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Half Speak Ashdodite and None Can Speak Judean: Code-Switching in Ezra-Nehemiah as an Identity Marker for Repatriate Judeans and Koreans (Chapter in Landscapes of Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation)

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Half Speak Ashdodite and None Can Speak Judean: Code-Switching in Ezra-Nehemiah as an Identity Marker for Repatriate Judeans and Koreans

Roger S. Nam

Ezra 4–7 narrates the reconstruction of the house of the Lord during the Judean repatriation under the Persian Empire. In the narration, there is a linguistic alteration between Hebrew and Aramaic for an extended portion of the narrative. The first Aramaic portion occurs in Ezra 4:8–6:18, beginning with the royal letter to King Artaxerxes, which would naturally be composed under the standard lingua franca of Aramaic. Similarly, the second Aramaic portion in Ezra 7:12–26 begins with the Artaxerxes Rescript, giving imperial support for the reconstruction. The contents of these passages befit the Aramaic language. Although the shift between the languages is rare in biblical text, it is not entirely unwarranted as Aramaic was the official language of Persian correspondence. Yet, what is puzzling is the deployment of Aramaic beyond the royal epistolary texts to include significantly substantial portions in the narrative.

In critical studies of these texts, scholars often turn to the composite nature of Ezra-Nehemiah to explain the insertion of the Aramaic sections.[1] Traditional historical-critical theories, in the spirit of Wellhausen, construct a schema of sources with the Persian imperial correspondence in Aramaic.[2] More recently, critical scholars have considered a more gradual traditional historical approach to reconstruct the textual development of Ezra-Nehemiah. Reinhard Kratz suggests that the Aramaic portions of the narrative form the inspiration for Ezra 1–4.[3] Others suggest that these Aramaic sources were reordered for the purposes of a

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[1] This paper assumes the compositional unity of Ezra-Nehemiah in line with much critical scholarship; for a summary of the issues, see Roger S. Nam, *The Theology of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

[2] For a basic overview of diachronic issues, one may consult Thomas Bolin, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 5–16.

[3] Reinhard Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 49–86.

positive portrayal of the rebuilding.[4] One of the clues to these diachronic theories is the *Wiederaufnahme*, or resumptive repetition of the phrase "Darius King of Persia" (vv. 5, 24) that signals insertion at a latter period.[5] The authenticity of the Aramaic letters have recently come under heavy assault, with the argument that the Aramaic is a stylized literary inclusion.[6] Regardless of the questions over authenticity, these diachronic theories of textual development do not account for the final form of the Ezra text including the Aramaic framing throughout the narrative, such as Ezra 4:8–11, 24, or even Ezra 5:1–2, which draws from the Hebrew sources of Haggai and Zechariah.

In addition, scholars have continued to examine rhetorical features and explanations for the bilingualism in Ezra-Nehemiah. In other words, the usage of Aramaic is not merely an accident of the composite nature of the text, but it is a deliberate rhetorical intention by the author-compilers. Daniel Snell suggests that the framing marker of Ezra 4:7 signals such intentions:

> וכתב הנשתון כתוב ארמית ומתרגם ארמית
> The letter was written in Aramaic and translated

Snell identifies this statement as an indication of a new viewpoint that signals authority against the preceding Judean perspective.[7] Similarly, Gary Rendsburg does not specifically refer to the Aramaic portions of Ezra, but he argues for the presence of a "foreign factor," in that the biblical texts may utilize lexical elements from Canaanite languages for rhetorical effect.[8] Bill Arnold draws on Boris Uspensky to argue that the alternating usage of Aramaic and Hebrew represents shifting points of view from the internal repatriates and the other.[9] Arnaud Sérandour argues that the bilingualism carries a direct theological contrast between the

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[4] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1988); Hugh Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Waco, TX: Nelson, 1985); also see C. C. Torrey, *The Composition and Historical Value of Ezra-Nehemiah* (Giessen: J. Ricker'sche Buchhandlung, 1896).

[5] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra*, 115; Williamson, *Ezra*, 57; cf. D. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 82.

[6] For a representative article defending the historical authenticity of these documents, see Hugh Williamson, "The Aramaic Documents in Ezra Revisited," *JTS* 59 (2008): 41–62; for representative works challenging this historical authenticity, see Lester Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 6; and Sebastian Grätz, *Das Edikt des Artaxerxes: Eine Untersuchen zum religionspolitischen und historischen Umfeld von Esra 7,12–26* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

[7] Daniel Snell, "Why Is There Aramaic in the Bible?," *JSOT* 18 (1980): 32–51.

[8] Gary Rendsburg, "Linguistic Variation and the 'Foreign' Factor in the Bible," in *Language and Culture in the Near East*, ed. Shlomo Iz'real and Rina Drory (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 177–90.

[9] Bill Arnold, "The Use of Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible: Another Look at the Bilingualism in Ezra and Daniel," *JNSL* 22 (1996): 1–16.

sacred, exclusive language of Hebrew and the universal, gentile language of Aramaic.[10] Joshua Berman gives one of the most complete analyses on the narrative perspective of Aramaic as an external point of view of the Samaritans, who slowly come to understand the efficacy of the repatriate group.[11] Berman argues that the string of independent pronouns and pronominal suffixes indicate that the Aramaic narrative sections assume an outsider group against the exclusivist repatriate Judeans. Ezra 5:1–4 is particularly illuminating to this outsider perspective for the Aramaic portions:

- In 5:1, Haggai and Zechariah are said to prophesy "to the Judeans who were in Judah and Jerusalem" (and not "to us").
- In 5:2, the temple is identified as "the house of the God who is in Jerusalem."
- In 5:3, Tattenai and the associates come "to them" and speak "to them" (and not "to us").
- And in 5:4, the Samarians are identified in the first person: "So then we asked them" (rather than "they asked us").[12]

The avoidance of the second person pronominal endings alongside the Aramaic indicates a perspective of the Samaritans, distinct from the Judean insider language (Ezra 1–4) and the first-person accounts of the so-called Ezra memoir (Ezra 7). These studies by Snell, Arnold, Rendsburg, Sérandour and Berman benefit from the growing research surrounding bilingualism arising from both sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. They account for a more sophisticated and richer understanding of the Aramaic portions beyond source analysis.

I add that bilingualism of Ezra-Nehemiah has unexplored possibilities. My investigation does not intend to supplant the theories that the bilingualism emerges from sociolinguistic rhetorical ideals, or the traditional understanding of a composite development of the Ezra-Nehemiah text. More specifically, I think through the phenomenon of code-switching as a further supplement to these earlier studies in ways that are not mutually exclusive. The alternating languages in Ezra-Nehemiah are analogous to modern-day code-switching. Namely, the shifts

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[10] Arnaud Sérandour, "Hébreu et Araméen dans la Bible," *Revues des Études juives* 159 (2000): 345–55; cf. A. Sérandour, "Remarques sur le Bilinguisme dans le Livre d'Esdras," in *Mosaïque de Langues, Mosaïque Culturelle: Le bilinguisme dans le Proche-Orient Ancien*, ed. F. Briquel- Chatonnet (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1996), 131–44.

[11] Joshua Berman, "The Narratorial Voice of the Scribes of Samaria: Ezra iv 8–vi 18 Reconsidered," *VT* 56 (2006): 313–26; more recently, Berman expands his argument to place Aramaic portions within a greater narrative flow; see J. Berman, "The Narratological Purpose of Aramaic Prose in Ezra 4:8–6:18," *Aramaic Studies* 5 (2007): 165–92.

[12] Berman, "Narratological," 165–92; cf. Gary Knoppers suggests that the divide between Samaritans and Judeans is overstated in Ezra-Nehemiah, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and Histories of Their Early Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

between Aramaic and Hebrew signal an expression of a complex identity maker that encapsulates the self-perceived origins of Ezra's repatriate community. By alternating between Hebrew and Aramaic, Ezra portrays the Judean community as an adapting community within the dynamics of the Persian empire while simultaneously with zeal, preserving their own heritage as the Lord's people. In doing so, code-switching in Ezra contributes to a subversive message that Judeans can maintain their identity as the people of God in the midst of colonization. Because code-switching is a modern sociolinguistic phenomenon, I offer observations on how code-switching can be a point of dialogue between the text of Ezra-Nehemiah and diasporic Koreans in ways whereby language signals our own negotiations within the larger worlds.

CODE-SWITCHING

Code-switching suggests that the change from one language to another is not mechanically rote, but deliberate and intentional.[13] It does not depend so much on competencies, but on social intentions. Bilinguals have the choice to shape a social context though language selection. Admittedly, the vast majority of research on code-switching is through modern spoken language, particularly in secondary language acquisition, and not through written texts. Formal studies in code-switching has its inception with John Gumperz and Jan-Petter Blom through studies of dialect-switching on a Norwegian fishing village.[14] Consequently, code-switching research largely assumes cognitive duality that emerges somewhat subconsciously. For the biblical comparison, scribal systems would be much more deliberate and intentional through written bilingual activity. Observations connect the phenomenon of code-switching to be activated by shared language structures, driven by the bilingual's linguistic competency and revealed through phonology and morphology, limited in observation compared to modern settings.[15] Also, code-switching is primarily used to alternate between languages within the same utterance, thus being more applicable to the insertion of two Aramaic words in Gen 31:47 than the extended narrative sections in Ezra 4–7.[16] Recent approaches

[13] Penelope Gardner-Chloros, *Code-Switching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. pp. 1–19.

[14] John J. Gumperz and Jan-Petter Blom, "Social Meaning in Linguistic Structures: Code Switching in Northern Norway," in *Sociolinguistics: Current Trends and Prospects*, ed. R. Shuy (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1972), 407–34.

[15] Shana Poplack, "Sometimes I'll Start a Sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPAÑOL: Toward a Typology of Code-Switching," *Linguistics* 18 (1980): 581–618; David Sankoff and Shana Poplack, "A Formal Grammar for Code Switching," *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 1 (1981): 3–45.

[16] Hedi M. Belazi, Edward J. Rubin, Almeida Jacqueline Toribi, "Code Switching and X-Bar Theory: The Functional Head Constraint," *Linguistic Inquiry* 25 (1994): 221–37.

to code-switching argue for complete linguistic data, and not just select portions, for a more holistic assessment of linguistic competencies.[17]

Despite these constraints, like other sociolinguistic theories and social-scientific approaches in general, the underlying hypotheses of code-switching can help explain the phenomena in Ezra's scribal bilingualism.[18] Timothy Hogue points out that scribal code-switching carries a greater conscious intent between the language alteration.[19] Code-switching may give insight on the governed intentions behind the final form of Ezra in two languages. The essential question behind code-switching, whereas not completely congruous to modern spoken registers, also serves the intent of biblical scholars: What drives bilingualism from the shared matrix of linguistic competencies and social factors? The matrix between language use would have been complex in the scribal world of Persian Yehud. Despite our lack of observable, empirical data, I contend that bilingualism within an ancient text, especially one so obsessed with written authority, reflects a complex social phenomenon behind the language switches.

In her analysis of bilingualism throughout the book of Daniel, Anathea Portier-Young suggests that code-switching can explain the Aramaic portions as a deliberate movement to forge identity in the midst of empire.[20] Portier-Young contends that the Hebrew opening in Daniel 1 provides a foundation for Judean identity, but the switch to Aramaic in Dan 2–7 reflects the reality of living in a vast empire. The return to Hebrew for Dan 8–12 parallels the narrative content of the triumph of colonial resistance over the hegemony of empire. This explanation for the bilingualism in Daniel is convincing, but one must resist the tendency to immediately draw direct parallels to the Aramaic portions of Daniel. The dating of the Aramaic literary genres is different. Most significantly, one must consider the broader social context of the Persian repatriation against the Hellenistic context of Daniel. Yet at the same time, as Portier-Young modeled, code-switching has potential as a methodological frame for Ezra-Nehemiah and its social context of bilingual Yehud under Persian hegemony.

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[17] Jeff MacSwan, "Code Switching and Linguistic Theory," in *Handbook of Bilingualism and Multilingualism*, ed. T. K. Bhatia and W. Ritchie (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 221–37.

[18] Other examples of sociolinguistics in biblical studies, see William M. Schneidewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[19] Timothy Hogue presents an additional point of alternation in the movements between Official Aramaic and Western Aramaic; see "Return from Exile: Diglossia and Literary Code-Switching in Ezra 1–7," *ZAW* (forthcoming); cf. Frank H. Polak, "Sociolinguistics and the Judean Speech Community in the Achaemenid Empire," in *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. O. Lipschitz and M. Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 589–628.

[20] Anathea Portier-Young, "Languages of Identity and Obligation: Daniel as Bilingual Book," *VT* 60 (2010): 98–115.

I suggest that bilingualism in Ezra manifests the repatriates' efforts to forge their own Judean identity in the midst of both adaptation and preservation during a crucial period of the repatriation events. Following Portier-Young's usage of code-switching as a methodological framework on the bilingualism in Ezra-Nehemiah, code-switching reveals an awareness and resistance of the political power of the Persian Empire. That resistance demonstrates a linguistic ability which makes Ezra capable of embodying that power but also using it subversively to promote Judean goals of proper worship and sociopolitical identity in Jerusalem.

Adaptation

The usage of Aramaic indicates the adaptive competencies of the repatriate community behind the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah. Because of their hyper-awareness of scribal communication, the ability to switch to Aramaic for both documents as well as narrative demonstrates a level of linguistic authority and power.[21] The usage of Aramaic establishes the community's access to writings and knowledge.[22] The prologue hints at the strategy of adaptation in Ezra 1:1:

> In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared." (NRSV)

In the opening verse, rather than relying on the reign of an Israelite or Judean king, the historical reference centers on the reign of King Cyrus. More significantly, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and not a Davidic representative—as Zerubbabel is relegated to the background in Ezra-Nehemiah. Immediately, the text gives an outwardly favorable assessment of the Persian Empire, in line with Second and Third Isaiah, and other texts that espouse a viewpoint of adaptation to the empire. Strategically, the prologue boldly places the foreign king inhabiting

[21] Two recent doctoral dissertations investigate textual authority within Ezra-Nehemiah; Cameron Howard, "Writing Yehud: Textuality and Power under Persian Rule" (Emory University, PhD diss, 2010); Lisa Cleath, "Reading Ceremonies in the Hebrew Bible: Ideologies of Textual Authority in Joshua 8, 2 Kings 23, Nehemiah 8" (UCLA, PhD diss, 2016).
[22] Mark Leuchter, "The Aramaic Transition and the Redaction of the Pentateuch," *JBL* 136 (2017): 249–68.

a Davidic role within the returning community.[23] The Judeans do not need to fight the empire, but rather through it, they can return to God's favor.[24]

Because of this outward recognition of Persian authority and power, Ezra-Nehemiah must turn to a more adaptive strategy. Along these lines, fluency in Aramaic demonstrates a powerful capacity by the repatriate community to communicate in the imperial language. The imperial mandate to unify scattered peoples through the language of Aramaic dates back to at least the eighth century BCE and the conquests of the Assyrian empire. By the time of the Persian period, epigraphic evidence overwhelmingly supports the widespread usage of the Aramaic script and language. Large Aramaic archives appear at multiple sites in Yehud (Arad, Beershaba) and surrounding areas (Wadi Daliyeh, Tell el-Kheliefeh). Extant examples of Hebrew are rare. They are limited to symbolically charged texts such as coins or sealings.[25] In contrast, almost all legal documents and economic texts are written in Aramaic signifying the permeance of Aramaic.

The Aramaic portions of Ezra exemplify that the command of Aramaic is significant, powerful, and ultimately can be harnessed in favor of the repatriate Judeans. The Aramaic letter to Artaxerxes and commentary in Ezra 4:8–6:18 show the adversaries making appeals to the Persian Empire to subvert the reconstruction project. This rhetorically powerful letter warns about the potential disobedience of Jerusalem through adjectives like "rebellious" (מרד; Ezra 4:12, 15, 19; cf. Hebrew cognate to describe Jerusalem in Neh 2:19; 6:6), "bad" (באיש; Ezra 4:12), "hurtful" (נזק; Ezra 4:15), and "seditious" (אשתדור; Ezra 4: 15, 19). These negative descriptors align with the primary accusation that the construction will allow Judeans to "not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be reduced" (Ezra 4:13). Rather than assert their own experiences of exclusion from the rebuilding in Ezra 4:2–3, the adversaries attempt to persuade the Persians against Jerusalem through financial threat. Authoritatively and legally, the language of the letter would be in Aramaic to appeal to the Persians. The argument is compelling. As a result of this letter written in Aramaic, Artaxerxes orders the stoppage of the rebuilding.

But the strategy of adaptation is effective, as the Judean Aramaic response from Ezra 5:8 reverses the stoppage. Inspired by prophetic activity, another letter

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[23] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), esp. pp. 68–69, 104–7.

[24] Multiple commentators highlight this aspect of Ezra 1:1, most recently Lisbeth S. Fried, *Ezra: A Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 47; cf. Antonius Gunnerweg, *Esra* (Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlagshaus Mohn, 1985), 41.

[25] Ya'akov Meshorer, *Persian Period through Hasmoneans*, vol. 1 of *Ancient Jewish Coinage* (New York: Amphora Books, 1982); Nahman Avigad, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, rev. Benjamin Sass (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Arts and Sciences/Israel Exploration Society/Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 1997); for a sociolinguisitic analysis, see William M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

in Aramaic appeals to an earlier decree from Cyrus, and thus reassures the Persians. This response letter counters the adversaries' appeal to archives that record Jerusalem's former greatness to another set of written documents that validate the original edict of Cyrus for continued reconstruction. As a result, in a stunning reversal of fortune, not only is the reconstruction taken up again, but done so at the expense of the empire and the empowerment of Sheshbazzar as the (new) director of the rebuilding project (Ezra 5:14, 16). In addition, the usage of Aramaic exhibits Judean capability and credibility to arrive at the desired outcome—reversal to the stoppage.

The Hebrew/Aramaic bilingualism in Ezra 4–7 sharply contrasts with that of 2 Kgs 18:26. In the latter text, set during the siege of Jerusalem, the Judeans at the wall plead with the Assyrian invaders to speak in Aramaic in order to shelter the city dwellers from the verbal rhetoric. The verse implies that Aramaic is limited to official and high-level usage in contrast to the common vernacular of Hebrew.[26] But consistent with general knowledge of Assyrian war tactics, the invaders refute the request and continue their threats upon the people in Hebrew, portending an unprecedented level of starvation and doom. The Judeans were not asking for withdrawal, but rather request for mercy through spoken Aramaic to keep the Jerusalem dwellers from panic and threat. The Assyrian invaders, represented by the Rab-sheka, however, deliberately spoke in Hebrew to communicate to the masses, to intimidate the defenders to surrender or face perpetual doom. By departing from the lingua franca and speaking in the vernacular, the Assyrians' demonstration of linguistic competency displays a wide range of powerful weapons to incite fear on the Judeans. In this case, the echoed words that the wall cannot protect the Judeans and that they will face starvation and death is further mixed with mockery of Yahweh.

In Ezra 4–7, it is the repatriate Judeans who bypass Hebrew and demonstrate fluency in the lingua franca of Aramaic to counter the letter of the adversaries by pointing out that there is a Persian source that legitimizes their reconstruction project. The medium of written words goes beyond spoken words and further accentuates the power of complete control of bilingualism in Ezra-Nehemiah. This linguistic adaptation ultimately assures the continuation of the temple project and the continuation of YHWH worship after generations in exile.

Preservation

On the one hand, code-switching suggests an effort to preserve an inherited culture. And on the other hand, the aspect of *adaptation* in code-switching reveals acculturation and command of the dominant culture. In the prologue of Ezra 1:1,

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[26] Avi Hurvitz, "Hebrew and Aramaic in the Biblical Period: The Problem of 'Aramaisms' in the Linguistic Research of the Hebrew Bible," in *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Typology and Chronology*, ed. Ian Young (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 24–37.

the efforts in *preservation* reach a culmination at the end of the work in Neh 13 as the repatriates reach resolve over the problem of language selection. Persian Yehud was undoubtedly a multilingual society.[27] Aramaic was the language of the Persian Empire and the imposed tongue and lingua franca of the ancient Near East since the Assyrian Empire. The emergence of Aramaic in the ancient Near East was among multiple alphabetic languages including Phoenician, Moabite, and even Hebrew, which developed for political ideologies. Seth Sanders contends that the rise of alphabetic script in the Western Levant in the early first millennium is a direct reflex of defining their own political order as articulated through royal inscriptions.[28] Sanders states, "Their language and assumptions are performative, in that they entail the existence of the very things they are trying to create on the ground: a single people, language, territory, and god."[29] In other words, languages are created and utilized for political gains and aims. Thus, Aramaic served as colonial hegemon, as it represented continuity of several generations of political empire—from the loose Aramaean states to the Neo-Assyrians' desire to create a single unified language, passed down to the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Empires. Accordingly, within the repatriate community, Aramaic represents the language of outsiders, associated with false gods in Jeremiah, or Babylon in Daniel. In contrast, Hebrew was the heritage language of resistance. It had little usage for economic gain or international correspondence even with other displaced and marginalized Judean groups such as the community at Elephantine. But Hebrew was the sacred language of the people's texts, and later referred to as the "holy tongue" / לשון הקודש. The hyper-awareness of their own language reaches crisis in Neh 13:24:

> ובניהם חצי מדבר אשדודית ואינם מכירים לדבר יהודית וכלשון עם ועם
> And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples.

Although the specific linguistic classification of the "language of the Ashdod" is under dispute, the significance lies in the ideology of the children adopting the language of a Philistia state.[30] Ashdodite was a denigrated language of the others in contrast to Hebrew due to its association with pagan deities (1 Sam 5:5–6; Is 20:1; Jer 25:20; Amos 3:9; 2 Chr 26:6). Of particular note, the people of Ashdod are referred to as ממזר in Zech 9:6, specifically referring to those children of mixed marriage (Deut 23:3). In the repatriation, the children lost their heritage language, which was natural for the children and grandchildren of immigrants.

[27] Bernard Spolsky, *The Language of the Jews: A Sociolinguistic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 30.
[28] Seth L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2009).
[29] Sanders, *Hebrew*, 118.
[30] Edward Ullendorff suggests that "Ashododite" is literary creation of a foreign/outsider language in contrast to Hebrew; "C'est de l'hébreu pour moi!," *JSS* 13 (1968): 125–35.

The occurrence is decried as the switch to Ashdodite demonstrates their pathway to assimilation.[31] Such a final statement to close the collective work of Ezra-Nehemiah repeats the earlier mixed marriage crisis of Ezra 9 and sets the repatriate community to ensure their protection from assimilation in the years to come. Of course, such a recourse of dissolving such marriages violates basic social norms in modern society. But within the social context of Ezra-Nehemiah, the liminal spaces of repatriation activate a preservation of Hebrew as a deliberate display of identity negotiation.

This preference for Hebrew is pronounced at different places in the narrative. One of significant examples is Ezra 6:19–21 when the narrative switches back to Hebrew in order to introduce the community's celebration of Passover.[32] Here, the usage of Hebrew is a natural switch for the celebration of a festival that symbolizes God's providence for an exclusive community in an escape from one land of bondage and entry to another land of promise. Other times, the Hebrew influence is likely unintentional, such as the Aramaisms within the Hebrew portions of Ezra-Nehemiah.[33]

The alternating languages between Hebrew and Aramaic present a parallel view of the repatriate community. They are able to adapt to the international lingua franca with enough facility to defeat the adversaries from their own satrap. Despite their diasporic situation with multiple displacements, Ezra-Nehemiah closes with a commitment to maintain their heritage language, even at the extreme cost of separating wives and children from the community. They remain Judeans at their core, and deeply committed to the preservation of their heritage, of which language is a crucial expression of said heritage.

Together, this adaptation and preservation also contribute to a subversion of empire. In *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, Daniel Smith-Christopher argues that Ezra-Nehemiah is ultimately a subversive text, one that openly acquiesces to Persian imperial authority, but within a deeper subtext, seeks to undermine the empire and empower the diasporic community to thrive in the midst of displacement.[34] Such subversion plays out in looking at some of the wider themes within Ezra-Nehemiah. Although the Aramaic epistolary letters help bring the reconstruction to completion, Ezra-Nehemiah recognizes another written document, the Torah, written in Hebrew.

[31] "The phrase, "but spoke the language of various peoples" is omitted in the LXX, as the phrase condemns the LXX audience of diaspora Jews"; Schniedewind, *Social History*, 165.
[32] Fried, *Ezra*, 285–96.
[33] The study of Aramaisms in Biblical Hebrew goes back to the seminal work by E. Kautzsch, *Die Aramaismem im Alten Testament. I: Lexicalischer Teil* (Halle), 1902; for a summary of Aramaisms in Ezra-Nehemiah, see Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 121–22.
[34] Daniel Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

Whereas Ezra-Nehemiah begins with the somewhat surprising declaration of Cyrus's regnal formulation, it ends with a repentant spirit over assimilation. The banishment of foreign wives and children is set in tension with the purity of the preservation of an inherited language, Hebrew. Although epigraphic evidence suggests the pervasiveness of Aramaic during this period, the limited samples of Hebrew indicate that it is symbolically charged.[35] As Persian control of Yehud atrophied in the mid-fourth century BCE, Yehud coins began to reflect the Hebrew language instead of Aramaic. Torah would last beyond royal Aramaic decrees. And God's people would survive beyond the Persian Empire.

CODE-SWITCHING AND KOREAN AMERICAN INTERPRETATIONS

The concept of code-switching may elicit particular responses in the landscape of Korean and Korean American interpretation.[36] Because the vast majority of Korean families immigrated after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, we begin to see the second and third generations of Korean Americans reaching adulthood in the masses. Bilingualism is a direct concern for Korean American communities, and consequently, the concept of code-switching may serve as a powerful prefigurative reading strategy.[37] In an earlier work, I argued for repatriation as an interpretive strategy for Ezra-Nehemiah, particularly for Korean communities.[38] Without essentializing the return migration experience, I suggest multiple parallels between the Judean and Korean repatriates, specifically, the centrality of blood purity in identity formation, as well as the effects of long term displacement. A repatriation hermeneutic is less of a methodology and more of a form of discourse that provokes discourse and imagination.[39] It is with hope that

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[35] Schniedewind, *Social History*, 157–61.

[36] I categorize Korean American interpretation in broad terms, in applying a conscious Korean American lens to the study of biblical texts; for further discussion, see Hyun Chul Paul Kim, "Currents in Korean-American Biblical Interpretation" *Journal of Korean American Ministries and Theology* 5 (2012): 7–19.

[37] Tat-Siong Benny Liew distinguishes the terms of "prefigurative" and "prescriptive," by drawing on Sharon K. Han, "Cross-Discipline Trafficking: What's Justice Got to Do with It?," in *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, ed. K. Chuh and K. Shimakawa (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 81, 97–98; the prefigurative approach does not claim exclusivity, but rather intends to function as a complementary option; see Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? Reading the New Testament* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 2.

[38] Roger S. Nam, "Unsettled Homecomings: A Repatriate Reading of Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Reading in These Times*, ed. Benny Tat-siong Liew and Fernando Segovia (Atlanta: SBL Press, forthcoming).

[39] Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

the Korean perspective on repatriation can create avenues of engagement for the multivalent Korean reading communities and broader Asian American worlds.

All of these communities must confront the issue of language and bilingualism as central factors in identity formation. Thus, the concept of code-switching carries enormous hermeneutical weight for today's Korean American readers. Bilingualism is a reality that we navigate. Whether Korean biblical scholars attempt to foster dialogue in an international community, or second or later generation diasporic Koreans wrestle with heritage, the development of our own bilingualism of either Korean as our heritage language or English goes beyond mechanical communication that resonates with the individual and the broader community. Code-switching according to the linguists Bhatia and Ritchie:

> Language clearly intertwines powerfully with conceptions and definitions of allegiance and "belonging." It possesses more than instrumental value; it is the vehicle of tradition and culture, and the medium of group narrative.… when more than one language is involved, then, we should expect ramifications in terms of identity and "groupness.[40]

Because Korean interpretation is deeply embedded within social contexts, said interpretations are not merely geographic and cultural. The Korean perspective is also a "social and political designator."[41] The centrality of language in the Korean community may parallel the usage of code-switching that signals assimilation, preservation and subversion. Each of these three themes emerge for both the Korean American (or really, any diasporic Korean) interpreter as well as the Korean interpreter.

My place as a second-generation Korean American informs my own interpretation of the bilingualism of Ezra-Nehemiah. For my parents' generation, the mastery of English was elusive. The shedding of their Asian accents was impossible. Proficiency in English was a path to assimilation, and many of us grew up at the insistence of English at the expense of our mother tongue. Paradoxically, this emphasis on access, through English competence, accompanied deliberate efforts at maintaining Korean language. I had an evolving relationship with the Korean language. As a child, I dreaded mandatory Korean language classes held on Saturdays at the church. But as a young adult, I eagerly took two years of Korean language as an undergraduate and moved to Seoul upon graduation. Such a desire for heritage language preservation is not natural and often met with resistance by younger generations. John WcWhorter suggests that the next-

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[40] Tej K. Bhatia and William C. Ritchie, eds., *The Handbook of Bilingualism and Multilingualism* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 19.

[41] Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, eds., *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006), xiii; cf. Jin Young Choi, "Asian/Asian American Interpretation," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Gender Studies*, ed. Julia M. O'Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–9.

generation often has little incentive to continue with the older language through a host of political and social reasons.[42] But these heritage languages arise in subversion. Long before the global rise of K-pop and K-drama, the desire to learn Korean was deeply tied to a sense of heritage preservation. For some like myself, this drive to cultural preservation led me to stay in Seoul for four years during my twenties, and the desire to instill this drive in my children, was a central reason behind a recent yearlong sabbatical in Korea.

The context for bilingualism is also subversive in political and social ways. With the rise of South Korea as the twelfth largest GDP in the world, a level unimaginable for the group of immigrants of the late 1960s, Korean is a legitimate language for business contacts. Korean language classes are now offered at every major university and even community colleges and high schools. On a social level, the efforts at bilingualism defies an American monoculturalism, and presents Korean-ness as a part of the identity. Code-switching presents a larger opportunity for both worlds, that allows one to assimilate into the language of privilege (English) while preserving the language of heritage (Korean).

Beyond all the linguistic theories and social-scientific approaches, bilinguals, whether from Persian Yehud or the Korean diaspora, all have an innate sense of the connection to a heritage language. Language connects, informs and expresses our own narratives and our own identity. The tenacity to protect such language runs deep and even nonsensical, but we understand that our articulation of self-identity begins with the language that we can self-select.

[42] John WcWhorter, *The Power of Babel: The Natural History of Languages* (New York: Harper, 2001), 271.