

Jesus' Multilingualism in the Gospel of Matthew

Introduction

We now have reached the last part of this study. My concern since chapter 3 has primarily been with demonstrating that ancient Palestine was a multilingual and diglossic speech community and that Jesus was a multilingual speaker who lived in that community. In chapter 3, I showed from a macro-sociolinguistic perspective how ancient Palestine, which originally was a Hebrew-speaking community, became a multilingual speech community. I also attempted to paint a geographical portrait of the possible linguistic landscape of the entire speech community. But that macro portrait of ancient Palestine's linguistic situation was unable to explain how people would have appropriated Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin in the various social institutions of the speech community. It also was unable to indicate whether Jesus actually interacted with those social institutions and whether he possessed the required ability to speak these languages. So, in chapter 4, I supplemented my macro analysis of the sociolinguistic situation of ancient Palestine with a microanalysis of the sociolinguistic world of Jesus. Chapter 4 discussed the six major social institutions, which I have called "fixed" (or standard) social or language domains, of ancient Palestine, and the social network and multilingual proficiency of Jesus. The chapter demonstrated that Jesus frequently interacted with these various fixed domains, and consequently, it argued that he probably was an early, consecutive multilingual who could speak Aramaic and Greek fluently, and Hebrew and Latin receptively (to some degree). Jesus' use of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin in various speech situations can be further examined, however. In this chapter, I will attempt to determine the language Jesus would have used in each of the episodes or speech situations in the Gospel of Matthew.

This chapter has two main sections. The first section explains the theory of ethnography of communication, a discourse analytic tool that sociolinguists use to analyze and describe the sociolinguistic context of a speech situation. It should be recalled that every speech situation happens in a particular fixed social domain, and its occurrence is constrained by a set of sociolinguistic factors that affect the language choice of the people involved in the conversation (see chapter 4). This set of sociolinguistic factors includes participants, social setting, and topic of conversation, and to this set of factors can still be added the various components involved in an ethnographic description of a

speech situation. Such expanded ethnographic descriptions allow us to determine more accurately the language that would have been used in a particular speech situation or event. The second and last section deals with the languages Jesus would have used in the various speech situations and events recorded in Matthew's Gospel. This section is divided into five sub-sections, each of which includes and discusses the speech situations where Jesus would have used Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew, or Latin. The speech situations are analyzed and described through the various components of the ethnography of communication. The possible language used in each of those speech situations or events is determined through a set of sociolinguistic rules. This set of rules are generated from a hierarchical "decision tree" that categorizes the order of importance of the ethnographic components. This set of rules also serves as my basis for identifying the language used in a particular episode in the Gospel of Matthew; specifically, I plot this set of criteria with their corresponding ethnographic components on a Gospel episode. Before I explain the concept of ethnography of communication, let me first discuss my concept of "variable" social domains, which I introduced in the preceding chapter.

Variable Social Domains

Strictly speaking, no speech situations in the real world are exactly alike. This is similar to asserting the idea that what we find in the real world is not really language or dialect but idiolect, that is, each person's speech or language is unique. Such realities also apply to the concept of social domains. We have seen from the preceding chapter that "fixed" social domains are identified through a familiar, standard set of sociolinguistic configuration. For instance, the ideal family domain in ancient Palestine would typically consist of family members, slaves, freedmen, and other first- and second-degree relatives interacting with each other and discussing family matters in a private or home setting. Many social factors, however, can disrupt this familiar, standard set of sociolinguistic configuration that marks the family domain. A visit by a friend can immediately make the private social setting in the home become more public, and it can simultaneously change the topic of conversation from dealing with family matters to non-family ones. In this particular case, the ideal or fixed family domain is converted into a variable family domain, since the standard set of sociolinguistic configurations that characterize a fixed domain has been altered. In other cases, two or more fixed domains may also combine to form a variable domain. A social setting with large crowds that gathered to listen to Jesus' teaching, for instance, may comprise family domains,