of the brothers' interactions with Joseph looking backwards and forwards. The translator figure must be imposed upon all the scenes where the brothers stand before Joseph, mediating and structuring all of their intercourse.[35] Greater depth is also given to the brothers' reaction later in the story to Joseph's self-disclosure. After dismissing all of his

---

[33] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the biblical names for the language of the Israelites.

[34] Much information about this system is omitted, including who it was who hired the interpreter (the brothers or Joseph), and how he came by his bilingual proficiency. Midrashic exegesis fills some of these gaps by identifying the interpreter as Joseph's son Manasseh, who was fluent in the language of Egypt through his upbringing in that land, but was taught Hebrew by his Israelite father. See *Gen. Rab.* 91.8; *Tg. Ps.-J.* and *Tg. Neof.* at Gen 42:23. This tradition is noted by Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Genesis* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 2000; repr. of *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis*; Berlin: Schocken, 1934), 771.

[35] In Roger Crumb's enjoyable and thought-provoking comic-book style illustrated interpretation of Genesis, *The Book of Genesis* (New York: Norton, 2009), this auditory experience is conveyed visually: Joseph's speech-bubbles contain Egyptian hieroglyphs, with the interpreter providing the (English) translation for the brothers.

attendants, Joseph utters five words, אני יוסף העוד אבי חי, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" (45:3), which leaves his brothers dismayed (נבהלו) and dumbfounded. In light of the mention of the מליץ in 42:23, we must assume that their shock arises partly from the fact that the mighty Egyptian official addresses them in their own tongue, a tongue they were sure he did not know.

That all this information should be conveyed by this simple statement המליץ בינתם is typical of Hebrew narration. Details irrelevant to plot or characterization are on the whole omitted, which creates a terse, powerful style. The relevance of mentioning the interpreter is evident in how Joseph's eavesdropping sets in motion an important events chain of events, as I shall now explain.

In vv. 21–22, the brothers lament a rather incriminating event in their collective past: their role in the abandonment and possible death of one of their siblings. Because the brothers assume their interlocutor cannot understand their language, they talk frankly and with candour about this event, without fear of condemning themselves. Given that the great Egyptian official before whom they stand (Joseph) already suspects the brothers of treachery (מרגלים אתם, "you are spies!" v. 9), they would hardly be so foolish as to mention this act of possible fratricide before him. In fact, this great Egyptian has demanded a demonstration of their integrity (אם כנים אתם, "if you are honest . . .," v. 19) to which they have agreed: they must leave one of their number in his custody as a sign of their sincere intent to return. But the Egyptian official would be rather unlikely to trust them in this matter if he knew that they had previously abandoned a brother in need. Thus, at risk in this case, if the great Egyptian overhears them, is the liberty of all of the brothers and the survival of their dependent

families, currently languishing from famine in Canaan. In this way it is of paramount importance that the brothers believe that their words cannot be understood.

They are, however, understood, and, in a great irony, the Egyptian official is in fact the abandoned brother they are discussing. But rather than proving damaging to their plight, this has consequences that the brothers could not have expected. In fact, this moment proves to be a turning point in the story.[36] Until now, Joseph's dealings with the brothers displayed coldness, if not cruelty: he had spoken harshly with them (v. 7), accusing them of espionage (v. 9), and had held them in custody for three days (v. 17). This suggests that the brothers' arrival primarily triggered feelings of anger and resentment within him, understandably enough. Overhearing his brothers express something like regret or remorse, however, moves Joseph in a different way: he "turned away and wept" (v. 24). This expression of tender emotion is the first hint in the narrative that some kind of reconciliation might be possible; an imagined language barrier provides the opportunity for unity. After this point, Joseph does not relent in his harsh demand that one of the brothers remain in custody (v. 24), but he does do them the (ambivalent) kindness of secretly repaying them the cost of the grain they had bought (v. 25).

Thus, in this passage the idea of the barrier of communication that linguistic diversity involves, is used by the author to very strategic purpose. Westermann writes: "[t]he way he uses it as a narrative device shows that he has reflected carefully on the mechanism of

---

[36] James Ackerman has studied the development of plot and character in Gen 37–50, identifying a further important turning point at the moment when Judah offers to assume personal responsibility for the brothers' failure to meet Joseph's terms (Gen 43:8–10). See James S. Ackerman, "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (2 vols.; ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis; Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 2:85–112, 305–306, at 103.

bridging the language gap."[37] Specifically, it provides the opportunity for an important shift in the course of the narrative. I therefore disagree with an understanding of this verse proposed by Gunkel. Of this verse, Gunkel claimed that, in the mere fact of mentioning the interpreter, it is "particularly demonstrative of a very advanced, one could almost say refined, narrative art."[38] Such art is absent in other "naively recounted" patriarchal narratives which contain no references to the necessity of translation in the encounters of Israel's ancestors with diverse peoples and nations. Gunkel connects this feature to other references to Egyptian custom and practices in the Joseph story (43:32; 46:34), and claims that these add "foreign charm" to the tale.[39] Against Gunkel's assessment, I would argue that translation is brought up here, not for its own sake, but because of its importance to the development of the story; it is not mentioned in the brothers' first encounter with Joseph (42:6–16), for instance, but only when the brothers say something in Hebrew that has a major effect on Joseph. Consequently, the absence of such references in the majority of biblical narratives should not be reckoned as demonstrative of any kind of naivety, or of lack of cosmopolitanism in them, but is quite possibly attributable to the fact that no plot point in those cases depended on linguistic difference.

To continue assessing the role of this event in the Joseph story, it seems significant that chance is apparently at work in turning the phantom language barrier between Joseph and his brothers into an important plot point. The brothers happen to voice their thoughts within earshot of Joseph, when they could have kept them to themselves, or shared them on the journey back to Canaan. If they had remained silent in Joseph's presence, Joseph's heart

---

[37] Westermann, *Genesis*, 3:111.

[38] Gunkel, *Genesis*, 425–26. The elements of Egyptian culture in the Joseph story are analysed in detail in Redford, who argues that they do not betray an especially notable familiarity with the customs of Egypt; see Redford, *Story of Joseph*, 187–243.

[39] Gunkel, *Genesis*, 383.

would not have been softened, and the subsequent course of events might have been quite different. The language barrier provides the opportunity for this chance act to occur, in one of the series of (un)fortunate events that befall Joseph in his uneven journey towards the stewardship of Egypt. It is precisely in these chance occurrences that Joseph discerns the outworking of divine providence (Gen 45:7–10; 50:20).

As far as the author's attitudes towards Hebrew and foreign language are concerned, this passage is decidedly neutral. It is not considered impressive that Joseph, who has lived in Egypt for many years, speaks Egyptian. This is in contrast with the prestige apparently attributed to Daniel for learning "the language of the Chaldeans," which required three years of devoted study for an individual who could already be described as "versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight" (Dan 1:4). Nor is emphasis placed on the strange sound or frightfulness of foreign language. Thus, the use of foreign language here differs from its use in the prophets and Deuteronomy, and from the effect of Ps 114:1's description of the Egyptians as עם לֹעֵז "a people who speak unintelligibly."

In Gen 42:23, a difference between the language of the sons of Jacob, and the language of Egypt is acknowledged, as it is elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 19:18; Ps 114:1).[40] In that this story presents such a difference as obtaining in the patriarchal period, we may compare it with Gen 31:47, where the language of Laban the Aramaean differs from Jacob's. Snippets and echoes of Egyptian language may be dotted through the story, in Egyptian names (e.g., Gen 41:45) and the herald's cry of אברך, *ʾabrēk*, before Joseph (41:43).[41] However, no name is given to this language, or to the language of Jacob's sons, and this anonymity should

---

[40] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of other allusions to the Egyptian language in the Hebrew Bible.

[41] Numerous understandings of this word have been proposed; see Jürgen Ebach, *Genesis 37–50* (HTKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007), 265–66.

probably be attributed to the irrelevance of the names of those languages to the story. Alternatively, the author may have recognized the anachronism that would have resulted from referring to the language of Jacob's sons by the name most commonly given to Hebrew in the Hebrew Bible, יהודית, "Judaean." For this is derived from the name of just one of those sons, Judah.

B. *Translation and the Royal Edicts in the Book of Esther*

וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כִּכְתָבָהּ וְאֶל־עַם וָעָם כִּלְשׁוֹנוֹ

> [Ahasuerus] sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province according to its own script and to every people according to its own language (Esth 1:22; cf. 3:12; 8:9).

A theme which punctuates the book of Esther is the issuance of irreversible decrees by the authority of the Persian king Ahasuerus. This occurs three times in the book, first in the matter of the divorce of Vashti (1:22), second when Haman desires to eradicate the Judaeans (3:12), and third when Mordecai arranges a counter-decree permitting what we might euphemistically call Judaean "pre-emptive self-defence" (8:9). The publication of these edicts is expressed in a standard manner (with some variation), repeated elements of which include the date of the decree, the summoning of scribes, the mention of satraps, and so on. In every case, it is stated that the decree is sent to מדינה ומדינה ככתבה עם ועם כלשונו,[42] "every province in according to its own script and every people according to its own language."[43] Though in

---

[42] In Esth 1:22, the first מְדִינָה is preceded by אֶל, and the first עַם by וְאֶל.

[43] LXX has variations of a shorter formula, κατὰ χώραν κατὰ τὴν λέξιν αὐτῶν, "by country according to their speech [or: 'diction']" (1:22). As Kristin De Troyer points out, this is probably an abbreviation of what was seen

these passages script and province are repeatedly paired, as are people and language, these pairs are not to be separated, for the peoples of the empire dwelt within its provinces, and languages are always written in some script or other. Thus, as Berlin notes, we should regard this formula as hendiadys: to each "ethno-province ... according to its written language."[44]

In the Hebrew Bible, the word כְּתָב is confined to the books of Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles, and so is considered a Late Biblical Hebrew term.[45] It most frequently refers to written documents (letters, lists, edicts, and so on), but the meaning "manner of writing, script, writing system," which is clear from the context in Esther, is not indisputably attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible for this word.[46] These passages may thus be the only ones in the Bible which raise the issue of variety among the writing systems (alphabetic and logo-syllabic; written on clay, papyrus or stone; etc.) in use across the Near East.[47] In communicating in these various written languages, Ahasuerus' scribes accomplish a formidable task. Translation is involved in this process at the stage of writing these many letters, as it is assumed that these bi- or multilingual scribes are capable of expressing a decree of their Persian king in the many languages of the empire. It should be noted that this kind of literary translation is different from the action of the simultaneous interpreter imagined in the Joseph story.

---

as repetitive phrasing; Kristin De Troyer, *The End of the Alpha Text of the Book of Esther: Translation and Narrative Technique in MT 8:1–17, LXX 8:1–17 and AT* (trans. Brian Doyle; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 230.

[44] Adele Berlin, *Esther: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 20.

[45] So, e.g., Hurvitz, who regards it as an Aramaic loanword (though of course the root is attested in all periods of Hebrew); Hurvitz, *Late Biblical Hebrew*, 147–50.

[46] כְּתָב in Ezra 4:7 is regarded by some as meaning "script." See the discussion below.

[47] Though this diversity of scripts may be implied in the reference in Dan 1:4 to the "literature [סֵפֶר] and language of the Chaldeans. See the discussion below for the nature of this literature and language.

In the use of the formula "to every province according to its own script and every people according to its own language," many biblical exegetes have detected a reference to Persian imperial tolerance of various forms of diversity among the subject peoples of the realm. Commenting on this passage, Harald Wahl, for instance, has written of "das kulturpolitisch tolerante Selbstverständnis der zentral geordneten Administration des Vielvölkerstaates."[48] Michael Fox regards this imperial respect for distinctiveness as a device which generates irony in Esther, since Haman's argues for the destruction of the Judaean people on the grounds of its difference from others.[49]

However, the representation of the Persian multilingual administration in Esther appears to be exaggerated. The question of the languages of administration in the Persian empire is a complex one, and variation may be expected across the great extent of the empire, and in the two centuries of the empire's hegemony in the Near East. Yet several general points may be noted.[50] The native or historic language of the Persians, Old Persian, was not a written language of normal imperial administration, and apparently did not have a standardized script before the Achaemenid period.[51] When this language does appear in writing, as in the Behistun inscription, it appears to display a particular ideological motivation. The Behistun inscription, along with other evidence, also attests the court's competency in Akkadian, but this language also does not appear to have played a role in Persia's domestic administration,

---

[48] "The politico-culturally tolerant self-understanding of the centrally ordered administration of the multinational state"; Harald M. Wahl, *Das Buch Esther: Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 67.

[49] Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 54.

[50] The picture outlined here follows that given by Gzella, *Cultural History*, 157–211. See also Jonas C. Greenfield, "Aramaic in the Achaemenian Empire," in *The Cambridge History of Iran* (7 vols.; ed. Ilya Gershevitch; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968–1991), 2:698–713, at 704–5.

[51] In the Behistun inscription, Old Persian is represented in cuneiform; however, Julius Lewy agues that this text contains reference (§70) to the promulgation of an alphabetic script for this language; Julius Lewy, "The Problems Inherent in Section 70 of the Bisitun Inscription," *HUCA* 25 (1954): 169–208.

or in its relations with its provinces. In the administration of the Persian heartland, the largest

role may have been played by Elamite, at least in the empire's first century, as is attested by

the great quantities of Elamite cuneiform tablets discovered at Persepolis. This language was

not, however, one in which the chancellery communicated with the provinces. Rather, this

function was served by a particular form of Aramaic, as a great deal of evidence from the far

reaches of the empire in Egypt and Bactria demonstrates. As Gzella writes, "Achaemenid

Official Aramaic acted as an empire-wide and highly standardized chancellery language."[52]

Aramaic was also used in within the provinces in their internal administration, but it did not

(immediately or completely) displace more established local scripts and languages. For

instance, the tradition of written Akkadian and Egyptian continues, though to a diminished

degree, in this period.

 The picture presented in Esther of the Achaemenid court sending out a royal edict in all the

various languages of the subject peoples of the empire does not, therefore, correspond to the

historical reality. What we may have, in Esther, is a recognition of the multilingual

competence of the imperial chancellery. The role of this multilingualism in the court's

relations with the provinces, however, appears to have been misremembered or exaggerated

for the purposes of the story. Indeed, Berlin has suggested that in Esther's references to the

many languages of the Persian empire we may detect a reflection of a particular element in

Achaemenid imperial rhetoric and ideology.[53] As Pierre Briant has noted, various Persian

sources stress the great linguistic diversity of the territories of the empire. [54] For instance, in

Achaemenid titulature, we find the title "king of absolutely every linguistic community"

---

[52] Gzella, *Cultural History*, 168–69.

[53] Berlin, *Esther*, 19.

[54] Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 179.

(Akkad. *šar napḫar lišāni gabbi*) used of Darius I and Xerxes I.[55] This is also dramatically

manifested in visual form in the extended monumental trilingual inscription of Darius I at

Behistun. Outside of Persian sources, the Greek historian Xenophon also stresses that Cyrus

"ruled over these [many] nations even though they did not speak the same language as he, nor

one nation the same as another."[56] Briant infers from these indications that the great linguistic

diversity of the subject peoples formed an important part in how the empire conceived of and

represented the nature of its territory, perhaps because it stressed the great extent of the

empire, as well as the supreme competence of the Persian kings in managing it. It is therefore

quite possible that in Esther we have an allusion to, and perhaps a parody of, the Persians'

pride in their multilingual empire.[57]

It should be remembered, however, that the image of Xerxes' realm in Esther is unlikely to be

grounded in direct experience of that emperor's court, but rather in popular and literary

traditions about it, and in experiences of life in the Persian empire at a later period. Berlin has

pointed out that Esther's presentation of Persian courtly affairs conforms to a standard type

also attested in Greek literature, emphasizing Persian vices like excess and bureaucracy. As

such, the book need not stem from the Achaemenid period, but may, like Daniel, have its

origins in the Hellenistic period.[58] However, specific correspondences like that just described

between Persian royal rhetoric and biblical narrative, remind us that the, albeit caricatured,

---

[55] With reference to Xerxes see, e.g., E. Herzfeld, *Altpersische Inschriften* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1938), text 14, page 27. For further references see *CAD* L *lišānu* at 214a. The origins of this claim are perhaps to be located in the Neo-Assyrian period, since Sargon II claims that he settled peoples "of all languages" in Dūr-Šarrukīn; see the discussions in Chapter 3 and 6.

[56] *Cyropaedia* 1.1.5

[57] It may also be noted that this claim to dominion over peoples of many languages is made by Xerxes I (see note above), who is the most likely candidate for the book of Esther's king "Ahasuerus" (אחשורוש). See Berlin, *Esther*, xxix–xxxii.

[58] Ibid.*,* xxix–xxxii.

image in Esther, did have as its subject some definite historical reality, with which it had real, if mediated, contact.

As noted, Xerxes and other Persian kings stressed the vastness of their empire through reference to its great linguistic diversity. The magnitude of the Achaemenid empire is also emphasized in the Esther passages under discussion, which speak of "the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces" (e.g., 8:9). In Esther, however, the reference to the various languages and scripts serves purposes beyond emphasizing the vastness of the empire. The empire's great size, combined with its "exaggerated" bureaucratic methods, produces a dramatic effect. In the case of Ahasuerus' marital dispute with Vasthi, this effect is comic, as Berlin remarks, since we witness "the machinery of state going to great lengths to send out nonsensical edicts."[59] But, as Jon Levenson points out, in the case of Haman's edict the effect is terrifying: it creates "a sense of a vast, uncaring, faceless bureaucracy that relentlessly, deterministically pursues an agenda that no human mind has considered or reviewed in appropriate fashion."[60] Levenson's characterization of the Persian bureaucracy as mindless, here, is astute. The scribes in Ahasuerus' court remain nameless throughout, and undertake no individual action; the story assigns them no role but the mechanical conversion of a message handed down from on high.

We see here, then, a notable difference in the use of foreign language from the alloglot-nation theme in the prophets. There, the strange speech of a conqueror was used primarily to convey fear. Here in Esther, the foreign language is not inherently threatening, but can be used to various ends, including fear *and* comedy. Nevertheless, though it is used towards these ends,

---

[59] Ibid., 20.

[60] Jon D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 73–74.

the linguistic diversity depicted in Esther is grounded in a genuine feature of Persian administration. The distorted scale of this feature may well be due to inaccurate knowledge of the actual system, or it may be a deliberate exaggeration, in line with the other excesses attributed to the Persian court.

C. Translation in Ezra 4:7

[62] מֶלֶךְ פָּרָס וּכְתָב [61] עַל־אַרְתַּחְשַׁשְׂתְּא וּבִימֵי אַרְתַּחְשַׁשְׂתָּא כָּתַב בִּשְׁלָם מִתְרְדָת טָבְאֵל וּשְׁאָר כְּנָוֹתָו
הַנִּשְׁתְּוָן כָּתוּב אֲרָמִית וּמְתֻרְגָּם אֲרָמִית

"And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia; the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated. Aramaic:"[63] (Ezra 4:7)

1. Context

Ezra 4:11–22 contains two Aramaic letters. The first is sent to Artaxerxes by certain groups opposed to the rebuilding of Jerusalem associated with Samaria, and the second is his response decreeing that reconstruction should cease. The Aramaic verses before these letters (vv. 8–10) intend to set the context of these letters, but are quite opaque.[64] The events in 4:1–6 (in Hebrew) are thematically related to these Aramaic letters, but refer to separate events in widely different periods (Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes). Our verse, Ezra 4:7, which introduces

---

[61] K; Q: כְּנָוֹתָיו.

[62] K; Q: אַרְתַּחְשַׁשְׂתָּא.

[63] NRSV modified.

[64] Loring Batten noted that "[i]t would be difficult to find a text more corrupt text than vv. 7–11"; Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (ICC; New York: Scribner's, 1913), 166.

the Aramaic letter to Artaxerxes, serves as the bridge between the Hebrew summaries in vv. 1–6 and the Aramaic letters that follow.

2. Interpretation

This chapter of Ezra is beset with interpretative difficulties. For instance, though these events are generally dated to the fifth century, it is not at all clear which of the several bearers of the several royal Persian names used here (except for Cyrus) are meant.[65] The authenticity of the Aramaic letters is also debated; Williamson, for one, supports it, while it is denied by, among others, Grabbe.[66] Until further evidence is discovered that sheds light on these events, it seems that these issues will not be satisfactorily resolved. For that reason, I shall here specifically address only issues relevant for interpreting the mention of translation in v. 7.

The most straightforward, relevant interpretative difficulty to resolve is the duplication of ארמית. As it stands, MT appears to claim that a letter written in Aramaic was translated into Aramaic, which is nonsensical. As in Dan 2:4, however, ארמית appears at the transition of the Hebrew text to Aramaic. We may thus regard it as a note marking the transition. It is possible that this note is secondary addition to the text, as it is absent from LXX (2 Esdras). The significance of the presence of Aramaic in Ezra will be in my next section, on bilingualism.

Next, we may consider the function of כְּתָב. It is not clear which meaning, either "text, document" or "script, writing system" is intended in Ezra 4:7. Williamson is among those

---

[65] See, for instance, Frank Moore Cross, Jr., *From Epic to Canon*: *History and Literature in Ancient Israel*. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 151–72.

[66] Hugh G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 54; Lester L. Grabbe, "The 'Persian Documents' in the Book of Ezra: Are They Authentic?" in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake. Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 531–70, at 561–63.

scholars who take כתב to mean "script" in this case.[67] The statement that the script of the

letter was "written in Aramaic," according to this interpretation, makes the point that the

letter was written in that particular alphabetic script used to write Aramaic, in contrast to

other alphabets, like the Phoenician or the Palaeo-Hebrew. Scholars differ as to why this

would be remarked upon here. Williamson imagines that the letter that the author had in front

of him was a Hebrew translation of an Aramaic original. That Hebrew translation, however,

was written in the Aramaic script, rather than the Palaeo-Hebrew, which merited comment.

This seems unlikely, however, given that the letter which has been included in Ezra 4 is

actually written in Aramaic, and not in Hebrew.[68]

Among those who interpret כתב, here, to mean "letter, document, text" is Blenkinsopp,[69] who

regards it as a gloss clarifying the rarer נשתון.[70] This removes the repetitive phrasing of the

verse (כתב הנשתון כתוב ארמית). The claim of the verse would therefore be that the letter was

written in Aramaic, which of course fits the context well, since a letter in Aramaic

immediately follows this verse. This also accords with the apparent function of (the first)

ארמית here: in light of the claim that the letter was מתרגם, "translated," ארמית should be taken

to indicate a language rather than a script. Blenkinsopp's proposal is therefore to be favoured.

Exactly what act of translation is being referred to here is also a matter of debate. Jacob

Myers writes that the letter "was translated for the benefit of the exiles who had returned"

---

[67] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 54.

[68] Ibid., 54.

[69] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1989), 112.

[70] Such a gloss would appear to have been necessary. LXX fails to understand נשתון here, rendering it with φορολόγος, "tax collector."

from Babylon to Judah,[71] thus imagining the translation to be part of the afterlife of the letter: an originally Aramaic letter sent to Artaxerxes from those opposed to the rebuilding of the temple later came into the hands of a Judaean, who shared it, in translation, with the community.[72]

Another explanation, which connects this verse with v. 18 seems more likely, however. In 4:18, King Artaxerxes informs Rehum, Shimshai, et al., that "the letter that you sent to us has been read *məpāraš* [מְפָרַשׁ] before me." Alone this would not be very suggestive. The verb פרשׁ in Aramaic has the basic meaning "to separate," but the extended meaning "to explain" is attested in Imperial Aramaic.[73] "Explained" (for the Pael pass. ptc.) would certainly make sense in Ezra 4:18. However, מפרשׁ in v. 18, and מתרגם in v. 7 have been viewed as linked by Blenkinsopp and others: the event in v. 18, the "explanation" of the letter before Artaxerxes, is considered the referent of the act of translation mentioned in v. 7; מתרגם in turn, provides the meaning of מפרשׁ as "translated" in this instance.[74] We may note that, in the Persian court, *viva voce* translation was probably involved in communicating the contents of a letter like this one, in Aramaic, to the king, likely an Old Persian speaker.[75]

This interpretation of מפרשׁ is made possible, but is not strongly supported, by evidence from Aramaic and cognate languages, where the meaning "to translate" is suggested, but not

---

[71] Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra. Nehemiah* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 32.

[72] Myers seems to imagine that the translation was from Aramaic to Hebrew, although he does not state this.

[73] *DNWSI* at *prš*₁, 944.

[74] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 112. See below for a discussion of מפרשׁ in Neh 8:8, which has also been regarded as meaning "translated."

[75] See Greenfield, "Aramaic in the Achaemenian Empire," 707–8.

required, by a handful of passages.[76] However, none of the ancient translations of the Hebrew Bible interprets מפרש in Ezra 4:18 passage in this way.

The case is thus difficult to determine. Because interpreting מפרש as referring to translation in this instance illuminates both v. 7 and v. 18, I am inclined to accept the association with מתרגם. If the linguistic evidence is not conclusive, and we attribute to the more usual meaning "explained" here, we may still regard מפרש as *referring* to the same act as מתרגם. After all, the conveying of the content, in translation, of the letter before Artaxerxes, could reasonably be described as an act of explaining. That is not to say, however, that the precise semantic content of מפרש is "translated" in this context.

3. The Role of Translation in Ezra 4

This discussion had led to the interpretation of v. 7 as a statement that a letter was written to Artaxerxes in the Aramaic language, and then translated; verse 18 completes the thought by informing us that the letter was translated before the Persian king. A note follows ("Aramaic") indicating that the subsequent verses are in that language. What role does translation play in these verses, and what attitude is displayed towards it? The answer is not straightforward, and depends on whether or not we regard the Aramaic letters as authentic correspondence sent to the Persian court. Since both positions are tenable, I shall offer an analysis of the role translation here in both "possible universes."

---

[76] *DNSWI* at *prš*₁, 944; *TADAE* D27.24 line 15. Krahmalkov cites a tantalizing case for Phoenician/Punic, in a Latin play, the *Poenulus* of Plautus, in which Punic speech is recorded; Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*, at *p-r-š*, 408.

Assuming that the letters are authentic, the function of מתרגם in v. 7 may be to explain a potentially perplexing datum in one of these texts, namely, Artaxerxes' comment that the letter from Rehum, Shimshai, et al. was read out 'מפרש' before him (v. 18). If the latter word is being used in the unusual sense "translated," it is clarified by מתרגם, as other details in vv. 7–10 are aimed at clarifying the scenario of the letters.

If these letters are not authentic, we have to imagine that the author of Ezra 4 is the originator of both references, מפרש and מתרגם. The question then becomes, Why did the author choose to include in this exchange of letters reference to translation? One answer which suggests itself is for reasons of verisimilitude. We may impute to the author a desire to make his historiographic work believable, and thus to make the "letters" he composes seem genuine. Introducing translation, here, achieves that affect, since it shows familiarity with the actual procedures involved in corresponding with the Persian court, namely, through the medium of (Achaemenid Official) Aramaic, as discussed above.

It seems, then, that what lies behind the reference to translation in Ezra 4 is a definite historical reality: the use of Aramaic as a means of communication in the Persian empire, and of the use of translation to deliver the messages so communicated effectively. This helps us to understand the references to translation in Ezra 4, whether or not the letters are genuine. If they are genuine, Ezra 4:7 mentions linguistic diversity to explain the givens of this material. If they are not genuine, linguistic diversity lends an air of credibility to the documents.

Once again, the use of the idea of linguistic diversity in this chapter stands in clear contrast to the use of the theme in Deuteronomy and the prophets. The highly charged rhetoric or those

texts is absent here, and instead the attitude is decidedly neutral and pragmatic. Translation

appears in this text precisely because it was a normal part of imperial administration.

D. The Interpretation of the Book of the Law of God (Neh 8:8)

וַיִּקְרְאוּ בַסֵּפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים מְפֹרָשׁ וְשׂוֹם שֶׂכֶל וַיָּבִינוּ בַּמִּקְרָא׃

> "So they [sc. the Levites] read from the book, from the law of God, with
> interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading."
> (Neh 8:8)

There is a long history of tradition which detects an act of translation in this verse, which

describes the reading aloud of the law of Moses (Neh 8:1) to the postexilic remnant

community of Judah, an event organized by the priest-scribe Ezra. The Babylonian Talmud

comments that in this verse is recorded the simultaneous translation of the Law into Aramaic,

that is, the first act of Targum.[77] Translation is also discerned here by some modern

interpreters.[78] Since this understanding is not universally accepted, I shall now analyse the

relevant linguistic, contextual, and historical evidence.

The primary linguistic evidence indicating translation is the word מְפֹרָשׁ, a Pual masc. sg.

participle of verb פרשׁ. This verb is rare in biblical Hebrew. As in Aramaic, the verb has the

basic meaning "to separate" (see Ezek 34:12), and is used twice with an extended meaning of

---

[77] *b. Megillah* 3a. This interpretation is not attested in the LXX (2 Esdras) or Vulg.B

[78] Myers, *Ezra. Nehemiah*, 150. Compare NJPS: "They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense."

"to state distinctly, make clear, specify" in the context of a legal decision: thus "it had not been made clear [לֹא פֹרַשׁ] what should be done to him" (Num 15:34; compare Lev 24:12).[79]

Either of these two meanings could apply in the case of Neh 8:8. If מְפֹרָשׁ had the meaning "stated distinctly, made clear," it could mean that, when the Law was read aloud, it was "clarified, explained" in this context. This is apparently the function LXX attributes to this word, which it seems to translate with ἐδίδασκεν, "he taught" (subject: Ezra; 2 Esd 18:8). In this case, מְפֹרָשׁ expresses a similar meaning to שׂוֹם שֶׂכֶל, "giving the sense." Alternatively, Williamson defends an interpretation of מפרש in the sense of "separated," here, taking it to mean that the reading was done, not continuously, but in sections, "paragraph by paragraph."[80] We may compare the postbiblical use of פָּרָשָׁה to refer to lectionary divisions of the Torah. In this case, מפרש conveys different information from שׂוֹם שֶׂכֶל.

What prompts the proposal that מְפֹרָשׁ means "translated, in translation" is the use of the verb, as discussed above, in Aramaic in Ezra 4:18. In both cases, the verb appears in a passive participle form, modifying קרא. On the basis of the similar form and usage, Myers and others conclude that Ezra translated the Law, written in Hebrew, into the everyday language of the postexilic Judaean community, Aramaic.[81]

The reasoning can be challenged in several respects. Firstly, it was conceded that, though מְפָרַשׁ and מתרגם seem to refer to the same event in Ezra 4:18, that does not imply that they mean the same thing; the translation "explain" for מְפָרַשׁ could also have applied to an act of

---

[79] See BDB at פרשׁ, 831b.

[80] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 277.

[81] Myers, *Ezra. Nehemiah*, 150. The linguistic situation of Judah in the Persian period is discussed further below.

translation. This would have removed the strength of the parallel with Neh 8:8. Secondly, if

we claim that מְפָרַשׁ does mean "translation" in Ezra 4:18, that would be in light of a

contextual clue, מתרגם. No such clue is found in the episode in Neh 8. Finally, the arguments

made above for מְפָרַשׁ in Ezra 4:18 were about an Aramaic word in an Aramaic passage. There

is no guarantee that this same considerations would apply to the Hebrew word in Neh 8:8. It

is possible that Aramaic had developed a specific technical meaning that the root in Hebrew

had not.[82]

We should not, therefore, regard מְפֹרָשׁ as denoting translation in Neh 8:8. Apart from this,

only one word in this verse belongs to the semantic field of foreign language: ויבינו.[83] In Isa

33:19, the root בין is used to express the idea of understanding a foreign language. Thus in

Neh 8:8, it may carry this nuance too: the people understand the Law because it has been

translated into a language they understand.[84] This is a possible, but not a necessary,

interpretation of the verb, however. It could simply mean that they understood the Law

because it had been explained.

Let us now move to a discussion of contextual considerations relevant to determining the

meaning of מְפֹרָשׁ. To explain the apparent repetitiveness of Neh 8:1–8, where the reading of

the Law is described twice, Williamson plausibly assigns this verse the form of a "concluding

---

[82] Perhaps recognizing this possiblity, NRSV has "in translation" for מְפָרַשׁ in Ezra 4:18, but "with interpretation" for מְפֹרָשׁ in Neh 8:8.

[83] שׂכל is never elsewhere used in Biblical Hebrew to describe the understanding of foreign language.

[84] Blenkinsopp regards ויבינו as a Hiphil verb, because no change in subject from ויקראו is indicated. Thus, the Levites "gave understanding" to the people, where "the people" is understood; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 288. In contrast, Williamson parses ויבינו as Qal, noting the absence of a direct object (expected in the Hiphil): "the people understood"; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 279. In either case, the verb could carry the nuance of understanding a foreign language.

summary" of the action previously narrated.[85] But since translation is not hinted at earlier in this chapter, it would be a surprise to find it mentioned here in this summary. In the wider context of Ezra-Nehemiah, we may note that inability to speak Hebrew is not widely commented upon, although it is presented in Neh 13:24. There, some of the children of mixed Judaean-Ashdodite marriages are said to be ignorant of Judaean. However, this is portrayed as a historically and geographically limited state of affairs that seems particularly outrageous to Nehemiah. Moreover, only half of the children of such unions are affected. Thus, we have no indication that the Judaean populace, as envisaged by the authors of Ezra-Nehemiah, was unable to understand Hebrew, and so a description of translation in Neh 8:8 would be unexpected.

Historical considerations support this. While epigraphic evidence of Hebrew from Persian-period Yehud is scant, evidence from later periods, including the Qumran texts, the Bar Kochba letters, and the Mishnah indicates that Hebrew persisted at least in some locations as a spoken language. As Lester Grabbe writes, "Hebrew continued to evolve and develop as a living language for many centuries after this," and consequently "[t]he assumption that the people of Jerusalem would have needed an Aramaic translation of a Hebrew text is based on an unproved hypothesis."[86] That is, if the Ezra's audience could understand Hebrew, there would have been no cause for the translation of the Law.

We see, then, that the view that translation takes place in this verse rests entirely on a particular interpretation of the very uncertain פרשׁ, while the weight of the other evidence

---

[85] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 290.

[86] Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (London: Routledge, 1998), 52.

inclines away from this reading. It is safest, then, not to regard this as an act of translation. The description seems rather to be of explanation and interpretation of other sorts.

This does not mean, however, that this text cannot be concerned with linguistic difference. It is quite possible that at least one of the reasons why the Levites need to explain the Law to the people is linguistic. Obscure lexis, morphology, and syntax hamper modern scholarly attempts to understand the Pentateuch, as they may have ancient readers. In particular, the language of the Pentateuch may have seemed archaic to speakers of Hebrew in the fifth century B.C.E., so that linguistic difference may be at work in obstructing understanding. However, in Neh 8:8, language change through time is not explicitly stated as the reason why the Judaeans required an explanation of the law; therefore we cannot claim this as a text clearly aware of linguistic difference.

E. Translation in these Texts

Both literary translation and simultaneous oral interpretation are depicted in Ezra, Esther, and Genesis, and in the contexts in which translation is mentioned, the subject is treated largely dispassionately. It is put to no single use in Genesis, Esther, or Ezra, but all three recognize it as a regular part of international relations and court bureaucracy. In Gen 42, the presence of the interpreter leads to an important plot development. In Esther, the court practices of the Persians are parodied through reference to translation. In Ezra, translation is mentioned because of the genre of the texts recorded there (letters). These texts thus take as given the multilingual contexts from which they arise, and display various ways of dealing with that reality.

IV. Bilingualism in Daniel and Ezra

Rarely in the Hebrew Bible is it made apparent that the author of a book knew more than one language, and rarely is a character in a narrative presented as being bilingual. In this and previous chapters, I discussed several examples of bilingual biblical authors (Gen 31:47; Jer 10:11) and bilingual biblical characters (Joseph in Gen 42:23; the Rabshakeh and the Judaean officials in 2 Kgs 18//Isa 36; the Persian scribes in Esther). Here I shall examine the bilingualism of and in Daniel and Ezra, and attempt to explain the occurrence in these books of these forms of references to linguistic diversity.

A. Dan 1:3–4

> "[3]Then the king told his chief officer Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites, some of the royal family, and some of the nobility,[87] [4]boys without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and capable of serving in the king's palace; and to teach them the literature [or: writing] and language of the Chaldeans [וללמדם ספר ולשון כשׂדים]."[88]

1. Context

The king mentioned here is Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon, and the Israelite boys that the chief officer selects are Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, all Judaeans (v. 6), although it is not clear from which of the three classes mentioned here (Israelites, royalty, nobility) each of these belongs. The presence of these Judaeans in Babylon is explained with reference to the exile of Jerusalem. In accordance with their new role in the Babylonian court, the

---

[87] The word translated "nobility" here is פרתמים, a word ultimately of Persian origin, perhaps mediated though Aramaic; see John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 21.

[88] NRSV modified.

palace master soon renames these Judaeans Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. With God's help, these four grow in intellect and acquire knowledge of all "literature and wisdom" (v. 17), to the extent that they are ten times more proficient than the all of Nebuchadnezzar's "magicians and enchanters" (v. 20).

2. Interpretation

Behind this depiction of the education of the Judaean boys at the Babylonian court may lie a historical practice of the Achaemenids, of taking selected individuals of local peoples and instructing them to be familiar with the ways of the empire.[89] This provides the context for the only instance of foreign-language learning mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, but a phrase used earlier in the passage may prepare the reader to expect that linguistic diversity will play a role in this tale. As Norman Porteous has noted, the reference to Babylonia as ארץ שנער, "the land of Shinar" (v. 2) may be a deliberate allusion to the story of the tower of Babel, where the same (rare) collocation is found.[90] By using it here, the author may be highlighting the association of Babylon with linguistic diversity, which Daniel and his companions are to experience first-hand.

It is notable that a degree of prestige is associated with the learning that these boys undertake, apparently because of its perceived difficulty. To qualify to enter the royal education, the boys must already be "versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight." In addition, during their studies they receive divine assistance (Dan 1:17). Later the author proudly records the resulting success of the Judaean characters over the native

---

[89] See Collins, *Daniel*, 136.

[90] Norman Porteous, *Daniel: A Commentary* (2d rev. ed.; London: SCM, 1979), 29. See Chapter 3 for an explanation of the likely origin of the term שנער.

Babylonian specialists, and clearly attributes that success to God (v. 20). This intellectual triumph is of a kind not generally praised in the Hebrew Bible, but "knowledge" (מדע) and "insight" (שׂכל) are frequently praised in wisdom literature, where they often have ethical and theological connotations. For this and other reasons, scholars, including von Rad and Fox, have contemplated the influence of wisdom texts and thinking in the book of Daniel.[91]

The prestige here attributed to the boys' skill in their studies has bothered some interpreters. Porteous remarks, "[i]t is strange that the author feels no incongruity in this introduction of the Jewish lads to the ambiguous world of heathen thought and practice."[92] Perhaps aware of the risk that exposure to foreign thinking poses, the author of Dan 1 immediately emphasizes these Judaeans' commitment to their people's customs and values: in v. 8, Daniel and his companions refuse to partake of the royal food rations, lest they defile themselves. In fact, Daniel and his companions risk death (see chs. 3, 6), rather than take part in foreign practices incompatible with their way of life.

This is an apparent disruption of the link between language and behaviour that may have been at work in the prophecies of the alloglot invader. Daniel and his companions are unscathed by their exposure to foreign thought and language. However, the narrative does not shield these characters from such exposure, or censure them for it, as Porteous' comment perhaps implies that it should. In fact, to imagine that the narrative would (or should) do this, reveals a mistake in perceiving one of the purposes of the book of Daniel, and of the related

---

[91] von Rad, "Josephgeschichte." Fox regards the wisdom in the book of Daniel as "pietistic and inspired," in contrast to the the "ethical and practical wisdom" more typical of wisdom literature; Michael V. Fox, "Wisdom in the Joseph Story," *VT* 51 (2001): 26–41, at 41.

[92] Porteous, *Daniel*, 27.

works Esther and Ezra-Nehemiah, as "diaspora literature."[93] These books are not primarily accounts of Judaean resistance to imperial overlords, in contrast to, for example, 1 & 2 Maccabees. Rather, they depict the possibilities available to dispersed Judaeans living under a greater authority. These depictions are certainly not utopian, but neither are they fundamentally pessimistic about the prospect of a finding a Judaean way of participating in, and even prospering within, an imperially-organized world.

3. ספר ולשׁון כשׂדים: *Literature (or Writing) and Language of the Chaldeans*

In Dan 1, the native language of Daniel and his fellows is not mentioned, but it is reasonable to assume that it is imagined to be Judaean (Hebrew). The four Israelites are referred to as בני יהודה, "Judaeans," (v. 6), and the introduction to the book implies that they were among those exiled from Jerusalem (vv. 1–2). Thus, if they had grown up in the kingdom of Judah, their first language would naturally be יהודית, Judaean.

The identity of the language these boys take up in Babylon, however, is less clear. A significant interpretative difficulty in this passage is the nature of the "literature [or: writing] and language" that the boys learn. From considerations external to the book of Daniel we may note two possibilities for the identity of the "language of the Chaldeans." Firstly, as a designation of an ethnic group, כשׂדים, Akkadian *kaldu*, "Chaldean," refers to a people first mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions of the ninth century B.C.E.[94] This group came to play a significant in Babylonia, and in the late seventh century B.C.E., Nabopolassar established a Chaldean dynasty in Babylon, and defeated the Assyrians, preparing the way for the

---

[93] A term used by, among others, Adele Berlin, "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," *JBL* 120 (2001): 3–14, at 7.

[94] See D. O. Edzard, "Kaldu," *RlA* 5:291–98; Richard S. Hess, "Chaldea," *ABD* 1:1322–24.

conquests that would build the Neo-Babylonian empire. The language of this group is very

scarcely attested. It appears to have been West Semitic (like Aramaic), although the

Chaldeans are clearly distinguished from the Arameans in Babylonia.[95] Perhaps, then, the

"language of the Chaldeans" in Dan 1:4 is a reference to this language. This would be

unusual, however, since references to this language elsewhere are few. Moreover, it does not

appear to have played a role in the administration of the Neo-Babylonian court,[96] so that it

would be strange for Daniel's courtly education to focus on this.

Another possible identification, prompted by external considerations, is Akkadian. This was

first suggested by C. F. Keil in the nineteenth century, and is favoured among more recent

interpreters, including Porteous and John Collins.[97] Important to this identification is the use

of the word כשׂדים elsewhere in Daniel as a class of specialists alongside other trained

predictive and interpretative professionals (e.g., 2:2, 10). In Greek literature Χαλδαῖος also

carries this professional sense, and is so used in Diodorus Siculus and Josephus.[98] In these

texts, the Chaldeans are portrayed as masters of a difficult body of knowledge contained in an

arcane literature, which is clearly a reference to the Akkadian intellectual tradition, and,

specifically, the Akkadian science of divination. In addition, in these postbiblical texts the

Chaldeans are associated with cities (including Babylon and Nippur) where cuneiform

learning was long maintained.

---

[95] Ran Zadok, *On West Semites in Babylonia during the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods: An Onomastic Study* (Jerusalem: H., J., and Z. Wanaarta, 1977), 10; a variety of Arabic is postulated by Robert D. Biggs, "A Chaldaean Inscription from Nippur," *BASOR* 179 (1965): 36–38.

[96] See Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East: c. 3000–330 BC* (London: Routledge, 1995), 589–610.

[97] Collins, *Daniel*, 138; Porteous, *Daniel*, 27.

[98] Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 2.29; Josephus, *Ant.* 10.10.1. Herodotus notes that the priests of Bel in Babylon were Chaldeans; *Hist*. 1.181.

This identification would explain the reference to the ספר of the Chaldeans, as well as their language.[99] Generally in the Hebrew Bible, ספר means "text, document," and can refer to letters and books. In this context, ספר might mean "literacy," that is, familiarity with a writing system, as in Isa 29:12,[100] thus referring to the distinctive cuneiform script in which the Akkadian intellectual tradition was transmitted. Alternatively, the reference may be to Akkadian "literature," that is, the set of writings in which the Chaldeans' science is recorded, although this would be a unique occurrence of ספר in the Hebrew Bible.[101] As Collins notes, this proposal about the content of Daniel's education fits well with the interpretative and predictive tasks he is asked to perform in the book, including explaining Nebuchadnezzar's dream (ch. 2), and reading the writing on the wall (ch. 5).[102]

Considerations internal to the book, however, suggest one final interpretation of the "language of the Chaldeans": the language that is in fact spoken in Daniel by the Chaldeans. In Dan 2, when Nebuchadnezzar's sleep is disturbed by a dream that he cannot understand, he summons his coterie of consultants, which consists of "the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans" (2:2). When the Chaldeans, as this group collectively seems to be known in the book, open their mouths to respond to the king's request for an interpretation of the dream, they speak in Aramaic (2:4). This is notable because the book up to this point has been in Hebrew.[103] The book continues in Aramaic until the end of ch. 7. By associating the Chaldeans with Aramaic in this way, the narrative provides its own answer to the question

---

[99] See GKC § 128a for the construct chain with two *nomina regentes*.

[100] "And if the document is given to one who cannot read [אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע סֵפֶר], saying, 'Read this,' he says, 'I cannot read [לֹא יָדַעְתִּי סֵפֶר]' (Isa 29:12).

[101] See BDB ספר at 706b–707b, and further Rainer Degen, "Die Genetivverbindung aus zwei Regentes und einem Rectum im Phönizischen," *ZDMG* 120 (1970):1–5, at 4.

[102] Daniel, of course, beats the Chaldeans at their own game.

[103] At this transitional point we find the word אֲרָמִית, the function of which I discuss below.

as to the identity of the "language of the Chaldeans."[104] This point holds even if composition-historical factors are invoked to explain the presence of Aramaic in Daniel. It is undeniable that at some point in the history of the book's composition, a clear link was made between the Chaldeans and Aramaic.

As well as this indicator, this identification of "the language of the Chaldeans" is supported by another consideration. Chapters 7–12 of the book are presented in the form of the first person narration of the character Daniel. Chapter 7 is written Aramaic, and Daniel's ability to compose a text in this language (and indeed the whole first half of the work that bears his name) would be neatly explained by his earlier learning of the language in which the Chaldeans speak in 2:4.

Thus, two candidates emerge as strong candidates for the identification of לשׁון כשׂדים. Comparative evidence strongly suggests Akkadian, and the structure of the book clearly indicates Aramaic. Since it does not seem satisfactory to ignore the weight of evidence on either side, how are we to resolve this dilemma? Potential resolutions come in two forms.

Firstly, the apparent dual identification of the languages could have been unintentional. The author or editor who linked the Chaldeans with Aramaic may not have known that their professional language was Akkadian. This is made possible by the fact that, as Collins notes, "there is no evidence that the biblical author understood the specializations of the Babylonian

---

[104] This is the traditional identification, which explains the reference to biblical Aramaic as "Chaldee" or "Chaldaic" in biblical scholarship up to the middle of the 19th century.

castes or was familiar with their methods."[105] In that case, the author or editor might also have been uninformed concerning Babylonian literature and language.

Alternatively, the apparent dual identification may have been deliberate. Explanations that fall into this category could come in various forms. One option, suggested by Louis Hartman, is that Aramaic is presented in the book as the language spoken by the Chaldeans because it was their ancestral language, while the professional language of their craft was Akkadian.[106] However, we have, as already noted, little evidence concerning the ancestral language of the Chaldeans, and it seems very unlikely that the author of Daniel, writing probably in the Hellenistic era, would have had such an ancient ethno-linguistic link in mind.

I would propose another explanation which sees the dual identification as deliberate, prompted by consideration of a point made by James Montgomery: "had the writer meant Aramaic [by ולשׁון כשׂדים] he would doubtless have said so."[107] If he imagined the language Daniel learns in 1:4 to be Aramaic, then, why did the author not make this identification explicit? The reason may be that it was not the Aramaic-ness of the Chaldeans' speech in 2:4 that the author intended to emphasize; rather, it was the different-ness of their speech from that of Daniel and his companions. To explain this proposal more fully, I shall now move to a discussion of the bilingualism displayed by the author of Daniel in composing a work in two languages.

---

[105] Collins, *Daniel*, 139.

[106] Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 129.

[107] James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927), 121.

B. The Bilingual Book of Daniel

As it stands, the book of Daniel is a bilingual text. Daniel 1:1–2:4a and 8:1–12:13 are in Hebrew, and 2:4b–7:28 are in Aramaic. Thus roughly half of the text is in Hebrew, and half is in Aramaic, but the work begins and ends in Hebrew, which establishes that language as, in some sense, the default one. Various explanations have been offered for the bilingual character of the book.[108] Source critical considerations appear to be relevant. For instance, Hartman notes that the character Daniel is absent from the (Aramaic) ch. 3, and that this story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, seems to be unaware of the alternative Hebrew names of its heroes.[109] It may be, then, that originally independent sources in both Hebrew and Aramaic were edited into a larger composition which thus became bilingual.

However, source-critical factors do not satisfactorily explain the entire distribution of Hebrew and Aramaic in Daniel. The Hebrew-to-Aramaic transition occurs within a cohesive unit (Nebuchadnezzar's first dream), not across a source boundary; and later, the switch from Aramaic to Hebrew separates a set of prophecies which are extremely closely related (ch. 7 and 8–12). I do not intend here to solve the "problem" of Aramaic in Daniel, but I shall make some observations regarding the role Aramaic seems to play in the work, with particular focus on the moments of transition (2:4 and 7:28/8:1).

At the point of transition from Hebrew to Aramaic in 2:4, we find the word וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֲרָמִית: הַכַּשְׂדִּים לַמֶּלֶךְ אֲרָמִית מַלְכָּא לְעָלְמִין חֱיִי. With many modern interpreters, is best to regard this as a

---

[108] See, for instance, Snell, "Aramaic in the Bible"; and Anathea E. Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation: Daniel as Bilingual Book," *VT* 60 (2010): 98–115.

[109] Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 130.

paratextual feature, a note indicating the language shift, rather than part of the narrative.[110]

Thus we should translate: "the Chaldeans said to the king, [Aramaic:] 'O king, live forever!'"; instead of "The Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, 'O king, live forever!'"[111] The comparable use of ארמית (second occurrence) in Ezra 4:7, where it may also be a gloss, speaks in favour of this paratextual interpretation. This is further supported by the apparent contextual function of ארמית: it introduces six continuous chapters of Aramaic, and not simply the Aramaic dialogue of the Chaldeans.

The fact that ארמית serves a paratextual function makes it possible that it is a secondary addition to the text. This is made more likely by the fact that the word is apparently omitted at this point in the manuscript 1QDan^a.[112] If we delete this gloss, then, the effect of the transition to Aramaic in the text is striking. The Chaldeans open their mouths and, without warning, a new language comes out. Because the reader expects to read Hebrew here, the speech of the Chaldeans is jarring, and its difference from the preceding Hebrew narrative is emphasized. Indeed, if ארמית is deleted, the different-ness of the Chaldeans' speech stands out more than the fact that it is specifically Aramaic.

This suggests an explanation for the apparent dual identification, discussed above, of "the language of the Chaldeans" with both Akkadian and Aramaic. Instead of regarding the Aramaic speech of the Chaldeans as a claim that "the language of the Chaldeans" was Aramaic, we should perhaps view it as stylistic device used to indicate that there was a

---

[110] So Porteous, *Daniel*, 40; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC; Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1989), 32. However cf. Collins, *Daniel*, 156; and the verse in NJPS and NRSV.

[111] The verb דבר can, like אמר, serve to introduce direct speech; see BDB דבר 180a–182a, at 180b.

[112] Concerning this omission, Collins writes: "There is a blank space before the words of the Chaldeans, but there is still sufficient space for ארמית in the lacuna at the end of the preceding line"; Collins, *Daniel*, 148. The word is not omitted in either of the Greek traditions of Daniel.

linguistic difference between, on the one hand, the Chaldeans and the officials of the Babylonian court, and on the other Daniel and his companions. However, the narrative may not be seeking to identify the specific languages involved. We may compare Caesar's sudden switch to Latin in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "*Et tu, Brute*?" Here, the language of Caesar's question is not especially important (it is, fittingly for this Roman figure, Latin), but the fact of a switch, aimed at capturing the historical Caesar's switch to Greek before his death (καὶ σὺ τέκνον) that Suetonius reports.[113]

In this respect, we can do justice to the weight of evidence which linked לשׁון כשׂדים in Dan 1:4 both to Akkadian and to Aramaic. The fact that the language chosen to represent the foreign speech of the Chaldeans is in fact Aramaic is related to the competencies of the target audience of the book, as is the use of Latin in *Julius Caesar*.[114] Thus the author or editor of Daniel by associating לשׁון כשׂדים with Aramaic achieves a wide ranging dramatic literary effect. Aramaic used throughout the book becomes a token to convey the foreignness of the Babylonian and Persian courts. This is in addition to the fact that Aramaic, a language that played an important role in the administration of those courts, is an extremely appropriate medium to convey the stories and prophecies of the book of Daniel which meditate upon the nature and meaning of empire, as Kratz has argued.[115]

The change back to Hebrew in Dan 8:1 is also sudden, although, since it occurs at the juncture between two vision episodes, it is not as striking as the first switch in Dan 2. After

---

[113] Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 3.1.87; Suetonius, *Julius* 82.2.

[114] This passage may thus differ in intent from Gen 31, in which Laban utters an Aramaic phrase. There, the author is apparently attempting to indicate that the Hebrew/Aramaic Israelite/Aramaean distinction has a long history.

[115] Reinhard G. Kratz, *Translatio Imperii: Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Danielerzählungen und ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Umfeld* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 42–70.

six chapters of Aramaic, it can hardly be said that the reader anticipates the resumption of Hebrew at this point. Nor is the first word of this section an unambiguously Hebrew one, בִּשְׁנַת. Rather, it is the second word of Dan 8:1, שָׁלוֹשׁ, which brings the realization that the language of the text has changed, forcing the reader to readjust his understanding of the verse. The effect is that the switch to back to Hebrew is abrupt, and this may be intentional. The motivation for the switch back, however, is obscure.[116] Snell attributes it to a change in theme in the work, though without specifying the nature of the change.[117] However, this is unsatisfactory, since Dan 8 is similar in setting (in Belshezzar's Babylonian court), and content (visions concerning the fate of the great kingdoms) to the previous chapters. More promising is the suggestion of Bill Arnold that the switch back to Hebrew is intended to convey to the reader that his perspective on the material that follows the switch should change, since the material ceases to be presented in Aramaic, the "outsider" language of kings and their courts, and it now related in the insider language of the Judaeans.[118] Indeed, the framing of the book of Daniel, which begins and ends with Hebrew, is a clear claim that the work is primarily for the Judaean audience.

C. The Bilingual Book of Ezra

The bilingualism of the book of Ezra is much more limited. Two short blocks of Aramaic occur in an otherwise Hebrew composition, 4:8–6:18 and 7:12–26. The presence of these

---

[116] Source critical considerations are relevant here, since Dan 7:28 ("here the account ends") presents itself as the conclusion of a literary unit.

[117] Snell, "Aramaic in the Bible," 37.

[118] Bill T. Arnold, "The Use of Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible: Another Look at Bilingualism in Ezra and Daniel," *JNSL* 22 (1996): 1–16.

blocks is somewhat simpler to account for than in the case of Daniel. It is certainly to be related to the language of the sources (or "sources") used: apart from Cyrus' decree (1:2–4), all of the communiqués in the book are in Aramaic. As discussed above, the reason these sources are in Aramaic, is, evidently, that Aramaic was the language in which the Achaemenid empire corresponded with its provinces. This explanation applies, as noted earlier, whether or not we regard the letters in Ezra as authentic.

We should not of course oversimplify the situation. As Williamson points out, there are significant portions of narrative material in the Aramaic section of Ezra (especially 4:23–5:5; 6:13–18).[119] But these come immediately before or after (or are sandwiched between) the Aramaic letters, so the language of the letters is likely influencing these passages. Especially with the Aramaic block 4:8–6:18, we may be dealing with a pre-existing Aramaic source (of mixed epistolary and narrative material) incorporated wholesale into Ezra.[120]

The manner in which the Aramaic is incorporated in Ezra, however, can still be usefully analysed. In contrast to Daniel, we may note that the inclusion of the Aramaic sections in Ezra is orderly, and seems designed not to be jarring to the reader. The first Aramaic block receives an introduction where the language of material to follow is explicitly stated (4:7). The second block receives a very similar introduction (7:11), and while it does not mention the language of the letter which follows, the reader can expect a language switch, given that it happened previously in the same circumstances.

---

[119] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 52.

[120] See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 54.

The transitions to Hebrew, while not explicitly noted, are also less jarring. The reader anticipates the switch back more strongly than in Daniel since Hebrew is more clearly the default language of Ezra. The words that begin the resumptions are also unambiguously Hebrew, unlike in Daniel, lowering the risk of confusion: ויעשׂו (6:19), and ברוך (7:27). In terms of content, it is understandable that the material following 7:27 be presented in Hebrew rather than Aramaic.[121] The theme of the material in chs. 8ff. is the work of the Judaean figure Ezra, on behalf of the Judaeans, in the province of Yehud. It is natural then that the Judaean language is used to recount this material. By contrast, the Persian court ceases to figure in the action of the book, and the language of the Persian administration disappears from the book.

In Ezra, then, a much smoother effect is achieved, one less jarring for the reader. In contrast to Daniel, Aramaic is not used to convey a general, unspecified air of foreignness (e.g., the foreignness of the Chaldeans). Rather, the Aramaic of Ezra, clearly marked off from the Hebrew, is the specific medium of communication used in the Persian empire, and does not appear to function as a token for some other implied language difference.

There are thus significant differences in the way the books of Ezra and Daniel use bilingualism, and the effects which this use achieves. There are also some fundamental similarities. One of the latter is the relationship, in both, between bilingualism and an encounter with empire. The presence in both texts of bilingualism is in contexts of encounters with imperial administration, reflecting the distinct impression of the historical reality of the role of Aramaic in the ancient Near East.

---

[121] See Arnold, "Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible," 8–10.

The use of bilingualism in these two texts is also similar in that it is underpinned by a shared assumption, namely, that the audience of the work was fluent in Hebrew and Aramaic. At this point we may consider the linguistic situation of Judaeans in the Persian period to understand the background of this use of Hebrew and Aramaic.

D. *The Linguistic Situation of the Judaeans in the Persian Period*

Unfortunately, a satisfactory understanding of the linguistic situation of Judaeans in the Persian period is very difficult to ascertain. In trying to reconstruct this situation, scholars point to several lines of evidence.

Contemporary epigraphic evidence witnesses directly to the use of written language in the life of Judaeans in this period. In Yehud, hundreds of short inscriptions in Aramaic script and language have been found that date from the two centuries of Persian rule.[122] Longer Aramaic texts addressed to Jerusalem are found among the letters from Elephantine.[123] By contrast, inscriptions in Hebrew language or script are extremely rare. From the early sixth century B.C.E. come several seal impressions, which use an Aramaic-like script and contain distinctively Hebrew words (e.g.,בן , "son of").[124] Several coins from the mid-fourth century

---

[122] See, e.g., William Schniedewind, "Aramaic, the Death of Written Hebrew, and Language Shift in the Persian Period," in *Margins of Writing: Origins of Cultures* (ed. Seth L. Sanders; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2006), 141–51, 142.

[123] *TADAE* A4.9. Outside Yehud, the fifth century B.C.E. archive from Nippur of the Murašû family of bankers indicates that Judaeans in Babylonia could conduct their affairs with Akkadian speakers, recording their transactions in both Akkadian and Aramaic. See, for instance, Matthew W. Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1985), 12.

[124] Nahman Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976).

B.C.E. contain the Hebrew words כהן, "priest," and פחה, "governor," written in Palaeo-Hebrew script. In the late fourth century B.C.E., from Samaria, come two seal impressions, including the seal of "the son of Sanballat, governor of Samaria," written in a form of the Palaeo-Hebrew script.[125] Schniedewind notes that these uses of Hebrew—in seals and coinage—are of a highly symbolic character, and attest primarily to the identity claims of their makers, owners, and users, rather than their linguistic proficiency.[126] Evidence of widespread knowledge of Hebrew is not therefore attested in the epigraphic findings.

Another source of evidence is the linguistic situation of Palestine after the Persian period. As mentioned above, the evidence of the Bar Kochba letters, the Mishnah, and Hebrew Qumran texts, appears to indicate that Hebrew was used as a spoken language in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. We should therefore imagine that Hebrew survived among some of the inhabitants of Palestine through the Persian period. However, significant demographic changes occurred in Judah in the early sixth century B.C.E. that likely reduced the number of locations where Hebrew was spoken: following the Babylonian invasions and deportations, the settled area of Judah decreased by approximately 80%.[127]

The Hebrew Bible has also been used as a source in this discussion. Biblical texts composed before and during the exile must have been copied and edited during the Persian period. Many scholars also regard the Persian period as one of intense literary composition, during

---

[125] Frank Moore Cross, Jr., "Papyri of the Fourth Century B.C. from Daliyeh," in *New Directions in Biblical Archaeology* (ed. David N. Freedman and Jonas C. Greenfield; New York: Doubleday, 1969), 41–62.

[126] Schniedewind, "Language Shift in the Persian Period," 142.

[127] Oded Lipschits, "Demographic Changes in Judah between the Seventh and the Fifth Centuries B.C.E.," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323–76.

which many biblical books were composed.[128] Thus, Hebrew must have been a language known in this period, at least among a learned scribal group. Polak argues further that biblical texts from the Persian period contain evidence of spoken Hebrew styles.[129]

The picture that emerges from these pieces of evidence is open to several interpretations. Knowledge of Aramaic appears to have been widespread in Yehud in this period, but the extent of Hebrew knowledge is unclear. According to one interpretation, Hebrew did not occupy a central position in Persian period, being replaced by Aramaic in nearly all functions.[130] According to another interpretation, in Persian period Yehud we may already be dealing with a situation of diglossia—a state of societal bilingualism, in which two or more languages occupy distinct roles. In this case, Hebrew would have been the language of traditional learning and religion, and Aramaic the widespread vernacular.[131]

Wherever on the spectrum between these views the truth may lie, it appears that among Judaeans of Persian Yehud, Hebrew and Aramaic co-existed. This contrasts with the pre-exilic situation, when we do not have good reason to believe that knowledge of languages other than Hebrew was widespread among the population of the kingdom of Judah. From this co-existence, a more structured relation of Hebrew, Aramaic (and Greek) develops in the late Second Temple period, as Bernard Spolsky has shown.[132] The Persian period therefore

---

[128] So, e.g., Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 75–84.

[129] Francis H. Polak, "Sociolinguistics and the Judean Speech Community in the Achaemenid Empire," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake. Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 589–628, at 606–14.

[130] So, e.g., Schniedewind, "Language Shift in the Persian Period," .

[131] See Polak, "Parler de la langue."

[132] For the evidence of diglossia at a slightly later period, see Bernard Spolsky, "Diglossia in Hebrew in the Late Second Temple Period," *SJL* 10 (1991): 85–104.

marked a very significant change in the history of the Judaeans' relationship with their language, and it is in light of this change that the bilingual books of Ezra and Daniel are to be understood.

V. Linguistic Nationalism

As noted in Chapter 1, Aaron has traced the history of relationship between Judaism and Hebrew in antiquity,[133] detecting the beginnings of a strong association of Hebrew with the Jewish people in late Second Temple literature, including 2 Maccabees and *Jubilees*. In this period, Hebrew begins to be presented as a symbol of distinctiveness and national unity in which Jews can take pride, and as a holy language associated with God. In this section I shall examine uses of language in the books of Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah which potentially exhibit similar sentiments to those found in the literature of the late Second Temple period. I shall be particularly concerned with the issue of whether there is a sense in these texts that a people should have a particular kind of relationship with its language. Here I use the term "linguistic nationalism" with a minimal sense, as an ideological claim that a nation *ought* to be unified by its language.

A. Synecdoche in the Use of לִשָּׁן and לָשׁוֹן

Seven times in the book of Daniel the Aramaic phrase כֹּל עַמְמַיָּא אֻמַיָּא וְלִשָּׁנַיָּא, "all peoples, nations, and languages," occurs, with minor variations.[134] As was discussed in Chapter 2, לִשָּׁן in this phrase is used with the synecdochic sense "speakers of a language, linguistic

---

[133] Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language," 64–77.

[134] Dan 3:4, 7, 29, 31; 5:19; 6:26; 7:14. כל is absent at 3:4. The words are sg. in 3:29.

community."[135] In the context of Daniel, the phrase "peoples, nations, and languages" is distinctive. In the book, לִשָּׁן and אֻמָּה are found only in this formula, and only alongside these other two words does עַם occur in the plural. The formula thus functions as something of a leitmotif, and acts as a unifying compositional device.[136] Four of the total seven occurrences of עממיא אמיא ולשניא are found within one narrative episode (Dan 3), in which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to worship Nebuchadnezzar's colossal idol.[137] This long-winded phrase contributes a note of bombastic absurdity to the already bizarre action of this chapter, and thus achieves a similar effect as the references to the many languages and scripts of the Persian empire in Esther.

In all but one case, the formula refers is to the subject peoples of the king of Babylon or Persia, and is found on the lips of an imperial official (Dan 3:7) and the king (Dan 3:29, 31). It is possible, then, that this phrase in Daniel echoes the Achaemenid rhetorical topos discussed above in connection with Esther, according to which the diversity of languages of the Persian empire is particularly stressed.[138] If this is so, then the phrase is somewhat anachronistic in the context of the reign of the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, but such anachronisms are not uncommon in the book of Daniel. In the final climactic occurrence

---

[135] The book of Judith contains a very similar usage to Daniel: "[Holofernes] had been commissioned to destroy all the gods of the land, so that all nations [τὰ ἔθνη] should worship Nebuchadnezzar alone, and that all their languages [αἱ γλῶσσαι] and tribes [αἱ φυλαὶ] should call upon him as a god" (Jdt 3:8). If Judith is an originally Greek composition, as Joosten has argued, this use of γλῶσσα is an imitation of the word's use in LXX, which is a calque from Hebrew לָשׁוֹן (as in Isa 66:18) and Aramaic לִשָּׁן. See Jan Joosten, "The Original Language and Historical Milieu of the Book of Judith" Meghillot 5–6 (2008): *159–*176.

[136] Collins notes that this phrase becomes a "cliché" in the book of Revelation; Collins, *Daniel*, 311.

[137] Hartman and others have suggested that this episode originally existed independently of the rest of Daniel, on the basis of its distinctive features (absence of the character Daniel; use of the non-Hebrew names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego); Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 130. If this is so, the formulaic phrase under discussion may have originated here, where it is most common, and been imitated by the author/editor of Daniel in other passages.

[138] Cf. Hartmann and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 157; Collins, *Daniel*, 183.

of the phrase in Dan 7:14, the overlord is not a Babylonian or a Persian, but the divinely-commissioned "one like a human being," who assumes dominion from the earthly kingdoms.

These uses of לשׁן alongside אמה and עם show a particularly close association between language and nation. However, there is no sense that this synecdochic usage of לשׁן is anything more than descriptive. It picks out a group by a recognized feature; it does not make any prescriptive claim, such as that a linguistic community should be especially unified through its language, or should reject other languages. It cannot therefore be said to express the sense that a people *should* be bound by its language.

B. Potential Indications of Linguistic Nationalism in Esther

Two passages in Esther may indicate a more-than-descriptive association between language and people, 1:22 and 8:9.

1. Esth 1:22

> He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province according to its own script and to every people according to its own language [אל עם ועם כלשׁונו], declaring that every man should be master in his own house and speak the language of his people [ומדבר כלשׁון עמו].[139] (Esth 1:22)

This is a difficult verse. After Ahasuerus was made to look a fool in front of his guests by his disobedient queen, Vashti, we can readily understand why Ahasuerus should declare every

---

[139] NRSV modified.

man "ruler in his household." However, nothing in the chapter prepares us for the stipulation that "every man should ... speak the language of his people." As is typical when the Hebrew text is difficult, scholars have suggested three types of approach: deletion; emendation; understanding.

Because a translation of ומדבר כלשון עמו is missing from LXX, it has been considered an addition in Esther.[140] Removing these words leaves a more understandable edict, but it does not remove the interpretative difficulty entirely. Even if this is an addition, we must presume that it was made with a particular intention in mind, which we should attempt to recover if we are to understand the history of this biblical book.

If deletion does not solve the problem, one may turn to several emendations that have been proposed. Gillis Gerleman suggests emending the Piel participle to a Pual, and understands it as a claim that the edict should be read/spoken to the head of each household in his own language.[141] The reasons why this should be specified, however, are not clear, and so this explanation replaces one unknown with another.[142]

Other interpreters have tried to make sense of the text as it stands. The traditional rabbinic interpretation takes this as a rule that, in the marital home, the husband's language should be spoken, if it differs from the wife's. Thus the text is to be read alongside Neh 13:24, where

---

[140] See, e.g., Lewis B. Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* (New York: Scribner's, 1908), 161–62.

[141] Gillis Gerleman, *Esther* (BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 70.

[142] Carey Moore proposes extensive emendation to וּמְדַבֵּר כֹּל שָׁוֶה עִמּוֹ, interpreted as "and he should command everything that suited him."[142] However the meaning "to be pleasing, suitable to" for שׁוה, "to be smooth," is only attested very rarely in the Hebrew Bible (perhaps Esth 7:4; Ps 119:30).

anxiety is expressed about children of mixed unions who cannot speak Judaean.[143] However, it should be noted that the household is not explicitly in view in this phrase, but rather in the previous one (שׂרר בביתו). The domain in which a man is to speak his people's language is not, strictly speaking, specified.

An important syntactic observation is made by Berlin.[144] In the description of the other royal edicts in Esther, phrases like this one, beginning with להיות, describe, not the content of the decrees, but their intended effects: "so that they [sc. all the peoples] would be ready for that day" (3:14); "so that the Judaeans would be ready for that day" (8:13).[145] This places a limit on how we are to interpret Ahasuerus' edict: it did not declare every man ruler in his house, and legislate that he *must* speak in his people's language; rather, these were the intended effects of the decree. Unfortunately, this does not bring us closer to understanding why Ahasuerus would desire this.

Another limitation which we should impose on any interpretations of this verse arises from consideration of the context of this phrase. This is something willed by the erratic, fickle Ahasuerus, in response to a personal slight. It does not, therefore, necessarily represent the view of the author (of editor) of Esther; indeed, it may be being ridiculed. Fox claims too much, then, when, in this verse, he detects a hint of linguistic nationalism on the part of the *author* of Esther: "[t]he author believes that all people are and should be concerned with the preservation of their national languages."[146]

---

[143] For this association see Levenson, *Esther*, 52. This interpretation is evident in *Esth. Rab.* and Rashi's commentary, among other texts.

[144] Berlin, *Esther*, 20.

[145] My translations.

[146] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 230.

From this discussion, no satisfactory explanation of the words ומדבר כלשׁון עמו has emerged,

though certain interpretations have been excluded, and limitations established for further

attempts to understand it. It must therefore be admitted that the intent and significance of

these words is unclear. The phrase is certainly suggestive of some kind of linguistic

nationalism; it seems to be Ahasuerus' goal for men to speak the languages of their respective

peoples, but in what contexts and for what reasons we cannot say. This verse, then,

contributes little to our discussion.

2. Esth 8:9

> An edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Judaeans
> and to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India
> to Cush, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to every province according to
> its own script and to every people according to its own language, and also to the
> Judaeans according to their script and their language [ואל־היהודים ככתבם וכלשׁונם].

This verse, which follows Esther's brave request that the king take steps to prevent the

slaughter of the Judaeans, was discussed above in connection with the idea of translation in

the book. Here I shall consider the reference specifically to the language and script of the

Judaeans.[147]

On one level, it is obvious why this particular message is sent specifically to the Judaeans: it

applies to them in a special way, permitting them to defend themselves against their

assailants, and thus ensure their survival.[148] In addition to this practical reason, however, we

---

[147] The phrase ואל־היהודים ככתבם וכלשׁונם is not rendered in LXX, and so it may be a secondary addition in the Hebrew. In this case, it may be aimed at completing the thought begun earlier in the verse: "and an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, *to the Judaeans* and to the satraps...."

[148] On a literary level, we may also note that this emphasizes the excess of the Persian bureaucracy. For if, let's say, a hundred and twenty-seven letters (one for each province) needed to be sent out before, now two hundred and fifty-two must be sent out, one to each province in its own language and script, along with one in the Judaean language and script to the Judaeans in that province.

may detect behind this statement certain potentially idealistic assumptions about the linguistic situation of the Judaeans in Ahasuerus' empire.

For one thing, and at the very least, this is an affirmation that the Judaeans have their own language. We should identify this with the language elsewhere called יהודית, "Judaean." As Fox notes, it is unlikely that Aramaic is meant here, since that language was a regional lingua franca, and while many (or most) Judaeans in the empire probably spoke it, the author of Esther is unlikely to have considered it distinctively Judaean.[149]

The next assumption that his verse makes is that this distinctively Judaean language was spoken by the Judaeans scattered throughout the empire. Only if this is so would it make sense for the Persian foreign office to dispatch letters in that language to every corner of the realm. Fox points out, however, that "[t]he notion that the Jews actually did speak their own language in the diaspora and that it was recognized by the Persian chancellery represents an ideal, not any historical reality we know of or that is likely to have existed."[150] Though, for reasons stated above, we may assume that Hebrew was known to those in the Persian territory of Yehud, we have little or no evidence for it elsewhere in the empire. In fact, the evidence we do have suggests that Judaeans outside Judah did not use Hebrew, for, in the Elephantine papyri, the correspondence between Judaeans in Jerusalem and in Egypt is conducted in Aramaic, even where religious matters are at issue. The picture of a widely dispersed community of speakers of Judaean Hebrew imagined by the author of Esther is thus an unrealistic one, and is indicative of an association between Judaean language and peoplehood

---

[149] Paton considers, but, for want of evidence, rejects, identifying the Judaeans' "script" with the Palaeo-Hebrew characters; Paton, *Esther*, 273. It may be that no particularly Judaean script is in mind here, and that the word כתב is included simply because it is part of an established formula used throughout the book.

[150] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 231.

that this author makes: for this author, the language of the Judaeans clearly has an important part to play in their national life.

Fox's further assessment of the situation, however, may overestimate the significance of this theme in Esther. According to Fox, when Ahasuerus issues a decree in the Judaean tongue, "[t]he Jews' language is thus given official status."[151] This, Fox claims, fulfils the author's "wish that the Jews be autonomous (in the sense of controlling their lives within their communities) while enjoying the status of a recognized *ethnos*, like many of the peoples among whom they lived."[152] If this were true, it would be a strong affirmation of the significance of the Judaean language for Judaean identity.

However, the status of the Judaeans as an "official" people by the end of the book is quite unclear. The sending out of a royal decree in their language could be imagined as ad hoc, a one-off expedient required by the unusually perilous circumstances in which the Judaeans stand. Moreover, it is not the administrative status of the Judaeans which is the focus of the book, but their existential one: the grave threat that Haman's pride poses to their very survival. In his interpretation of this verse, Fox may be guided by the ideological claim he supposes the author is making in 1:22, that all peoples should be concerned with the preservation of their national languages. As discussed above, I do not agree with his understanding of that verse.[153]

---

[151] Ibid., 230.

[152] Ibid., 232.

[153] If Fox's assessment were correct, then we might expect Judaean linguistic autonomy to be emphasized in letters send by Mordecai and Esther to the Jews of the empire encouraging the celebration of Purim (9:20, 29), but the language of these letters is not mentioned.

Thus, the note in Esth 8:9 that the edict was also sent to the Judaeans in their language and script is informative of the author's imagined historical picture of the Judaeans in the earlier Persian period. In this idealized picture, the Judaean language had a special role to play. However, this verse does not seem to constitute a declaration about the status of the Judaeans within the empire. A sense that the Judaean language should or must play a role in Judaean peoplehood is not, therefore, strongly displayed in this verse.

C. Linguistic Nationalism in Neh 13

We may now move to the passage which, among these books and indeed in the whole Hebrew Bible, most clearly displays some form of linguistic nationalism.

<div dir="rtl">

²³גַּם בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם רָאִיתִי אֶת־הַיְּהוּדִים הֹשִׁיבוּ נָשִׁים אַשְׁדּוֹדִיּוֹת עַמּוֹנִיּוֹת מוֹאֲבִיּוֹת ²⁴וּבְנֵיהֶם חֲצִי מְדַבֵּר אַשְׁדּוֹדִית וְאֵינָם מַכִּירִים לְדַבֵּר יְהוּדִית וְכִלְשׁוֹן עַם וָעָם

</div>

²³In those days also I saw Judaeans who had married Ashdodite, Ammonite, Moabite women; ²⁴and their children—half spoke Ashdodite, and they did not know how to speak Judaean, but the language of each people.[154] (Neh 13:23–24)

1. Textual Issues

LXX omits וכלשׁון עם ועם. In MT this phrase is awkward in its position in the sentence, since it would most naturally follow אשׁדודית, rather than יהודית. With Williamson we should regard it as an addition,[155] the form of which displays the typically Late Biblical Hebrew distributive

---

[154] NRSV modified.

[155] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 393.

construction (עם ועם), apparently influenced by similar phrasing in Esther (עם ועם כלשׁנו in Esth 1:22, 8:9; also כלשׁון עמו in Esth 1:22).

Williamson suggests that this expansion was motivated by an earlier addition to the previous verse, namely עמוניות מואביות, identified by Loring Batten.[156] These terms differ from the category "Ashdodite" in denoting nationalities rather than affiliation with a particular city. Moreover they stand out since they are, contrary to normal Hebrew style, listed asyndetically. If these are additions, they serve the purpose of linking this passage with the separation of Ammonites and Moabites from Judah earlier in this chapter (vv. 1–3), and with the mixed marriage episode in Ezra 9, both of which draw on the law in Deut 23:3 preventing Ammonites and Moabites from entering "the assembly of Yahweh." Regarding these two words as additions has the advantage of leaving in these verses two pairs, Ashdodite women and Ashdodite language; and Judaean men and Judaean language.

Unlike וכלשׁון עם ועם, the sequence עמוניות מואביות is represented in LXX. Williamson thus posits a three stage compositional process: the original verse was expanded with עמוניות מואביות (at which point the Greek translation was made); later another editor added וכלשׁון עם ועם. This second insertion was made by an editor who felt that the reference solely to the Ashdodite language was not sufficient; surely the children of the unions with Ammonites and Moabites would have spoken those languages.

This reconstruction seems sensible, and we may tentatively conclude that Nehemiah's point was originally made specifically about intermarriage with women from Ashdod, and about the Ashdodite language, rather than about various peoples and languages.

---

[156] Batten, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 299.

2. Context

This verse occurs in a short narrative (Neh 13:23–27) which tells of Nehemiah's encounter with Judaean men who had entered into marriages with Ashdodite (Moabite, Ammonite) women. Nehemiah verbally and physically chastises these men for their sin, citing Solomon's apostasy as evidence of the great risk foreign women pose even to great men. This is one of several pious interventions recounted in this chapter that Nehemiah makes to life in and around Jerusalem, the others being aimed at enforcing Sabbath observance and cultic propriety. In the wider context of Ezra-Nehemiah this episode should be linked to the great communal divorce of foreign wives under Ezra (Ezra 9–10).

3. The Identity of אשׁדודית

One significant interpretative difficulty with this verse is the identity of the language referred to as אשׁדודית. "Ashdodite" is not mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible or other ancient Near Eastern sources as a specific language, and the epigraphic evidence from Ashdod in this period is not conclusive. The single inscription from Ashdod in the Achaemenid period yet discovered is extremely short and is written in cursive Aramaic script. Its language may be Aramaic, Phoenician, or some other Canaanite dialect.[157] Scholars have reasoned from historical and contextual considerations, but to various identifications. Aramaic, suggested by Rudolph and others,[158] may be excluded because a standard Hebrew name for Aramaic, ארמית, is attested in other places in the Hebrew Bible (four times in total), including in texts roughly contemporaneous with Nehemiah (e.g., Ezra 4:7). It would thus be strange if a

---

[157] See Bob Becking, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity* (FAT 80; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 103.

[158] Wilhelm Rudolph, *Esra und Nehemia* (HAT 1.20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1949), 208–9.

different word were used to designate that language here. David Janzen makes another suggestion: the role of Ashdod as an important port in the Phoenician trading network in this period may indicate an identification with the language of Tyre and Sidon.[159]

Offering quite a different interpretation, Ullendorff sees in the use of אשדודית in this passage a parallel to the English phrase "it's all Greek to me": "Ashdodite stands here for some barbarous and unintelligible tongue. Ashdod, as one of the five federated city-states of the Philistines, is selected in this passage as a model of a non-Semitic and totally incomprehensible language."[160] But in fact, epigraphic evidence shows that from an early point the Philistines spoke a Northwest Semitic language closely related to Hebrew.[161] Moreover if we are to delete עמוניות מואביות from v. 23, then "Ashdodite" in v. 24 here did not (at least at first) stand in for the language of all three, but specifically the language of Ashdod, and thus does not resemble the use of Greek as "gibberish" in English (or *hébreu* in French, etc.).[162] Thus we may reject Ullendorff's suggestion.

In making proposals about the identity of אשדודית, scholars seem to have been influenced to look far afield by Nehemiah's claim that (half of) the Ashdodite-Judaean children do not know (Hiphil of נכר) the Judaean language. The reasoning is that if Ashdodite were a

---

[159] David Janzen, *Witch-Hunts, Purity and Social Boundaries: The Expulsion of the Foreign Women in Ezra 9–10* (JSOTSup 350; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 144. Archaeological evidence indicates the relative prominence of Ashdod on the coast of the southern Levant in the Persian period; see David Ben-Shlomo, "Ashdod," *OEBA* n.p.

[160] Ullendorff, "C'est de l'hébreu," 133.

[161] For the longest continuous text from a Philistine city yet discovered, from the late 8th or early 7th century B.C.E., see Seymour Gitin, Trude Dothan, and Joseph Naveh, "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron," *IEJ* 47 (1997): 1–16. Well before its discovery, Batten observed that "[f]rom the free intercourse between Israelites and Philistines in the early days we would infer that their languages were mutually intelligible"; Batten, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 300.

[162] Assuming, with Ullendorff, Philistine to be a non-Semitic language, Myers suggests that the Ammonite and Moabite languages are not mentioned in v. 24 because Nehemiah did not have a strong objection to them, being more similar to Hebrew than Ashdodite was; Myers, *Ezra. Nehemiah*, 216.

Canaanite dialect closely related to Judaean, these children would naturally understand both Ashdodite and Judaean, no matter which one they grew up speaking. In this case, Nehemiah would have no grounds for complaint, but since Nehemiah claims they do not know both, Ashdodite and Judaean must not be closely related.

In fact, as Machinist has noted, such scholars have failed to make an important distinction which undermines this line of reasoning: the distinction between active or passive knowledge of a language—the ability to speak or merely to understand.[163] As I have pointed out, passive knowledge of a language is generally conveyed in biblical Hebrew by שָׁמַע, "hear; understand." It might be imagined that the same would hold for נכר, here. Since the Hiphil of נכר generally means "to recognize" (a person), we might assume that passive knowledge is being described in Neh 13:24. But in fact, as Machinist points out, it is active knowledge that is at issue here. The phrase is ואינם מכירים לדבר יהודית, "they did not know *how to speak* Judaean."[164]

Thus we cannot deduce anything about how different Ashdodite was from Judaean, from Nehemiah's claim that the children did not "know how to speak" it. These languages may well have been mutually intelligible—that is, a speaker of one would automatically have understanding of the other. It does not follow, though, that that speaker would have good *active* proficiency in the other language. Though a Swede can understand Norwegian, for instance, Norwegian does not sound like good Swedish to a Swede. Therefore, Nehemiah's accusation would hold even in cases of mutual intelligibility, and his criticism may have been

---

[163] Peter Machinist, "Biblical Traditions: The Philistines and Israelite History," in *The Sea Peoples and Their World: A Reassessment* (ed. Eliezer D. Oren; Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Philadelphia, 2000), 53–83, at 75 n. 76.

[164] If לדבר had been absent here, נכר may have been ambiguous between active and passive knowledge, much like English "know."

of "an inability to speak *proper* Judaean," as Machinist puts it, not of a complete ignorance of the language.[165] Therefore, it may well be the case that Ashdodite, then, indicates the dialect of the Canaanite language family used in Ashdod at this period, and hence we must admit that the precise identity of אשדודית is quite uncertain.

4. Explaining Nehemiah's Reaction

Nehemiah is quite upset by the situation he comes across. He appears to detect two undesirable elements in it: marriage to Ashdodite women; and children who cannot speak Judaean. It is clear that the more significant of these evils is marriage to the Ashdodites, which Nehemiah denounces in his homily (Neh 13:25–27), primarily on the grounds that foreign women can lead men into apostasy, as they did Solomon. Concerning the evil of children who cannot speak Judaean, Nehemiah takes no measures to change the situation (he does not take the children away from their mothers, or institute some educational programme),[166] nor does he mention the topic in his speech to the Judaean men. It is certainly less significant, then, than mixed marriages.

Nevertheless, the linguistic concern is a voiced very clearly. In this concern we are dealing with a clear indication that the relationship between language and people *should* be of a certain kind, and thus with a trace of linguistic nationalism, according to the minimal definition of it given earlier: Nehemiah is angered by the fact that children of Judaeans

---

[165] Machinist, "Philistines and Israelite History," 75 n. 76; emphasis added. Here we might note André Lemaire's interesting suggestion that Neh 13:24 tells us, not that half of the children spoke Ashdodite, but that the children spoke "half Ashdodite," a mixed language or pidgin. See André Lemaire, "Ashdodien et judéen à l'époque perse: Ne 13,24," in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipiński* (ed. by K. van Leberghe and A. Schoors; OLA 65; Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 153–63.

[166] Compare Ahasuerus' decree, discussed above, aimed at making every man "speak the language of his people" (Esth 1:22).

cannot speak Judaean; we may therefore infer that he believes that the children of Judaeans should speak Judaean. That is, Nehemiah holds the belief that the Judaean language has a part to play in being Judaean. The question is, then, what leads Nehemiah hold this belief?

One possibility is offered by Williamson. In attempting to understand what leads to Nehemiah's prioritizing of Judaean, Williamson cites the role of Hebrew as a scriptural language: "For a religion in which Scripture plays a central part, grasp of the language is vital; one might compare the importance of Arabic for Islam."[167] On this interpretation, Nehemiah would be emphasizing the role that Judaean, as the language of the holy writings, must play in the religious life of Judaeans, and the threat that a foreign language poses for that religious life.

In favour of Williamson's view, it is certainly true that religion is at issue in this passage. Nehemiah warns the Judaeans that foreign women led Solomon to apostasy, and so we may posit some kind of association between language and religion. However, the scripturality of Judaean is not explicitly raised in this passage (or, indeed, anywhere in the Hebrew Bible). Nehemiah does not describe Judaean as the language of the Law. Thus we must modify Williamson's claim, and detect, at most, a sense that there is a religious, rather than a scriptural, dimension to Judaean in this passage. But this too is not stated explicitly. Nehemiah does not call Judaean holy, or associate it with Yahweh or the cult. In fact, the connexion between religion and language is made only indirectly. Both apostasy and foreign language are linked to foreign women, but at different points of this passage. Thus there is no *direct* link between apostasy and foreign language and hence no direct link between the

---

[167] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 391. Williamson's view should be contrasted that of Batten who states that Nehemiah did not have religious reasons for commenting on Ashdodite, here, but was "disturbed purely by the corruption of the language, and feared the Jewish people were losing their identity"; Batten, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 301.

Judaean language and Judaean religion. Here, the assessment made by Aaron originally with reference to Gen 31 might also be said to apply: "Language usage clearly has some part in this ethnic and religious differentiation, but only as an ancillary aspect of the narrative."[168]

I would offer another explanation for Nehemiah's strong reaction. This passage is the only one in the Hebrew Bible in which it is stated that an Israelite or Judaean (or child thereof) cannot speak the language of his people. The situation that Nehemiah faces is thus, biblically speaking, unprecedented. For the first time, Hebrew and Israel (Judaean and Judah) do not stand in an automatic relationship; the role of Hebrew in Judaean identity is potentially subject to change. Perhaps Hebrew could even cease to exist among Judaeans.

This is a very uncanny thing to realize. Here, we may detect the basic intuition that ethnic divisions are often associated with distinct languages. Therefore, the loss of a distinct Judaean language might eventually lead to the disappearance of the Judaean people. But even without a worked-out concept of the various roles that Hebrew played in Judaean identity (in history, religion, literature/scripture, etc.), Nehemiah would have been able to perceive that a great deal was at stake if Hebrew were at risk. Thus he reacts strongly, but his objection is amorphous. It is more a protest at the situation, expressing outrage, than an argument about what the precise problem is with the children of Judaean men being ignorant of Hebrew.

I would suggest, then, that we cannot discover precisely what motivates Nehemiah's objections because those objections were vague and inchoate. They are based on a sensitivity and a perception of danger, but are not embedded in any particular theory that sets out clearly what is at risk.

---

[168] Ibid., 62.

D. *Summary of Linguistic Nationalism*

The analysis of linguistic nationalism in these books has not uncovered indications of the sentiments concerning Hebrew expressed in the works from the late Second Temple period. The uses of לָשׁוֹן in Daniel indicated a clear link between people and language, but this was no more than descriptive. In Esther, the shape of the historical picture depicted there implied that the author believed Judaeans to have some special relationship to their language, although this is not stressed. Finally in Nehemiah, a strong assertion of the importance of the Judaean language to Judaean identity was found, though the grounds of that assertion could not be firmly determined. A developed understanding of the relationship that does or ought to exist between Judah and its language, then, is not expressed in these books.

VI. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, a wide range of forms in which references to linguistic diversity occurs have been examined. It was found that the books of Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah contain a higher frequency of such references than is found in other texts in the Hebrew Bible. The forms in which these references presented itself proved to be mutually illuminating.

Several recurrent themes could be discerned in these texts. Firstly, the role of empire in prompting and conditioning references to linguistic diversity was extremely significant. In particular, experience (direct or mediated) of the bureaucratic practices of the Persian empire left a deep impression on these texts. In general, these books regarded those practices with

neutrality, approaching them as accepted and standard features of a life lived under imperial rule, as is shown by the fairly dispassionate presentation of linguistic diversity which was apparent in many instances.

Another significant, and related, theme was the role of language in the life of Judaeans in the diaspora. The scattering of Judaeans across the Near East led to new relationships with Hebrew and other languages. A precise categorization of the linguistic situation of Judaeans across the region in this period could not be confidently made, but the biblical texts attest varied forms of incorporating (or not incorporating) foreign languages into a Judaean lifestyle, as Judaeans found themselves in various new settings.

Finally, differences between these texts in their presentation of foreign language and their attitudes towards Hebrew were examined throughout this chapter. The wide variety of approaches to the topic of linguistic difference was related to fluctuations in the linguistic situation, over time and from place to place, of Judaeans. In this period, no one tone was sounded throughout the texts, perhaps in contrast to the repeated evaluation of foreign language as frightening in the prophetic texts and Deuteronomy.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

I. Review

In this study a large number of explicit references, and implicit allusions, to linguistic diversity have been analysed. These references and allusions have been shown to appear in many biblical books, from several genres of biblical literature and historical periods. They were seen to serve a wide range of functions in their contexts, and exhibited various attitudes towards particular languages and the reality of linguistic diversity. The categories under which these references and allusions were examined are heterogeneous. Chapter 2 examined the terminology involved in talking about linguistic difference in the Hebrew Bible, and the function of language in establishing distinctions. Chapter 3 continued this examination of language in establishing distinctions, in biblical texts that present the origins and future of linguistic diversity. Style- and code-switching were examined in Chapters 4 and 5, two closely-related forms of the manifestation of the idea of linguistic diversity. In Chapter 6 the prediction of the invasion of Israel/Judah by an alloglot nation was shown to belong to a specific literary genre, prophecy. And Chapter 7 explored the high relative frequency of references to linguistic diversity in texts from a particular historical period, the postexilic age of Israelite history. Despite the heterogeneity of these categories, they have usefully brought to light some notable functions of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible and some significant similarities and differences in biblical attitudes towards that diversity; and for summaries of these I refer the reader to the final section of each chapter. In this concluding chapter, I shall reflect upon the overall picture that emerges from the Hebrew Bible, through

a consideration of several issues: the diachronic distribution of references to linguistic diversity; the role of empire in shaping biblical attitudes towards foreign language; the biblical authors' attitudes towards their own language; and the general significance of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. Finally, I shall indicate some desirable directions that future research on language in the Hebrew Bible might take.

II. Diachronic Considerations

It is unfortunately not possible to reconstruct a detailed history of the development of ancient Israelite attitudes towards linguistic diversity. For one thing, as has become clear from the analysis of the relevant texts, much of the evidence we have cannot be dated with the certainty required to enable us to detect datable trends. In addition, the evidence is not plentiful enough for us to suppose that the picture we may draw from the Hebrew Bible is widely representative of ancient Israelite attitudes.

It is with caution, then, that I present here observations on the diachronic distribution of references to and attitudes towards linguistic diversity. Firstly, while these references are not found in the earliest corpus of archaic poetry,[1] they are not confined to biblical texts that belong with certainty to the latest phases of the composition of the Hebrew Bible (Ezra-Neh, Esth, Dan, Chr, Ecc). In the Pentateuch, we can detect reference to linguistic diversity in the Table of Nations, the Tower of Babel episode; in the encounters of Jacob and Laban, and Moses and Jethro; and in the reference to the alloglot invader in the curses of Deuteronomy. In the historical literature, we have a reference in the Rabshakeh's speech in 2 Kgs 18. And in the classical prophets, the alloglot invader theme appears in First Isaiah (twice), Jeremiah,

---

[1] Saénz-Badillos gives the standard list of this corpus: Gen 49; Exod 15; Deut 32, 33; Num 23–24; and Judg 5; Saénz-Badillos, *History of Hebrew*, 56–62. See further footnote 25 in Chapter 3.

and Ezekiel. Now, issues in dating these texts were noted in their exegesis in the previous chapters, and they cannot be repeated here; suffice it to say that it would be extremely unlikely for *none* of these texts to date from the monarchic and exilic periods (tenth to mid-sixth century B.C.E.), unless there really is no material in the Hebrew Bible that stems from earlier than the postexilic period (late sixth century B.C.E. on), as the most extreme among revisionists maintain. Therefore, we may say that references to linguistic diversity appear to be established in the literature of the monarchic and exilic periods.

There is, however, a marked increase in the frequency of such references in the postexilic period. In Chapter 7, I suggested that this increase should be related to changes in the linguistic situation for the Judaeans. In this period, Judaeans, as subjects of an alloglot empire, living among speakers of foreign languages both in Judah and abroad, were confronted much more frequently with the reality of linguistic diversity. Moreover, in this period, the relationship between the people and its language changed significantly, with Aramaic replacing, or coming to stand alongside, the Judaean language as the first language or vernacular of Judaeans.[2] In the literature of this period, attitudes towards linguistic diversity are diverse, but one earlier theme is notably absent: in this new linguistic situation, the dread of foreign language, which had been expressed in the theme of the alloglot invader, is not manifested.

Overall, then, while the near ubiquitous reality of linguistic diversity is quite naturally reflected fairly widely in the Hebrew Bible, it appears to be possible to discern the influence of historical circumstances in the form and frequency with which the issue is raised.

---

[2] See Chapter 7.

III. The Encounter with Empire

In all periods, it appears that a dominant factor in the references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible is what we might refer to as empire: the great kingdoms of Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia which spanned much of the ancient Near East roughly in the first half of the first millennium B.C.E. Encounters with these kingdoms provoke many of the references to language in the Hebrew Bible. The prophecies of the alloglot invader reflect the threat of invasion by Assyria and Babylonia in Isaiah and Jeremiah. In the retelling of the invasion of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36), the choice of language in which to discourse with the Assyrians becomes a point of controversy. In Ezra and Esther, written correspondence with the Persian court raises issues of translation and linguistic diversity. For Daniel, occupying a position at the Babylonian imperial court involves learning a new language. And imitations of imperial rhetoric appear in references to the "peoples, nations, and linguistic communities" (Dan 3:4, 7, etc.) subject to the Babylonian and Persian kings.

In particular, it may be seen that the language especially associated with empire is Aramaic. For the biblical authors, Aramaic is a language of Assyrian diplomacy (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36); it is the language uttered by the Chaldeans in Nebuchadnezzar's court (Dan 2); and it is the language in which letters to and from the Achaemenid kings are written (Ezra 4–7). Moreover, the use of Aramaic in Daniel may be related to the central theme structuring that work—the succession of the various empires of the Near East—although this is not made explicit in the book. In so associating Aramaic with empire, the biblical texts clearly bear the impression of the special function and use of Aramaic in the history of these empires.

Thus, the ongoing encounter with empire had a large part to play in biblical references to linguistic diversity. This is natural since a great deal of biblical literature, especially in prophecy and narrative, arose out of, and indeed in response to, this encounter. But may we

further say that this association with empire has coloured the presentation of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible? Has empire affected the biblical authors' perception of foreign language, in positive or negative ways? The answer appears to be yes, but we must point out that the presentation of linguistic diversity is not, to continue the metaphor, monochromatic, just as the meaning of the encounters with the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians is manifold in the Hebrew Bible.

On the one hand, in the alloglot invader prophecies (Deut 28:49; Isa 28:11; 33:19; Jer 5:15; cf. Ezek 3:5–6), foreign language is presented as terrifying, and its terror derives largely from its association with a merciless, insatiable, and humanly unstoppable nation—a nation which is the spectre of the world powers, Assyria and Babylonia. Similarly, the control that the Rabshakeh asserts over the language of discourse with the Judaean officials (2 Kgs 18:26–28//Isa 36:11–13) is emblematic of the threat of the Assyrians' military dominance over Judah. These attitudes are generally reflective of the broader biblical presentation of Assyria and Babylonia as oppressors of Israel and Judah.

In literature from later periods, however, foreign language in the context of empire has a mixed set of associations. The skill required to learn a foreign language is acknowledged when Daniel, because of his "wisdom, knowledge and insight," is chosen to learn the language of the Chaldeans (Dan 1:4). What is more, the authors of the Aramaic portions of Ezra and Daniel were clearly content to express themselves to their community in a language other than "Judaean." And in Esther, Xerxes' multilingual edicts (Esth 1:22; 3:12; 8:9) are a remarkable element in the juggernaut of Achaemenid bureaucracy, by turns humorous— because of the system's excessive complexity, and the trivial purposes for which it may be used—and frightening—because the system is impersonal and unstoppable. Thus, we see a greater diversity of associations between language and empire in postexilic texts. This

appears to be in keeping with the mixed presentation of the Persians in biblical literature, as Judah's liberators from Babylonian captivity, but as political sovereigns with power over the Judaeans, wielded at times capriciously with lack of interest or danger.

Thus, the meaning or value that linguistic diversity acquires from its association with empire is not uniform. In some instances it is positive, and in some negative, and in some it stands somewhere in between these two. Moreover, since linguistic diversity is a pervasive feature of human culture, it should not be thought that all references to linguistic diversity are associated with or explained through the encounter with empires. For instance, I detect no particular influence of empire in the tribal dispute between Ephraim and Gilead in Judg 12, in which the Shibboleth test was used. Similarly, an encounter with empire does not seem to motivate the description of a territorial border between Jacob and Laban in Gen 31, in which the different Aramaic and Hebrew names for the "heap of witness" are recorded. Thus, though empire plays a role in many references to linguistic diversity, it certainly does not explain them all.

IV. The Biblical Authors' Understanding of Their Own Language

As for the biblical authors' understanding of their own language, this study has largely confirmed Aaron's assessment, quoted earlier: "There is no discrete notion that Hebrew had a unique value or purpose as will become the case in post-biblical eras . . . Hebrew during the biblical eras of Israelite religion . . . is not yet Judaism's language, let alone, a holy tongue."[3] However, this assessment requires significant qualification and explanation.

---

[3] Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language," 64.

Firstly, the Hebrew Bible does not attest a concept corresponding to our "Hebrew"—the language of all Israel that consisted of the several dialects spoken by a community in Israel and Judah unified as Jacob's descendants and as the people of Yahweh. Instead, we have two different notions expressed in biblical texts: "Judaean" is narrower than Hebrew, being the language of the kingdom of Judah, and of the postexilic community tracing its roots to that kingdom; and "the language of Canaan" is broader than Hebrew, since it does not exclude the dialects of the nations and city-states bordering Israel and Judah. Thus, the texts of the Hebrew Bible do not indicate that all Israel is a linguistic unity, and the distinction between Israel and its neighbours, so important to the biblical authors, is not seen to consist in linguistic difference.

In this way, it is trivially true that "Hebrew" did not have "a unique value or purpose" for the biblical authors, simply because they appear not to have known of the idea of "Hebrew." This is not to say, however, that the language of the biblical authors, however they conceived it, had no significance for them. In fact, there are several indications that this is not the case. For instance, the "language of Canaan" appears to be presented as symbol of Judah's future military dominance over Egypt, and a proper medium for worshipping Yahweh (Isa 19:18). Thus for the author of this oracle at least, his community's language had political and religious significance. Nehemiah's anger at seeing children of Judaean men ignorant of the Judaean language also reveals a perception of the importance of that language (Neh 13:24), apparently in maintaining an ethnic boundary. For these and other biblical authors, then, the language of their community was not an irrelevance. However, the significance of Hebrew in these passages is not of the same kind—Nehemiah does not clearly claim that Judaean had a particular religious meaning, in contrast to Isa 19:18. In addition, we should admit that the significance that the biblical authors' language had for them is only infrequently affirmed in the Hebrew Bible.

In a similar way, it is true, but only trivially so, that the biblical authors' language is not yet "Judaism's language." For it is problematic on historical grounds to refer to the religion or religious community of ancient Israel and Judah as "Judaism."[4] And thus if Judaism per se did not exist in the biblical period, it cannot have had a language. But in fact, we may point out that the community called "Judah" *is* presented as having a distinctive language: "Judaean" is the proper language of Judah and the Judaeans (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36; Neh 13:24; Esth 8:9). Judah, then, is a community bounded and bonded by language, and while the nature of that community shifted over time—from tribe to kingdom to diasporic people—a religious dimension is never absent from the biblical presentation of this community, namely, its relationship to its god Yahweh.[5] Hence, while the Judaean language is not in the Hebrew Bible "Judaism's language," it is nevertheless the historical and distinctive language of the religious community of Judah. The later development of a notion that this language is itself a "holy tongue" is certainly not inconsistent with this picture.

However, that development hardly be said to be explained through this. Indeed, Greek and Aramaic, especially as mediums of scriptural translation, came to play important religious roles among Jews,[6] without having the historical association with the people of Judah that Judaean did. In fact, I believe that it is apparent from my analyses throughout this dissertation that late Second Temple and rabbinic ideas about Hebrew are not explained in the Hebrew Bible's references to linguistic diversity and to its own language. Such ideas, discussed in Chapter 1, included: Hebrew as a scriptural language; as a liturgical language; as the

---

[4] Several important distinctions between the religion of ancient Israel and later (particularly rabbinic) Judaism could be noted. For one thing, the important role played by the biblical canon in Jewish religion distinguishes it from the religion of the Israelites, since the latter were among the composers of that canon and are described in it. Moreover, the development of rabbinic Judaism should be associated with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and the cessation of the sacrificial cult. See Tzvee Zahavy, "Judaism in the Mishnaic Period," *ABD* 3:1490–99, at 1491.

[5] This community is also a cultural and ethnic one. At least in the biblical texts, however, the religious dimension is most frequently emphasized.

[6] See, e.g., Smelik, "Language Selection and the Holy Tongue," 116–18.

language of God (and hence an eternal language); as the original language of humanity; and as an inexpressible language. These ideas are not to be found in the Hebrew Bible's references to its own language, and to the phenomenon of linguistic diversity,[7] and explanations for them should be sought elsewhere. However, that ongoing search is not my purpose here.[8]

V. The (In?)Significance of Linguistic Diversity in the Hebrew Bible

We may now consider the question of the overall significance of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. As has become clear, linguistic diversity is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in the vast majority of cases where we may suppose that it would have been an issue. In the four-century history of the united and divided Israelite kingdoms, the Israelites must frequently have had to deal with linguistic diversity. In their peaceful and hostile relations with other nations, language barriers must have been encountered, and an apparatus of some kind, perhaps including foreign language education, professional interpreters and/or document translators, must have existed.[9] But in the narrative accounts of this period of history, the books of Samuel–Kings and Chronicles, linguistic diversity is raised only once, in the Rabshakeh episode; otherwise, from these texts alone we would not suspect that the speech of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Aramaeans, etc., differed from that of the Israelites.

---

[7] That is not to say that scriptural "evidence" played no part in influencing these ideas. Indeed, in rabbinic texts, midrashic exegesis can be seen at work in filling out information about the "holy language." See, e.g., *y. Sotah* 7.1, 21, and Smelik, "Language Selection and the Holy Tongue," 112–13.

[8] See Smelik, "Language Selection and the Holy Tongue," 91–105; Aaron, "Judaism's Holy Language," passim; Rubin, "Language of Creation," 309–17.

[9] We have little or no evidence for such an apparatus, however; the bilingual Judaean officials in 2 Kgs 18//Isa 36 may be the only piece.

In passages that do make reference to linguistic diversity, the reference is often fleeting, and the situation is not explained beyond the requirements of the text. The author of Judg 12 does not tell us why the Ephraimites could not pronounce "Shibboleth," and here and elsewhere the difference between a language and a dialect is not made clear. Similarly, the narrator of 2 Kgs 18//Isa 36 does not tell us why the officials of Jerusalem knew Aramaic while the ordinary people of Jerusalem did not, nor why these officials could have expected the Rabshakeh to know Aramaic. Even when a text goes beyond a description of a linguistic situation and evaluates it, explicit statements about the nature or meaning of linguistic diversity are rare. Thus, though Nehemiah clearly believes that the children of Judaeans should be able to speak the Judaean language, he does not categorically say so. A notable exception to this is, of course, the Tower of Babel episode, in which the origins of linguistic diversity are squarely addressed.

These observations might lead one to suspect that linguistic diversity was not a topic of constant reflection for the biblical authors, nor a matter of the utmost importance. And this is correct, to the extent that numerous other themes are much more consistently highlighted in the Hebrew Bible. However, what I believe I have shown in this dissertation is that in the places where linguistic diversity is raised as an issue, it usually plays an important role in its context and evinces a great deal of thought on the part of the author or editor of the passage. This is clear, for instance, in the very careful chiasmus and wordplay present in the Aramaic oracle in Jer 10. It is also evident in the Rabshakeh episode, in the role that the Judaean officials' code-switching request ironically plays in structuring the narrative (in prompting the Rabshakeh's shift in address to the people of Jerusalem with arguments targeted at them) and in the way that that request exhibits the relationships of power between Assyria and Judah. Moreover, in these and other references, the issue of linguistic diversity intersects with significant concerns of the Hebrew Bible, including Israel's experience in Egypt, the

relationships among the tribes of Israel, and the worship of Yahweh beyond Israel's borders. Therefore, despite the fact that references to linguistic diversity are infrequent, it would be incorrect to conclude that linguistic diversity was of no or little importance to the authors and editors of the biblical books. Rather, linguistic diversity does occur as a significant part of some biblical texts, though only occasionally.

If I were to try to account for the relative infrequency of references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible, I would make two observations. Firstly, the Hebrew Bible does not stand out in this regard from other ancient Near Eastern literature. For instance, in ancient Egyptian texts, as Uljas and others have made clear, references to linguistic diversity only seldom occur.[10] Similarly, no glottonyms or words used with the meaning "a language" appear to be attested in Ugaritic literature. Thus, the situation of the Hebrew Bible may not call for special explanation in its ancient context.[11] Of course, a larger question remains unanswered, that of why references to linguistic diversity in these literatures stemming from a multilingual region are relatively few. That issue, however, lies beyond the scope of this study, and must await further research.

Secondly, the apparent *religious* insignificance for the majority of the biblical authors of their own language may be relevant in accounting for the infrequency of references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. Israel's relationship with its god is certainly one of the most (perhaps *the* most) consistent focuses of the Hebrew Bible. Correspondingly, if Israel's language played an important role in that relationship, as Hebrew does in later Judaism, we

---

[10] See Uljas, "Language Consciousness"; Donadoni, "Gli Egiziani e le lingue degli altri"; Sauneron, "La différenciation des langages d'après la tradition Égyptienne." It is more difficult to generalize about references to linguistic diversity in Sumerian and Akkadian literature, since synthetic reviews of the Mesopotamian situation have not yet been undertaken. It might be pointed out, however, that references to the Akkadian and Sumerian languages are fairly frequent.

[11] Indeed, along with the "Spell of Nudimmud," perhaps, (of which several interpretative difficulties were mentioned in Chapter 3), the biblical Tower of Babel episode is as yet the clearest and most extensive account of the origin of linguistic diversity that we have from the ancient Near East.

might expect issues of language to be raised more frequently than they are. However, as discussed above, the evidence examined in this dissertation does not lead us to believe that Hebrew did have a clear or consistent religious significance in ancient Israel. Hence, in theological and religious contexts, references to that language, and thereby to the fact of linguistic diversity, remain relatively few.

VI. Avenues for Future Research

This study has by no means exhausted the topic of language in the Hebrew Bible. The understanding of language among the biblical authors would be enhanced by a consideration of the linguistic terminology of biblical Hebrew, several items of which were encountered in this study. For instance, in the passages examined, several terms expressing linguistic competence and incompetence occurred: שׁמע, "understand" (e.g., Gen 42:23; 2 Kgs 18:26); בין, "understand" (Isa 33:19); ידע, "know" (Deut 28:29; Jer 5:15); הכיר לדבר, "be able to speak" (Neh 13:24); למד, "learn" (Dan 1:4); לעג, "stutter" (Isa 28:11; 33:19); and so on. Other words expressing notions within the functioning of language ("grammatical" concepts) were also encountered: קרא, "to call" in the sense "to give a name to, use a particular word for," as in Deut 2:11; דבר, perhaps "to pronounce, make the sound of" in Judg 12:6. An examination of the lexical field of language in the Hebrew Bible, including the individual items and their relation to one another, would be informative of the ways in which the biblical authors talked and thought about language.

In addition, my focus has been on texts that raise the issue of linguistic diversity, primarily in the form of references to particular languages. However, the Hebrew Bible shows consciousness of linguistic issues of other sorts, the study of which would provide a useful

counterpart to this dissertation. For instance, the role of language in distinguishing humans from animals may be highlighted by the fact that in only a few cases do animals display the ability to speak, as when the snake persuades the first woman to eat from the tree of knowledge in Eden (3:15), or when Balaam's ass accuses her master of maltreatment (Num 22:28–30). Moreover, the issue of the origins of language may also be addressed in the Hebrew Bible. Such appears to be the case in the story of the creation of the first woman, where Yahweh initially presents the first man with all of the animals in turn, the animals receiving their names in the process (Gen 2:19–20). A comprehensive study of the treatment of these linguistic issues and others would be illuminating, especially of the biblical authors' conceptions of human nature, and would complement the examination of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible that has been the focus of this dissertation.

Bibliography

Aaron, David H. "Judaism's Holy Language." Pages 49–107 in vol. 16 of *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*. Second Series edited by Jacob Neusner. South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 209. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.

Ackerman, James S. "Joseph, Judah, and Jacob." Pages 85–112, 305–306 in vol. 2 of *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*. 2 vols. Edited by Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis. Nashville: Abingdon, 1974.

Ackroyd, Peter R. "Isaiah 36–39: Structure and Function." Pages 3–12 in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. Dr. J.P.M. van der Ploeg.* Edited by W.C. Delsman. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 211. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker, 1982.

Aitken, James K. "Hebrew Study in Ben Sira's *Beth Midrash*." Pages 27–37 in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda.* Edited by William Horbury. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

Akin, Salih. "Désignation d'une langue innommable dans un texte de loi: le cas du kurde dans les textes législatifs turcs." Pages 69–80 in *Le nom des langues I: Les enjeux de la nomination des langues*. Edited by Andrée Tabouret-Keller. Bibliothèque des cahiers de l'institut de linguistique de Louvain 95. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.

Allen, Leslie C. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

Alter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*. New York: Norton, 2007.

———. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Rev. and updated ed. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Althann, Robert. *A Philological Analysis of Jeremiah 4–6 in the Light of Northwest Semitic*. Biblica et orientalia 38. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1983.

Amit, Yaira. *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2001.

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006.

Anderson, Bernhard W. "The Tower of Babel: Unity and Diversity in God's Creation." Pages 165–78 in his *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.

Archi, Alfonso. "How a Pantheon Forms: The Cases of Hattian-Hittite Anatolia and Ebla of the 3rd Millennium B.C." Pages 1–19 in *Religionsgeschichtliche Beziehungen zwischen Kleinasien, Nordsyrien und dem Alten Testament*. Edited by Bernd Janowski, Klaus Koch, and Gernot Wilhelm. Orbis biblicus et orientalis 129. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993.

Arnold, Bill T. "The Use of Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible: Another Look at Bilingualism in Ezra and Daniel." *JNSL* 22 (1996): 1–16.

———. *Genesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Ashcroft, Bill. "Language and Race." Pages 37–53 in *The Language, Ethnicity and Race Reader*. Edited by Roxy Harris and Ben Rampton. London: Routledge, 2003.

Auld, A. Graeme. *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2011.

Avigad, Nahman. *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976.

Awabdy, Mark A. "Babel, Suspense, and the Introduction to the Terah-Abram Narrative." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (2010): 3–29.

Baden, Joel. "The Tower of Babel: A Case Study in the Competing Methods of Historical and Modern Literary Criticism." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 209–24.

Balogh, Csaba. *The Stele of YHWH in Egypt: The Prophecies of Isaiah 18–20 concerning Egypt and Cush*. Oudtestamentische Studiën 60. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Bartholomew, Craig C. "Babel and Derrida: Postmodernism, Language and Biblical Interpretation." *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998): 305–328.

Barton, John. *Isaiah 1–39*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995.

Batten, Loring W. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.* International Critical Commentary. New York: Scribner's, 1913.

Becking, Bob. *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 80. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011.

Ben Zvi, Ehud. "Who Wrote the Speech of Rabshakeh and When?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 79–92.

Zvi, Ehud, Diana V. Edelman, and Frank H. Polak, eds. *A Palimpsest: Rhetoric, Ideology, Stylistics, and Language Relating to Persian Israel*. Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts 5. Piscataway, N. J.: Gorgias, 2009.

Ben-Shlomo. "Ashdod." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Archaeology*. Edited by Daniel M. Master. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. No pages. Cited 10 July 2015. Online: http://www.oxfordreference.com

Berges, Ulrich F. *The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form*. Translated by Millard C. Lund. Hebrew Bible Monographs 46. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012.

Berlin, Adele. *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985.

———. *Esther: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001.

———. "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001): 3–14.

Beuken, Willem A. M. "Jesaja 33 als Spiegeltext im Jesajabuch." *Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses* 67 (1991): 5–35.

———. *Jesaja 28–39*. Translated by Andrea Spans. Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2010.

Black, J.A., G. Cunningham, J. Ebeling, E. Flückiger-Hawker, E. Robson, J. Taylor, and G. Zólyomi, eds. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*. Cited 13 January 2015. Online: http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/. Oxford, 1998–2006.

Blau, Joshua. *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM, 1989.

———. *Isaiah 1–39*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2000.

———. *Isaiah 56–66*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

Bloch-Smith, Elizabeth. "Israelite Identity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What is Remembered and What is Forgotten in Israel's History." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 401–425.

Block, Daniel I. "The Role of Language in Ancient Israelite Perceptions of National Identity." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 321–40.

———. *Deuteronomy*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012.

Boling, Robert G. *Judges*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975.

Bompiani, Brian A. "Is Genesis 24 a Problem for Source Criticism?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (2007): 403–15.

———. "Style Switching: The Representation of the Speech of Foreigners in the Hebrew Bible." PhD diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012.

———. "Style Switching in the Jacob and Laban Narrative." *Hebrew Studies* 55 (2014): 43–57.

Booij, T. "The Background of the Oracle in Psalm 81." *Biblica* 65 (1985): 465–75.

Boyd, Samuel. "Contact and Context: Studies in Language Contact and Literary Strata in the Hebrew Bible." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014.

Brettler, Marc Zvi. *The Book of Judges*. Old Testament Readings. London: Routledge, 2002.

Briant, Pierre. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*. Translated by Peter T. Daniels. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002.

Bridge, Edward J. "A Mother's Influence: Mothers Naming Children in the Hebrew Bible." *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 389–400.

Briggs, Charles A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. 2 vols. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906–1907.

Broadribb, Donald. *An Attempt to Delineate the Characteristics of (Biblical) Hebrew Poetry*. Bakers Hill, Australia: Bookleaf Publishing, 1995.

Brodsky, Harold. "Dumah (Place)." Page 237 in vol. 2 of The Anchor Bible Dictionary. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Brown, Francis, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis*. Interpretation. Atlanta: John Knox, 1982.

———. *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdemans, 1998.

Budde, Karl. "Der Schluss des Buches Hosea." Pages 205–11 in *Studies in the History of Religions: Presented to Crawford Howell Toy*. Edited by David Gordon Lyon and George Foot Moore. New York: Macmillan, 1912.

Buhlman, Alain. "The Difficulty of Thinking in Greek and Speaking in Hebrew (Qoheleth 3.18; 4.13–16; 5.8). *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 90 (2000): 101–8.

Butcher, Kevin. "Numismatics in Roman Palestine." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Archaeology*. Edited by Daniel M. Master. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. No pages. Cited 12 July 2015. Online: http://www.oxfordreference.com

Campbell, Edward F. *Ruth*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975.

Campbell, Jonathan. "Hebrew and Its Study at Qumran." Pages 38–52 in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*. Edited by William Horbury. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

Canney, Maurice A. "The Hebrew מְלִיץ." *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 40 (1924): 135–37.

Carley, Keith W. *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*. Cambridge Bible Commentary. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

Carroll, Robert P. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM, 1986.

Cassuto, Umberto. *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part II: From Noah to Abraham* Translated by Israel Abrahams. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964.

Cavigneaux, Antoine. "Texte und Fragmente aus Warka." *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 10 (1979): 111–42.

Charpin, Dominique. *Writing, Law, and Kingship in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*. Studies in Biblical Theology 2d series 3. London: SCM, 1967.

———. *Isaiah*. Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

Clendenen, E. Ray. "Discourse Strategies in Jeremiah 10:1–16." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 401–8.

Clines, David J. A., ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–2015.

Cogan, Mordechai, and Hayim Tadmor. "Gyges and Ashurbanipal: A Study in Literary Transmission." *Orientalia* 46 (1977): 65–85.

———. *II Kings*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1988.

Cohen, Chaim. "Neo-Assyrian Elements in the First Speech of the Biblical Rab-Šāqê." *Israel Oriental Studies* 9 (1979): 32–48.

Collins, Bille Jean, ed. *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*. 2d ed. Atlanta: SBL, 2014.

Collins, John J. *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Cooke, G. A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*. 2 vols. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937.

Cooper, Jerrold S. *The Curse of Agade*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Coupland, Nikolas, and Adam Jaworski. *The New Sociolinguistics Reader*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Cowley, A. E. *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1923.

Croatto, J. Severino. "A Reading of the Story of the Tower of Babel from the Perspective of Non-Identity: Genesis 11:1–9 in the Context of Its Production." Pages 203–223 in *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy*. Edited by Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998.

Cross, Frank Moore, Jr. "Papyri of the Fourth Century B.C. from Daliyeh." Pages 41–62 in *New Directions in Biblical Archaeology*. Edited by David N. Freedman and Jonas C. Greenfield. New York: Doubleday, 1969.

———. *From Epic to Canon*: *History and Literature in Ancient Israel*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Cross, Frank Moore, Jr., and David Noel Freedman. New ed. *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*. Grand Rapids, Mich. Eerdmans, 1997.

Crumb, Roger. *The Book of Genesis*. New York: Norton, 2009.

Crystal, David. *Language Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Dabène, Louise, and Danièle Moore. "Bilingual Speech of Migrant People." Pages 17–44 in *One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives on Code-Switching*. Edited by Lesley Milroy and Pieter Muysken. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Dahood, Mitchell. *Psalms*. 3 vols. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966–1970.

Dalley, Stephanie. "Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II." *Iraq* 47 (1985): 31–48.

Dalman, Gustaf. *Grammatik des jüdischen-palästinischen Aramäisch*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978.

Davies, Phillip R. *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

Degen, Rainer. "Die Genetivverbindung aus zwei Regentes und einem Rectum im Phönizischen." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 120 (1970):1–5.

Derrida, Jacques. "Des tours de Babel." Translated by Joseph F. Graham. Pages 165–207 in *Difference in Translation*. Edited by Joseph F. Graham. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985. Reprinted from *Semeia* 54 (1991): 3–34.

Dezső, Tamás. *The Assyrian Army.* 2 vols. Budapest: Eötvös University Press, 2012–.

Donadoni, Sergio. "Gli Egiziani e le lingue degli altri." *Vicino Oriente* 3 (1980): 1–14.

Doran, Robert. *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

Driver, Godrey R. "Linguistic and Textual Problems: Minor Prophets. I." *Journal of Theological* Studies 39 (1938): 154–66.

———. "Isaiah I–XXXIX: Textual and Linguistic Problems." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13 (1968): 36–57.

Dunham, Sally. "The Monkey in the Middle." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 75 (1985) 235–64.

Eaton, John. *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation*. London: T&T Clark, 2003.

Ebach, Jürgen. *Genesis 37–50*. Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007.

Eckert, Penelope, and John R. Rickford, eds. *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

———. "Introduction." Pages 1–18 in *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Edited by Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Edzard, D. O. "Kaldu." Pages 291–98 in vol. 5 of *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*. Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. 14 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1928–2014.

Eichrodt, Walther. *Ezekiel: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970.

Eira, Christina. "Authority and Discourse: Towards a Model for Orthography Selection." *Written Language and Literacy* 1 (1998): 171–224.

Ellenbogen, Maxim. *Foreign Words in the Old Testament: Their Origin and Etymology*. London: Luzac, 1962.

Embry, Bradley. Review of Phillip M. Sherman, *Babel's Tower Translated: Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation*. *Review of Biblical Literature* 12 (2013). No pages. Cited 10 May 2014. Online: http://www.bookreviews.org

Emerton, John A. "Some Comments on the Shibboleth Incident (Judges XII 6)." Pages 150–57 in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Mathias Delcor*. Edited by A. Caquot, S. Légasse, and M. Tardieu. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985.

Eph'al, Israel. "The 'Samarian(s)' in the Assyrian Sources." Pages 36–45 in *Ah, Assyria…: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*. Edited by Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al. Scripta Hierosolymitana 33. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991.

Ervin-Tripp, Susan. "Variety, Style-Shifting, and Ideology." Pages 44–56 in *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Edited by Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Eshel, Esther, and Michael E. Stone. "The Holy Language at the End of Days in Light of a New Fragment Found at Qumran." *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 169–77 [Hebrew].

Eslinger, Lyle. "The Enigmatic Plurals Like 'One of Us' (Genesis I 26, III 22, and XI 7) in Hyperchronic Perspective." *Vetus Testamentum* 56 (2006): 171–84.

Exodus: Gods and Kings. Film. Directed by Ridley Scott. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox. 2014.

Ferguson, Charles A. "Diglossia." *Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York* 15 (1959): 326–40.

Fewell, Danna N. "Sennacherib's Defeat: Words at War in 2 Kings 18.13–19.37." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34 (1986): 79–90.

Finkel, Irving. "Strange Byways in Cuneiform Writing." Pages 9–25 in *The Idea of Writing: Play and Complexity*. Edited by Alex de Voogt and Irving Finkel. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Fishman, Joshua A. "Bilingualism with and without Diglossia; Diglossia with and without Bilingualism." *Journal of Social Issues* 23 (1967): 29–38.

———. "Positive Bilingualism: Some Overlooked Rationales and Forefathers." Pages 42–52 in *International Dimensions of Bilingual Education*. Edited by James E. Alatis. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1978.

Fokkelman, Jan P. "Genesis 11:1–9: The Tower of Babel." Pages 11–45 in his *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*. 2d ed. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1975.

Foley, William A. "Language Birth: The Process of Pidginization and Creolization." Pages 162–83 in *Language: The Socio-Cultural Context*. Edited by Frederick J. Newmeyer. Vol. 4 of *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey*. Edited by Frederick J. Newmeyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

———. *Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

Folmer, Margaretha L. *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period: A Study in Linguistic Variation*. Orientalia lovaniensia analecta 68. Leuven: Peeters, 1995.

Foreman, Benjamin A. "Strike the Tongue: Silencing the Prophet in Jeremiah 18:18b." *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009): 653–57.

Fox, Michael V. *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991.

———. "Wisdom in the Joseph Story." *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001): 26–41.

———. *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. JPS Bible Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004.

Fraade, Stephen D. "Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third–Sixth Centuries." Pages 253–88 in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*. Edited by Lee I. Levine. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992.

Freedman, H. and Maurice Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah*. 3d ed. 10 vols. London: Soncino, 1983.

Friberg, Göran. "Numbers and Counting." Pages 1579–88 in vol. 4 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Friedrich, Johannes. "Göttersprache und Menschensprache im hethitischen Schrifttum." Pages 135–39 in *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung: Festschrift Albert Debrunner gewidmet von Schülern, Freunden und Kollegen*. Bern: Francke, 1954.

Gan, M. "The Book of Esther in the Light of the Story of Joseph in Egypt." *Tarbiz* 31 (1961): 144–9 [Hebrew].

Garr, W. Randall. *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000–586 B.C.E.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.

Gass, Erasmus. "New Moabite Inscriptions and Their Historical Relevance." *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 38 (2012): 45–78.

Gaster, Theodor H. "Esther 1 22." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69 (1950): 381.

———. *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament: A Comparative Study with Chapters from Sir James G. Frazer's* Folklore in the Old Testament. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

Gelb, Ignace J. *Hurrians and Subarians*. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations 22. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944.

———. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of Chicago*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1956–.

———. "The Word for Dragoman in the Ancient Near East." *Glossa* 2 (1968): 93–104.

Geller, Stephen A. "The Language of Imagery in Psalm 114." Pages 179–94 in *Lingering over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*. Edited by Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard and Piotr Steinkeller. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

George, Andrew R. "Ninurta-Paqidat's Dog Bite, and Notes on Other Comic Tales." *Iraq* 55 (1993): 63–72.

Gerleman, Gillis. *Esther*. Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973.

Gerstenberger, Erhard S. *Psalms Part 2 and Lamentations*. Forms of Old Testament Literature 15. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001.

Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.

Gitin, Seymour, Trude Dothan, and Joseph Naveh. "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron." *Israel Exploration Journal* 47 (1997): 1–16.

Glaßner, Gottfried. "Aufbruch asl Heimat." *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 116 (1994): 472–9.

Glenny, W. Edward. *Hosea: A Commentary Based on Hosea in Codex Vaticanus*. Septuagint Commentary Series. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Goldingay, John. *Daniel*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1989.

———. *Psalms*. 3 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006–2008.

Gordis, Robert. "Studies in the Esther Narrative." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 43–58.

Gordon, Cyrus H. "אחדים = *iltênûtu* 'Pair.'" Pages 5–9 in *Sefer Segal: mugash likhvod Mosheh Tsevi Segal.* Edited by J. M. Grintz and J. Liver. Publications of the Israel Society for Biblical Research 17. Jerusalem: ha-Ḥevrah le-ḥeḵer ha-Miḵra be-Yiśra'el 'al yede hotsa'at Ḵiryat sefer, 1964.

Goshen-Gottstein, Moshe H. "The Language of Targum Onqelos and the Model of Literary Diglossia in Aramaic." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 37 (1998): 169–79.

Gowan, Donald E. *When Man Becomes God: Humanism and* Hybris *in the Old Testament.* Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975.

Grabbe, Lester L. *Ezra-Nehemiah*. London: Routledge, 1998.

———. "The 'Persian Documents' in the Book of Ezra: Are They Authentic?" Pages 531–70 in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period.* Edited by Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming. Winona Lake. Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Gray, John. *I & II Kings: A Commentary*. 2d rev. ed. Old Testament Library. London: SCM, 1970.

Greenberg, Moshe. *Ezekiel 1–20*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983.

———. *Ezekiel 21–37*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Greenfield, Jonas C. "Aramaic in the Achaemenian Empire." Pages 698–713 in vol. 1 of *The Cambridge History of Iran*. 7 vols. Edited by Ilya Gershevitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968–1991.

———. "Aramaic Studies and the Bible." Pages 110–30 in *Congress Volume: Vienna 1980.* Edited by John A. Emerton. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 32. Leiden: Brill, 1981.

Greenstein, Edward L. "Jethro's Wit: An Interpretation of Wordplay in Exodus 18." Pages 155–71 in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes*. Edited by Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winter. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.

———. "The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 651–66.

Gudykunst, William B. and Karen L. Schmidt. "Language and Ethnic Identity: An Overview and Prologue." Pages 1–14 in *Language and Ethnic Identity*. Edited by William B. Gudykunst. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1988.

Gumperz, John J. *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Gunkel, Hermann. *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895.

———. *Genesis*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997. Translated by Mark E. Biddle, with foreword by Ernest W. Nicholson. Translation of the 3d German ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910.

Gzella, Holger. *A Cultural History of Aramaic: From the Beginnings to the Advent of Islam*. Handbuch der Orientalistik 1.3. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Habel, Norman C. *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985.

Hagerdorn, Anselm C. "Looking at Foreigners in Biblical and Greek Prophecy." *Vetus Testamentum* 57 (2007): 432–48.

Hall, Jonathan M. *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Hallo, William H. *Origins: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of some Modern Western Institutions*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

———, ed. *The Context of Scripture*. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002.

Hamilton, Jefferson M. "Gilead" Pages 1990–95 in vol. 2 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Harland, Peter J. "Vertical or Horizontal: The Sin of Babel." *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998): 515–33.

Hartman, Louis F., and Alexander A. Di Lella. *The Book of Daniel*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978.

Haupt, Paul. "Critical Notes on Esther." *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*. 24 (1908): 97–186.

Hauspie, Katrin. "Neologisms in the Septuagint of Ezekiel." *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 27 (2001): 17–37.

Hendel, Ronald S. Review of Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und "eine Rede": eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Gen 11, 1–9). Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (1993): 785–87.

van Henten, Jan Willem. "The Ancestral Language of the Jews in 2 Maccabees." Pages 53–68 in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*. Edited by William Horbury. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

Herbert, Robert K. Review of Andrée Tabouret-Keller (ed.), *Les enjeux de la nomination des langues. Language in Society* 29 (2000): 439–41.

Herzfeld, E. *Altpersische Inschriften*. Berlin: D. Reimer, 1938.

Hess, Richard S. "Chaldea." Pages 1322–24 in vol. 1 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992

Hiebert, Theodore, ed. *Toppling the Tower: Essays on Babel and Diversity*. Chicago: McCormick Theological Seminary, 2004.

———. "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2006): 29–58.

Hilman, Yitzhak. "Gentilic: Biblical Hebrew." In *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. Edited by Geoffrey Khan. Leiden: Brill, 2013. No pages. Cited 6 July 2015. Online: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopedia-of-hebrew-language-and-linguistics.

Höffken, Peter. "Die Rede des Rabsake vor Jerusalem (2 Kön. xviii / Jes. xxxvi) im Kontext anderer Kapitulationsforderungen." *Vetus Testamentum* 58 (2008): 44–55.

Hoftijzer, J., and K. Jongeling. *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1995.

Holladay, William L. *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986.

Holmstedt, Robert D. *Ruth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010.

Horbury, William, ed. *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

Horwitz, Elaine K., Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope. "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal* 70 (1986): 125–32.

Hossfeld, Frank-Lothar and Erich Zenger. *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.

———. *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011.

Huehnergard, John. "Asseverative *la* and Hypothetical *lu/law* in Semitic." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 569–93.

Humphreys, W. Lee. *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study*. Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.

Hurvitz, Avi. "The Chronological Significance of 'Aramaisms' in Biblical Hebrew." *Israel Exploration Journal* 18 (1968): 234–40.

———. *A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Innovation in the Writings of the Second Temple Period*. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 160. Brill: Leiden, 2014.

Hutton, Jeremy M. *The Transjordanian Palimpsest: The Overwritten Texts of Personal Exile and Transformation in the Deuteronomistic History*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 396. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009.

Hyatt, J. Philip. "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1942): 156–73.

Hymes, Dell. "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Setting." *Journal of Social Issues* 23 (1967): 8–28.

Irsigler, Hubert. *Zefanja: Übersetzt und ausgelegt*. Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002.

Irvine, Judith T. "'Style' as Distinctiveness: The Culture and Ideology of Linguistic Differentiation." Pages 21–43 in *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Edited by Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Irvine, Judith T. and Susan Gal. "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation." Pages 35–85 in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Polities, and Identities*. Edited by Paul V. Kroskrity. Santa Fe, N.Mex.: School of America Research, 2000.

Irwin, William H. *Isaiah: Translation with Philological Notes*. Biblica et orientalia 30. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977.

Jackson, Kent P. "The Language of the Meshaʿ Inscription." Pages 96–130 in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*. Edited by Andrew Dearman. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.

Jacob, Benno. *Das Buch Genesis*. Stuttgart: Calwer, 2000. Repr. of *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis*. Berlin: Schocken, 1934.

———. *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*. Translated by Walter Jacob. Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1992.

Jacobsen, Thorkild. "Sumerian Mythology: A Review Article." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1946): 128–52.

———. *The Harps that Once…: Sumerian Poetry in Translation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

———. "The Spell of Nudimmud." Pages 403–416 in *"Shaʿarei Talmon": Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*. Edited by Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Janzen, David. *Witch-Hunts, Purity and Social Boundaries: The Expulsion of the Foreign Women in Ezra 9–10*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 350. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002.

Janzen, John Gerald. *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*. Harvard Semitic Monographs 6. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973.

Japhet, Sara. *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM, 1993.

Jastrow, Marcus. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. 2d ed. New York: Putnam, 1903.

Jenni, Ernst. *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*. 3 Vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992–2000.

Jindo, Job Y. "Toward a Poetics of the Biblical Mind: Language, Culture, and Cognition." *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009): 222–43.

Jones, Richard N., Philip C. Hammond, David J. Johnson, and Zbigniew T. Fiema. "A Second Nabataean Inscription from Tell esh-Shuqafiya, Egypt." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 269 (1998): 47–57.

Joosten, Jan. "The Original Language and Historical Milieu of the Book of Judith." *Meghillot: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls* 5–6 (2008): *159–*176.

Joyce, Paul. *Ezekiel: A Commentary*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 482. New York: T&T Clark, 2007.

Kaiser, Otto. *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 13–39*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973.

Kaufman, Stephen A. "The Classification of the North West Semitic Dialects of the Biblical Period and Some Implications Thereof." Pages 41–57 in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Jerusalem, August 4–12, 1985, Panel Sessions Hebrew and Aramaic*. Edited by Moshe Bar-Asher. Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1988.

Kikawada, "The Shape of Genesis 11:1–9." Pages 18–32 in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg*. Edited by Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler. Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974.

Kim, Hyun Chul Paul. "Jonah Read Intertextually." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2007): 497–528.

Klein, Jacob. "The So-Called 'Spell of Nudimmud' (ELA 134–155): A Re-Examination." Pages 563–84 in vol. 2 of *Studi sul vicino oriente antico dedicati alla memoria di Luigi Cagni*. Edited by Simonetta Graziani. Naples: Instituto universitario orientale, 2000.

Klein, Ralph W. *2 Chronicles: A Commentary*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

Kline, Jonathan Greenlee. "Transforming the Tradition: Soundplay as an Interpretive Device in Innerbiblical Allusions." PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014.

Kloss, Heinz. "Types of Multilingual Communities: A Discussion of Ten Variables." *Sociological Inquiry* 36 (1966): 135–45.

Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner and Johann J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000.

Koller, Aaron. "Present and Future of the Hebrew Past." Review of William M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Classical Hebrew*. *Marginalia Review of Books* 23 June 2015. No pages. Online: http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/present-and-future-of-the-hebrew-past-by-aaron-koller/

van der Kooij, Arie. "Nehemiah 8:8 and the Question of the 'Targum'-Tradition." Pages 79–90 in *Tradition of the Text: Studies Offered to Dominique Barthélemy in Celebration of his 70th Birthday*. Edited by Gerard J Norton and Stephen Pisano. Orbis biblicus et orientalis 109. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991.

Kottsieper, Ingo. "'And They Did Not Care to Speak Yehidit': On Linguistic Change in Judah during the Late Persian Era." Pages 95–124 in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* Edited by Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Rainer Albertz. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007.

Krahmalkov, Charles R. *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*. Orientalia lovaniensia analecta 90. Studia phoenicia 15. Leuven: Peeters, 2000.

Kramer, Samuel N. "Man's Golden Age: A Sumerian Parallel to Genesis XI. 1." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 63 (1943): 191–4.

———. *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta: A Sumerian Epic Tale of Iraq and Iran*. Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Philadelphia, 1952.

———. "The 'Babel of Tongues': A Sumerian Version." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (1968): 108–11.

Kratz, Reinhard G. *Translatio Imperii: Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Danielerzählungen und ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Umfeld*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991.

———. "Rewriting Isaiah: The Case of Isaiah 28–31." Pages 245–66 in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*. Edited by John Day. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 531. New York: T&T Clark, 2010.

Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*. Translated by Hilton C. Oswald. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988.

———. *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary*. Translated by Hilton C. Oswald. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989.

Krüger, Thomas. *Qoheleth: A Commentary*. Translated by O. C. Dean, Jr. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

Kuhrt, Amélie. *The Ancient Near East: c. 3000–330 BC*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Kutscher, Eduard Yechezkel. *A History of the Hebrew Language*. Edited by Raphael Kutscher. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982.

Labov, William. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1966.

———. *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1972.

———. "The Intersection of Sex and Social Class in the Course of Linguistic Change." *Language Variation and Change* 2 (1990): 205–254.

Labuschagne, Casper J. "The *našû-nadānu* Formula and Its Biblical Equivalent." Pages 176–80 in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament: Studies Presented to Professor M. A. Beek on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*. Edited by Matthieu S. H. G. Heerma van Voss, Philo H. J. Houwink ten Cate, and N. A. van Uchelen. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974.

Lacocque, André. "Whatever Happened in the Valley of Shinar? A Response to Theodore Hiebert." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 29–41.

Lambert, Wallace E. "A Social Psychology of Bilingualism." *Journal of Social Issues* 23 (1967): 91–109.

Landman, Yael. "On Lips and Tongues in Ancient Hebrew: A Semantic Analysis." Paper presented at the annual national meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. San Diego, Ca. 23 November 2014.

Landsberger, Benno. "Scribal Concepts of Education." Pages 94–124 in *City Invincible: A Symposium on Urbanization and Cultural Development in the Ancient Near East*. Edited by Carl H. Kraeling and Robert M. Adams. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960.

Lane, Edward W. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. 8 vols. London: Williams & Norgate, 1863–1893. Repr.,. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984.

de Lange, Nicholas. Review of Willem F. Smelik, *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity*. *Journal of Jewish Studies* 65 (2014): 199–201.

Lauterbach, Jacob Z. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004.

Léglise, Isabelle and Bettina Migge. "Language-Naming Practices, Ideologies, and Linguistic Practices: Toward a Comprehensive Description of Language Varieties." *Language in Society* 35 (2006): 313–39.

Lemaire, André. "Ashdodien et judéen à l'époque perse: Ne 13,24." Pages 153–63 in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipiński*. Edited by K. van Leberghe and A. Schoors. Orientalia lovaniensia analecta 65. Leuven: Peeters, 1995.

Lesley, Michael. "Illusions of Grandeur: The Instruments of Daniel 3 Reconsidered." Pages 201–12 in *Music in Antiquity: The Near East and the Mediterranean*. Edited by Joan Goodnick Westenholz, Yossi Maurey, and Edwin Seroussi. Yuval 8. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014.

Leveen, Adriane. "Inside Out: Jethro, the Midianites and a Biblical Construction of the Outsider." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34 (2010): 395–417.

Levenson, Jon D. *Esther: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997.

Levin, Yigal. "Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad." *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002): 350–66.

Lewy, Julius. "The Problems Inherent in Section 70 of the Bisitun Inscription." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 25 (1954): 169–208.

Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Lipschits, Oded. "Demographic Changes in Judah between the Seventh and the Fifth Centuries B.C.E." Pages 323–76 in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*. Edited by Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Lipschits, Oded and David S. Vanderhooft. *The Yehud Stamp Impressions: A Corpus of Inscribed Impressions from the Persian and Hellenistic Periods in Judah*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011.

Liu, Meihua and Jane Jackson. "An Exploration of Chinese EFL Learners' Unwillingness to Communicate and Foreign Language Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal* 92 (2008): 71–86.

Liverani, Mario. "Stereotipi della lingua 'altra' nell'Asia anteriore antica." *Vicino Oriente* 3 (1980): 15–31.

———. "Political Lexicon and Political Ideologies in the Amarna Letters." *Berytus* 31 (1983): 41–56.

———. *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600–1100 B.C.* History of the Ancient Near East Studies 1. Padua: Sargon, 1990.

Long, Michael H. "Acquisition of Language." In *The International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. 2d ed. Edited by William J. Frawley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. No pages. Cited 10 July 2015. Online: http://www.oxfordreference.com

Lundberg, Marilyn J. "The *mīs pî* Rituals and Incantations and Jeremiah 10:1–16." Pages 210–17 in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen*. Edited by John Goldingay. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 459. New York: T&T Clark, 2007.

Lundbom, Jack R. *Jeremiah 1–20*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1999.

Machinist, Peter. "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 719–37.

———. "The Question of Distinctiveness in Ancient Israel: An Essay." Pages 196–212 in *Ah, Assyria…: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*. Edited by Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al. Scripta Hierosolymitana 33. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991.

———. "Assyrians on Assyria in the First Millenium B.C." Pages 77–104 in *Anfänge politischen Denkens in de Antike: Die nahöstlichen Kulturen und die Griechen*. Edited by Kurt Raaflaub. Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993.

———. "Biblical Traditions: The Philistines and Israelite History." Pages 53–83 in *The Sea Peoples and Their World: A Reassessment*. Edited by Eliezer D. Oren. Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Philadelphia, 2000.

———. "The *Rab Šāqēh* at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the Face of the Assyrian 'Other.'" *Hebrew Studies* 41 (2000): 151–68.

Macintosh, Andrew A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997.

Malamat, Abraham. "ʿ*AMM LᵉḆĀḎĀḎ YIŠKŌN*: A Report from Mari and an Oracle of Balaam." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76 (1985): 47–50.

Mankowski, Paul V. *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000.

Margaliot, Meshulam. "Jeremiah X 1–16: A Re-Examination." *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980) 295–308.

Marks, Herbert. "Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 21–42.

Mayes, Andrew D. H. *Deuteronomy*. New Century Bible. London: Oliphants, 1979.

McCarter, P. Kyle, Jr. *I Samuel*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980.

McKane, William. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*. 2 vols. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986–1996.

Melton, J. Gordon. "Xenoglossy." Pages 359–60 in *The Encyclopedia of Religious Phenomena*. Edited by J. Gordon Melton. Detroit: Visible Ink, 2008.

Melville, Sarah C. *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics*. State Archives of Assyria Studies 9. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999.

Meyers, Carol L. and Eric M. Meyers. *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987.

Michael Graves, trans. *Jerome's Commentary on Jeremiah*. Edited by Christopher A. Hall. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011.

Milgrom, Jacob. "Did Isaiah Prophesy during the Reign of Uzziah?" *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964): 164–82.

Miller, Patrick D. *The Religion of Ancient Israel*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000.

Mishor, Mordechay. "On the Language and Text of Exodus 18." Pages 225–29 in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives*. Edited by Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz. Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Mizrahi, Noam. "A Matter of Choice: A Sociolinguistic Perspective on the Contact between Hebrew and Aramaic, with Special Attention to Jeremiah 10.1–16." Pages 107–24 in *Discourse, Dialogue and Debate in the Bible: Essays in Honour of Frank H. Polak.* Edited by Athalya Brenner-Idan. Hebrew Bible Monographs 63. Amsterdam Studies in Bible and Religion 7. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014.

Moberly, R. Walter L. "Preaching for a Response? Jonah's Message to the Ninevites Reconsidered." *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2003): 156–68.

Montgomery, James A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel.* International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927.

Moore, Carey A. *Esther.* Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971.

Moran, William L. "Some Reflections on Amarna Politics." Pages 559–72 in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots.* Edited by Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin and Michael Sokoloff. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995.

Morrison, Craig E. "Courtesy Expressions: Biblical Hebrew." In *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics.* Edited by Geoffrey Khan. Leiden: Brill, 2013. No pages. Cited 18 July 2015. Online: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopedia-of-hebrew-language-and-linguistics

Muljačić, Žarko. "Standardization in Romance." Pages 77–116 in *Bilingualism and Linguistic Conflict in Romance.* Vol. 5 of *Trends in Romance Linguistics and Philology.* Edited by Rebecca Posner and John N. Green. The Hague: Mouton, 1993.

Myers, Jacob M. *Ezra. Nehemiah.* Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965.

Myers-Scotton, Carol. "Comparing Codeswitching and Borrowing." Pages 19–40 in *Codeswitching.* Edited by Carol M. Eastman. Multilingual Matters 89. Clevedon: Multlingual Matters, 1992.

———. *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.

Na'aman, Nadav. "Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45 (1986): 271–86.

Nelson, Richard D. *Deuteronomy: A Commentary.* Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

Newsom, Carol A. *Daniel: A Commentary.* Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2014.

Nicholson, Ernest W. *Deuteronomy and Tradition.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967.

———. *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1–25.* Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Niditch, Susan. *Judges: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008.

Niehr, Herbert (ed.). *The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria*. Handbuch der Orientalistik 1.106. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Nissinen, Martti. "Outlook: Aramaeans Outside of Syria, I. Assyria." Pages 273–96 in *The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria*. Edited by Herbert Niehr. Handbuch der Orientalistik 1.106. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Noegel, Scott B. "Paronomasia." Pages 24–29 in vol. 3 of *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. Edited by Geoffrey Khan. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Oded, Bustenay. "The Table of Nations (Genesis 10)—A Socio-Cultural Approach." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98 (1986): 14–31.

Ólafsson, Sverrir. "On Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew and Its Graphic Representation." *Folia Orientalia* 28 (1991): 193–205.

Olley, John W. *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiēl in Codex Vaticanus*. Septuagint Commentary Series. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Olson, S. Douglas. *The Archarnians*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Pardee, Dennis. *The Ugaritic Texts and the Origins of West Semitic Literary Composition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Parker, Simon B. "Ammonite, Edomite, and Moabite." Pages 43–60 in *Beyond Babel: A Handbook for Biblical Hebrew and Related Languages*. Edited by John Kaltner and Steven L. McKenzie. Resources for Biblical Study 42. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.

Paton, Lewis B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther*. New York: Scribner's, 1908.

Petersen, David L. *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM, 1984.

Polak, Frank H. "The Oral and the Written: Syntax, Stylistics and the Development of Biblical Prose Narrative." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 26 (1998): 59–105.

———. "Sociolinguistics and the Judean Speech Community in the Achaemenid Empire." Pages 589–628 in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*. Edited by Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming. Winona Lake. Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

———. "Sociolinguistics: A Key to the Typology and the Social Background of Biblical Hebrew." *Hebrew Studies* 47 (2006): 115–62.

———. "Forms of Talk in Hebrew Biblical Narrative: Negotiations, Interaction, and Sociocultural Context." Pages 167–98 in *Literary Construction of Identity in the*

Ancient World. Edited by Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010.

———. "Parler de la langue: Labov, Fishman et l'histoire de l'hébreu biblique." *Yod* 18 (2013), no pages. Cited 19 September 2014. Online: http://www.yod.revues.org

———. "Speaker, Addressee, and Positioning: Dialogue Structure and Pragmatics in Biblical Narrative." Pages 359–72 in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines*. Edited by James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

Polzin, Robert. *Late Biblical Hebrew: Towards an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*. Harvard Semitic Monographs 12. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976.

Porten, Bezalel, and Ada Yardeni. *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt: Newly Copied, Edited, and Translated into Hebrew and English*. 4 vols. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986–1999.

Porteous, Norman. *Daniel: A Commentary*. 2d rev. ed. London: SCM, 1979.

Portier-Young, Anathea E. "Languages of Identity and Obligation: Daniel as Bilingual Book." *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 98–115.

Pritchard, James B. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3d ed with supplement. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Propp, William H. C. *Exodus 1–18*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1999.

Quack, Joachim Friedrich. "Egyptian Writing for Non-Egyptian Languages and Vice Versa: A Short Overview." Pages 317–325 in *The Idea of Writing: Play and Complexity*. Edited by Alex de Voogt and Irving Finkel. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

———. "From Group-Writing to Word Association: Representation and Integration of Foreign Words in Egyptian Script." Pages 73–92 in *The Idea of Writing: Play and Complexity*. Edited by Alex de Voogt and Irving Finkel. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Rabin, Chaim. "The Historical Background of Qumran Hebrew." Pages 144–61 in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Edited by Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin. Scripta Hierosolymitana 4. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1958.

———. "An Arabic Phrase in Isaiah." Pages 303–9 in *Studi sull'Oriente a la Bibbia Offerti al P. Giovanni Rinaldi nel 60° Compleanno da Allievi, Colleghi, Amici*. Giovanni Rinaldi. Genoa: Studio e Vita, 1967.

von Rad, Gerhard. "Josephgeschichte und ältere Chokma." Pages 121–7 in *Congress Volume: Copenhagen 1953*. Edited by G. W. Anderson. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 1. Leiden: Brill, 1953.

———. *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*. Translated by Dorothea Barton. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1966.

———. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Translated by John H. Marks. Old Testament Library. Rev. ed. London: SCM, 1972. Translation of *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis*. 9th ed. 3 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972.

Rajak, Tessa. *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Redford, Donald B. *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50)*. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 20. Leiden: Brill, 1970.

Reid, Garnett. "'Thus Shall You Say to Them': A Cross-Cultural Polemic in Jeremiah 10.11." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31 (2006): 221–38.

Reiner, Erica. "Why do you Cuss Me?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 130 (1986): 1–6.

———. "The Tale of the Illiterate Doctor in Nippur." *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2003: 62.

———. "A Comprehensive Guide to Israelian Hebrew: Grammar and Lexicon." *Orient* 38 (2003): 5–35.

———. "Aramaic-Like Features in the Pentateuch." *Hebrew Studies* 47 (2006): 163–76.

Rendsburg, Gary A. "Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible." *Vetus Testamentum* 38 (1988): 354–57.

———. "Sabaic Notes to Hebrew Grammar." *Abr-Nahrain* 27 (1989): 106–19.

———. *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew*. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1990.

———. *Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990.

———. "The Strata of Biblical Hebrew." *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 17 (1991): 81–99.

———. "*Kabbîr* in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for Style-Switching and Addressee-Switching in the Hebrew Bible." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112 (1992): 649–51.

———. "Morphological Evidence for Regional Dialects of Ancient Hebrew." Pages 65–88 in *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*. Edited by Walter R. Bodine. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

———. "Shibboleth," Pages 1210–12 in vol. 5 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

———. "Linguistic Variation and the 'Foreign' Factor in the Hebrew Bible." *Israel Oriental Studies* 15 (1995): 177–90.

———. "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 2 (1999). No pages. Cited 20 March 2013. Online: http://www.jhsonline.org/.

———. *Israelian Hebrew in the Book of Kings*. Occasional Publications of the Department of Near Eastern Studies and the Program of Jewish Studies, Cornell University 5. Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2002.

———. "Some False Leads in the Identification of Late Biblical Hebrew Texts: The Cases of Genesis 24 and 1 Samuel 2:27–36." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 23–46.

———. "ואשב in Mesha Stele, Line 12." *Maarav* 14 (2007): 9–25.

Richardson, H. Neil. "Some Notes on ליץ and Its Derivatives." *Vetus Testamentum* 5 (1955): 163–79.

———. "Two Addenda to 'Some Notes on ליץ and Its Derivatives.'" *Vetus Testamentum* 5 (1955): 434–36.

Rindge, Matthew S. "Jewish Identity under Foreign Rule: Daniel 2 as a Reconfiguration of Genesis 41." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010): 85–104.

Robertson, David A. *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*. Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972.

Rofé, Alexander. "An Enquiry into the Betrothal of Rebekah." Pages 27–39 in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag*. Edited by Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz, and Ekkehard W. Stegemann. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990.

Roitman, Adolfo D. "'This People are Descendants of Chaldeans' (Judith 5:6): Its Literary Form and Historical Setting." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): 245–63.

Rojcewicz, Stephen. "The Languages of the Gods." *Journal of Poetry Therapy* 14 (2001): 213–28.

Rollston, Christopher A. "Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: The Old Hebrew Epigraphic Evidence." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 344 (2006): 47–74.

———. *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

Romaine, Suzanne. *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. 2d ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Rose, Christian. "Nochmals: Der Turmbau zu Babel." *Vetus Testamentum* 54 (2004): 223–38.

Rosenthal, Franz. *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*. 6th rev. ed. Porta linguarum orientalum 5. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1995.

Rosenthal, L. A. "Die Josephgeschichte mit den Büchern Ester und Daniel verglichen." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 15 (1895): 278–85.

Roth, Martha T. *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. 2d ed. Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.

Rubin, Milka. "The Language of Creation or the Primordial Language: A Case of Cultural Polemics in Antiquity." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 49 (1998): 306–33.

Rudman, Dominic. "Creation and Fall in Jeremiah X 12–16." *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998): 63–73.

———. "Is the Rabshakeh Also among the Prophets? A Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings XVIII 17–35." *Vetus Testamentum* 50 (2000): 100–110.

Rudolph, Wilhelm. *Esra und Nehemia*. Handbuch zum Alten Testament 1.20. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1949.

———. *Jeremia*. 2d ed. Handbuch zum Alten Testament. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1958.

———. *Hosea*. Kommentar zum Alten Testament 13.1. Gütersloh: Mohn, 1966.

Saénz-Badillos, Angel. *A History of the Hebrew Language.* Translated by John E. Elwolde. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Sanders, Seth L. "What was the Alphabet For? The Rise of Written Vernaculars and the Making of Israelite National Literature." *Maarav* 11 (2004): 25–56.

———, ed. *Margins of Writing: Origins of Cultures*. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2006.

———. "Writing and Early Iron Age Israel: Before National Scripts, Beyond Nations and States." Pages 97–112 in *Literate Culture and Tenth-Century Canaan: The Tel Zayit Abecedary in Context*. Edited by Ron E. Tappy and P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008.

———. *The Invention of Hebrew*. Traditions. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

———. "From People to Public in the Iron Age Levant." Pages 191–211 in *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Würzberg 20–25 July 2008*. Edited by Gernot Wilhelm. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2012.

Sarna, Nahum M. *Understanding Genesis*. New York: Shocken, 1966.

———. *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

———. *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991.

Sasson, Jack M. "The 'Tower of Babel' as a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History [Gen. 1–11:9]." Pages in 211–9 in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*. Edited by Gary A. Rendsburg, Ruth Adler, Milton Arfa and Nathan H. Winter. New York: KTAV, 1980.

———. *Judges 1–12*. Anchor Bible. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Sauneron, Serge. "La différenciation des langages d'après la tradition Égyptienne." *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 60 (1960): 31–41.

Schaper, Joachim. "Hebrew and Its Study in the Persian Period." Pages 15–26 in *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda*. Edited by William Horbury. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

Schiffman, Harold F. "Diglossia as a Sociolinguistic Situation." Pages 205–16 in *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Edited by Florian Coulmas. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

Schmitz, Philip C. "Canaan." Pages 1243–46 in vol. 1 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Schniedewind, William M. "Linguistic Ideology in Qumran Hebrew." Pages 245–55 in *Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira*. Edited by Takamitsu Muraoka and John E. Elwolde. Brill: Leiden, 2000.

———. "Aramaic, the Death of Written Hebrew, and Language Shift in the Persian Period." Pages 141–51 in *Margins of Writing: Origins of Cultures*. Edited by Seth L. Sanders. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2006.

———. "Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 5 (2004). No pages. Cited 20 March 2013. Online: http://www.jhsonline.org/.

———. *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period*. Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Schniedewind, William M. and Daniel Sivan. "The Elijah-Elisha Narratives: A Test Case for the Northern Dialect of Hebrew." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 87 (1997): 303–337.

Schorch, Stefan. "The Pre-Eminence of the Hebrew Language and the Emerging Concept of the 'Ideal Text' in Late Second Temple Judaism." Pages 43–54 in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime'on Centre, Papa, Hungary, 18–20 May, 2006*. Edited by Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 127. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Schwartz, Seth. "Language, Power and Identity in Ancient Palestine." *Past & Present* 148 (1995): 3–47.

Segal, Michael. "From Joseph to Daniel: The Literary Development of the Narrative in Daniel 2." *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2002): 123–49.

Seitz, Gottfried. *Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studien zum Deuteronomium*. Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament. Fifth Series 13. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971.

Seminara, Stefano. "The Babylonian Science of the Translation and the Ideological Adjustment of the Sumerian Text to the 'Target Culture.'" Pages 245–5 in *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena: Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium of the*

Assyrian and Babylonian Heritage Project, Held in Chicago, USA, October 27–31, 2000. Edited by A. Panaino and G. Pettinato. Milan: Università di Bologna, IsIAO, 2002.

Seow, Choon-Leong. *Ecclesiastes*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Sérandour, Arnaud. "Hébreu et araméen dans la Bible." *Revue des Études juives* 159 (2000): 345–55.

Sériot, Patrick. "Le cas du macédonien: faut-il nommer les langues?" Pages 167–90 in *Le nom des langues I: Les enjeux de la nomination des langues*. Edited by Andrée Tabouret-Keller. Bibliothèque des cahiers de l'institut de linguistique de Louvain 95. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.

Shaffer, Aaron. "The Tower of Babel." Unpublished lecture. Delivered at the University of California, Berkeley; Yale University, New Haven; and elsewhere, 1977. Manuscript provided by Peter Machinist. Thirty-five pages, typed and handwritten.

Sherman, Phillip M. *Babel's Tower Translated: Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation*. Biblical Interpretation Series 117. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Sjöberg, Åke W. "Der Examenstext A." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 64 (1975): 137–77.

Skinner, John. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Genesis.* International Critical Commentary. New York: Scribner's, 1910.

Smelik, Klaas A. D. "King Hezekiah Advocates True Prophecy." Pages 93–128 in his *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*. Oudtestamentische Studiën 28. Leiden: Brill, 1992.

Smelik, Willem F. "Language Selection and the Holy Tongue in Early Rabbinic Literature." Pages 91–151 in *Interpretation, Religion and Culture in Midrash and Beyond: Proceedings of the 2006 and 2007 SBL Midrash Sections*. Edited by Lieve M. Teugels and Rivka Ulmer. Judaism in Context 6. Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2008.

———. *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Smith, Duane E. "The Divining Snake: Reading Genesis 3 in the Context of Mesopotamian Ophiomancy." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134 (2015): 31–49.

Smith, Scobie P. "The Question of Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew." Pages 37–52 in *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics*. Edited by Stanley E. Porter. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement 193. Studies in New Testament Greek 6. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Smith, Stuart T. *Wretched Kush: Ethnic Identities and Boundaries in Egypt's Nubian Empire*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Snell, Daniel C. "Why is there Aramaic in the Bible?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 18 (1980): 32–51.

von Soden, Wolfram. *Zweisprachigkeit in der geistigen Kultur Babyloniens*. Sitzungsberichte - Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse 235:1. Vienna: Böhlau, 1960.

———. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch: unter Benutzung des lexikalischen Nachlasses von Bruno Meissner (1869–1947)*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985.

Soggin, J. Alberto. *Judges: A Commentary*. Translated by John Bowden. 2d English ed. London: SCM, 1987.

Sokoloff, Michael. *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin. Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's* Lexicon Syriacum. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009.

Sovran, Tamar. "Metonymy and Synecdoche." In *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. Edited by Geoffrey Khan. Leiden: Brill, 2013. No pages. Cited 3 July 2015. Online: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopedia-of-hebrew-language-and-linguistics

Sparks, Kenton L. *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998.

Speiser, Ephraim A. "The Shibboleth Incident (Judges 12:6)." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 85 (1942): 10–13.

———. "Word Plays on the Creation Epic's Version of the Founding of Babylon." *Orientalia* 25 (1956): 317–23.

———. *Genesis*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1964.

Spolsky, Bernard. "Jewish Multilingualism in the First Century: An Essay in Historical Sociolinguistics." Pages 35–50 in *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages*. Edited by Joshua A. Fishman. Vol. 1 of *Contributions to the Sociology of Jewish Languages*. Edited by Joshua A. Fishman. Brill: Leiden, 1985.

———. "Diglossia in Hebrew in the Late Second Temple Period." *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 10 (1991): 85–104.

Staal, Frits. "Oriental Ideas on the Origin of Language." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1979): 1–14.

Stade, Bernard. "Miscellen. 16. Anmerkungen zu 2 Kö. 15–21." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 6 (1886): 156–89.

Steiner, Richard C. "Bishlam's Archival Search Report in Nehemiah's Archive: Multiple Introductions and Reverse Chronological Order as Clues to the Origin of the Aramaic Letters in Ezra 4–6." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 641–85.

Stølen, Marianne. "Codeswitching for Humor and Ethnic Identity: Written Danish-American Occasional Songs." Pages 215–28 in *Codeswitching*. Edited by Carol M. Eastman. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1992.

Stolper, Matthew W. *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia*. Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Institut te Istanbul, 1985.

Strong, John T. "Shattering the Image of God: A Response to Theodore Hiebert's Interpretation of the Story of the Tower of Babel." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 625–34.

Sweeney, Marvin A. *Zephaniah: A Commentary*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.

———. *I & II Kings: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007.

Tabouret-Keller, André, ed. *Le nom des langues I: Les enjeux de la nomination des langues*. Biliothèque des cahiers de l'institut de linguistique de Louvain 95. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.

———. "Les enjeux de la nomination des langues: Présentation." Pages 5–20 in *Le nom des langues I: Les enjeux de la nomination des langues*. Edited by Andrée Tabouret-Keller. Bibliothèque des cahiers de l'institut de linguistique de Louvain 95. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.

Tadmor, Hayim. "Rabshaqeh." Pages 323–25 in vol. 7 of *Entsiklopedya mikra'it*. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1976 [Hebrew].

———. "Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: Historical and Historiographical Considerations." *Zion* 50 (1985): 65–80 [Hebrew].

———. "On the Role of Aramaic in the Assyrian Empire." Pages 419–26 in *Near Eastern Studies Dedicated to H. I. H. Prince Takahito Mikasa on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*. Edited by Masao Mori, Hideo Ogawa and Mamoru Yoshikawa. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991.

Tal, Abraham. "'Hebrew Language' and 'Holy Tongue' between Judea and Samaria." Pages 187–201 in *Samaria, Samarians, Samaritans: Studies on Bible, History and Linguistics*. Edited by József Zsengellér. Studia Judaica 66. Studia Samaritana 6. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011.

Talmon, Shemaryahu. "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther." *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 419–55.

Tan, Nancy Nam Hoon. *The "Foreignness" of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1–9*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 381. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008.

Teeter, D. Andrew, "Isaiah and the King of As/Syria in Daniel's Final Vision: On the Rhetoric of Inner-Scriptural Allusion and the Hermeneutics of 'Mantological Exegesis.'" Pages 169–99 in vol. 1 of *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*. Edited by Eric F. Mason, Samuel L. Thomas, Alison Schofield, and Eugene Ulrich. 2 vols. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 153. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Thiel, Winfried. *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25*. Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 41. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973.

Thompson, John A. *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974.

Tigay, Jeffrey H. "'Heavy of Mouth' and 'Heavy of Tongue': On Moses' Speech Difficulty." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 231 (1978): 57–67.

———. *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996.

van der Toorn, Karel. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

van der Toorn, Karel and Pieter W. van der Horst. "Nimrod before and after the Bible." *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1990): 1–29.

Torrey, Charles C. "The Older Book of Esther." *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944): 1–40.

Tov, Emanuel. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 2d rev. ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.

De Troyer, Kristin. *The End of the Alpha Text of the Book of Esther: Translation and Narrative Technique in MT 8:1–17, LXX 8:1–17 and AT*. Translated by Brian Doyle. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000.

Uehlinger, Christoph. *Weltreich und "eine Rede": eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Gen 11, 1–9)*. Orbis biblicus et orientalis 101. Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1990.

Uljas, Sami. "Linguistic Consciousness." No pages. In *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*. Edited by Julie Stauder-Porchet, Andréas Stauder, and Willeke Wendrich. Los Angeles: 2013. Cited 9 June 2015. Online: digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002dn8xd

Ullendorff, Edward. "The Knowledge of Languages in the Old Testament." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 44 (1961–2): 455–65.

———. "C'est de l'hébreu pour moi!" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13 (1968): 125–35.

Van Seters, John. *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

VanderKam, James C. *The Book of Jubilees: A Critical Text*. Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium 510–11. Scriptores Aethiopici 87–88. Leuven: E. Peeters, 1989.

———. *The Book of Jubilees*. Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001.

Vanstiphout, H. L. J. "Another Attempt at the 'Spell of Nudimmud.'" *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 88 (1994): 135–54.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Vergote, Joseph. *Joseph en Égypte: Genèse chap. 37–50 à la lumière des études Égyptologiques récentes*. Orientalia et biblica lovaniensia 3. Leuven: Publications Universitaires, 1959.

Wahl, Harald M. *Das Buch Esther: Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009.

Walsh, Jerome T. "The Rab Šāqēh between Rhetoric and Redaction." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130 (2011): 263–79.

Waltke, Bruce, and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Walton, John H. "The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 155–75.

Wardhaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. 5th ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.

Wasserstein, Abraham and David J. Wasserstein. *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Watkins, Calvert. "Language of Gods and Language of Men: Remarks on Some Indo-European Metalinguistic Traditions." Pages 1–17 in *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans: Studies in Indo-European Comparative Mythology*. Edited by Jaan Puhvel. Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1970.

Watts, John D. *Isaiah 1–33*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985.

Wei, Li, ed. *The Bilingualism Reader*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Weinberg, Werner. "Language Consciousness in the Hebrew Bible." Pages 51–73 in *Essays on Hebrew*. Edited by Paul Citrin. South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 46. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993. Repr. of "Language Consciousness in the OT" from *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92 (1980): 185–204.

Weinfeld, Moshe. *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972.

Weiser, Artur. *The Psalms: A Commentary*. Translated by Herbert Hartwell. London: SCM, 1962.

Westermann, Claus. *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*. Translated by David M. G. Stalker. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969.

———. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Translated by John J. Scullion. 3 vols. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984–1986.

Wevers, John William. *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy*. Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series 39. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995.

Wexler, Paul. *The Schizoid Nature of Modern Hebrew: A Slavic Language in Search of a Semitic Past*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990.

Wildberger, Hans. *Isaiah: A Continental Commentary*. 3 vols. Translated by Thomas H. Trapp. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991–2002.

Williamson, Hugh G. M. *Ezra, Nehemiah*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985.

———. *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.

Wilson, Robert R. *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980.

Wiseman, D. J. *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon*. London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958.

Withington, Robert. "Xenoglottophobia." *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors* 27 (1941): 568–76.

van Wolde, Ellen. *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11*. Leiden: Brill, 1994.

Woolard, Kathryn A. "Language Ideology: Issues and Approaches." *Pragmatics* 2 (1992): 235–49.

———. "Introduction: Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry." Pages 3–37 in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*. Edited by Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard and Paul V. Kroskrity. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Woolard, Kathryn A., and Bambi B. Schieffelin. "Language Ideology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 55–82.

Wright, Benjamin E. "Why a Prologue? Ben Sira's Grandson and His Greek Translation." Pages 633–44 in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*. Edited by Shalom Paul et al. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 94. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Wright, Jacob L. "Making a Name for Oneself: Martial Valor, Heroic Death, and Procreation in the Hebrew Bible." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (2011): 131–62.

Young, Ian. "The 'Northernisms' of the Israelite Narratives in Kings." *Zeitschrift für Althebräistik* 7–8 (1994–1995): 63–70.

Young, Ian, and Robert Rezetko. *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*. 2 vols. London: Equinox, 2008.

Zaccagnini, Carlo. "The Enemy in the Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The 'Ethnographic' Description." Pages 409–424 in vol. 2 of *Mesopotamien und Seine Nachbarn:*

Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. Jahrtausent v. Chr. Edited by Hans-Jörg Nissen and Joannes Renger. Berlin: Reimer, 1982.

Zadok, Ran. *On West Semites in Babylonia during the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods: An Onomastic Study*. Jerusalem: H., J., and Z. Wanaarta, 1977.

———. "The Origin of the Name Shinar." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 74 (1984): 241–4.

Zahavy, Tzvee. "Judaism in the Mishnaic Period." Pages 1490–99 in vol. 3 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Zarins, Juris. "Dumah (Person)." Pages 235–37 in vol. 2 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Zehnder, Markus. *Umgang mit Fremden in Israel und Assyrien: Ein Beitrag zur Anthropologie des "Fremden" im Licht antiker Quellen*. Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 9. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005.

Zempel, Solveig Pauline Tweet. "Language Use in the Novels of Johannes B. Wist: A Study of Bilingualism in Literature." PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1980.

Zevit, Ziony. "A Misunderstanding at Bethel." *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975): 783–90.

Ziegler, Joseph. *Beiträge zur Ieremias-Septuaginta*. Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse 1958.2. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958.

Zimmerli, Walther. *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*. Translated by Ronald E. Clements. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.