

THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
FROM A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Hughson T. Ong

McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON, Canada

Introduction

In the history of research on the language of the New Testament, there are two major observations that can be made. One is that this subject encompasses a number of interrelated topics, such as the Greek text of the New Testament, the languages of Jesus and his contemporaries and the linguistic environment of first-century Palestine. The second one is that treatments of this subject have advanced in two major ways. The first is that treatments have at times conflated these interrelated topics into a single discussion, depending upon the particular subject being investigated by a particular scholar,¹ and have at other times dealt with simply either one of them, even though it can readily be seen that any specific treatment of these topics has inevitably encroached and touched upon the others.² These variegated treatments clearly indicate the complex nature of investigating this subject—the context of the text of the New Testament was the linguistic environment of the first-century speech community, and the language of the text of the New Testament was of course the language of Jesus and his contemporaries

1. There are a number of works that can be cited here, but for a classic example, see Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays* (JSNTSup, 60; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), which, while its main goal was to trace the historical development of the scholarly discussion on the Greek of the New Testament, includes various articles that deal with the philology and type of Greek language of the New Testament and the languages of Jesus and of first-century Palestine.

2. There are numerous works that can be cited here, and I have compiled a list of them in Hughson T. Ong, *The Multilingual Jesus and the Sociolinguistic World of the New Testament* (LBS, 12; Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 33-34 n. 85.

(including the authors of the New Testament) who lived in that speech community—and it is certainly difficult to find ways and means to show the complexities of their interrelationships in a single discussion. The second, other way is that treatments of this linguistic issue have also mostly been done via a singular, uniform method, namely the combination of historical methods and deductive reasoning; previous works have tried to decipher and interpret the available linguistic evidence (e.g. epigraphs, manuscripts and various types of archaeological discoveries and extant literature) using this conventional method, and the sheer quantity of scholarly publications produced since then will attest to this fact.

Despite this large quantity of literature produced, however, the history of research will show that the results of research have been far from reaching a scholarly consensus, and, I would even say that it has, to a certain degree, become a hodgepodge of a mixed or random treatment of the topics involved and an assortment of scholarly opinions that do not and cannot push the discussion forward. What this field of research needs at this time, if it wants to see new developments, is to focus upon searching for the right tools for the job. What specific methodological tools or framework should be used to arrive at a better understanding of the linguistic complexities of the language of the New Testament, and how can we incorporate and account for the aforementioned interrelated topics on this subject in that methodological framework? This is the goal of this paper. I wish to show and describe the linguistic context of the language of the New Testament—the substrata behind the Greek text of the New Testament—via a sociolinguistic framework.³ The intention is still to provide answers to an old question: how do we make sense of the fact that, even when the linguistic environment in which Jesus and his contemporaries (who were first-century Jews) lived was multilingual, the New Testament (a first-century document) was virtually transmitted in Greek? I will discuss this sociolinguistic framework and its applications to the historical information and linguistic evidence in the following sections and thereafter summarize my answers in the concluding section, after providing a brief overview of the scholarly discussion on this subject.

3. It is important to note that since its beginnings in the 1960s–70s as a distinct discipline of its own, scholars have begun to utilize sociolinguistics to study the New Testament (and the Old Testament). For a survey of these works, see Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*, pp. 71-101.

A Brief Overview of the Scholarly Discussion

It has now become common knowledge in biblical scholarship that the linguistic environment of first-century Palestine (or ancient Palestine) was multilingual and that its residents would also have been, by and large, multilingual. This notion of the speech community's linguistic situation is totally different from the earliest beginnings of the scholarly discussion, which started off with the Aramaic theory (the view that Aramaic constituted the *lingua franca* of ancient Palestine).⁴ The Aramaic hypothesis has for a long time enjoyed its dominance within biblical scholarship, especially with the works of Gustaf Dalman, C.F. Burney and Charles Torrey, who attempted to show Aramaic substrata and features in the Greek text of the Gospels,⁵ and among circles that take what I would call a simplistic view of the usage of language within a speech community—that is, that inhabitants of a local community could only speak their native tongue.⁶ For instance, many historical Jesus scholars emphasize Jesus' Second Temple environment and Jewish roots and background, arguing that his teaching and actions should be studied within and not deviate from this Jewish context,⁷ with

4. Prior to the proposals of J.A. Widmanstadt and J.J. Scaliger in the sixteenth to seventeenth century, from which the Aramaic hypothesis appears to originate, there had been no distinction made between the languages—Syrian, Hebrew and Chaldean—of the speech community. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (trans. W. Montgomery; repr., Mineola: NY: Dover, 1911), pp. 269-92, esp. p. 270.

5. See Gustaf F. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus: Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language* (trans. D.M. Kay; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902); C.F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922); and Charles C. Torrey, *The Four Gospels: A New Translation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1934).

6. The literature here is vast, since supporters of the Aramaic hypothesis are many, including those who oppose the Greek hypothesis of Adolf Deissmann, James H. Moulton and Albert Thumb. These scholars argue, for example, that, because Jesus and his contemporaries were Jewish natives, their linguistic environment would have been Jewish, and their spoken and written language would have been Aramaic.

7. See Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, 'Introduction to Key Events and Actions in the Life of the Historical Jesus', in Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb (eds.), *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 1-8 (1-2); and James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, 'The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An

some questioning the reliability and utility of the criterion of dissimilarity.⁸ Other scholars, such as Maurice Casey, have even gone further in their works by reconstructing an Aramaic text through retroversion of the Greek text of the Synoptic Gospels.⁹ However, since the time of the discoveries of the Egyptian papyri shortly before the turn of the twentieth century and of the large volume of both literary and non-literary artifacts in the middle of the twentieth century in Qumran and other Judean Desert sites, other languages, such as Hebrew, Greek and Latin were becoming increasingly recognized as the major vernaculars that co-existed with Aramaic during the Late Second Temple period.

More importantly, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, an increasing number of scholars have become more convinced of the viability of the Greek theory (the view that Greek functioned as the lingua franca of ancient Palestine) rather than the Aramaic theory. It is fair to say that the Greek theory originated with the comparative studies of Adolf Deissmann, James Hope Moulton and Albert Thumb in the early 1900s. These scholars argue that the character of the Greek of the New Testament (Κοινή) is similar to that of the discovered Egyptian papyri.¹⁰ The Greek theory, however, became more popular, at least in New Testament studies, starting in the late 1900s through the works of

Introduction', in James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (eds.), *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), pp. 9-54 (48), who note that a 'rare consensus' is being achieved among historical Jesus scholars in their 'commitment to take seriously the Jewishness of Jesus'. These scholars follow the kinds of work done by such scholars as Joachim Jeremias (*New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* [trans. John Bowden; New York: Scribner, 1971]) and George B. Caird (*Jesus and the Jewish Nation* [Ethel M. Wood Lecture; London: Althone Press, 1965]).

8. A recent group of scholars has reacted against the usefulness of the traditional criteria of authenticity; see the essays in Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne (eds.), *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2012).

9. See Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (SNTSMS, 102; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Casey, *An Aramaic Approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (SNTSMS, 122; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

10. For a summative discussion of the works of these scholars, see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, 'Semitic Influence on Greek: An Authenticating Criterion in Jesus Research?', in Keith and Le Donne (eds.), *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*, pp. 75-77.

Stanley Porter. Before this time, the middle of the twentieth century still saw the persistence and dominance of the Aramaic theory. Porter, using linguistic theories, argues that Greek had replaced Aramaic as the lingua franca of the first century CE, and at the same time, the language also became the prestige language of the time.¹¹ There also have been a number of sociolinguistic studies that more pointedly focused on the multilingualism and the linguistic situation of first-century Palestine, such as Jonathan Watt's and my own work, which also have seen Greek as the primary and prestige language of first-century Palestine,¹² and some others, who recognize to varying degrees the major role Greek played in the linguistic composition and dynamics in that ancient speech community.¹³

11. Porter's bibliography is large. But see Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (JSNTSup, 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 164-80; Porter, 'Jesus and the Use of Greek in Galilee', in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 123-54; Porter, 'The Role of Greek Language Criteria in Historical Jesus Research', in Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2011), I, pp. 361-404; Porter, 'The Language(s) Jesus Spoke', in Holmén and Porter (eds.), *Handbook*, III, pp. 2455-71.

12. Jonathan M. Watt, *Code-Switching in Luke and Acts* (Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics, 31; New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Watt, 'The Current Landscape of Diglossia Studies', in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics* (JSNTSup, 193; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 18-36; 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* (LBS, 6; Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 9-27; Hughson T. Ong, 'Ancient Palestine Is Multilingual and Diglossic—Introducing Multilingualism Theories to New Testament Studies', *CBR* 13.3 (2015), pp. 330-50; Ong, 'Can Linguistic Analysis in Historical Jesus Research Stand on Its Own? A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Matt 26:36—27:26', *BAGL* 2 (2013), pp. 109-39; and Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*.

13. For example, see the following recent works: Scott D. Charlesworth, 'The Use of Greek in Early Roman Galilee: The Inscriptional Evidence Re-Examined', *JSNT* 38.3 (2016), pp. 356-95; Michael O. Wise, *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents* (AYBRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); G. Scott Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015). See also Hughson T. Ong, 'The Use of Greek in First-Century Palestine: An Issue of Method in Dialogue with Scott D. Charlesworth', in Lois K. Fuller Dow,

Amidst these two competing theories, some have, since the work of M. Segal in the early twentieth century on the grammar and vocabulary of Mishnaic Hebrew, which he thinks was a vernacular form of Hebrew, argued for the priority of Hebrew as the popular, or, more precisely, principal vernacular of the speech community.¹⁴ In particular, Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley's *The Language Environment of First-Century Judaea* (2014) has challenged the Aramaic hypothesis, which goes against the idea of seeing Hebrew as the daily vernacular of the Jews.¹⁵ Their theory, because it is highly speculative and unlikely, deserves mention:

Throughout the twentieth century, New Testament scholarship primarily worked under the assumption that only two languages, Aramaic and Greek, were in common use in the land of Israel in the first century. Studies on the Gospels have assumed that Aramaic was the only viable language for Jesus' public teaching or for any early Semitic records of the Jesus movement, whether oral or written. Hebrew was considered to be restricted primarily to educated religious teachers and unsuitable for speaking parables to peasants, especially in Galilee. However, during the twentieth century, specialists working in the field of Mishnaic Hebrew have proven that three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, were in common use. Their studies have moved out of a restricted, marginal status within the first-century language use.¹⁶

However, most scholars believe that the use of Hebrew would have been confined to very limited social contexts, such as in Jewish synagogues and the Jerusalem Temple. This is probably correct, since, if the Mishnaic Hebrew specialists have actually 'proven' in their studies that Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek were still in common use at that time (as Buth and Notley want to contend), there remains the question as to which of the three served as the lingua franca and the prestige language

Craig A. Evans and Andrew W. Pitts (eds.), *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter's 60th Birthday* (BINS, 150; Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 218-36.

14. See M.H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927); Segal, 'Mishnaic Hebrew and its Relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic', *JQR* 20 (1908), pp. 647-700, 734-37.

15. See 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), chs. 1, 5, 6 and 7, but esp. pp. 1-5.

16. Randall Buth, 'Introduction: Language Issues Are Important for Gospel Studies', in Buth and Notley (eds.), *Language Environment*, p. 1.

of the community, not to mention that the linguistic status of each and the linguistic domains in which each of them were being deployed in the speech community would still have to be stratified and defined. This brings us now to the ‘how’ or the methodological question in determining the answers to this question, which I will discuss in the next section, before I end here with a few words about Latin.

With respect to Latin, few scholars have really talked about the language (or even mentioned it, for some), but J.A. Fitzmyer has acknowledged in the late twentieth century the significance of a handful of Latin inscriptions and papyri fragments discovered in some areas in Judaea, especially in Caesarea Maritima.¹⁷ The reason for this paucity of support for the use of Latin until today might be due to the scholarly belief that the language would unlikely have been spoken by the Jews and that the residents of ancient Palestine would never have learned or acquired use of the language; Latin was the language that belonged to the western side of the Mediterranean and the Romans.¹⁸ However, the sociolinguistic dynamics of the linguistic composition of ancient Palestine, which included Latin, would necessarily have allowed for the language to appear on the social scene to perform its linguistic role and function at least in some social or language domains, even if we ignore and discount the significance of the linguistic evidence (which is not small) for Latin.¹⁹ The title on Jesus’ cross (Jn. 19.20), on which one line was written in Latin, and the number of Latin words that we find in the Gospels (e.g. *quadrans* [Mk 12.42]; *praetorium* [Mk 15.16]; *milia* [Mt. 5.41]; *custodia* [Mt. 27.65, 66; 28.11]; *modius* [Mk 4.21; Mt. 5.15]; *census* [Mk 12.14; Mt. 17.25; 22.17]; *flagellare* [Mk 15.15; Mt. 27.26]; *sudarium* [Lk. 19.20; Jn 11.4; 20.7; cf. Acts 19.19]; *flagellium* [Jn 2.15]; *linteum* [Jn 13.4, 5] *libra* [Jn 12.3; 19.39]; *titulus* [Jn 19.19, 20]; and the common *denarius*) should indicate that the language would

18. See J.A. Fitzmyer, ‘Languages of Palestine in the First Century AD’, *CBQ* 32.4 (1970), pp. 501-31 (reprinted in Porter [ed.], *Language of the New Testament*, pp. 126-62).

18. The majority of Latin texts discovered were excavated from Caesarea Maritima, the busy seaport to the western world in the first century CE. See Werner Eck, ‘The Language of Power: Latin in the Inscriptions of Iudaea/Syria Palaestina’, in L.H. Schiffman (ed.), *Semitic Papyrology in Context: A Climate of Creativity. Papers from a New University Conference Marking the Retirement of Baruch A. Levine* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 126-31.

19. For more recent information on Latin, see Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*, pp. 64-68.

also have been used to some degree—an evidence of lexical borrowing. To be sure, S.W. Patterson writes, ‘At Capernaum ... the Master may have spoken ... to smaller groups, such as soldiers, in virile, everyday Latin.’²⁰ In fact, I have even argued elsewhere that Jesus’ reply, ‘You have said so,’ to Pontius Pilate in Mt. 27.11 *might possibly* have transpired in Latin (but see below).²¹

The Linguistic Context of the New Testament

As mentioned in the introduction, the goal of this paper is to describe and show, via a sociolinguistic framework, the linguistic substrata and context of the text of the New Testament, and I wish to discuss this framework by my definition of sociolinguistics, which is

The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary study of the three basic components of a society—language, culture, and people—in actual speech communities constrained by a specific goal of investigation, with the aim of understanding the multifarious ways these basic components are interrelated and interdependent for the formulation of theories and principles that are universally recognizable by diverse cultural communities and that are simultaneously applicable to the analysis of written texts.²²

There are a few significant things to note in this definition that will show how and why sociolinguistics is the right tool for studying the language of the New Testament. The first is the obvious reality that the text of the New Testament was a product of a particular language spoken and used by a particular people of a particular culture or society; the language(s) is that which was spoken by the residents of first-century Palestine. The second is that study of these three components requires use of theories and principles from other fields of sciences, such as, among other related fields (e.g. social-psychology, social-anthropology, etc.), linguistics (the study of language), sociology (the study of culture) and anthropology (the study of humans). The third, and corollary to the second point, is that there needs to be another, integrative discipline that is able to combine these three fields of

20. S.W. Patterson, ‘What Language Did Jesus Speak?’, *The Classical Outlook* 23 (1946), pp. 65-67 (65).

21. See Ong, ‘Linguistic Analysis’, pp. 130-31; Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*, p. 67 and esp. p. 323.

22. Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*, p. 114.

sciences (i.e. linguistics, sociology, anthropology) into one distinct discipline in order to account for the interrelationship and interdependence of these disciplines, since the object(s) of study of each of these disciplines are actually examined with these inherent assumptions. For instance, sociologists cannot study the social dynamics of a society without taking into account the people who lived in that society, in the same way as anthropologists cannot simply evaluate people's behaviors and values without situating them in the cultural context of a specific society and studying how they communicate with each other, and as linguists cannot simply study a language per se without looking at how people use and allocate their linguistic repertoire within a speech community. The fourth, and corollary to the third, is that sociolinguistics, through integration, formulation and use of universal theories and principles from these fields of study, is able to study various and particular aspects of a speech community, namely its language, people and culture. The fifth and last is that sociolinguistics, as the name implies, focuses upon the uses or functions of language in relation to its users and the speech community from which it is produced.

Thus, to talk about the linguistic context of the New Testament basically means dealing with its sociolinguistic composition, which, essentially, comprises three components—its speech community (first-century Palestine), its languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin) and its language users (Romans, Jews and non-Jews). All three components, based on what I have explained so far, are naturally intertwined and interrelated such that one cannot and does not exist without the others. Analysis of each of these components requires use of a number of sociolinguistic theories that are applicable to each of them. Specifically, the first-century speech community may be analyzed using the concepts of 'speech community' and linguistic repertoire,²³ the roles of the languages of the community using the

23. My discussion of these concepts below is based on the following works: William Labov, 'Exact Description of Speech Community: Short A in Philadelphia', in R. Fasold and D. Schiffrin (eds.), *Language Change and Variation* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1989), pp. 1-57; Richard A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1996), pp. 24-30; and Dell H. Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), pp. 47-65.

concepts of language (or social) domains and diglossia,²⁴ and the ability of the people in that community to use the languages using some theories of individual bilingualism and code-switching.²⁵ Analysis will also require extra-sociolinguistic information that would serve as the input information for each of these specific theories. The results from the analysis of each of these components will combine to give us a more accurate and, more importantly, justifiable picture of the linguistic environment of first-century Palestine, and consequently provide answers to our question. I begin with the speech community of first-century Palestine.

Speech Community (First-Century Palestine)

A speech community can, in the most simplistic manner, be defined as a group or groups of people who communicate with each other by means of a language or languages.²⁶ However, it is important to understand this definition and notion of speech community as a set of concentric circles with the innermost circle functioning as the core community (i.e. members are most familiar and intimate with each other), having subsequent outer circles emanating from this core community (i.e. circles of community closer to the core will be more familiar and intimate with the innermost community) and, concurrently, as a geographical place on a map (i.e. a diagrammatic representation of

24. My discussion of these concepts below is based on my continuing work in the development and application of them to the text of the New Testament. In my work on these topics, I am indebted to the works of Charles Ferguson and Joshua Fishman; see Charles A. Ferguson, 'Diglossia', in Thom Huebner (ed.), *Sociolinguistic Perspectives: Papers on Language in Society by Charles A. Ferguson, 1959–1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 25-39; and Joshua A. Fishman, 'Who Speaks What Language to Whom and When', in Li Wei (ed.), *The Bilingualism Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 82-100.

25. My discussion of these concepts below is taken from M.A.K. Halliday, *Language and Society* (Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday, 10; ed. Jonathan Webster; London: Continuum, 2009); Barbara E. Bullock and Almeida Jacqueline Toribio, 'Themes in the Study of Code-switching', in B.E. Bullock and A.J. Toribio (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Code-switching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-17; and Colin Baker and Sylvia Prys Jones, *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 1998), pp. 36-43, 58-61.

26. Sociolinguists have variously defined the term 'speech community'. For a list of definitions of a 'speech community', see Hudson, *Sociolinguistics*, pp. 24-27.

a physical land or property) consisting of various cities within a region, various regions within a country, various countries within a continent, etc. The former provides for the idea that there is, in reality, no such thing as an ‘isolated’ speech community. The latter shows how, through the concept of isogloss (i.e. the boundary lines on a map that demarcate the linguistic items found in the areas of a map being studied), speech communities are geographically and linguistically related to each other.²⁷ For example, the speech community of Judea belongs to the larger geographical community of Judea composed of Samaria, Judea and Idumea (the political territory of Archelaus), which, in turn, belongs to the entire community of ancient Palestine. The geographical relationship of Judea with these two neighboring communities is that Samaria is to its northern border and Idumea to its southern border. Moreover, as we will see below, a community’s geographical relationship with its neighbors also directly correlates with its linguistic repertoire from the intermingling and interaction of its members with the members of its neighboring communities.

The linguistic repertoire of a speech community refers to the available linguistic varieties or languages that members share with each other and use when they communicate with non-members. With respect to first-century Palestine, it seems clear from the existing linguistic evidence (see above) that the four languages—Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew and Latin—were spoken and used in the community. Of course, this does not mean that everyone knew or used all four languages, or that all four languages were used indistinguishably in all social settings, where anyone could simply code-switch from one language to another (about these more will be said below). Rather, it simply means that, from a speech community’s perspective, these were the languages that would have been used by its members. As to where and when these languages were spoken or used, we will need more background information and further analysis to determine the answer. Using our concept of speech community, we should therefore note that the linguistic repertoire of Galilee, for example, will be different from that of Samaria and from that of Judea, because its neighboring regions and the composition of its residents would have been different as well.²⁸

27. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics*, p. 38.

28. Cf. Moisés Silva, ‘Bilingualism and the Character of Palestinian Greek’, in Porter (ed.), *Language of the New Testament*, pp. 205-26, esp. pp. 205-206.

The region of Galilee, which includes the cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris, has been, at least in biblical studies, a subject of much scholarly interest, primarily because it is the place where Jesus of Nazareth spent most of his life and public ministry.²⁹ My immediate concern here, however, is simply with the possible ethnic composition of its inhabitants so as to determine which of the four languages would have been the primary language used by the members of the community. There are two major opinions. The traditional opinion is that first-century Galilee, because of its numerous Gentile neighbors (so Syro-Phoenicia, the Golan region, the Decapolis and Samaria) had a mixed Galilean population, with strong Gentile but weak Jewish communities; Greek then would have been its primary language. The alternative opinion is that the Galilean population was mostly composed of Jews, and therefore Aramaic would have been the primary language of the community.³⁰ On the basis of several pieces of information that made up the region, the balance seems to tip in favor of the traditional view.

First, as is well recognized, virtually all the linguistic evidences (e.g. potteries, ossuaries, numismatics and human and animal remains) discovered in the region were written in Greek. This fact suggests the greater plausibility of Greek being used as the everyday, common language of the residents, instead of it serving simply as the administrative language of the region (as Root wants to claim, for example).³¹ The presence of Jewish communities certainly does not mean that Aramaic was their language, but rather, that a diverse population lived in that region (note the predominance of Greek linguistic evidence) and that first-century Jews spoke Greek as their primary language with some perhaps even as their native tongue (from the three- to four-centuries time period that has elapsed since the

29. See, for example, Eric M. Meyers (ed.), *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999); Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of Galilee* (SNTSMS, 118; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (SNTSMS, 134; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995); and most recently, Bradley W. Root, *First Century Galilee* (WUNT, 2.378; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

30. Chancey, *Myth*, p. 7. See also Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 174.

31. Root, *First Century Galilee*, p. 174.

Hellenization program of Alexander the Great in the early third century BCE).

Secondly, the international and widespread trade between Upper Galilee and its northwestern neighbor, Phoenician Tyre, and its north-eastern neighbor, the Golan villages (including Tel Anafa),³² suggests that Greek would have been their trade language, since these neighbors were Greek speakers (see Mk 7.25-26).

Thirdly, the Gentile population in Galilee seems more likely to be much larger than its Jewish population for two reasons. One is that Gentile communities, such as Samaria, the Decapolis, Phoenicia and the Golan regions, surrounded the region. Another is that Galilee has since been known as the ‘Galilee of the nations’ (cf. Isa. 9.1 [8.23]; Mt. 4.15; 1 Macc. 5.15) and that, when Jesus instructed his disciples to go to the lost sheep of Israel instead of going to the Gentiles and Samaritans, his injunction suggests that there should be a good percentage of Gentile population in Galilee.

Fourthly and lastly, Galilee was under the governance of Herod the Great, a client king of Rome who built many infrastructural projects for the Galileans, at the turn of the first century CE. Some of Herod’s projects include a royal palace and a Roman arsenal in Sepphoris (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.271; *War* 2.56) and other Greco-Roman structures and architecture in both Sepphoris and Tiberias, both of which were neighboring Greek cities of Lower Galilee. For all these reasons, it seems very likely that the residents of both Upper and Lower Galilee would have primarily been speakers of Greek, even though Jewish ethnic markers would certainly have been visible and palpable given the presence of some Jewish communities.

Geographically, Samaria is situated between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. Samaria is a strategic, and thus prominent, region in the New Testament, because it serves as a passageway for Jesus and his disciples to traverse between its two bordering regions. The linguistic composition of this densely populated (Josephus, *War* 3.49-50) and

32. On these, see Eric M. Meyers, ‘The Cultural Setting of Galilee: The Case of Regionalism and Early Judaism’, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.19 (1979), pp. 686-702 (700); R.S. Hanson, *Tyrian Influence in the Upper Galilee* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1980), pp. 53-54; and Sharon C. Herbert et al., *Tel Anafa I. I. Final Report on Ten Years of Excavation as a Hellenistic and Roman Settlement in Northern Israel* (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series, 10; Ann Arbor, MI: Kelsey Museum, 1994), pp. 1-2.

culturally diverse community,³³ however, can be observed from its busiest seaports in the west along the Mediterranean coastline. The harbors of Caesarea Maritima and Joppa were busy trade routes for wine, oil and grain, which were shipped to the Western world across the Mediterranean Sea. This important piece of information indicates that people who lived in western Samaria would have been both ethnically and linguistically diverse, especially in its western foothills.³⁴ Some additional information will further support this theory.

First, Samaria was a community highly influenced by the Greek culture from its earliest times. Mesopotamians in as early as 720 BCE, and Macedonians and Sidonians during the Greek period (c. 331–63 BCE), had settled in the region.³⁵ Their settlements are confirmed by archeological discovery of fragments of Greek painted pottery and documents of property and land ownership, sale and loan contracts and slave manumission certificates dated from the fourth century BCE to the sixth century CE.³⁶

Secondly, Samaria was Herod the Great's military supply base during his war against Hyrcanus II (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.408; *War* 1.299; Appianus, *Civil War* 5.75) in the mid-first century BCE. If Herod had architectural projects built in Greco-Roman style in Galilee, he would have had more and larger projects in Samaria, not least the cities of Caesarea Maritima and Sebaste, which was built from 27 to 12 BCE. Zangenberg writes, 'Herod's activities, which clearly presuppose the pagan character of the city, certainly represent the apex of Hellenistic culture in Sebaste.'³⁷

Thirdly and lastly, a good number of its residents were soldiers of the Roman army (Josephus, *Ant.* 19.356, 364-366), and this in fact was the reason Sebaste was destroyed by the Jewish rebels during the First Jewish Revolt (Josephus, *War* 2.458-460). Furthermore, the Roman

33. Samaria is described as a 'region of many cultures'; see Jürgen Zangenberg, 'Between Jerusalem and the Galilee: Samaria in the Time of Jesus', in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 393-432 (398).

34. Zangenberg, 'Between Jerusalem and the Galilee', pp. 400-401.

35. Josephus, *Ant.* 11.340-346; Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, Vol. 2: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and the Persian Periods, 732–322 BCE* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001), p. 51; K.L. Younger Jr, 'The Fall of Samaria in Light of Recent Research', *CBQ* 61 (1999), pp. 461-82.

36. Stern, *Archaeology*, pp. 422-28.

37. Zangenberg, 'Between Jerusalem and the Galilee', p. 428.

praetorium, the base of the Roman government, was located in Caesarea Maritima. Therefore, the Samaritans during Jesus' time would primarily have been speakers of the Greek language in order to live in that multicultural and multilingual community. It even further suggests that the Greek speakers who lived there would have been exposed to Latin, and some might even have spoken the language to some extent.

South of Samaria is the Judean region. Judea is known as the 'residence of the Jews', perhaps mainly because its earliest residents were known as Judeans. This nomenclature, however, certainly does not mean that only local Jews were the main inhabitants of this region at any given time during the first century CE. Foreigners and diaspora Jews from all over the world (Gaul, Rome, Greece, Cyprus, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Parthia, Syria, Arabia, Egypt, Cyrene and Ethiopia) frequently visited Judea, especially Jerusalem, during various Jewish festivals, especially the Passover (Acts 2.9-11).³⁸ We cannot give an accurate estimate of the number of pilgrims that visited Jerusalem during Passover festivals, but we do know that the paschal lambs killed for sacrifice were reported to be many thousands (Josephus, *War* 6.422-427).

This annual, seasonal influx of visitors would have made Judea, like Galilee and Samaria, a melting pot of various ethnic groups. And when these groups came together and interacted, the question becomes whether Aramaic or Greek was used as the lingua franca or contact language. I suppose that on the basis of both diaspora and local Jews being still ethnically 'Jews', Aramaic would have been the more plausible lingua franca. But this theory neglects the historical linguistic shift from Aramaic to Greek that happened during the political transition periods from the Persian to the Greek and Roman empires and the linguistic repertoire of the Greco-Roman world, which of course, at that time, had Greek as its lingua franca and prestige language. It also presumes the typical faulty notion that Aramaic had been continuously spoken and preserved from the generation of Jews who lived during the exilic period to the fifth- to sixth-generation of Jews during the first-century period. As cultural changes take place (as we have seen in the Greco-Roman culture of the time), language shifts and linguistic changes take place simultaneously as well. Thus, it is

38. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 58-84.

better to think that the lingua franca during the Greco-Roman period would have been the language that was used between local and diaspora Jews.

With reference to its bordering neighbors, the Samaritans to its northern border were definitely more Greek than its southern counterpart, Idumea.³⁹ The region of Idumea was not as Hellenized as the northern regions of ancient Palestine, since the military and cultural campaign of Alexander and his generals came from the northern region to the southern region. In other words, in terms of the degree of Hellenization of these three regions, the direction goes from the Phoenician-Tyrian and the Golan regions to Galilee, Samaria, Judea and then Idumea. It is therefore fair to say that, in Judea, Greek would still have been the primary language of its residents, especially with the presence of many seasonal visitors throughout the year, although, in its southern part near the Idumean border, residents might have used Aramaic more than in central and northern Judea. And, as well, in more private social settings, Aramaic might have been used among Jewish groups, especially in the synagogues and in the section of the Temple where only Jewish men were allowed to enter (about these more will be said in the next section).

Thus far, we have dealt with the concepts of speech community and its linguistic repertoire with respect to the three major regions that comprised first-century Palestine. These concepts were used to paint in broad strokes the linguistic repertoire of these speech communities, showing that we cannot treat the linguistic situation of ancient Palestine as a singular, uniform thing, since the linguistic situation of Galilee is different from that of Samaria, which is also different from that of Judea. This investigation, however, has simply looked at the linguistic situation of ancient Palestine from a speech community's perspective. But what would this linguistic situation look like from the perspective of the languages being used in the community?

39. On the history and origins of the Idumeans, see Aryeh Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Nations of the Frontier and the Desert during the Hellenistic and Roman Era (332 BCE–70 CE)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988); and Elie Assis, 'Why Edom? On the Hostility towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources', *VT* 56.1 (2006), pp. 1-20.

Languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin)

Our brief summary of the history of research above shows that scholars have largely speculated on either the various social contexts where Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin would have been used, or the specific ethnic groups that would have spoken any or a combination of these languages. For instance, most scholars believe that the use of Hebrew would have been confined to educational and liturgical settings, that Aramaic would have been Jesus' everyday (casual) and pedagogical language, that Greek would have been spoken by non-Jews and Romans and used for governance and administration and that Latin would have been a language strictly confined to Roman circles. Scholars have mostly used logical deduction to arrive at these conclusions, and their proposals of course deserve some merit. But, as noted above, this logical deductive method is too simplistic, and hence incapable to account for the linguistic dynamics at play in a multilingual speech community like ancient Palestine. From a sociolinguistic perspective, discussion of the functions of languages in a multilingual speech community uses the concepts of language domains and diglossia.

The concept of language domains usefully categorizes each language in the linguistic repertoire of a multilingual speech community according to its function and use in the various 'universal' social institutions that compose a speech community. A useful definition of language domains is that they refer to a set of institutionalized contexts that involve 'typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings'.⁴⁰ These institutionalized contexts are considered the 'fixed', 'standard' or 'primary' domains of a speech community, since these domains can be found in virtually all speech communities, both ancient and modern. Fixed domains can further be broken down into sub-domains, and sub-domains can still be further broken down into sub-sub-domains until the point where the most delicate sub-domain would basically be the particular speech events or speech acts that cannot be broken down further. I have termed any sub-domain other than the fixed domains as 'variable domains'.⁴¹ There are many identifiable

40. Janet Holmes, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Learning about Language; New York: Pearson & Longman, 3rd edn, 2008), p. 21.

41. For more information about the concept of variable domains, see Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*, pp. 258-59; and Ong, 'Sociolinguistics and New Testament

fixed domains, but the basic ones are education, government, transaction or business, religion, friendship and family domains. In each of these fixed domains, there will of course be, based on what I have just mentioned, an infinite number of variable domains.

To illustrate these concepts, let me use this event of writing this paper as an example. There are perhaps a number of ways to characterize and classify this writing event, and one of them would be to say that this event is one (and the only one) unique event out of the other similar writing events that I have had in the past. From this we can further say that the sum of my writing events is part of the larger writing events of people who write on this same topic about the language of the New Testament. From here we can still say further that the writing events of this particular group of New Testament scholars belong to the even larger writing events of all types of scholars who write on various kinds of topics. Finally, we can ultimately say that the writing events of all scholars would belong to the sum of all writing events of all writers of all written genres (academic, novels, fiction, history, science, etc.).

The classification of fixed domains and variable domains can be done using register analysis,⁴² or domain analysis, which mainly examines three basic sociolinguistic elements—social settings, participants and topics of conversation—of a speech event. The specific combination of these sociolinguistic elements that characterize a speech event is called a sociolinguistic configuration. In any specific sociolinguistic configuration, one of these three elements will become more salient than the others, depending on the social situation. For instance, in the example above, we can see that the sum of all writing events does bridge across all fixed domains, simply because there are various writing events that happen in each of these fixed domains. However, if

Exegesis: Three Approaches to Discourse Analysis Using Acts 21:27—22:5 as a Test Case', *BAGL* 4 (2015), pp. 49-84 (54-56).

42. In linguistics, the term 'register analysis' is more popularly linked to Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which can be described, in simplest terms, as a systematized linguistic network that provides the formal linkages between a text and its context of situation. The Hallidayan and SFL bibliography is vast; for an introduction, see M.A.K. Halliday, *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (Explorations in Language Study; London: Edward Arnold, 1973); and Geoff Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar* (London: Edward Arnold, 1996).

we make the ‘participant’ element as the most salient factor in ascertaining the specific fixed domain under which the sum of all writing events (note that I am referring to academic and essay writing) in history should or would (normally) be classified, we could then perhaps say that it belongs to the education domain for at least two reasons. First, the participants in these events are primarily ‘writers’, people who are interested in and have undergone some sort of writing training or education. And secondly, writing is primarily a skill learned and an activity done in the education domain. Even if one would argue that the activity of writing also happens in the government and religion domains, the activity of writing is still confined to specific types of people who possessed both the interest and the skill to write, and this fact (i.e. the ‘participants’ element) takes precedence over the topics being written about (e.g. politics and religion) and the social setting (e.g. government office and church) of a specific writing event.

The language that may or will be deployed in a specific domain will be directly related to and dependent upon its sociolinguistic configuration. So, for instance, a speech event, which participants only included Romans, would most likely have used Latin or Greek, instead of Aramaic or Hebrew, for conversing with each other. Similarly, a formal religious ceremony in the Jewish Temple would likely have required the appropriate language, namely Hebrew and/or Aramaic, for the performance of scriptural reading and other ceremonial rituals, just as an ordinary meal conversation at home would have simply transpired in the native tongue of the family members involved (of course, when no visitors were around). Noting that the sociolinguistic configuration of a speech event (i.e. a variable domain) can only be determined via a register or domain analysis, which would require extensive analysis, for my purposes here, I will simply discuss based on this concept of language domains the ‘ideal’ language that would probably, under normal circumstances, have been used in the fixed domains of ancient Palestine. And to do this, we need to employ the concept of diglossia.

The concept of language domains is directly correlated with the concept of diglossia, which refers to the functional distribution of the languages in the linguistic repertoire of a speech community. According to Janet Holmes, in a multilingual community, ‘there is a division of labor between the languages’.⁴³ Each language is linked to a particular

43. Holmes, *Introduction*, p. 31.

social function—oral or written, formal or informal and private or public—within a particular fixed domain. In a diglossic, multilingual community, the function of a language is classified either as a high variety (H) or a low variety (L). The H-form is the standardized, codified linguistic variety, and it is used in more official and public speech events. The L-form is confined to more private and informal speech events. First-century Palestine, however, is not simply a diglossic but is a multiglossic community, since the community has four languages in its linguistic repertoire (see above). How, then, should we classify these four languages into H- and L-forms, and subsequently identify the fixed domains where each of them would likely have been used? Let us begin with Hebrew.

Hebrew, based on the history and text of the Old Testament, is a codified and standardized Semitic language, and, at the same time, a well-known spoken variety of the Israelites during pre-exilic times. However, the successive imperial annexation of ancient Palestine by the Assyrians (c. 722–597 BCE), the Babylonians (c. 597–539 BCE) and then the Persians (539–331 BCE), shows and suggests that the language, as a spoken vernacular, might already have been replaced by Aramaic in New Testament times. The linguistic evidence for Hebrew has largely been confined to the excavations in Qumran, where we find the settlements of the Essenes, who were religious extremists who sought for the preservation of their religious identity through preservation of Jewish ethnic markers, including the Hebrew language.⁴⁴ Most importantly, there has been more linguistic evidence for Aramaic and Greek discovered than for Hebrew, which tells us that the language during the first century CE might have only and largely been used in very limited social settings.⁴⁵ For the first-century Jews, if their native tongue was Aramaic and their primary language was Greek, there seems to have been no place for the use of Hebrew in any speech event except in the reading of the Scripture in the synagogues (e.g. Lk. 4.16-21) and in other official religious functions where there is need for the reading of the Hebrew Scripture and the recitation of the Torah, as well as in other ceremonial rituals that would have required the language. We could therefore say that, for the Jews, Hebrew would have been their H1

44. See John Adney Emerton, 'The Problem of Vernacular Hebrew in the First Century AD and the Language of Jesus', *JTS* 24 (1973), pp. 1-23 (5-8).

45. See John C. Poirier, 'The Linguistic Situation in Jewish Palestine in Late Antiquity', *JGRChJ* 4 (2007), pp. 55-134.

language that was strictly used for official religious functions in the religion domain, such as in the Temple and synagogues, and, to some extent, perhaps in the Sanhedrin councils and by the religious leaders.

If Hebrew were the H1 variety of the Jews, Aramaic would have been their H2 and L1 language. The language is considered an H variety because it had been codified and standardized since the eighth century BCE, and Official/Imperial Aramaic was in fact the *lingua franca* and the prestige language of the ancient Near East in exilic and post-exilic times until Greek replaced it in the following Hellenistic period (c. 334/331–63 BCE).⁴⁶ The language is considered the H2 variety for the Jews, because Hebrew would still have remained as the Jewish religious, linguistic symbol and identity marker in the first century CE; the Tanakh was their Scripture (Lk. 24.44). The large amount of epigraphic (e.g. the hundreds of ossuaries in Jerusalem, the vast collection of ostraca and the numerous funerary and synagogue inscriptions) and literary evidence (e.g. the targums) for Aramaic could also indicate that the language was still a H-form for many Jews in the first century CE, although Greek would naturally have competed with the language for the H2 spot in some Jewish circles, such as, among others, Herod's family and other groups who had embraced and had been acculturated to Hellenism. Aramaic should also be considered a L1 variety because the language would have been the native tongue, and hence the everyday language, of the Jews. Again, however, Greek would also have competed for the L1 ranking, since it would have been the primary language for almost all Jews in that generation, that is, the first century CE; four centuries have already lapsed since the massive Hellenization program of Alexander the Great and his successors in the fourth century BCE, and by the first century CE, most, if not all, Jews would have had Greek as either their native tongue or their primary language. Moreover, Greek was the *lingua franca* of the time; thus, Jews would have had to learn the language to communicate with all sorts of ethnic groups (e.g. non-Jews and Romans) in various social settings (e.g. Mt. 8.5-13//Lk. 7.1-10; Mt. 15.21-28//Mk 7.24-30). Aramaic, then, would for the most part have been restricted to more private and informal domains, such as in the home and in intimate and private conversations with fellow Jews and friends (i.e. home and friendship domains).

46. See Klaus Beyer, *The Aramaic Language: Its Distribution and Subdivision* (trans. John F. Healy; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), esp. pp. 14-21.

For Greek, it should go without saying that it was the *lingua franca* and the prestige language of the time. The varied literary evidence we have, such as the New Testament and other Hellenistic literature, readily shows that the language exists in a codified and standardized form, and hence a H variety. Legal documents, such as marriage contracts, property and guardian ownership certificates, etc., would also have been written in Greek by the first-century public scribes as we can see, for example, in the Zenon and Babatha archives. Similarly, having the status of being the *lingua franca* of the speech community tells us clearly that it is also the prestige L-variety of the community. For this reason, from the perspective of the entire speech community, it should have occupied the H1 and L1 positions. Nevertheless, for different ethnic groups, this scenario would of course have varied. For the Jews of the time, it is likely that the language would have been either their H2 and L1 language (for most, I would say, especially among the younger generation) or their H2 and L2 language (perhaps for the older generation); Hebrew would still have been their H1 variety for religious and ethnic identity reasons. Most Jews would have spoken Greek regularly in their daily conversations. Jesus' conversations with the Syro-Phoenician woman in Tyre (Mk 7.24-30//Mt. 15.21-28), with the Roman centurion (Mt. 8.5-13//Lk. 7.1-10) and with the Roman governor, Pilate (Mt. 27.11-26; Mk 15.2-15; Lk. 23.2-3, 18-25; Jn 18.29-19.16), are prime examples. It is therefore accurate to say that in most public, formal and informal social settings in all domains (but perhaps not so much in Jewish homes) and for non-Jews and Romans, Greek would have been the default language of communication across all domains.

Finally, the use of Latin would mostly have been confined to Roman social settings, where only Romans were present and when the speech event was considered official and very formal, such as the festive and commemorative celebrations of Caesar's birthday and other official occasions in the Roman praetorium and other Roman residences. Latin should also be considered a H variety, since it was a codified and standardized language that eventually became the prestige variety of the Roman Empire beginning in the fourth century CE.⁴⁷ Just as Hebrew would have been the H1 variety for the Jews, Latin would have served the same H1 status for the Romans. Nevertheless, except perhaps in the

47. See J.N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

western part of the empire, Greek, instead of Latin, would have functioned as their L1 variety. For non-Jews, Greek would likely have been both their H1 and L1 variety. For the Jews, however, if Latin had been part of their linguistic repertoire, it would largely have served as a marginal language with some of them occasionally borrowing and using a few Latin words here and there.⁴⁸ There is simply no place for the language to occupy a visible status in the linguistic repertoire of the Jews, because Aramaic and Greek would have served as either their L1 or L2 variety (as noted above), with Hebrew and Greek, respectively, occupying the H1 or H2 status. For these reasons, the use of Latin would mostly have been seen in the government domain, particularly in official functions and occasions, and in Roman homes (but perhaps only in the western part of the empire).

We have now viewed the linguistic situation of ancient Palestine from two perspectives—the speech community and its languages. In the former, we ask the question, which languages would have been spoken in Galilee, Samaria and Judea, the three major regions that comprised the sociolinguistic setting of the New Testament. In the latter, we ask, in which social contexts, or more specifically, fixed language domains, would Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin have been spoken in the speech community. One final question still remains to be asked, however, and that is, whether the people in that community were actually able to speak any or a combination of these four languages. Thus, my task in this last section is to examine the third and last sociolinguistic component in my definition of sociolinguistics above, that is, the people who lived in that community.

People (Jews, Non-Jews and Romans)

It is important to note and remember that the linguistic capabilities of an individual largely depend upon the level and type of education they acquire, as well as upon the type of ‘speaker’ they are, whether they are a monolingual or bilingual (or multilingual) speaker. With respect to

48. Alan R. Millard, ‘Latin in First-Century Palestine’, in Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin and Michael Sokoloff (eds.), *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pp. 451-58 (453), notes that Herod’s household would have known Latin to select the type of vintage wine Herod wanted, since the amphorae in his wine cellar bore the label: C. SENTIO SATURNINO CONSULE PHILONIANUM DE L. LAENI FUNDO REGI HERODI IUDACO.

the former, we will need to consider the stage or level of educational attainment a Jewish individual acquired from the educational system of the first-century Greco-Roman society.⁴⁹ Perhaps in the tertiary (highest) stage,⁵⁰ Jews (Paul and Luke, for example) who studied such subjects as philosophy, law, grammar, rhetoric, medicine, etc. would naturally have been exposed to Greek, and perhaps even to Latin in some cases, as these subjects were taught in that language. But not all Jews would have acquired that level of education; consequently, their facility and use of Greek would only have been at the conversational level. With respect to the latter, we should understand that, perhaps, most non-Jews and Romans in the first century CE would have been ‘less bilingual’, perhaps even close to being monolinguals, than most Jews would have been in general. Most non-Jews would only have had Greek as their H1 and L1 language, and there were no reasons for them to learn Aramaic and Hebrew, for Greek was the default language—the lingua franca and the prestige language of the time. The same would likely have been true with the Romans, except for the possibility that they might have had Latin as their second language.

For the Jews, however, the importance of preserving their ethnic, religious identity, and the necessity to communicate with the outside world, would likely have forced them to learn three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. For this reason, without a doubt, most first-century Jews would have had the ability to switch between linguistic codes or languages, when there was a need to do so in certain social settings. This linguistic phenomenon and bilingual ability to switch between languages is known as code-switching.⁵¹ However, the code-switching ability and the linguistic competence in a specific language of bilinguals will vary from one person to another. Thus, it is helpful to discuss the concept of bilingual types, if we want to

49. See Catherine Hezser, ‘Private and Public Education’, in Catherine Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 465-81; and William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 3-24, 116-46.

50. Some have challenged this traditional view of seeing a three-tiered Hellenistic education, arguing that the boundaries demarcating these stages are often blurry and more fluid; see Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, ‘Paul’s Bible, his Education and Access to the Scriptures of Israel’, *JGRChJ* 5 (2008), esp. pp. 11-21.

51. See Baker and Jones, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 36-43, 58-61.

characterize more accurately the kinds of bilingual people that existed in the first century CE.⁵²

There are three main types of bilinguals. The first is known as a balanced bilingual or an ambilingual, who, by definition, is a person that possesses an equal, native-like control of two or more languages. But balanced bilingualism is a rare phenomenon in the ordinary life of a speech community, because this would entail that individuals have ‘no accent, no target vocabulary and expression selection, no age of second language acquisition, equal quality of linguistic instruction received and equal amount of language usage in all the known languages of the bilingual’.⁵³ The second type is a simultaneous or early bilingual, who would have learned their languages simultaneously at a very early age and have used all of them throughout their life. Those in this category who have learned their language consecutively (i.e. not concurrently), so for example bilinguals who learn their first language at the age of three (at home) and the second language at the age of seven (in school and outside of home), are called consecutive or sequential bilinguals. Over time, both simultaneous and consecutive bilinguals will become more proficient and fluent in the language that they use more frequently, and their children will consequently become less bilingual than them. The third type is a second-language acquirer or a late bilingual, who is an adult learner of a second language or someone who learns a second language when the linguistic system of their first language is already in place. Many overseas missionaries are second-language acquirers; they learn their second language so that they can function better, professionally, in the new community in which they are working.

What types of bilinguals, then, would the first-century people have been? We have already noted that most non-Jews and Romans would have been less bilingual than most Jews would have been in general. For this reason, there probably would have been more second-language acquirers or late bilinguals in these two camps, especially since they

52. A bilingual type can be more accurately determined and characterized when assessed simultaneously with the concepts of childhood bilingualism or types of bilingual families and measuring bilingual proficiency. On these, see E. Harding and P. Riley, *The Bilingual Family: A Handbook for Parents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), esp. pp. 47-48; and Baker and Jones, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 90-94.

53. Ong, *Multilingual Jesus*, p. 245.

would most likely have used Greek to communicate with the Aramaic-speaking Jews (if there actually was such a group of Jews). Moreover, for these two groups of people, there was no pressing need for them to learn Aramaic or Hebrew. Knowing and speaking Greek was sufficient, since it was the *lingua franca* of the speech community. For proselytes and God-fearers who might have had to learn Aramaic or Hebrew for some religious circumstances, they would have started learning these languages in their adulthood (at least for most of them; see Acts *passim*).

This scenario, however, is different from that of the Jews in general. Most Jews would have been either simultaneous or consecutive bilinguals. For Jewish parents who had Greek as their primary language, that is, they largely used Greek to communicate with their children, and they only used Aramaic and Hebrew in special social settings, such as when they chat with their fellow older Jews, when they are in a synagogue and the Temple or when they teach the Torah to their children, their children would have been simultaneous bilinguals, who learned Aramaic and Greek at home at a very early age. However, for Jewish parents who primarily spoke Aramaic at home even to their children, their children would have been consecutive bilinguals learning Aramaic at home at the earliest age and Greek outside of home at an early age.⁵⁴

Having given these two general scenarios for Jewish families, however, it still remains a question whether Jewish parents in the first century would still speak Aramaic with their children at home, given the fact that the first-century Jews would already have been fifth- to sixth-generation Jews (by tracing them to the first-generation Jews during the time of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE). In other words, it is also likely that the first-century people, regardless of their ethnic groups, would largely have been Greek speakers. There is more linguistic evidence for Greek than for Aramaic, and the evidence we have in support of the use of Aramaic might not actually tell us that the language was still a widely-spoken vernacular at that time. It might simply indicate that some Jewish groups, especially the religious groups and the older generation, had wanted to preserve the language, in the

54. It is important to note that many sociolinguistic factors affect the nature and level of bilingualism within an individual family. See Suzanne Romaine, 'Bilingual Language Development', in K. Trott, S. Dobbinson and P. Griffiths (eds.), *The Child Language Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 291-302.

same way as the Essenes had preserved Hebrew in their community through the excavated Qumran documents (e.g. 4Q229, 3Q15 [the Copper Scroll], 4QMMT, KhQ1, etc.).⁵⁵

Conclusion

My primary objective in this paper was to describe the linguistic context or substrata of the text of the New Testament to talk about the language of the New Testament. For a long period of time, this linguistic issue has received considerable discussion and debate among biblical scholars. The theories and proposals are many, but the methods of investigation used have largely been the same and uniform. The scholarly scenario cannot push the research on this topic forward. A historical, logical, deductive method simply cannot paint, even in broad strokes, an accurate and justifiable portrait of the linguistic context or substrata of the language of the New Testament. In this paper, therefore, I have tried to formulate a sociolinguistic framework based upon my definition of sociolinguistics to examine this linguistic issue from three perspectives—the speech community (first-century Palestine), its languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin) and its people (Jews, Non-Jews and Romans). From a speech community's perspective, while it seems clear that the four languages would have served as the major languages in the linguistic repertoire of first-century Palestine, it is important to note that the combination of any or all of these languages would have been different in the regions of Galilee, Samaria and Judea, even though Greek has always stood out as the primary language in all these regions. From the perspective of the use of these four languages in the community, we see that each language would have been deployed in particular language (or social) domains or social contexts. In particular, we see Greek as being the L1 (or at the least, the L2 for some minority groups) of the community, the H1 for non-Jews and Romans and the H2 for Jews. More significantly, we see that Aramaic might not have been widely spoken anymore during the first century, except in some more private social and religious settings, against what most biblical scholars have often thought; if this were the

55. See Devorah Dimant, 'Qumran Manuscripts: Contents and Significance', in D. Dimant and L.H. Schiffman (ed.), *Time to Prepare the Way in the Wilderness* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 34-35; and William M. Schniedewind, 'Qumran Hebrew as an Antilanguage', *JBL* 118 (1999), pp. 235-52.

case, it then further demonstrates the highly conjectural nature of the Aramaic hypothesis, which has since the start been based upon the simple notion that people simply speak their native language. Finally, from the perspective of the people who lived in that community, it seems accurate to say that Jews were ‘more bilingual’ than non-Jews and Romans, since the latter appears to have no good reasons to learn Hebrew and Aramaic. For the Jews, however, they would have been compelled to learn Greek, the lingua franca and prestige language of the time, although the level of bilingualism among them would also have differed from one person to another, with some being simultaneous bilinguals and others consecutive bilinguals. If there were non-Jews and Romans who had been bilinguals, they would have been second-language acquirers who would have had to learn Hebrew or Aramaic for religious purposes.