

## The Living Language Environment of Acts 21:27–40

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**Abstract:** A sociolinguistic approach to Paul’s language usage in the Jerusalem arrest narratives of Acts 21–22 offers inferences with regard to his specific language choices between Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic during his interactions. However, modern language studies show considerable inter-language penetration that, by implication, complicates conclusions one may reach with regard to the New Testament situation. (Article)

**Keywords:** sociolinguistics, multilingualism, linguistic repertoire, code-switching, cross-linguistic penetration

### 1. *Introduction*

In a discussion of rhetorical constructions such as elliptical zeugma and brachylogy in his epic 1934 grammar, A.T. Robertson references an instance of *hypallage* (an unexpected interchange of word segments) in the Fourth Gospel involving the adjectival/attributed genitive phrase often translated “full of grace.”<sup>1</sup> Responding critically to discussions of how the ancient writer ‘should’ have worded something, Robertson admits that the apostolic author “used repetition of word and phrase” in atypical fashion but crisply affirms that “[t]he papyri have taught

1. Robertson, *Grammar*, 1204. See also Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 89–91. This paper was originally presented at the New Testament Greek Language and Exegesis consultation of the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 19, 2014.

us to be chary about charging John with being ungrammatical in *πλήρης χάριτος* (John 1:14). These matters simply show that the N.T. writers used a live language and were not automata.”<sup>2</sup> In short, Robertson affirmed that a fluent speaker’s language *performance* may contravene the expectation of a theoretical grammarian who lives apart from the original living language environment. As in the case of the gospel’s writer, a competent speaker with firsthand experience of his own linguistic environment may defy scholarly expectation even as he writes (as Robertson put it) “with consummate skill and marvelous vividness and dramatic power.”<sup>3</sup>

Sociolinguists are avid observers of that “consummate skill,” being as one seasoned practitioner, Alan Bell, has put it, “professional eavesdroppers—not on what people say, but on how they are saying it.”<sup>4</sup> Citing Dell Hymes, Bell notes that sociolinguists are on the hunt for three things: social issues which have a language component, “real-society data,” and evidence which shows that “language is inherently social and society is inherently linguistic.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, these eavesdroppers are simultaneously theoretical-deductive as well as observational-inductive, both idealists and pragmatists. Whether one eats one’s Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup outward from the soft center, or inward from its crenellated periphery, sociolinguistics has something to offer everyone.

Language and culture engage in mutual dialogue: on the one hand, context shapes how language is used and, on the other, speakers address culture and instruct it on how it ‘should’ be done. Multilinguals make language choices based on factors rooted simultaneously in the external circumstances fixed around them and in perceptions rooted deep in their own minds which often (though not always) align with their surroundings. Ronald Wardhaugh suggests:

2. Robertson, *Grammar*, 1204.
3. Robertson, *Grammar*, 1204.
4. Bell, *Guidebook to Sociolinguistics*, 1.
5. Bell, *Guidebook to Sociolinguistics*, 2.

There are several possible relationships between language and society. One is that social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure and/or behavior . . . [and] a second possible relationship is directly opposed to the first: linguistic structure and/or behavior may either influence or determine social structure. This is the view that is behind the [Sapir-]Whorfian hypothesis . . . . A third possible relationship is that the influence is bi-directional: language and society may influence each other.<sup>6</sup>

This paper follows that bi-directional frame, being oriented toward Wardhaugh's suggestion that there is a helpful distinction to be made between *sociolinguistics as micro-linguistics* or the study of language in relation to society, and *sociology of language as macro-linguistics* or the study of society in relation to language.<sup>7</sup> The former examines language and society with a view to understanding the nature of language while the latter inverts the order. Wardhaugh adds that the former (i.e. socio- or micro-linguistics) looks at how social structures (e.g. class, age, gender) influence the ways people talk, while the latter (sociology/macro-linguistics) considers what societies do with their languages, including attitudes toward language, functional distribution of varieties, language shift and maintenance, and so forth.<sup>8</sup> We can straddle that fence, paying attention to the *collective repertoire of a community* (what society says to the speaker) and also to the *repertoire of individual speakers* (which may be broader or narrower than the community's; this is what the speaker believes is most appropriate)—and to the ideologies of language that arise from either side of that equation.

One caveat that should be mentioned here relates to the dissonance between the title of this paper and the nature of the evidence that must be cited in all the literature on this subject: that which is “living” versus that which is inscribed. A written source's language is not necessarily equivalent to the original living language of a reported event. Baltes appropriately notes,

6. Wardhaugh, *Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 10.

7. Wardhaugh, *Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 12–13; Hudson, *Sociolinguistics*, 4.

8. Wardhaugh, *Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 2.

for example, that an ossuary inscription could reflect the language of the person who is buried, of the one who commissioned the inscription, of the ossuary decorator, or of the intended reader of the inscription; or “it could simply be the language perceived to be culturally appropriate for the occasion.”<sup>9</sup> This adds a layer of complexity that necessarily haunts this area of investigation. Nevertheless, we must press on in the spirit of Robertson’s contention that a fluent speaker possesses “skill and vividness” in wielding his repertoire, and will engage the way sociolinguists capture the situation by applying concepts of the field to Acts 21:27–40. We shall ask certain questions about how a multicultural Jewish-Christian leader, being detained in a Roman stronghold adjacent to an historic center of Jewish worship, chose to speak—for by all accounts, this situation presents a curious set of discordant cultural factors that are sure to yield some interesting results.

## 2. *What is the Language Situation behind Acts 21?*

Although this is the necessary and natural beginning point, I will devote the least amount of attention to it because much has been written on the subject, and previous conferences and publications have given considerable attention to the usage of Hebrew (Biblical and Mishnaic), Aramaic, Greek and (to a limited degree) Latin. More useful right now will be the concept of *repertoire*, that collection of codes from which multilingual speakers select their mode of communication. In its simplest formulation, the factors of social circumstances act as *independent variables*, the givens of each situation, which exert an influence on the choices one makes from codes available in that repertoire which comprise a set of dependent variables that become activated in response to the needs of each social setting.

The community’s repertoire is often subject to a *functional distribution*, especially when it experiences a particular form of

9. Baltes, “Use of Hebrew and Aramaic,” 53–54.

bilingualism known as *diglossia*.<sup>10</sup> With *diglossia*, particular assignments ('high' and 'low') are to be given to each type of code, and each is expected to be used in a particular situation (parallel to general bilingualism, in which case the codes are different languages; e.g. English is *the* language of international aviation regardless of the plane's location or the pilot's native language). Significant features of social setting include what is formal/informal and public/private, the topic and purpose of the conversation, the relationship of the speakers to each other, whether the context is religious or civil, and so forth—though the lines of demarcation defining these features are uniquely delineated by different communities. The *functional distribution* of the codes in a first-century Palestinian Jewish repertoire, for example, *could* prompt Jesus to select Aramaic in the presence of a bereft Galilean family (Mark 5:41) as the colloquial code for close social proximity; Hebrew, when in discussion with temple teachers (Luke 2:46–47) since it was the language of the sacred Scriptures and suitable for rabbinic instruction; and Greek with Pontius Pilate (John 18:28–38) since it was the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world at that time. That the *titulus* posted on the cross was inscribed also in Latin (John 19:19–20) implies both the authority behind the formal condemnation and perhaps a presumption of selective comprehension within the occupied community.

However, it must be noted that multilingual societies are notorious for having considerable differences between their speakers' individual repertoires, and also for having widely diverse competency levels between personal repertoires.<sup>11</sup> This ragged picture means that sociolinguistics properly starts by framing the big picture of what speech habits generally occur in bilingual communities, and this brief introduction to related issues is intended only as an orientation to these foundational considerations of multilingual repertoires, (in-)dependent

10. Watt, "Bilingualism"; Buth and Notley, *Language Environment*; and Ong, "Linguistics Analysis."

11. Watt, "Bilingualism."

variables, *diglossia* and functional distribution. The literature is extensive and readily available.

### 3. *What is the Domain in Acts 21:27–40?*

Subsequent to the conclusion of the cross-continental itineration of Paul's third missionary journey, the apostle and his companions arrive in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17) presumably with the intention of circulating back up to Syrian Antioch. While in Jerusalem, Paul meets with fellow believers and then ascends the temple mount, likely after making use of one of the *mikvoth* (21:26) positioned adjacent to it. He is careful not to take Greek visitors beyond the *soreq* (21:29) but is suspected of doing so anyway, and consequently he is mobbed by a zealous crowd that has been agitated by Jews visiting Jerusalem from Asia Minor (21:27, 30). Alerted to the commotion, the Roman chiliarch who is stationed at the adjacent Antonia fortress takes Paul into protective custody (21:31–36), but as he hurries his prisoner toward the fortress—a trip of no more than a few hundred yards—he is addressed by his captive in Greek (21:37–39), a surprise that buys Paul enough time to clarify that he is hardly an insurrectionist but a Jew of reputable standing *and* a Roman citizen (21:39). The speech that follows these events (22:1–21) was given τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ (21:40; also 22:2)—to which I will return—a move which garners respectful silence momentarily, at least until he goes on to mention evangelism to Gentiles.<sup>12</sup>

This contextual view will help identify some important circumstances relating to the domain of 21:27–40. *Domain* is “an abstraction which refers to a sphere of activity representing a combination of specific times, settings and role relationships.”<sup>13</sup> It may be predicated on things like family, friendship, religion or education, and it provides “anchor points for distinct value

12. For recent discussion, see Buth and Pierce, “*Hebraisti*,” especially 97, for its relevance to Acts 21–22.

13. Romaine, *Language in Society*, 44.

systems” that tend to lead people toward specified language usage. The domain of the temple mount and its Jewish activities might call for Aramaic as the vernacular of Palestinian Jewry, but also Hebrew, as has been attested elsewhere as the language of temple police commands, not to mention the more obvious language of the Jewish Scriptures (ANT 5:272).<sup>14</sup> Greek was not prohibited, but would surely be dispreferred by some people in that setting. It is illuminating to consider the three dozen documents discovered by Yigael Yadin from the “Cave of Letters” with its various materials from AD 73–132; most are in Greek, though some are written in Aramaic and Hebrew, and six are in Nabataean. One item is a letter to Bar Kochba that apologizes for writing in Greek instead of Hebrew.<sup>15</sup> There are indicators of intentionality, even formality, on Paul’s part, including the fact that he stood, motioned with his hands, and then proceeded to speak (Acts 21:40), addressing them as “brothers and fathers.” Together these motions elicited “a great hush” (NASB) that became even more so once his Ἑβραϊδὶ was heard by them (22:2). One wonders whether his register or some specific word choices in his address might have affirmed his personal identification with Jerusalem (22:3). The depicting of the occasion urges consideration of Hebrew as the medium of address.

Also relevant to the discussion is Paul’s prior and explicitly identified use of Greek (Acts 21:37) when speaking to the Roman chiliarch. It has been shown elsewhere in the literature that, by the latter years of the Republic, Rome had drawn Hellenistic Greek westward as a language of advanced literacy and wider communication.<sup>16</sup> The striking thing about Paul’s language choice in Acts 21:37 was not the Greek but the location, for in those circumstances the chiliarch expected *something* Semitic. Studies of language ideology indicate that values related to religion, nationality, and kinship exert

14. Buth and Kvasnica, “Temple Authorities.”

15. See Eshel, “Use of Hebrew Language,” 251–52; also Baltes, “Use of Hebrew and Aramaic,” 61–62.

16. Watt, “Brief History.”

considerable pressure upon one's code of preference for a given situation. Curiously, as Safrai notes in connection with use of Hebrew amongst the Galilean population, educational level is not necessarily in direct proportion to multilingualism, as shown by numerous modern parallels; people acquire auxiliary languages either by formal study or informal use (or both), and the value of living usage exceeds the potentials of "book work."<sup>17</sup> The diversity of occasions for the use of Hebrew (as shown in Safrai, for example)—temple, synagogue Torah readings, instruction/discussion, and prayer, not to mention formal documents (also Eshel)—in other words, the *breadth of functional distribution*, helps strengthen the case for a wider Hebrew competence that has sometimes been allowed by modern scholars.

#### 4. *In What Language Did Paul Speak To The Crowd?*

The Aramaic versus Hebrew discussion over the past century has seen deviations in course. The traditionally Hebrew-centered picture was supplanted by an "Exclusive Aramaic Model" on an assumption of the morbidity of living (i.e. spoken) Hebrew.<sup>18</sup> The Aramaic model then went through a refinement pertaining to which dialect (and period) of Aramaic was at issue, and a gradual consideration of developments in twentieth-century linguistics that shed light on the issue. Part of the picture that brings in a living/spoken Hebrew (Mishnaic) is the growing evidence that the functional distribution of Hebrew and Aramaic did not involve such mutually exclusive assignments as was once thought to exist: "[T]he assumption that Hebrew was exclusively used for religious purposes while Aramaic was used for all other matters, cannot be verified from the epigraphic sources," concludes Baltes.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the assumption that Hebrew was for the learned and Aramaic the general uneducated

17. Safrai, "Spoken and Literary Languages," 231–32.

18. See description in Baltes, "Origins," 9–34, of its development.

19. Baltes, "Use of Hebrew and Aramaic," 64.



population is increasingly unsustainable. This picture is painted similarly by Millard, whose survey of everyday writings (from kitchenware to construction beams) led him to conclude that “The surviving examples of writing from Herodian Palestine and the available literary references show that writing in Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew was widespread and could be found at all levels of society.”<sup>20</sup> The *titulus* on the cross is a much-discussed example of this, and it shows what would be expected if, as Baltes concludes,

From the statistical overview of language use the clear picture emerges of a trilingual society in which Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew are used side by side and even in close interaction with each other. None of the three languages can be said to be dominant. Generally speaking, there is a prevalence of the Semitic languages over Greek (at least in the New Testament era) and, within the Semitic languages, a prevalence of Aramaic over Hebrew, however not to a significant degree.<sup>21</sup>

The same can be said for Jesus’ cry from the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Two gospels report this quotation but differ in their wording: Matt 27:46 reports *ηλι, ηλι, λεμα σαβαχθανι*, while Mark 15:34 has *ελωι*.<sup>22</sup> The verb appears to be Aramaized Hebrew, transliterated of course into Greek. Other parts of the New Testament specifically tag and translate such code-switches (e.g. John 5:2; 19:13, 17, 20; 20:16; Acts 21:40; Rev 9:11; 16:16) but these may leave unanswered exactly which language is being tagged. Joseph Fitzmyer notes that:

Greek writers of a later period refer to the language [Aramaic] as *συριστί* or *συριακή*. When, however, Greek writers of the first century refer to the native Semitic language of Palestine, they use *εβραϊστί*, *εβραϊς*, *διάλεκτος*, or *εβραϊζων*. As far as I can see, no one has yet found the adverb *aramaisti*. The adverb *εβραϊστί* (and its related expressions) seem to mean “in Hebrew,” and it has often been argued that it means this and nothing more. As is well known, it is used at times with words and expressions that are clearly Aramaic.

20. Millard, *Reading and Writing*, 210.

21. Baltes, “Use of Hebrew and Aramaic,” 53. See also the discussion in 47–52.

22. See Buth, “The Riddle of Jesus’ Cry,” for extensive discussion.

Thus in John 19:13, ἐβραῖστῃ δὲ Γαββαθᾶ is given as an explanation of the Lithostrotos, and γαββαθᾶ is a Grecized form of the Aramaic word *gabbētā*, “raised place.” This long-standing, thorny question is still debated; and unfortunately, the Greek letter of Bar Cochba (?) cited earlier does not shed a ray of light on the meaning of ἐβραῖστῃ.<sup>23</sup>

In response, Buth and Pierce argue that *Hebraisti* always points to Hebrew and never to Aramaic “in attested texts during the Second Temple and Greco-Roman periods.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Buth and Kvasnica argue that “it is imperative that Hebrew be restored to an active diagnostic role”<sup>25</sup>—though in a subsequent volume in that 2014 series edited by Buth and Notley, Ruzer suggests that some ancient sources, including Hellenistic Jewish ones, did not always “distinguish between the two closely related languages,” and Philo’s own writings are “a witness for . . . the possibility that Aramaic and Hebrew would remain undifferentiated in Diaspora Jewish perception . . . .”<sup>26</sup> However, none of these implies that the difference was always left unclarified. It is noteworthy that Acts 6:1 presents a dichotomy between the complaints τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν and τοὺς Ἑβραίους. Commentaries differ on whether they understand these as ethno-cultural or linguistic identifiers, but in either case it leaves open the likelihood that some ancient writers were less concerned with language nomenclature (of course ancient Jewish authors could distinguish one language from the other) and more focused on what distinguished one ethnic group (e.g. Jews) from others.

Along these same lines, Kuhn suggests that the use of Ἑβραῖος in Greek inscriptions was sometimes preferred over Ἰουδαῖος because the latter term could be perceived as “derogatory and contemptuous” while the former was “lofty.”<sup>27</sup> He proposes that the word conveyed the “national characteristics of Palestinian Jews . . . who maintained their Palestinian traits, primarily of using Aramaic as their mother tongue, in distinction

23. Fitzmyer, *Semitic Background*, 43. Question mark his.

24. Buth and Pierce, “*Hebraisti*,” 109.

25. Buth and Kvasnica, “Temple Authorities,” 77.

26. Ruzer, “Hebrew versus Aramaic as Jesus’ Language,” 184–85.

27. Kuhn, “Jewish Literature,” 368–69.

from Jews of the *diaspora* who had fully adapted themselves to the surrounding world in language and manner of life.”<sup>28</sup> In Acts 21:40 and 22:2, the word strongly suggests Hebrew or something Hebraic (see below for what is implied here), intended more as a reference to the language habits of a people group—in contrast to outsiders, Paul was an insider—for what was being identified was *the speech of Palestinian Jews*. In principle, Hebrew seems to be the most compelling choice here, as it presses the fact of Paul’s expertise on matters pertinent to the domain in which that language would be most compelling.

### 5. *What do Modern (Living) Language Parallels Offer?*

It might appear that Hebrew ‘wins’ over Aramaic, both on epigraphic and sociolinguistic (including domain-related) grounds. However, when it comes to the matter of discourse there is a necessary qualification. The classic formulations of traditional sociolinguistics relating independent (sociological) to dependent (linguistic) variables is undergoing scrutiny even when it comes to basic concepts such as language and dialect choices. “Language cannot be tamed to an idealized standard. It is always and everywhere variegated,”<sup>29</sup> says Bell (also quoting Bakhtin) and adding that: “At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form.”<sup>30</sup> One begins to suspect that even late Second Temple Judaism might also have experienced a hyphenated history (with apologies to Gottwald and Mendenhall).

This spirit of hyphenation (and Bakhtin) lurks behind Braj Kachru’s depiction of the relationship of language to culture: he

28. Kuhn, “Jewish Literature,” 368.

29. Bell, *Guidebook to Sociolinguistics*, 3.

30. Bakhtin, “Discourse,” 291.

sees concentric circles in which language is the site of a struggle between peripheralizing centrifugal forces which pull it toward diversity and centripetal forces that promote standardization and prescription. Illustrating via English, Kachru observes that first-language nations such as England and the United States provide a putative norm for language while second-language English-speaking nations such as Malaysia and India constitute an outer circle which promotes variations on the norms; the expanding circle of ESL nations (such as Korea and Germany) is expected in turn to adapt to the norms.<sup>31</sup> Canagarajah's adaptation of Kachru's framework holds that English is being simultaneously vernacularized and pluralized.<sup>32</sup> If one turns to Greek and Palestinian Aramaic, a parallel suggests itself: the former is being internationalized and peripheralized because of its second language role across the Mediterranean, while the latter is caught in a toss-up between Classical/literary Hebrew (standardization) and the local vernacularizing needs which find Aramaic convenient while holding the original language of the Scriptures in high regard. The outcomes of these centripetal and centrifugal forces would then apply to Mishnaic Hebrew and Semiticized Greek, as both become subject to the tension between what had occurred historically on a literary level and that which was occurring in an oral environment. In multilingual (and specifically *diglossic*) societies, speakers differ in their idiosyncratic usage and, accordingly, diversity can be expected amongst first-century Palestinian Jews as well. As Safrai notes, the diversity of language choice he cites with regard to legal documents "reflects a consequence of the spiritual quandary and national crisis" of the latter part of that century, adding that "Either Hebrew or Aramaic was used in the synagogue or at other communal gatherings, but there are a number of questions concerning the relationship of these two languages in the land of Israel."<sup>33</sup>

31. Kachru, "Teaching World Englishes."

32. Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*; see also discussion in Bell, *Guidebook to Sociolinguistics*, 278–80.

33. Safrai, "Spoken and Literary Languages," 258.

So a different sort of question is in order, given that Acts 21 depicts oral discourse: rather than ask ‘What Language?’ one perhaps ought to ask ‘How?’ instead. Paul would ‘need’ to use *something* Semitic in the temple setting and would have to balance the needs of those people who expected Hebrew along with all whose competence was stronger in Aramaic. After all, he was facing a multitude (some translations have ‘crowd’ or ‘rabble’ Acts 21:27, 30, 34, 35, 36) and that implies diversity, including diversity of competence. Their situation would be similar to that of the Old Order Amish of North America today: German is the traditional and expected language of Bible reading in worship services, but there is a limited understanding of Modern High German, especially among younger attendants; Pennsylvania German vernacular is the most readily understood. In such *diglossic* arrangements, inter-language penetration is especially common, as evidenced as well in Jesus’ words from the cross (mentioned above).

So the answer to the question of Paul’s language choice in Acts 21:40 and 22:2, even if given as Hebrew, should be qualified, though not for taxonomic reasons. ‘Sociolinguistic eavesdropping’ requires attention to domain (here: the Jewish temple precinct), formality (public though impromptu speech) and topic (defense of teaching legitimacy); while this situation might call for Hebrew as the most compelling mode of address, the tension between the ideal and the practicalities of easy comprehension in Aramaic would surely have been reflected in Paul’s actual speech, even as the evidence of the specifics would be minimized or erased by its summation in Greek. Conflicting situational needs are discussed in Stewart’s 1962 Caribbean study, which shows the complex interaction of (in-)formality and public/private factors and the resulting competition between social factors. Even the subsequent accounts in Acts of Paul’s defense before the Sanhedrin (23:1–10), forensic review with Tertullus (24:1–23), and appearances before Festus (25:1–27) and Agrippa II (26:1–32), all present these domain-related complexities that surely required linguistic flexibility and adeptness reminiscent of Robertson’s ascription of a

“consummate skill and marvelous vividness and dramatic power” on the part of the New Testament’s players.

All this leads naturally to Wardhaugh’s observation that “it is not uncommon to find references to Standard English being a dialect—admittedly, a very important one—of English . . .” even though the term *dialect* usually implies a local, *non*-standard variety, often an “informal, lower-class or rural speech.” He broadens the scope further, adding

We can observe too that questions such as ‘Which language do you speak?’ or ‘Which dialect do you speak?’ may be answered quite differently by people who appear to speak in an identical manner. As Gumperz . . . has pointed out, many regions of the world provide plenty of evidence for what he calls “a bewildering array of language and dialect divisions.”<sup>34</sup>

Wardhaugh insists that “socio-historical factors play a crucial role in determining [linguistic] boundaries,” alluding to ragged edges of language nomenclature mentioned also by Bell:

[R]esearch into code-switching demands that we begin not with identifying the two languages but with the overall linguistic practices of the speakers. What language they are speaking may not be the important question—may not even be answerable . . . [since certain speakers] often blend their two languages together in ways that make it unclear which language a particular item belongs to—it may be either or both . . . . Language is a social practice, a range of resources on which speakers draw rather than a set of linguistic ‘codes’ . . . .<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, Julie Coleman contends that even “[s]tandard English is not a well-defined concept in itself; its meaning varies according to geographical location and social context. Slang, of course, is even harder to define.”<sup>36</sup> Daniel Heller-Roazen relates these dynamics even to the cryptic cant of criminals: “In private or in public, those who speak a language retain the capacity to

34. Wardhaugh, *Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 24.

35. Bell, *Guidebook to Sociolinguistics*, 31–32, and referencing Peter Auer.

36. Coleman, ed., *Global English Slang*, 1.

draw from their knowledge of its grammar the elements of a new and cryptic variety of speech.”<sup>37</sup>

Today, rapidity of contact and the proliferation of various kinds of media amidst routine communication acts are rendering the face of language perpetually malleable, as in John McWhorter’s metaphor of language as an ever-morphing lava lamp. Samples of formal bilingual writing intended for public domain (which is not as variable as speech) which I have collected in the past two years in Austria, Germany and Turkey likewise evidence an astonishing diversity of inter-language penetration that includes block translation, word-by-word code-switching, affixation of one language’s inflectional or derivational morpheme onto the words of another, not to mention the customary loanwords and loan-blends. Yet these pale in comparison to personal notes provided by a Korean woman raised in Japan who speaks fluent English: though taken in a North American lecture setting, her notes are intermingled with Japanese Hiragana and Katakana scripts, Chinese-origin Kanji symbols and Korean words, along with some Greek word translations. What is the language of her personal notes? The answer may reside in the cultural background of the labeler, for if there are “fifty ways to leave your lover” there’s even more by which to leave your mono-lingualism. Languages in contact, especially genetically related ones, evidence interpenetration of lexicon and morpho-syntactic features, and live harmoniously with Hugo Schuchardt’s maxim that *Es gibt keine voellig ungemischte Sprache* (There is no completely unmixed language). Formality and flexibility both demand a seat at the speech table. Though we cannot eavesdrop on Paul’s speech, we can assume that “the linguistic chemistry and dynamics”<sup>38</sup> warranted by circumstantial particulars would have prompted Paul to harness his Semitic resources deftly.

37. Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues*, 17.

38. Ong, “Linguistic Analysis,” 3.

6. *Post-Script*

Language makes a fine tool but a terrible master. Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* prayed “O Lord my God, be patient . . . with the men of this world as you watch them and see how strictly they obey the rules of grammar which have been handed down to them, and yet ignore the eternal rules of everlasting salvation.”<sup>39</sup> Sociolinguists salivate when speech rules are broken, and though the academic study of language-in-context is fairly recent, sociology of language has a long and ignoble history. It was practiced when east-bank Gileadites who were aligned with Jephthah interrogated fleeing west-bank Ephraimites on their pronunciation of *shibboleth* ‘ear of corn’ (Judg 12:5–6). The slightest of phonetic variation between /s/ and /sh/—the mere absence of phonetic frication—prompted bloodshed, and in that account (as Christina Paulston likes to say) lies the first recorded case of *applied* sociolinguistics. In 1302, according to some claims, that tradition was continued as Flemish forces identified Frenchmen living in Bruges on the basis of their idiosyncratic pronunciation of the Flemish phrase *schilt ende vriend* ‘shield and friend’, and slaughtered them. In 1937, suspected Haitian immigrants living along the border with the Dominican Republic were also given impromptu speech ‘tests’ aimed at identifying vernacular pronunciation of the Spanish word *perejil* ‘parsley’ and, by order of the president of the Dominican Republic, Haitians were executed in what came to be known as the ‘Parsley Massacre.’ During World War II, American soldiers in the Pacific quizzed suspected Japanese soldiers on their pronunciation of *lollapalooza*, capitalizing on the common Asian /r~l/ allophonic distribution; at war’s end, Dutch patriots trapped fleeing German soldiers by eliciting their pronunciation of the initial consonant cluster in the seaside town of *Scheveningen*.

Today, *Shibboleth*—as the company website explains its name—is an “open source project that provides Single Sign-On capabilities and allows sites to make informed authorization decisions for individual access of protected on-line resources in a

39. Cited in Hitchings, *Language Wars*, 25.



privacy-preserving manner.”<sup>40</sup> From the Antonia to the internet, the horizon of sociolinguistics has cast quite a long shadow.

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