

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIOLOGY
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EDITED BY

JOSHUA A. FISHMAN

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LEIDEN — E. J. BRILL — 1985

READINGS IN THE SOCIOLOGY
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HEBREW IS NOT A JEWISH LANGUAGE

UZZI ORNAN

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1. On the face of it, a "Jewish language" can be defined as one that Jews speak among themselves. But this seems too broad a definition. It may include other languages which we would not want to call "Jewish languages"—those used in the same way both by Jews and their neighbors, anywhere in the world. For example, upper class British English is used by many Jews in Britain exactly as do their socially equal non-Jewish peers.

A more exact definition is required: "A Jewish language" is one that Jews speak only among themselves, and which is different from the one used outside their homes or neighborhoods. The condition of these Jews, then, would be diglottal. Of course, if a man lived and circulated only within his own neighborhood, he would use mainly a Jewish language. But such cases do not change the rule: "A Jewish language" is a language that Jews use together with another common language. Their diglotism is divided between "a Jewish language", on the one hand, and a common "gentile language" on the other.

2. With this definition in mind, we can now examine the uses of Hebrew in various societies.

a) In many Jewish families in Israel—especially immigrants still using some sort of Jewish language at home, the status of Hebrew, then, is that of the common language used outside—the language of the country; "the language of the gentiles."

The status of Hebrew in this case is no different from that of the Turkish language among the Jews in Izmir, where their Jewish language "at home" is the Spanish dialect (Ladino, Judesmo), while in the street, at school, to the authorities and with the general public they speak Turkish. Another example: Hebrew occupies the same place as does Spanish among many Jewish families in Argentina. The latter have a "home language" which is not Spanish but rather Yiddish.

b) In old-established Israeli families, Hebrew is the only language used—an all-encompassing language. With these families, too, we cannot say that Hebrew is used as a "Jewish language", for as we said, in order for a language to be considered a "Jewish language", it must be in use in the home and the neighborhood, while in more general surroundings a different one is used. Here, however, the language "in general use"—is the same as the "home language", just as "British English" in Great Britain

is not a "Jewish language" even though used by a considerable number of Jewish families, we cannot consider Hebrew in Israel a "Jewish language".

c) A number of Jewish communities use Hebrew in a different way: They do not use it as a "home language" opposed to the surrounding one (i.e. not as is the pattern of all the Jewish languages), nor as the "language of the gentiles", as do many families in Israel (especially the immigrant ones), nor even as "the all-encompassing language," as among the old established Israeli families, but rather they use it as one of the diglottic languages—not as the "home language," but mainly for prayer, or more exactly for cultural and religious communication. For hundreds, even thousands of years, up until about one hundred years ago, this was the principal use of the Hebrew language among most Jews. To this day there are various Jewish communities who still use it in this way, though to a lesser extent and on a more restricted scale than those of previous generations.

d) It is worthwhile mentioning here the communities of Israeli emigrants abroad—especially in the United States. Some of them use Hebrew as the "home language", but in this, they are no different from other immigrant communities, such as the Italians and the Poles who hold onto their native language for one or two generations after their arrival in their new homeland.

3. To sum up, in all the uses to which Hebrew is put, it is in no way similar to any "Jewish language". From a sociolinguistic standpoint, it cannot at all be considered a "Jewish language". Scrutiny of Israeli Hebrew is in this respect especially important. Here, we conclude that even if we consider *all* those using it as Jews, even then we could not define it, from a sociolinguistic aspect, as a "Jewish language", but rather as a "gentile language". This is especially so for many Jews living in the land of Israel—who have immigrated during the past few decades. For them Hebrew is clearly a "state language", i.e. a "language of the gentiles". One is therefore unable to include Hebrew among the "Jewish languages".

4. There is more to be said on this subject: The revival of Hebrew in Israel occurred about a hundred years ago, and was a movement to turn Hebrew from one of the Jewish diglottal languages to the main or sole language of the younger generations. This revival was in the nature of a revolt against the way of life of generations of Jews scattered in many countries in the diaspora, and against the continuing condition of diglottism. As we know, diglottism was a common and a normal phenomenon in many medieval societies, so there was nothing special about the Jews having their own language to speak among themselves or another for cultural communication. This is not found today in advanced societies in the modern world. The revolt against the Jewish way of life included rebellion against Jewish diglottism, and its purpose was to bring forth a

new nationality in the land of Israel. This nationality, like most others in the world, has its own national language which for its native sons is "an all-encompassing language".

The national Israeli society does not include Jews living outside its borders, Israelis, although biologically descended—most of them—from Jews living outside of Israel, are not "Jews living in Israel". They are of Israeli nationality. This too is not a rare phenomenon. Many newly independent nations have sprung up in the new world during the past few generations, and no one will deny the biological connection between them and the older societies on the other side of the ocean.

5. There is also, perhaps, some room for the claim that taking the subject of "Jewish languages" as a research topic on its own, is not a truly linguistic concern. The Jews speak many and varied languages, and there is no linguistic reason for studying these particular languages as a linguistic discipline on its own. If it were such, then we should also have to include in the same research Ukrainian, Armenian or Polish in the United States, and many other "home languages" of small communities living as minorities surrounded by people speaking a different tongue.

Of course there is common content in some or all of the Jewish languages. We can find and compare them in the literary works written in the various Jewish languages, or making parallel etymological comparisons of words of Hebrew or Aramaic origin. However it is doubtful if these points of similarity justify establishment of a *linguistic* subject such as "Jewish languages". Actually the real point in creating such a field of study is the interest in *Jews*, and the social manifestations arising from their way of life. In this case, the place of such a subject should not be in the field of linguistics but rather in the history, sociology or demography of the Jews in their countries of birth, over the generations.

6. We cannot, of course, force the future course of Israeli Hebrew. What is clear to me at this time is that from every aspect it does not belong to the "Jewish languages", and a linguist studying Hebrew linguistics cannot in any way count himself among those studying "Jewish languages".

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that persisted as a functional organ and not as a museum exhibit for a period of two thousand years under the most adverse conditions, deprived of a geographical *milieu* and in the midst of an all-pervading majority culture. History can record no parallel case." However, the Hebrew case can be explained: the linguistic continuity of Hebrew was the outward symbol for the spiritual continuity of Judaism and the historical continuity of the Jewish people. As it was throughout history, so it remains today.

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JEWISH MULTILINGUALISM IN THE FIRST CENTURY: AN ESSAY IN HISTORICAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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The study of Jewish languages provides an excellent field for what might be called historical sociolinguistics, the application of sociolinguistic principles and models to questions of language use at earlier times. The paradigm of such scholarship is probably the work of Max Weinreich whose history of the Yiddish language has contributed in equal measures to Jewish studies, to historical linguistics, and to sociolinguistic theory. In this essay, I shall demonstrate the potential contribution of sociolinguistic theory to the solution of a problem of historical language use, looking at the way a theory casts light on the available contemporary evidence and reveals the pattern of language use among Jews of Palestine in the first century of the Common Era.

In their attempts at understanding this pattern, scholars were long handicapped by an assumption of virtual monolingualism, a sort of image of the modern educated Anglo-Saxon with his capability for fluency in one language and limited formal use of a second. These scholars held that the majority of Palestinian Jews of the time spoke only Aramaic; they conceded that the Rabbis knew Hebrew for their studies and wrote an artificial version of it rather like the Latin of nineteenth century scholars or clergymen; and they believed that only a small group of Hellenizing Jews knew Greek, just as some of the upper class of a conquered group might know the language of an occupying government. This view of the early death of Hebrew assumed that it had been the language of the people only until 597 BCE, when the population was forced into Exile in Babylon. After the return in 537 BCE, Hebrew was thought to have been replaced by Aramaic as the language of the people. Dubnow, for instance, (1967: 379) claimed that Aramaic spread with "remarkable speed," becoming the general language of conversation among the population and not just in cases of intermarriage. While he admitted that this Aramaic had many Hebraic elements in it, he argued that Aramaic was not just the language of legal acts (official documents are quoted in the Book of Ezra in Aramaic) and for conversation with those Jews who remained in Babylon and for those who went to Egypt, but that it was also needed for translating the Bible to the "unlearned"; in his opinion,

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it was only the learned who kept a working (and scholarly) knowledge of Hebrew.

But there is good reason to believe that this account anticipates the death of spoken Hebrew by some six or seven hundred years at least. In the report of the return from exile in the book of Nehemiah, we do find complaints that some of the men who had stayed behind had intermarried with non-Jews, woman of Ashdod, and that their children could not speak the "language of Judah" (Hebrew), but spoke rather "half in the speech of Ashdod" (Nehemiah 13.24), a description that any modern sociolinguist would recognize as code-switching. But the existence of code-switching and of related bilingualism after the political and cultural mixtures of the period of the exile is hardly the picture of rapid language loss painted by Dubnow.

More recent work has in fact found evidence for the continuity of Hebrew as a spoken language. One of the strongest proponents of this view has been the Christian scholar, Birkeland (1954) who argued that Jesus was undoubtedly fluent in Hebrew. There is strong evidence for this idea of Hebrew continuity, particularly in the case presented by Hebrew language scholars beginning with Graetz (1844), Segal (1908), and ably summarized most recently by Rabin (1976). They have demonstrated that the language in which the Rabbis composed the Mishnah was not an artificial language of scholars (as for instance Pfeiffer 1949: 379 held), but in fact just what would be expected if Biblical Hebrew had continued to be a spoken language developing over time in normal ways. Its grammatical and lexical differences from Biblical Hebrew are those of a living language, and not the attempts of scholars to reproduce an extinct language. As Rabin points out, there were in fact some people who wrote in the style of Biblical Hebrew until quite late. Archaic Biblical Hebrew was the choice of the Dead Sea Sects even though their writing occasionally shows signs of contamination by the kind of Hebrew they too must have spoken (Rabin 1958). We have no reason to doubt then that the Rabbis could have written in the archaic style had they wished to; they had no need to create an artificial language. Furthermore, since the Mishnah was composed and transmitted orally and not in writing, there would have been no reason to have written it down later in Mishnaic Hebrew were it not as a record of the spoken version.

It is clear therefore that the Rabbis of the Talmud spoke Hebrew and did not limit its use to prayer and writing. There is also good evidence of the use of Hebrew by ordinary people. We find an account of the Rabbis learning the meaning of an archaic term from a servant who came from a village in Judea. A number of the Bar-Kokhba letters (42-52) are written in Hebrew, the same living Hebrew that is found in the Mish-

nah (Benoit et al 1961). It does seem however that Hebrew was better maintained, or at least less influenced by Aramaic and other languages, in Judea than in Galilee, an area where a great number of other peoples had been settled during the Babylonian exile.

The Judeans who had been careful about their language succeeded in preserving the Torah, while the people of Galilee, who did not care for their language, did not preserve the Torah. (T.B. Erubin 53a).¹

The Talmud then goes on to discuss, with considerable detail, the kinds of mistakes made by people from Galilee in their spoken Hebrew, complaining especially of careless pronunciation that led to humorous misunderstanding. The linguist would recognize the kind of complaints that one often finds about another dialect. Hebrew then was still a fully spoken language well into the first century, different from the Hebrew of the Bible but only different in those ways that we would expect in the normal course of development of a language with similar exposure to multilingualism.

The evidence for widespread knowledge of Greek has been presented most clearly by Lieberman (1942) and Hengel (1974). As early as 345 BCE, Clearchus of Soli reports meeting a Greek-educated Palestinian Jew:

He was a Greek not only in his language but also in his soul. (Josephus c. Ap. 1, quoted by Hengel 1974: 59).

By 150 BCE, good knowledge of the Greek language could be expected of members of the Palestinian Jewish aristocracy; one learns for instance from 1 Macc. 8: 17-23 that Judah and some of his supporters knew enough Greek to carry on diplomatic negotiations in Rome and Sparta. A young Jew who wanted to rise in the secular world would have to learn Greek; a good number of contemporary Jewish books were written in Greek. In the house of Rabbi Gamaliel, it is reported, as many students studied Greek culture as Hebrew.

But is Greek philosophy forbidden? Behold Rab Judah declared that Samuel said in the name of Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel, ... there were a thousand pupils in my father's house; five hundred studied Torah and five hundred studied Greek wisdom... It was different with the house of Rabban Gamaliel because they had close associations with the Government. (T.B. Sotah 49b)

¹ The following abbreviations are used throughout the paper for Talmudic references: T.B. = Babylonian Talmud; P.T. = Jerusalem Talmud; M. = Mishnah; Citations from T.B. are from the Soncino translation.

Even among the Dead Sea Sects, at Qumran, Hengel reports, there were many Greek papyri, and the "Overseer of the Camp" was expected to know Greek. It was Lieberman who drew attention to how well the Rabbis knew Greek. Not only are there many words in the Talmud derived from Greek sources, but at a number of places (e.g. T.B. Shabbath 31b and 63b, T.B. Sanhedrin 76b) points are made with Hebrew-Greek puns of the kind that only a bilingual would be able to follow. The Rabbis did not just know Greek, but saw reasons to encourage people to learn and use it:

Rabbi said: why use the Syrian (= Aramaic; also, a pun on *sursi*, clipped) language in Palestine? Either the Holy tongue or Greek. (T.B. Sotah 49b)

The relative value of Greek and the other language is recognized in the Jerusalem Talmud:

Four languages are of value: Greek for song, Latin for war, Aramaic for dirges, and Hebrew for speaking. (P. T. Sotah VII)

Greek was the language of the Greek colonies not only outside but also in Palestine; it was the language of cities like Caesarea, Ashkelon, Akko, Jaffa, Gadara, Philadelphia, and Beth Shean (Scythopolis) just as it was of other Greek colonies throughout Asia Minor. By this time, it had become the first (and in many cases only) language of the extensive Jewish communities in Egypt. Jews in Egypt had spoken Aramaic until the middle of the second century BCE, but, as Tcherikover (1957: 30) shows, Greek eventually became the language of intercourse in the cities. Since there was no particular Jewish language loyalty to Aramaic, it was quite soon replaced by Greek, Tcherikover suggests, in much the same way that Yiddish was replaced by English in America. The language change did not, he argues, have any basic effect on the "national foundation" of the Jews of Egypt. More serious was the translation of the Bible into Greek, for the Written Law was the center of Jewish life, and once it was available in Greek, the study of Hebrew became obsolete in Egypt. By the time of Philo (c. 20 BCE- 50 CE), Hebrew was virtually unknown in Egypt. It was presumably for the sake of these Greek-speaking monolingual Egyptian Jews that the Rabbis gave permission to pray in the Greek language in the foreigners' synagoge in Jerusalem. (Tosefta Megillah iv 3).

It must be conceded that there was at various times opposition to Greek. After the tragic War against Quietus (116 CE), there was even a ban on the teaching (but not the use) of the Greek language, the action being explained with the story of a Greek-speaking Jew who had at an

earlier time betrayed Jerusalem to the Romans. (T.B. Sotah 49b). But there is good evidence that not just aristocrats with close relations with the government, but also the Rabbis, except for those who had come from Babylon, knew and spoke Greek. And just as with use of Hebrew, there is no reason to suggest that the Rabbis were exceptional in their knowledge of Greek.

Greek then had a role not just as the language for intercourse with the government, and for those Jews who lived in or traded with the many Greek towns, but also for contact with Jewish pilgrims from Greek-speaking Asia Minor and Egypt. In the Greek towns, Jewish knowledge of colloquial Greek was good; there is evidence in the Jerusalem Talmud that the Jews of Caesarea said prayers in Greek (P. T. Sotah VII.1.21b) and Lieberman (1942: 32ff) reports a case where Greek was used in a sreek prayer there, during a drought where it was customary to ask the common people to pray in their own language in the streets. He also points out that the Rabbis often quote or refer to Greek proverbs in their sermons, without translating, apparently assuming that they would be familiar to their listeners.

There is of course no doubt about the importance of Aramaic as one of the major languages of Jews in Palestine in the first century. Before the Babylonian exile, while the inhabitants of Judah did not know Aramaic, officials at the court were able to use Official Aramaic, the language of diplomacy. In 574 BCE, the king of Assyria sent an army against Jerusalem. When the emissary started speaking in Hebrew, Hezekiah's courtiers replied to him:

Speak, I pray you, to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it, and don't speak to us in the language of Judah (Hebrew) in the hearing of the people who are on the wall. (2 Kings 18, 26).

During the Babylonian exile, as the Book of Esther attests, knowledge of Hebrew was maintained for some time at least, but the upper classes at least must have learned Aramaic. During this period, a policy of resettlement of conquered populations anticipatory of the Soviet Union (see Lewis 1972) brought a great number of foreign settlers into Palestine, and, just as this population mix has led in the Soviet Union to the spread and strengthening of Russian, so we can assume that Aramaic developed first as the lingua franca between groups and then the language to be used within the various communities.

It is not clear however how fast Aramaic spread among the Jews that returned from Babylon or among those that had stayed behind. The earlier citation from Ezra certainly depicts language mixture, but not rapid language change. The text most often cited in support of a rapid

switch to Aramaic is a passage from Nehemiah, describing the establishment in the days of Ezra of the custom of reading the Torah aloud in public:

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people ...and Yeshua... and the Levites caused the people to understand the Torah; and the people stood in their places. So they read in the book, in the Torah of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8, 5-8.)

In its explanation of this passage (T. B. Nedarim 37b), the Talmud interprets this last verse to refer to the institution of the practice of the Targum, the reciting of an Aramaic translation after the public reading of each Biblical Hebrew verse. (T. B. Nedarim 37b). It is possible that it refers to a translation into any language; it might also refer to an interpretation given in more colloquial language. Even if the practice did not in fact start this early, it is certain that within a few centuries the Aramaic translation and interpretation that accompanied the public reading of the Written Law was firmly established, making clear that in the course of time most of the inhabitants of Palestine, including presumably many who spoke Hebrew, used Aramaic as a *lingua franca*.

Aramaic was the principal language of the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine—the Nabateans, the Samaritans, the Idumeans (these latter converted to Judaism by the Hasmoneans). By the first century, Aramaic had moved from being an imperial *lingua franca* to being a local vernacular. It remained the official language for commercial and personal contracts, including marriage and divorce documents), and a number of Jewish books (part of Daniel, Tobit, Jubilees, Enoch, the Greek Esther, and the second book of Maccabees) were written in it in the first century BCE; others (Josephus' History, Baruch, Esdras, and Baruch) were composed in Aramaic in the first century of the Common Era. The virtual triumph of Aramaic is attested to in the second century CE, when, in the face of dangers of language loss, the Rabbis start arguing for the need to teach Hebrew (see below). By this period, Aramaic was the first language of the Jewish home; Hebrew had started to become restricted in its roles to Jewish intellectual and religious life.

Putting all this together, the picture that emerges then is that, until the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE, the Jews of Palestine were multilingual, using Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek for different purposes and in different parts of the country. Hebrew continued to be used in the villages of Judea until then, and continued for a while longer in the villages of Galilee where Jews settled after the Romans drove them out of Judea; Greek was the language of many cities and towns; and Aramaic

was the most common first language. Rabin applies the term "triglossia" to this situation, deriving it from Ferguson's original proposal (1959) to use the term diglossia for situations where two languages, or to be more precise, two versions of the same language, were in a stable situation of complementary use, one language being used for one set of public functions and the other for a set private functions. How well, we might ask, does this this categorization fit our case?

The variation by region and by class in language use patterns may be summarized as follows:

Jews in the Diaspora:		
a. Egypt, Rome, Asia Minor		Greek.
b. Babylon		Aramaic and Hebrew.
Non-Jews in Palestine:		
a. Government officials		Greek and some Latin
b. Coastal cities (Greek colonies)		Greek
c. Elsewhere		Aramaic
Jews in Palestine		
a. Judean village		Hebrew
b. Galilee		Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek
c. Coastal cities		Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew
d. Jerusalem	i. upper class	Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew
	ii. lower class	Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek

The order that languages are mentioned in the right hand column is significant and represents the probable frequency of use and level of proficiency. The functional separation is much more complex. In Ferguson's pattern, the functions in a diglossic situation group into two, a set of H (or higher) functions such as public life, formal writing, religion, culture, and education, and a set of L (or lower functions) such as home, neighbourhood, and work. In first century Palestine, certain functional allocations appear clear. Greek was the language for government, Hebrew for prayer and study, Aramaic for trade, but the functional distribution is much more complex, being more than just the addition of one more language to the normal diglossic pattern. This becomes clearer if we look specifically at the use of the various languages for literacy functions (see Spolsky 1983).

Let us start with Greek. Greek rather than Latin was the usual language of Roman government in Asia Minor (Baron 1957, II: 300). There was a sign in the Temple in Greek advising non-Jews of the penalty for entering the holy places. Greek was used on many Jewish tombs, and starts to appear on other synagogue inscriptions later. One of Bar-Kokhba's letters to his captains was in Greek, so we may assume a degree of

popular literacy in Greek. Even though Greek as a language of literacy did not have the importance for Jews of Palestine that it did in the Diaspora, especially Egypt, its special status is in fact noted in the Talmud, for whereas some authorities held that the Bible could be written in any language (M. Megillah i. 8), Rabbi Simeon said that it could be written only in Hebrew or in Greek (P. T. Megillah i. 1).

The second language to be considered is Aramaic which, as I have already mentioned, had long been established as the official language for official legal and commercial documents. Two tractates of the Talmud deal in particular with the writing of marriage contracts and divorce documents, both of which were written in Aramaic according to carefully prescribed formulas. But although the form of the documents was clearly laid down, the Rabbis held the written document to be less reliable than the word of the witnesses who saw it being written or signed. As a result, no special status was attached to the ability to write such documents. Seeing that Hebrew had been written in the square Aramaic letters since the return from Babylonian Exile, anyone who could write a religious scroll in Hebrew could presumably write a marriage contract in Aramaic, and there is a reference in the Talmud to schools for scribes where you might hear a teacher dictating to the class a model divorce bill. But it was not clear that writing these Aramaic documents had a special status: in fact, the Talmud says that anyone could write such a document, including a woman or a minor, neither of whom could give evidence in a law court. We learn also that the Talmud can accept the notion of a member of the Sanhedrin being unable to write when it rules that there are circumstances when he must learn to write in order to carry out the request of a dying man to write a bill of divorce for him. One other kind of document could be written in Aramaic, the Targum or Aramaic translation or interpretation of the Bible. I have mentioned above the requirement that such an interpretation accompany all public readings of the Torah, but the Talmud holds that such a Targum was part of the Oral Law. As such, it was not allowed to be written down or read from a written text, but had to be delivered, one verse at a time, following the reading of the Hebrew verse, from memory or extemporaneously. (T.B. Soferim 39b). The Talmud is clear that the Holy Scriptures could be written down only in Hebrew, and that public readings as part of worship could only take place from a Hebrew text. But there is reference in the Talmud to one written Targum, and others probably existed. While such documents could not be used in statutory services, they had the sanctity of other sacred writings, and could for instance be carried out of a house on the Sabbath to save them from a fire (T.B. Shabbath 113b).

What we seem to have here, then, is a kind of casual attitude to writing

(except of contracts) that is not uncommon in diglossic situation: ephemera (personal notes of any kind) may be written in any language. But for sacred material, the rules are much stricter: in formal situations such as those to be discussed in the next few paragraphs, there are strict rules about the choice of language for writing.

The major language for Jewish sacred text literacy was Hebrew. Sacred text literacy was divided between two roles, that of the ordinary person and that of the scribe. The ordinary educated Jewish man was expected to be able to read a portion of the Written Law aloud, with correct cantillation, from an unpointed text, as part of a public worship service. The scribe had a twofold task: first, to train young boys in the skill of reading aloud and in the elementary level of interpretation of the sacred texts, and second to copy and maintain the accuracy of the written text. The copying was done letter by letter and not from dictation or memory but from a written model. During Temple times, the task of copying the Holy Scriptures was attached to the Temple; by the first century there were families and schools of scribes. Some of them became Rabbis; the ability to write a sacred text was classed, along with the abilities to perform a circumcision and to slaughter animals in accordance with the religious laws, as the kind of method of serving the public that was most desirable in a Rabbi.

To sum up, we are dealing with a period that was multiliterate as well as multilingual. In marked contrast to situations where one finds a bilingual but monoliterate community, there was an established role for literacy in each of the three languages, with Hebrew being the main language of the sacred written texts, Aramaic the language for legal contracts and commerce, Greek the language for government writing and many public inscriptions; ephemera could be written in any language. Each literacy was maintained by specialists and had its own training system associated with it. At the time we are concerned with, these specialists had important roles, but their status was not as high as that of scribes in earlier times, for the skills of reading and writing were starting to be widespread.

The situation we are dealing with is one that can be called triglossia, but such a labelling does not do much more than tell us that there are three languages in use in a recognizable pattern. Whereas the term diglossia as used by Ferguson (1959) or even as reinterpreted by Fishman (1972) was fairly precise in its suggestion of two distinct varieties each with an appropriate set of functions, later studies have shown the greater complexity of actual functional distribution. Fishman (1971), for instance, makes clear that he considers it necessary to re-establish empirically the domains of language use for each bilingual society studied.

There is clearly room then for considering what kind of model best accounts for the special kind of language variation that we are looking at here. The model that I want to explore in the rest of this paper is one based on the work of Ray Jackendoff² in preference linguistics. Language choice, like other sociolinguistic and pragmatic features (and some syntactic features as well), is best described by a set of rules only some of which define necessary conditions of well-formedness; the others are what Jackendoff calls preference rules: rules that apply typically but not necessarily, and the weighting or salience of which is dependent on situations and attitudes. While the exact nature of such rules remains to be established, the preference model seems particularly helpful in clarifying the working of the processes underlying the case we have been describing here. Let me first sketch a general set of such rules as they seem to apply to language choice, then show how they help account for the sociolinguistic pattern that we have been looking at of Jews in the first century.

There appear to be at least two necessary conditions for choice of language for communication:

Necessary condition 1: Use (speak, write) a language which you know.

Necessary condition 2: Use (speak, write) a language which the person you want to communicate with knows.

While knowing a language is of course a gradient condition, that is to say it is measured on a continuum and not as a binary decision, the necessary condition for a well-formed linguistic interaction is that both speaker-writer and listener-reader can achieve a minimal threshold level of understanding. These two conditions explain why one of the first tasks that parents accept with a newborn child is teaching it their language, i.e. making sure that it can meet necessary condition 2. Similarly, these two conditions explain why the continued presence of a significant monolingual in the home will ensure that other members of the family will know that language. We will see that these conditions are significant for some of the facts we have described. In communication with oneself (counting, dreaming, writing notes), it is obvious that the speaker/writer has the fullest freedom.

The typicality conditions that I next list can apply only where the two necessary conditions have been met, which means when the two interlocutors are (or can be expected to be) bilingual in the same two languages. The first pair relates to a preference according to how well the language is known by each of them.

² See for instance Jackendoff (1983); also for applications of the model to music, Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983); to literature, Schaubert and Spolsky (1981 and in press).

Typicality condition 1: Prefer to use the language you know best for the topic concerned.

Typicality condition 2: Prefer to use the language that you believe the person you are addressing knows best for the topic being discussed.

Essentially, these two rules fall into two parts. First, they both assume that choice of language is influenced by amount of knowledge and ease of expression, which themselves vary from topic to topic (perhaps domain to domain) depending on the experience of the speaker and, at another remove, on the experience (cultural history) of users of the language as a whole. The second part, equally pertinent to our concerns, is the question of whose preference is to count. Clearly, there will be cases where each user has (or can be assumed to have) equal and similar control of the two languages, but there will also be cases in which the two rules could lead to conflict. The resolution of this conflict is partly to be explained by the absolute and relative status of the two people concerned; it is partly to be explained by accommodation theory. The rules themselves are simple: the conditions that provide weighting for them are much more complex (see for instance Breitborde 1983, Genesee 1983).

The next condition is a conservative factor:

Typicality condition 3: Prefer to use the language you used the last time you addressed this person.

To switch language use to a person you have regularly spoken to—a family member, a close friend—takes a major effort; thus, the weight of inertia favors conservatism: parents can be persuaded to speak a new language to their children more easily than they can be persuaded to use it to each other.

Typicality condition 4: Prefer a language that includes or excludes a third party.

There are conditions in which it is considered important to make it possible for a third party to be able to understand what one is saying or writing; similarly, there can be conditions that make it important to prevent a third party understanding. In other cases, this condition has no weight at all.

The final condition is a complex and important one: I am tempted to break it down into several, but prefer to try to treat it as a single rule, with the complexities in the weightings that determine its salience in a specific case.

Typicality condition 5: Prefer to use a language that asserts the most advantageous social group membership for you in the proposed interaction.

Assume that both you and your addressee are equally bilingual; that it is a person you have not spoken to before; that there is no third party involved and that the conversation takes place in a society with at least two groups of uneven power, each with its associated language. If the interaction is between a member of the dominating group and of a dominated group, conditions 1 and 2 suggest that the comfort of the member of the dominating group will be served by using his/her language, unless he/she chooses to accommodate to the other party. Assume however a conversation between two members of the dominated group: in such a case, the use of the language of the dominant group will have nothing to do with comfort but will count as a claim to membership of that group and so to an advantageous status in the current situation. The working of conditions like these clearly depends on the ideological values of both people involved and derives from general social values.

Before we start discussing the detailed application of these rules to the case of Jewish Palestine in the first century, we need to make clear the nature of the model we are proposing. It is a competence model: a set of rules that underlies the understanding of a competent member of a speech community. In Chomsky's attempt to explain linguistic competence, this person was an idealized monolingual; in a sociolinguistic description, it is of necessity someone who shares not just the community's rules for forming sentences (linguistic competence in its narrowest sense) but its rules for language use (communicative competence). But knowing the rules is of course not the same as using them; there will in practice be cases where mistakes are made, or where knowledge is imperfect. In describing the rules of a speech community, there is another complication in that various members of the community will have different values and apply the same rules differently. For instance, in the situation I have been describing, it is clear that Jews from towns in Galilee had different linguistic competence from Jews from Judean villages. However, as our point of view is the whole speech community, we are interested not just in what such a local person does, but in what members of the community expect people from a certain part of the country to do.

This will help understand how the first two rules (the necessary conditions) work. The facts that emerge from our description are that there are potentially a number of significant monolinguals, or at least people with whom a multilingual Jew would share only one language. With Jews from Egypt or Asia Minor, or with Greek colonists, or with the Greek-speaking government, Greek would be the only possible language for communication. With non-Jews or other backgrounds, Greek might sometimes be useful, but the large majority would most probably be restricted to the use of Aramaic as a *lingua franca*. With a good number

of Jews, presumably older and younger, coming mainly from Judean (and after the destruction of Judea, Galilean and Golan villages), the only language for communication would be Hebrew. Thus multilingual Jews living in Palestine in the first century who had reason to interact with any of these named groups would have good reason to both maintain and use their ability in each of the three languages.

Typicality conditions 1 and 2 set up conditions for language choice between bilinguals and deal with topical division on the one hand and decision as to whose convenience to follow on the other. The Talmudic citation earlier hints at a topical division when it discusses the suitability of various languages:

Four languages are of value: Greek for song, Latin for war, Aramaic for dirges, and Hebrew for speaking. (P.T. Sotah VII)

The clearest statements of topical preferences are perhaps the extensive discussions in the Talmud on the language for writing the Holy Scriptures (mentioned above) and the language to be used for public readings from the Scriptures, for prayers (see e.g. T.B. Berakhot 13a), and for citing the words of a teacher (T.B. Berakhot 47a). Briefly, preference is always given to Hebrew, with a special provision that some things should always be quoted in the original (e.g. an Aramaic word used in the Bible, or a teaching from a Rabbi); as we would expect in a preference model, however, this is a typicality condition and can be outweighed by other provisions (especially the two necessary conditions). I have not so far been able to find evidence for the working of the second part of these conditions, the question of who accommodates when there is uneven language ability.

The way that typicality condition 3 works is well illustrated by the major reward and punishment cited in the attempts in the second century to persuade fathers to speak Hebrew to their children:

Rabbi Meir said, he who speaks with his son in the Holy Tongue is guaranteed a place in the world to come.

Or in more detail:

Rabbi Jose ben Aqabiah says, from here it is said that as soon as an infant begins to talk, his father talks to him in Hebrew and teaches him the Torah. He who fails to speak Hebrew with him and teach him the Torah acts like one who buries him. (Sifre on Deuteronomy)

Changing an established pattern of language use certainly calls for strong persuasion.

Finally, it is typicality condition 5 that must be used to account for the major language changes that did take place as sections of the Jewish community moved to Greek or to Aramaic as their language for intra-community use. Whether we are talking of the Jewish communities of Asia Minor, Babylon, or Palestine, we need to account for the ultimate switch to Greek or Aramaic for non-religious (or in the case of Egypt, for all) functions. Part of the explanation might be intermarriage, with Jews marrying converted non-Hebrew speakers, but this explanation is not enough. We must explain why Hebrew speakers who married other Hebrew speakers would have started to speak Aramaic or Greek to each other and more importantly to their children. And the answer must reside in large measure in the relative social group membership asserted by the use of the non-Hebrew language. In other words, we must assume a situation in which the status attached to being a Hebrew speaker was less than that attached to speaking the other language.

The pattern is easy to imagine in the areas where Greek was the predominant language, the language associated with culture as well as government, such as Egypt, Asia Minor, and the Greek cities. In such places, it was obviously the language of the non-Jewish upper class. Within the Jewish community, use of Greek would mark one as sharing in that status, so that one would start using it with other Jews and ultimately with one's children. This value of Greek is recorded in an opinion in the Jerusalem Talmud:

A man may teach his daughter Greek because it is an ornament. (P.T. Pe'ah I.1. 15c)

A similar pattern would account for the move from Hebrew to Greek in Egypt, and the development of the home use of Greek by aristocratic Jews in Palestine itself. Only a strong feeling of linguistic and national loyalty (such as one finds with the Dead Sea sects and with the Rabbis at certain periods) would hold out against this force in those areas where there was any extensive knowledge of Greek.

The switch to Aramaic is less easy to account for, unless it owed its status to the use of the language as a language of wider communication: the speaker of Aramaic then was someone with good connections outside the community, with extensive trade contacts perhaps. As I have already mentioned, the evidence suggests that the strongest move to Aramaic did in fact take place in Galilee, where there was the greatest mixture of population. Speaking Aramaic inside the community there must have at one stage signified an identification with the wider community, evidence perhaps of business success. And it is revealing that as the earlier citation made clear, this language change was assumed by the Talmud to be

accompanied by a weakening also of religious traditions. In the villages of Judea, however, these forces for language change seem to have been much less operative, so that we assume that Hebrew could have remained the normal language for home as well as religious use until the physical destruction and dispersal of the population. A second significant force for Aramaic must have been the rising status of rabbis from Babylon where the switch to Aramaic followed the same process as the switch to Greek in Egypt. As the importance of Babylon grew as a center of Jewish learning, the status within the scholarly world of speaking Aramaic must have similarly risen. The combination of these two forces then led to the temporary triumph of Aramaic as the Jewish language of the Talmudic period.

The preference model of language choice then helps us understand the complex interplay of forces in a multilingual situation. It will need to be refined by using it to analyse contemporary communities where survey and observational techniques will make the search for evidence of its operation simpler, but even in a historical study like this of the triglossia of the Jews of Palestine in the first century, it can cast light on the nature of the situation and the force behind it.

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