

CIAN POWER

The Significance of Linguistic Diversity in the Hebrew Bible

*Forschungen
zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe
138*

Mohr Siebeck

Forschungen zum Alten Testament
2. Reihe

Edited by

Corinna Körting (Hamburg) · Konrad Schmid (Zürich)
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138



Cian Power

The Significance
of Linguistic Diversity
in the Hebrew Bible

Language and Boundaries
of Self and Other

Mohr Siebeck

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ISBN 978-3-16-159324-6 / eISBN 978-3-16-161625-9
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-161625-9

ISSN 1611-4914 / eISSN 2568-8367 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament, 2. Reihe)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was printed by Laupp & Göbel in Gomaringen on non-aging paper and bound by Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren. The cover was designed by Uli Gleis in Tübingen.

Printed in Germany.

Preface

The present monograph is a revision of a doctoral dissertation entitled “Many Peoples of Obscure Speech and Difficult Language: Attitudes towards Linguistic Diversity in the Hebrew Bible” presented to the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, in 2015. The work has changed in light of the generous feedback I have received on the ideas contained within it since then, and several sections have been extensively expanded and updated, in particular: “The Ills of Linguistic Diversity: Confusion as Punishment or Foiling?”(3.I.B.6); “Jeremiah 10:11: An Aramaic Message for Idolaters” (5.I); and “Explaining Nehemiah’s Reaction” (7.IV.C.3). The concluding chapter contains substantial new material.

I remain deeply indebted to those named in the acknowledgements of the dissertation; here I take the opportunity to mention some of those to whom I owe thanks for their role in transforming that work into this monograph. For their careful attention and stimulating critique, I am grateful to my inspirational advisor, Peter Machinist; to my examiners, Jon Levenson and Andrew Teeter; and to Konrad Schmid and the reviewers for the FAT 2 series. The work has also benefitted from opportunities I have had to present it, and for these I thank Göran Eidevall and the Högre seminarium i Gamla testamentets/Hebreiska bibelns exegetik at Uppsala University; the OTSEM network and my respondent Kåre Berge; Cat Quine and the participants in the “Borders and Boundaries in Ancient Israel” conference at the University of Nottingham; Ben Williams and Leo Baeck College; and my fellow members of the Oxford Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Seminar.

I began these revisions as a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Theology, Uppsala University in 2016. There I found a wonderful community of exegetes – among them Göran Eidevall, Karin Tillberg, Richard Pleijel, Natalie Lantz, Mikael Larsson, Lina Sjöberg, and Cecilia Wassén – to whom I was sad to bid farewell. Work on the manuscript since has largely been undertaken during my time as Lecturer in Ancient Hebrew Language at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, Oxford University. The interest of my brilliant students in this work has been a great motivation, and in the brief moments of calm between the whirlwind of term, the Faculty has provided an accommodating setting to finish

the job. Un Sung Kwak's assistance in compiling the index of references is greatly appreciated. I am also indebted to the staff at Mohr Siebeck for their work and for their patience and understanding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The support of many friends and loved ones in North America, Europe, and Britain has been instrumental to the publication of this work, and Maxim Cardew's excitement to see the finished product has particularly spurred me on. I could not have completed the task without my family; throughout, my dear mother Karen and loving grandparents John and Rosemary have been unfaltering in their belief in me.

I dedicate this book to a peerless colleague and true friend, to whom I owe so much – Hindy Najman, the Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at the University of Oxford. Without your assistance and encouragement, this book may never have seen the light of day.

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List of Abbreviations

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

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ABRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
abs.	absolute
act.	active
AHw	<i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965–1981.
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
Akk.	Akkadian
ANEM	Ancient Near Eastern Monographs
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. with supplement. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
Ant.	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> of Josephus
AOAT	<i>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</i>
ARA	<i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i>
Aram.	Aramaic
ASBR	Amsterdam Studies in Bible and Religion
AuOr	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
b.	Babylonian Talmud
BaghM	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i>
BAOS	<i>Bulletin of the American Oriental Society</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCILL	Bibliothèque des cahiers de l'institut de linguistique de Louvain
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series

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

HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HB	Hebrew Bible
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
Heb.	Hebrew
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Histories of Herodotus</i>
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IBHS</i>	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place
ICC	International Critical Commentary
idem	the same (the same author, the same editor)
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IEL</i>	<i>The International Encyclopedia of Linguistics</i> . 2d ed. Edited by William J. Frawley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
impf.	imperfect
impv.	imperative
inf.	infinitive
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Society</i>
J	Yahwist
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
Jastrow	Jastrow, M. <i>A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature</i> . 2d ed. New York: Putnam, 1903.
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JIC	Judaism in Context Series
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
Joüon	Joüon, P. <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. Subsidia biblica 27. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006.
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSI</i>	<i>Journal of Social Issues</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>

<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
K	<i>ketiv</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KRI	<i>Rameside inscriptions: Historical and Biographical</i> . Kenneth Kitchen. 8 vols. Oxford: Blackwell, 1975–1990.
KUB	<i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi</i> . Berlin: Akademie, 1921–1990.
Lane	Lane, E. W. <i>An Arabic-English Lexicon</i> . 8 vols. London: Williams and Nor-gate, 1863.
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>Lev. Rab.</i>	<i>Leviticus Rabbah</i>
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with re-vised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
LXX	Septuagint, Old Greek
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah tractate
masc.	masculine
<i>Meghillot</i>	<i>Meghillot: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls</i>
MM	Multilingual Matters
MT	Masoretic Text
n.	note
n.p.	no pages
<i>NABU</i>	<i>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</i>
<i>NAWG</i>	<i>Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen</i>
NCB	New Century Bible
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
<i>OEBA</i>	<i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Archaeology</i> . Edited by Daniel M. Master. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
<i>OED</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> . 3d ed. Edited by John Simpson. Oxford: Ox-ford University Press, 2008–.
OLA	Orientalia Iovaniensia analecta
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTR	Old Testament Readings
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
P	Priestly author
p(p).	page(s)
<i>PAPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society</i>
pass.	passive
per.	person
pf.	perfect
pl.	plural
PLO	Porta Linguarum Orientalium

<i>PMBH</i>	<i>Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew</i> . Joshua Blau. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010.
ptc.	participle
Q	<i>qere</i>
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
<i>Rab.</i>	<i>Rabbah</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des Études juives</i>
repr.	reprint; reprinted
<i>RIA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–.
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SBH	Standard Biblical Hebrew
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series
ScrHier	Scripta Hierosolymitana
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series
SepComm	Septuagint Commentary Series
sg.	singular
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SJ	Studia judaica
<i>SJL</i>	<i>Southwest Journal of Linguistics</i>
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
StSa	Studia samaritana
Syr.	Peshitta
<i>TADAE</i>	<i>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt: Newly Copied, Edited, and Translated into Hebrew and English</i> . Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni. 4 vols. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986–1999.
Tg.	Targum
<i>Tg. Neb.</i>	<i>Targum of the Prophets</i>
<i>Tg. Neof.</i>	<i>Targum Neofiti</i>
<i>Tg. Onq.</i>	<i>Targum Onqelos</i>
<i>Tg. Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
trans.	translation; translated by
UEE	<i>The UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology</i> . Edited by Julie Stauder-Porchet, Andrés Stauder, and Willeke Wendrich. Los Angeles: California Digital Library, 2008–.
Ugar.	Ugaritic
<i>VO</i>	<i>Vicino Oriente</i>
vol(s).	volume(s)
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
Vulg.	Vulgate

WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>Word</i>	<i>Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York</i>
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie</i>
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

I. Overview

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

Linguistic diversity takes many forms. One language differs from another, one dialect differs from another, and one speaker's use of a language differs from another's. Naturally, then, references to linguistic diversity take many related forms, including to the fact that one's own language (or languages) differs from other, "foreign" tongues, and that no language, not even one's own, is entirely uniform. I will be concerned, here, with references to all such forms of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. Since, however, the majority of texts that contain such references deal with the difference between the biblical authors' own language and the languages spoken by other peoples, references to foreign language will constitute my main focus.

Explicit references to linguistic diversity occur in a variety of texts in the Hebrew Bible. The most familiar and, arguably, most powerful case is the account of the building of the city and tower of Babel (Babylon), and the frustration of this project by the god Yahweh, through the confusion of tongues and the scattering of peoples throughout the world (Gen 11:1–9).¹ The influence of this short tale, which grapples with a universal element of human experience

¹ Biblical citations follow the chapter and verse numbering of the Hebrew text.

with deep insight, on later Jewish and Christian interpretation is difficult to estimate. But references to linguistic diversity are also present in other familiar texts, such as the conflict between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites (Judg 12) – which has given English the word “Shibboleth” – and the Rabshakeh’s intimidating address in Hebrew, or rather “Judaean,” to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a memorable ancient use of psychological warfare (2 Kgs 18//Isa 36//2 Chr 32). Examples of sensitivity to linguistic multiplicity that are less overt also come in various forms. Such a case is the presence of the Aramaic phrase **יגַר שְׁהַרְוּתָא**, “heap of witness,” attributed to Laban the Aramaean, Jacob’s uncle and father-in-law, in a Hebrew narrative (Gen 31:47). Likewise, the unusual linguistic forms in the speech of Moses’ father-in-law, the Midianite priest Jethro, are implicit indications of that character’s linguistic otherness (Exod 18).

Because these and related passages are present in biblical texts of various genres from all historical periods, an analysis of the depictions and conceptualizations of linguistic difference contained in the Hebrew Bible must form part of our understanding of biblical history, literature, and thought. This subject, therefore, merits careful study, which this study undertakes. Among the questions that will be addressed are: What methodological issues confront us when attempting to discern references to linguistic diversity, especially implicit ones? What role was linguistic difference perceived to play in indicating or establishing social and political distinctions? What was the particular significance, if any, of the Hebrew language for the biblical authors? Do references to linguistic diversity exhibit different forms and functions in different genres of biblical literature? And what relationship can be discerned between Israel’s changing historical circumstances and its attitudes towards foreign languages?

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

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

II. History of Research

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

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

In a subsequent article published in 1968, Ullendorff made reference to some of the same texts in a general cross-cultural survey of expressions of the kind “it’s all Greek to me,” where one language is presented as paradigmatically opaque.³ Ullendorff’s treatment of this topic ranges from ancient to modern languages from Europe and Asia, including biblical and rabbinic evidence. In his discussion of the possible biblical expressions that indicate a strange, unknown language, Ullendorff considered the verb לעז (Ps 114:1) in biblical and later Hebrew; the phrase עמקי שפה וכבדי לשון, “deep-lipped and heavy-tongued” (Ezek 3:5–6; cf. Isa 33:19); and the language of Ashdod, אשדודית (Neh 13:24), concluding that the latter, as a non-Semitic language, is used as an exemplar of linguistic strangeness.⁴

² Edward Ullendorff, “The Knowledge of Languages in the Old Testament,” *BJRL* 44 (1961–2): 455–65.

³ Edward Ullendorff, “C’est de l’hébreu pour moi!,” *JSS* 13 (1968): 125–35. Ullendorff’s title makes use of the French equivalent.

⁴ Ullendorff’s identification of “Ashdodite” will be challenged in Ch. 6.

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

This contrasts with the approach of Daniel Block, who, in 1984, examined biblical texts mentioning foreign language in order to answer a particular question: What role did language play in ancient Israelite perceptions of national identity?⁶ Block was motivated to answer this question because he took issue with what he saw as a prevailing assumption in approaches to the history of the ancient Near East, namely that language may be treated “as the basic means of distinguishing various ethnic units in the ancient Near East.”⁷ In determining whether this held for ancient Israel and its neighbours, Block analysed the association between, on the one hand, biblical language-names and words for language, and, on the other, words for and names of people groups. He also investigated texts which have an “antithetical” attitude towards foreign language. Block found that “the Hebrews at least seemed to have recognized a correlation between nations and their languages” but that “this does not mean that the correspondence was one nation/one language.”⁸ More broadly, Block

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

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

⁷ *Ibid.*, 322; Block is quoting Ignace J. Gelb, *Hurrians and Subarians* (SAOC 22; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), vi.

⁸ Block, “National Identity,” 339.

claimed that “the importance of language as an indicator of kinship, especially for this region, should not be overemphasized,” since in this area “language is less a function of nationality than of geography.”⁹ Thus, Block advanced the discussion of the topic of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible by integrating a detailed study of many relevant passages into an argument for a particular conclusion. Block also introduced relevant comparative Near Eastern materials into this discussion. Akkadian, Sumerian, Egyptian, and Hittite sources were cited to provide parallels and contrasts to the biblical evidence.

Since the appearance of Block’s article, no sustained treatment of the topic of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible has been published, but one other study may be mentioned. In 1999, David Aaron investigated the place of Judaism’s “holy language,” לשון הקודש, in Jewish tradition. In this article, Aaron devoted several pages to the attitudes of the biblical authors towards their own language.¹⁰ After discussing biblical names for Hebrew, and the association of Hebrew with the patriarch Jacob in contrast to the Aramaic of Laban (Gen 31:47), Aaron draws a largely negative conclusion about the biblical situation: “There is no discrete notion that Hebrew had a unique value or purpose as will become the case in post-biblical eras ... Hebrew during the biblical eras of Israelite religion ... is not yet Judaism’s language, let alone, a holy tongue.”¹¹

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

⁹ Ibid., 338.

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

¹¹ Ibid., 64.

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

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

Rendsburg¹⁴ and Brian Bompiani¹⁵ have made efforts to refine and systematize the study of this literary device.

This review of previous research into biblical texts that raise issues of a linguistic nature indicates that further study is justified on several grounds. Firstly, no extended analysis of these texts has yet appeared, and no sustained attempt has been made to understand these texts in relation to one another. Secondly, the articles of Ullendorff, Weinberg, and Block, which have the broadest scope, do not take into account the phenomenon of style-switching in biblical texts as a manifestation of the recognition of linguistic diversity. In fact, Ullendorff wrote: “The languages of Israel’s neighbours ... are not used to express the idea of linguistic strangeness or eccentricity.”¹⁶ However, this appears to be precisely what several instances of style-switching are designed to achieve. Thus, it is important that style-switching be integrated into the study of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible. Finally, the research so far conducted in this area does not reflect important developments in the study of ancient Hebrew and ancient Israel. Block’s article appeared more than three decades ago, and is not informed by categories from sociolinguistics, which have in recent years been fruitfully applied to the study of ancient Hebrew (see below), and are extremely relevant to understanding the significance of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible.

III. Methodological Considerations: Sociolinguistics

In addition to the standard philological tools employed in biblical criticism, in this study I employ several concepts and principles drawn from sociolinguistics. This discipline usefully provides categories for analysing certain

¹⁴ See especially Gary A. Rendsburg, “Linguistic Variation and the ‘Foreign’ Factor in the Hebrew Bible,” *IOS* 15 (1995): 177–90; idem, “Style-Switching in Biblical Hebrew,” in *Epigraphy, Philology, and the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Perspectives on Philological and Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Jo Ann Hackett* (ed. Jeremy M. Hutton and Aaron D. Rubin; ANEM 12; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 65–85; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Style Switching,” ch. 25 in idem, *How the Bible is Written* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2019), 501–17. Further publications of Rendsburg’s on this topic are cited in Ch. 4 below.

¹⁵ Brian A. Bompiani, “Style Switching: The Representation of the Speech of Foreigners in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012). Revised portions of this dissertation have appeared as journal articles: idem, “Style Switching in the Jacob and Laban Narrative” *HS* 55 (2014): 43–57; idem, “Style Switching in the Speech of Transjordanians,” *HS* 57 (2016): 51–71.

¹⁶ Ullendorff, “C’est de l’hébreu,” 132.

references to linguistic diversity that are found in the Hebrew Bible, and also offers a framework for relating such references to social circumstances in Israelite history. I shall outline here the chief concerns and approaches of sociolinguistics, as well as some specific areas of relevance within the discipline.

As Suzanne Romaine and Ronald Wardhaugh lay out in their introductions to this field, sociolinguistics is a discipline within linguistics that studies the relationship between language use and its social setting, and in particular how linguistic variation and change relate to social factors.¹⁷ The fundamental principle motivating the sociolinguistic study of language is that language use, variety, and change cannot be understood without thorough consideration of the setting of language within a community of speakers. Indeed, William Labov, a pioneer of the field, claimed that a separate name for this discipline was inappropriate, “as it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social.”¹⁸

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

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

¹⁷ Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (5th ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 13–15; Suzanne Romaine, *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2d ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 67–75.

¹⁸ William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1972), xiii.

religious/profane).¹⁹ Diglossia of this kind exists, for example, in Arabic-speaking societies, where Modern Standard (*fuṣḥa*) Arabic exists alongside a vernacular Arabic dialect.

Other focuses of sociolinguistic research are the related phenomena of style-switching and code-switching, which have been studied by many, including Carol Myers-Scotton, Penelope Eckert and John Rickford.²⁰ During the course of a single conversation, speakers may switch between two or more of the language varieties that are available in a speech community. Those varieties may be distinct languages, in which case the practice is referred to as code-switching, or they may be lesser varieties, in which case the term style-switching is used. This switching has been shown by Myers-Scotton, Eckert, Rickford, and others, to be related to contextual factors, such as audience and setting. In particular, it has been shown that through code- and style-switching a speaker can project or suppress a certain identity, because of the social values associated with particular language varieties, in order to achieve desired effects.

A final subject of sociolinguistic research that I shall mention here is language ideology, a notion developed in particular by Judith Irvine, Susan Gal, Kathryn Woolard, and Bambi Schieffelin.²¹ A speech community may possess a developed and explicit set of beliefs about particular linguistic features or language varieties. In these language (alternatively “linguistic”) ideologies, social prestige or stigma is expressed in praise or censure of particular words, pronunciations, and grammatical structures, or, in written language, of particular writing systems, character forms, spellings, and punctuation. Moreover, the names given to particular languages by some speech community – “glottonyms” (alternatively “glossonyms” or “linguonyms”) – may be informed by particular beliefs about and attitudes towards those languages and their speakers, and thus express a community’s language ideology.

The relevance of these concepts and areas of research in sociolinguistics for understanding the significance of references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible is clear. Linguistic diversity is not an abstract phenomenon, but an embodied social reality. References to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible

¹⁹ Charles A. Ferguson, “Diglossia,” *Word* 15 (1959): 326–40; Joshua A. Fishman, “Bilingualism with and without Diglossia; Diglossia with and without Bilingualism,” *JSI* 23 (1967): 29–38.

²⁰ Carol Myers-Scotton, *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford (eds.), *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²¹ Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities* (ed. Paul V. Kroskrity; Santa Fe, N.Mex.: School of America Research, 2000), 35–85; Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, “Language Ideology,” *ARA* 23 (1994): 55–82.

reflect this, imbuing difference in language with social significance, be it in distinguishing tribes (Judg 12:6), peoples (Gen 11:1–9), or communities of worship (Isa 19:18); in conveying loyalty or disloyalty (Neh 13:24); or in many other ways. In revealing the nature of the connections between the social and the linguistic, sociolinguistics proves extremely useful in investigating the significance of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible.

IV. Contributions

I regard this study of the significance of references to linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible as adding to ongoing discourses primarily within three areas of research: 1) the broader project of a sociolinguistic account of ancient Hebrew; 2) the study of references to and reflections upon the topic of language and linguistic diversity more broadly in the ancient Near East; and 3) the investigation of Hebrew's rise to prominence as the language of Jews and Judaism in the late Second Temple period and rabbinic literature. The fact that this study contributes to these different areas of research indicates that the topic of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible exists at the intersection of important concerns in scholarship. In this work, I do not attempt to integrate my findings thoroughly into these large areas of study, but it is hoped that future research, of my own or of others, will make use of the findings presented here to further these debates.

A. Sociolinguistics and the Study of the Hebrew Bible

A sociolinguistic account of ancient Hebrew has long been considered desirable. Ullendorff encouraged scholars to “endeavour to shed more light on dialect geography and the influence of social stratification on the Hebrew of Biblical times.”²² In recent decades, a marked increase in such study is apparent, and several important contributions to that field may be noted.

The methods, evidence, and motivations for a sociolinguistics of ancient Hebrew were outlined by William Schniedewind in 2004.²³ Here we may note some of the unfortunately severe limitations of such study that Schniedewind points out. For one thing, our knowledge of ancient Hebrew is limited in various respects. Our only evidence of ancient Hebrew is written, and thus, we cannot hope to construct a sociolinguistics of ancient Hebrew in general, but rather only of the written language; moreover, this written corpus is compara-

²² Ullendorff, “Knowledge of Languages,” 465.

²³ William M. Schniedewind, “Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew,” *JHebS* 5 (2004), n.p. (online: <http://www.jhsonline.org/>).

tively small, and as a result cannot be expected to attest to nearly all of the features of the ancient language, nor to do so in a representative fashion. Secondly, though it has increased steadily in recent decades, our knowledge of the social history of ancient Israel is incomplete in important areas. Archaeological and textual evidence can be used to reconstruct certain social realities of ancient Israel (family life, settlement patterns, economic organization, religion, and so on), but often only in general or broad terms; moreover, our access to important yet ephemeral social distinctions (e.g., gender, class, age) is inadequate. Finally, our ability to relate the Hebrew language to particular social conditions is greatly hampered by the fact that the texts of the Hebrew Bible often cannot be dated with certainty; indeed, they frequently reflect a process of redaction that associates them with several historical periods.

But while, for these reasons, any sociolinguistic analysis of ancient Hebrew must be incomplete, such an analysis is nonetheless valuable. Schniedewind himself has produced a “social history of Hebrew” through to the rabbinic period.²⁴ In this work, Schniedewind relies on the work of scholars who have identified diversity and change in the language, such as dialectal differences between Hebrew in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the diachronically distinct language varieties usually referred to as Archaic, Standard, and Late Biblical Hebrew. More deliberately than previous scholars, Schniedewind links these linguistic differences and changes to social factors, including state-formation and consolidation, conquest and exile, and imperialism. In the process, Schniedewind is able to elaborate on the ideological dimension of various aspects of language change in ancient Israel, including the standardization of language and orthography, and in this respect, Schniedewind’s work intersects with the project of Seth Sanders. Sanders has, in numerous studies, sought to demonstrate a link between the emergence of an idea of Israelite nationhood, and a state-sponsored spread of a standardized Hebrew vernacular alongside a standardized script for representing it.²⁵

Other scholars have carried out notable research into specific topics in the sociolinguistics of ancient Hebrew. On the basis of supposedly colloquial expressions in the Hebrew Bible, Rendsburg has argued that a situation of

²⁴ William M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). For a thorough review of this work which highlights some of its notable achievements, see Aaron Koller, “Present and Future of the Hebrew Past,” review of William M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Classical Hebrew*, *Marginalia Review of Books* 23 June 2015 (n.p.; online: <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/present-and-future-of-the-hebrew-past-by-aaron-koller/>).

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

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