

SEMITIC LANGUAGE RESOURCES OF ANCIENT JEWISH PALESTINE

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*Introduction*

Language is a resource which offers not only a recognized system of communication for conveyance of information but a network of relationships that are emblematic of one's identity. If a speaker's repertoire of codes falls short of adequate performance in these areas, additional codes can be acquired at the language, dialect or register levels. Given the prevalence of language- and cultural-contact, and the diversity of functional and representational needs people have, it is hardly surprising that multilingualism is the historic norm for individuals and societies. This norm applied as well to Levantine Jews of the Late Second Temple Period, and this paper will specifically address the Semitic language resources of ancient Palestinian Jews and consider the role they may have played in Jewish identity.

To that end, I will offer first a concise summary of what appear to have been the functional roles of Hebrew and Aramaic at that time. Secondly, I will discuss how codes used side-by-side for extended periods of time—that is, relatively stable multilingualism—tend to promote certain linguistic changes. Thirdly, I will propose that just as modern multilinguals sometimes conceptualize a language differently from formal-objective taxonomies, so also 'Aramaic' and 'Hebrew' at least in spoken forms may have interpenetrated. Fourthly, I will make some observations about the roles these sister languages sometimes played in Jewish cultural and religious identity as they took their place among the 'myriad contact languages of the Graeco-Roman world'.<sup>1</sup>

1. Alex Mullen, *Southern Gaul and the Mediterranean: Multilingualism and Multiple Identities in the Iron Age and Roman Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 11.

*Hebrew and Aramaic in Second Temple Palestinian Judaism*

Studies on the language repertoire of ancient Jewish Palestine pave a heavily traveled highway—something that is to be expected given a world in which the human and society norm is to be multilingual.<sup>2</sup> It is generally held that Hebrew (in written and spoken variants), Aramaic and Hellenistic Greek—and to some limited degree Latin, for tertiary purposes<sup>3</sup>—were used by Palestinian Jews. More difficult to determine are the contours of their usage, that is (with acknowledgment to Joshua Fishman and Christina Paulston), the *where*, *why*, *by whom* and *for what reason* each saw usage.

With respect to historical studies, Hebrew is the obvious starting point. This Northwest Semitic language was that of the majority (though by no means all) of ancient Jewish writings of the first millennium BCE, and that of the original versions of the Jewish Scriptures most often known by their Christian label, the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> However, language shift to Aramaic at the spoken levels that lie behind the documents occurred in connection with the catastrophic developments that took place between the fall of the Northern Israelite Kingdom to Assyria in 722 BCE and that of the Southern

2. Mullen, *Southern Gaul*, p. 5.

3. Bernard Spolsky, 'Diglossia in Hebrew in the Late Second Temple Period', *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 10 (1991), pp. 85-104; Stanley E. Porter, 'The Functional Distribution of Koine Greek in First-Century Palestine', in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics* (JSNTSup, 193; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 53-78; J.N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Hanan Eshel, 'Use of the Hebrew Language in Economic Documents from the Judaean Desert', in R. Steven Notley, Marc Turnage and Brian Becker (eds.), *Jesus' Last Week: Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels, Vol. 1* (JCP, 11; Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 245-58; Bernard Spolsky, 'Triglossia and Literacy in Jewish Palestine of the First Century', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 42 (1983), pp. 95-109; Spolsky, 'Diglossia in Hebrew in the Late Second Temple Period', *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 10 (1991), pp. 85-104; Alan Millard, 'Latin in First Century Palestine', in Z. Zevit, S. Gitin and M. Sokoloff (eds.), *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas Greenfield* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pp. 551-58.

4. For selected language histories, see John F.A. Sawyer, *Sacred Languages and Sacred Texts* (London: Routledge, 1999); and E.Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Leiden: Brill, 1982).

Kingdom to Neo-Babylonia in 587 BCE. Post-exilic émigrés to the Levant from Mesopotamia came to speak Aramaic,<sup>5</sup> thereby planting, in what had been Hebrew-speaking territory, a sister Semitic language that was to become the daily vernacular of Palestinian Jews—a role it continued to play some half-millennium later, into the Late Second Temple period. Jews and other groups, tribal and ‘national’, from the Levant to Mesopotamia adopted Aramaic as their vernacular, and it would appear that scholarship is fairly agreed on this view.<sup>6</sup> The ‘Aramaic Hypothesis’<sup>7</sup> had begun to take form prior to its most effective early proponent, but it was through Gustav Dalman that its assuredness as the majority view took root, carrying as its correlate that Hebrew was to remain in the picture as the distinct language of religion. Still, it should be acknowledged that in an ancient Jewish society occupying historically Jewish territory, a modern Western distinction between ‘sacred’ and ‘common/secular’ domains would be awkward at best, if not irrelevant.

That new situation involving sister languages Hebrew and Aramaic co-existing in Jewish Palestine goes to the heart of current scholarly contention. Hezser<sup>8</sup> offers a substantial contribution to this discussion,

5. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 1-56; Etienn N. Koffi, *Language and Society in Biblical Times* (San Francisco, CA: International Scholars Publications, 1996); see also Sawyer, *Sacred Languages*.

6. Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (TSAJ, 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), p. 230.

7. For helpful discussion and overview of the Aramaic Hypothesis, see Michael O. Wise, *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 7-13. See also Guido Baltes, ‘The Origins of the “Exclusive Aramaic Model” in the Nineteenth Century: Methodological Fallacies and Subtle Motives’, in Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley (eds), *The Language Environment of First Century Judaea: Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels, Vol. 2* (JCP, 26; Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 1-34.

8. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, pp. 227-52, and invoking Fishman’s classic heuristic, the Lazarsfeld formula (p. 227 n. 4). See Chaim Rabin, ‘Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century’, in S. Safrai and M. Stern (eds.), *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1976), pp. 1007-1039; Stanley E. Porter, ‘Latin Language’, in C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter (eds.), *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 630-31; Porter, ‘Did Paul Speak Latin?’, in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Paul: Jew, Greek and Roman* (PAST, 5; Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 289-308.

including a helpful overview of the usage issues. She argues that in the Roman (i.e. Late Second Temple) Period, Hebrew ‘may have been employed as a written language for particular religious and/or representational purposes’,<sup>9</sup> thereby taking a fairly restricted view of its usage.

However, this tight conceptual envelope is increasingly being stretched. Wise, for one, critiques Hezser’s work for its lack of attention to ‘on-the-ground data that may serve as checks to high-level models like Hezser’s’,<sup>10</sup> while she inclines away from the possibility that Hebrew remained a vernacular in the Late Second Temple period and arguing that ‘Aramaic was not an essential component of Jewish identity’.<sup>11</sup> By way of contrast, Wise looks broadly beyond the rabbinic literature of Hezser’s purview and takes discussion of the functional distribution of the language in a modified direction while admitting that ‘scholarly consensus’ on their mutual roles is ‘precariously balanced’.<sup>12</sup> Among proponents for the vernacular use of Hebrew are Buth and Notley.<sup>13</sup> This essay does not seek to enter the specifics of their debate, but observes the challenge of establishing oral performance and actual competence when only written documents survive for analysis. Attempting to overcome this problem, Wise cites data (e.g. from ossuaries) in order to argue for the *active and simultaneous usage of the three primary languages*, albeit with the caution that the data for Greek need to be balanced with reference to region and timing (i.e. pre- or post-First Jewish Revolt). The apparent expansion of the use of Greek alongside Aramaic and Hebrew was, in some regards, ‘a practical matter, as happened likewise in Egypt’.<sup>14</sup>

Expansion of repertoire allows people to access additional environments and associations—this of course is the perennial promise of multilingualism. Fishman observes that ‘spreading languages that are not being imposed by force must provide (or promise to provide) entrée to scarce power and resources or there would be little reason for indigenous populations to adopt them for intergroup ( ... or intragroup)

9. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 229.

10. Wise, *Language and Literacy*, p. 4, and emphasizing the role played by language pragmatism (pp. 40-41) in determining some of the common usage.

11. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 240.

12. Wise, *Language and Literacy*, p. 36.

13. Buth and Notley (eds.), *Language Environment*.

14. Wise, *Language and Literacy*, p. 18.

use'.<sup>15</sup> For indeed, 'Linguistic ideology is not a predictable, automatic reflex of the social experience of multilingualism in which it is rooted,'<sup>16</sup> and there exists a high practicality factor to language choices that impacts repertoire and vernacular choices.

### *Semitic Codes in Contact*

The concept of *diglossia* has often been applied to the ancient Jewish language picture not only because of the simultaneous use of related codes but because they exhibit functional distribution and genetic relationships. While the ancient situation does not align cleanly with Ferguson's classic paradigm (and has been variously labeled triglossia, tetraglossia, polyglossia and more), of relevance here is the fact of functional distribution and domain. Considerable discussion continues—or rages—over the extent to which Hebrew saw ongoing use by the first century, and the extent to which Hellenistic Greek was involved as well—even by Jews in personal conversation with each other.<sup>17</sup> There is considerable evidence that Hebrew remained, for some, a viable code of interaction and study and even for public interactions at the Jerusalem Temple,<sup>18</sup> albeit as the usage of Greek vernacular was expanding.

A diglossic construal of this language situation holds that ancient Palestinian Judaism existed in a *stable* multilingual environment by virtue of its code distribution, fuzzy domain edges (to modern eyes) notwithstanding. Clackson offers that stability of repertoire and usage increases when social domain assignments come into play—that is, in cases of diglossia.<sup>19</sup> As Ong observes,<sup>20</sup> Aramaic certainly saw

15. Joshua A. Fishman, *Language Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 1989), pp. 240-41.

16. Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, 'Language Ideology', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994), pp. 55-82.

17. Jonathan M. Watt, 'Some Implications of Bilingualism for New Testament Exegesis', in Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (eds.), *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development* (EHC, 3; LBS, 6; Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 9-27.

18. Randall Buth and Brian Kvasnica, 'Temple Authorities and Tithe Evasion: The Linguistic Background and Impact of the Parable of the Vineyard, the Tenants and the Son', in Notley, Turnage and Becker (eds.), *Jesus' Last Week*, pp. 53-80.

19. James Clackson and Geoffrey Horrocks, *The Blackwell History of the Latin Language* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 37.

extensive domestic usage, Greek would work for business situations involving outsiders (as when a Galilean Jew traded goods destined for Syro-Phoenician urbanites), while Hebrew served for what we might call the more overt religious purposes (such as rabbinic teaching, and some readings of sacred Scripture in worship settings of temple or synagogue). Various sources show this, such as funerary epigraphy, and the same goes for the New Testament, in which writers introduce Semitic code-switching in the texts periodically (including loanwords, short phrases and clauses and various sorts of syntactic and semantic interference), quote mixed-language Semitic sources (e.g. Jesus' final words, Mt. 27.46)<sup>21</sup> and even refer to the multilingual inscription on the cross (Jn 19.19; Mt. 27.37), while at other points they reference the fact that a code-switch of some sort took place in the discourse being described by a narrative (Acts 21–22). Together, this constitutes evidence that the New Testament writers firmly planted in Palestine interactions were interconnected on many levels with the linguistic diversity of the Greco-Roman world.

One is inclined to conclude that the essentially trilingual situation that typified Palestinian Judaism at that time was marked by functional distribution of a diglossic nature, with frequent and widespread contact between the three main languages of community usage.

#### *Perceptions of 'Hebrew' and 'Aramaic' as Languages*

A tendency toward *metatypy*, in which languages used alongside each other increasingly share structural features, may be strengthened by long-term (i.e. stable) bilingualism. With Aramaic having been in use at least in domestic Jewish environments for a half millennium by the time of the Late Second Temple period, and with Hebrew being used in religious contexts (at the very least), metatypy may have occurred particularly in oral discourse by the first century. While ancient Palestinian Jews generally would have perceived differences between

20. Hughson T. Ong, *The Multilingual Jesus and the Sociolinguistic World of the New Testament* (LBS, 12; Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 15.

21. For discussion of this, see Randall Buth, 'The Riddle of Jesus' Cry from the Cross: The Meaning of *ἡλι ἡλι λαμα σαβαχθανι* (Matthew 27:46) and the Literary Function of *ἡλωι ελωι λειμα σαβαχθανι* (Mark 15:34)', in Buth and Notley (eds.), *Language Environment*, pp. 395-421.

Classical Biblical Hebrew, for example, and the forms of spoken Aramaic or the emerging Mishnaic Hebrew, this does not require that they always cared to label them in ways consistent with formal taxonomy. Various writers have noted that even the definition of a language shows flexibility from the viewpoints of its speakers—in other words, what native speakers deem to be the idiolects that fall within ‘their’ language may differ from the way linguists classify it. ‘In the case of long-term stable multilingualism, one may find convergence effects or “metatypy”, where the languages used alongside each other begin to show similarities in underlying grammatical structures.’<sup>22</sup>

Despite the risks inherent in applying a Uniformitarian Hypothesis, failure to attempt its application would ignore conceptual generalities.<sup>23</sup> One might ask, when a Palestinian Jew of the first century used the dative noun Ἑβραϊστί, as occurs in a variety of locations in the New Testament (e.g. Jn 5.2; 19.13, 17, 20; 20.16; Rev. 9.11; 16.16), and is usually prefaced with verbs (or participles) of speaking (such as ἐπιλεγόμενη, λεγόμενον, λέγει/λέγεται, γεγράμμενον, καλούμενον), is he conceiving of the same concept of formal Hebrew language as a theoretical linguist would construe it, or is he thinking of language *as customarily used* by Jews? The question is important because it could have been ‘pure’ Hebrew or a pastiche of Hebrew and Aramaic in selected speech situations. A mutually code-switched or inter-mixed usage of Hebrew and Aramaic (of varying degrees, particularly in oral usage) would have been the language recognizable to others as what was spoken by Jews. What continues to plague the discussion is the non-recoverability of spoken language (other than by citation or indirect reference). Insofar as Hengel and others are correct that, over

22. This quotation is part of a valuable discussion of the topic in James Clackson, ‘Language Maintenance and Language Shift in the Mediterranean World during the Roman Empire’, in Alex Mullen and Patrick James (eds.), *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 36-57. See also J.N. Adams, Mark Janse and Simon Swain (eds.), *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

23. Jonathan M. Watt, ‘The Principle of Universality in Sociolinguistics, with Implications for Acts 22:2’, Paper presented to the Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics Section of the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, CA, USA, November 2014.

the centuries, ‘Aramaic became the language of the illiterate’,<sup>24</sup> then its direction as living speech will continue to obscure its contours. Nevertheless, observations of living languages show that multilingual speakers *use* language as suits them best, and tend to perform rapid code-switching that produces inter-mixture.

### *Cultural Identification and Semitic Language Resources*

We now address a less traveled road, namely the role Semitic languages may have played in cultural identification for ancient Levantine Jews. Even a small margin of flexibility in language identification, placed alongside pragmatic needs and ideological commitments, makes this task interesting. It pits conflicting (or at least non-compatible) purposes against each other: does a speaker choose a code from his/her repertoire because it expresses something about their perception of themselves, or simply because it ‘works’ for a particular situation? And, if a speaker is responding to both kinds of motivations simultaneously, how is that to be construed by the researcher?

Schwartz proposes<sup>25</sup> approaching this language-and-identity question via three ‘stages of social history’: a formative period that leads into the Israelite monarchy and onto the post-exilic period (c. 300 BCE), a secondary stage covering much of the Second Temple period (c. 300 BCE–70 CE), and then a third stage that lasts up to the Christianization of the Roman Empire (c. fourth century CE). He concludes that Hebrew played a ‘negligible’ ideological role in the first stage, and that for curators of the second stage it was a valuable ‘commodity [which was] consciously manipulated by the leaders of the Jews to evoke the Jews’ distinctness from their neighbors, and the leaders’ own distinctness from their social inferiors’, while its ideological value ‘petered out’ during the third stage as Hebrew ‘retained its evocative power’, even though it ‘lost much of its practical significance’.<sup>26</sup>

This is significant because, as Schwartz observes ironically,<sup>27</sup> what often has been accorded recognition as ‘holy language’ (*leshon*

24. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism, Vol. 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 59.

25. Seth Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity in Ancient Palestine’, *Past and Present* 148 (1995), pp. 3-47.

26. Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity’, pp. 3-4.

27. Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity’, p. 8.



*haqodesh*) seems in the Bible itself to lack any self-conscious, national status; it is only in Neh. 13.23-30 (the prophet lamenting in the fifth century BCE the limited ability of descendants of Jewish returnees to speak ‘Judahite’ rather than Ashdodite) that readers see a passage suggesting that ‘Hebrew was apparently not central to the self-understanding of the Israelites’<sup>28</sup> during this first stage of their history. Whether or not this argument from silence is sustainable, it seems that the Levant possessed a linguistic continuum of ‘languages which were hardly more diverse than the dialects of Greek’,<sup>29</sup> in which it might be assumed (as at the time of Ruth) that Judahites and Moabites spoke mutually comprehensible languages and where ‘you loathed your neighbors—but spoke their language’. Commonality of language is no guarantee of shared identity, and Schwartz argues that this helps explain why texts such as Daniel and Ezra–Nehemiah can code-switch and style-modulate with ‘unselfconscious’ ease.<sup>30</sup> Such conditions would thus facilitate the post-exilic shifts to Aramaic and/or Greek, for it was not until his second stage (i.e. third century BCE onward) that the ‘Hebrew language began to be ideologized’.<sup>31</sup> The Jerusalem Temple liturgy necessarily remained Hebrew, while the ‘ascendancy of Aramaic’ saw this linguistic newcomer become vernacular in the Jewish Levant (though he goes on to note that its usage extended beyond the temple walls). On the other hand, Hebrew was ‘uncommon in Palestinian epigraphy of the Roman Imperial period’,<sup>32</sup> while in synagogues, for example, inscriptions were mostly in Aramaic or Greek, such that in ‘synagogue-based Judaism of the second to the fourth centuries, Hebrew had little role to play’.

So regarding issues of language and identity, some cautious conclusions seem warranted, and they include the following.

First, allowance must be made for different speakers and Jewish sub-communities to value language resources in different kinds of ways. Though on the one hand Hezser concludes that Hebrew no later than post-70 CE (and certainly after 135 CE) ‘had lost its political importance, but ... maintained its religious significance as a symbol of Jewishness’, and that rabbis whose self-perceived role was to represent

28. Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity’, p. 9.

29. Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity’, p. 9.

30. Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity’, p. 11.

31. Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity’, p. 18.

32. Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity’, p. 35.

the ‘old pre-destruction curatorial class’ therefore ‘propagated the learning of Hebrew as the “holy language”’,<sup>33</sup> on the other hand, Joosten observes that the language has been regarded as holy by Jews and Christians ‘from time immemorial’, and the fact of its twentieth-century re-vivification is potent evidence of that political and national potential.<sup>34</sup> Location (even within Palestine), dating (especially with reference to major events such as the two Jewish revolts against Rome), status (scholar vs. commoner) and purpose (e.g. casual speech, friendship letter, epitaph, contract, community document or product label) constitute different domains which must be brought into consideration when assessing ‘values’ that are being attached to Hebrew. Languages are simultaneously functional, social, cultural, ideological and political phenomena, and as such must be studied in connection with speakers and their perceptions.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, it must be remembered that simply because an individual belongs to a certain social group does not ensure he will adhere to ‘the party line’, for outliers often lurk on cultural perimeters. The fact that a person uses a language leaves open the question of *why* they chose to use it. It might be as simple a matter as functionality (hearers will understand better, or it qualifies one for a job, or facilitates trade, as Hezser notes,<sup>36</sup> or makes someone more marriageable)—or indeed, it could be emblematic of religious identity. Addition of a code to one’s repertoire, even of a marginal or moribund language (particularly if it is deemed holy), would advance one’s prestige. In such cases, a language such as Hebrew could constitute ‘symbolic commodity’<sup>37</sup> as self-conscious Hebrew classicisms attest in literature. It seems that even the apostle Paul did not shrink back from leveraging such a commodity.<sup>38</sup>

Thirdly, it can be seen that regional differences in language ideologies existed within classic Judaism: the exilic community in Babylon kept Hebrew alive in what was to become a Mishnaic variety,

33. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 229.

34. Jan Joosten, ‘How Hebrew Became a Holy Language’, *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Jan/Feb 2017), p. 44.

35. See helpful discussion in Robin Osborne, ‘Cultures as Languages and Languages as Cultures’, in Mullen and James (eds.), *Multilingualism*, pp. 317-24.

36. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy*, p. 231.

37. Schwartz, ‘Power and Identity’, p. 30.

38. Jonathan M. Watt, ‘The Living Language Environment of Acts 21:27-40’, *BAGL* 4 (2015), pp. 30-48.

while those of Alexandria sought to prepare the Septuagint as those in nearby Elephantine shifted to Aramaic.<sup>39</sup> A besieged Jewish general (likely of a Hellenized background) wrote to Bar Kochba during the Second Jewish Revolt and apologized that he was writing in Greek rather than in the politically-preferential Hebrew due to the exigencies of the moment. On the other hand, many sectarians at Qumran read and copied, and perhaps spoke and wrote, with a preference for Hebrew—though Aramaic and Greek are also the languages of some Dead Sea Scrolls materials.

It is axiomatic to the field that prestige languages/dialects attract new speakers. So how did this play out when Semitic languages came into contact with a ubiquitous Greek? *Sometimes* quite smoothly, it would seem, as favorable comments about Greek language appear in early Jewish commentaries (such *Esth. R.* 4.12; *Gen. R.* 16.4, 36.8). And Rabbi Simeon b. Gamaliel II (c. 140 CE) is reported to have instructed hundreds of students in the Greek language (*b. Sot.* 49b) despite his close proximity to the Second Revolt, and even went so far as to claim that Greek was most suitable for discussion of the Jewish Scriptures (*m. Meg.* 1.8)—not quite what one might have expected with regard to the language of a colonizer. Pragmatism often has its day, then and now, as evidenced in the national official language status of English in such post-colonial countries as India and Kenya.

The prevalence of Greek synagogue inscriptions<sup>40</sup> seems to belie any notion that Jews *necessarily* found ‘the language of heaven’ essential for the present world, as even Rabbi Judah the Prince studied Greek and, at the conclusion of the second century, was encouraging its value over Aramaic in domestic contexts. As Joosten sees it, this regional variability ‘shows with particular clarity that the continuation of Hebrew in the Babylonian diaspora was *not a necessary choice*’ (emphasis mine),<sup>41</sup> though it remained sacred language for many.

Fourthly, one should therefore expect that whatever picture is painted of Hebrew and Aramaic in classical Judaism, it must be done so as to reflect diachronic as well as synchronic factors. Even stable bilingualism evidences variables, and such factors as classical usages

39. Joosten, ‘Hebrew’, p. 62.

40. For discussion of these, see L. Roth-Gerson, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Synagogues in Eretz-Israel and the Diaspora* (Hebrew Language ed.; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1987).

41. Joosten, ‘Hebrew’, p. 62.

increase ‘exponentially’ after an exilic period—for as Joosten<sup>42</sup> and others argue, the appearance of being able to use a biblical language may be as valuable as performing it with competence. Osborne observes similarly that ‘models of verbal language use have immediate attractions for thinking about other forms of cultural communication. People deploy elements of various verbal languages, discretely or in some type of mixture, in an extraordinarily wide range of circumstances and for an equally wide range of purposes.’<sup>43</sup>

So I conclude that performance of a Semitic language, even with minimal proficiency, was *sometimes* emblematic of identity for *certain* Jews in *parts* of ancient Palestine.

42. Joosten, ‘Hebrew’, p. 49.

43. Osborne, ‘Cultures as Languages’, p. 318.