MULTILINGUALISM IN ANCIENT CONTEXTS

Perspectives from
Ancient Near Eastern
and Early Christian
Contexts

EDITORS

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INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITORS

The idea of the nation-state as it developed in Europe of the 19th century, linked language to identity, particularly national identity, and acts, to this day, as a lens through which the role of language in ancient and modern cultures is seen. An example of this can be seen in historians' and archaeologists' conclusions that the presence of a Greek inscription in a site necessarily would mean that Greeks were present there in the past.

However, the ancient Mediterranean world had been multilingual since many centuries BCE, and the use of a particular language or script did not necessarily function as an identity marker of a particular culture or ethnic group. The more extensively an empire developed in the past (e.g., the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, etc.), the more diverse it became in terms of languages. Simultaneously, and not in contradistinction, communication within such a linguistically diverse empire was simply not possible without the development of a *lingua franca* which all (or, at least those in ideologically powerful positions) could master.

In the 1st century CE in the Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian world – probably already from as early as the 8th century BCE – such a common language was Aramaic. However, the co-existence of a *lingua franca* with other languages was the norm. Or to put it differently, multilingualism was the norm, despite the use of a *lingua franca*. The same occurred/occurs in other contexts where Latin, Arab, English, Chinese, and other languages emerged as *lingua francas*.

What has been said above, goes somewhat against the tide of contemporary South African (and certainly in other contexts in the world) discourses on monolingualism and multilingualism. The language identities in great parts of the globe – be it Africa, Latin America, North America, Eastern Europe, Australasia, etc. – were heavily impacted by the processes of imperialism that swept over these continents from the 15th to the 20th centuries. To take the African continent as one example: Africa is to this day divided into francophone (mainly central and west Africa), anglophone (mainly east and southern Africa), and lusophone (mainly Angola and Mozambique) parts, with some germanophone pockets spread over the continent (mainly Namibia, Tanzania and Cameroon), although numerous indigenous languages exist in all those contexts. Since the middle of the 20th century, numerous liberation movements changed the political face of the African continent from colonies dominated by European empires, to independent states formulating their own language policies. Ironically, the imperial languages remained a very prominent remnant of a colonial past. In South Africa, within the very fierce debates about decolonisation in education in recent years, English ironically remained the language within which these debates were conducted. The tide of decolonisation did not push for indigenous languages to receive a fair place in the linguistic landscape of the country and the continent; pressure was rather exerted that all educational institutions should teach solely in English.

However, the (South) African situation is not unique. Migration patterns all over the world often lead to the development of some *lingua francas* as well, or to the diversification of the language landscape. Good international examples are the emergence of Spanish as another prominent language alongside English in the United States, as well as the diversification of languages in present-day western Europe under the influence of the influx of migrants from northern Africa and western Asia.

The ancient and contemporary examples discussed thus far prompt certain questions that should be taken seriously in research on monolingualism and multilingualism. Some of these questions are:

- What were the social phenomena which determined the co-existence of multilingualism and a *lingua franca* in historical contexts?
- When we look at current (post)modern societies, which social forces influence the relationship between language pluralism and monolingualism today?
- What universal patterns can be identified in ancient and (post)modern contexts in terms of lingualism?
- Could the study of the dynamics of multilingualism and *lingua francas* in ancient contexts assist with a deeper understanding of the same social phenomena in (post)modern contexts?

It becomes clear from historical studies that the spheres of political power, education, and religion, in particular, contributed towards the formation of the multilingual and/or monolingual landscapes in the past. The complex interaction amongst these and other spheres of social life contributed heavily towards the language landscapes of particular geographical areas and historical epochs. It is worth investigating whether this complex interaction presents a universal pattern which spans over centuries and geographical boundaries.

The dynamics of linguistic contexts and the questions articulated above, brought the editors of this book to the idea of starting a multidisciplinary project to investigate what the relationships are between *lingua francas* and multilingualism, between mono-/multilingualism and identity, and between mono-/multilingualism and political power (imperialism, in particular). The idea was first raised by Angelika Berlejung, when over a glass of wine in Heidelberg, she discussed the possibility of such a project with Louis Jonker. The latter, in turn, discussed the topic over a cup of coffee with some colleagues in Stellenbosch, particularly with Izak Cornelius (a scholar of the ancient Mediterranean world) and Christa van der Walt (an educationist with a specialisation in matters of multilingualism). Both these colleagues, like Louis Jonker, are fellows of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Bonn), and they considered organising a

colloquium on the theme, where colleagues from various disciplines could be brought into conversation on the topic. After they successfully applied for a grant from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, this colloquium was held in Stellenbosch in September 2019.

Although scholars from divergent academic fields took part, the common denominator was the very dynamic interaction between mono- and multilingualism in ancient and (post)modern contexts, be it political, in education, in religious expression, or in cultural identification. Furthermore, all participants were eager to learn from one another: scholars interested in contemporary education debates about language were keen to hear how language functioned in ancient contexts; and scholars of the ancient world were keen to learn about psycho- and social linguistics; about how power and language, and identity and language, are configured in contemporary society.

During the colloquium, amazement was often expressed by participants who felt enriched by the input of their colleagues in totally different, but related fields of study.

This volume contains about half of the papers that were presented at the aforementioned colloquium. Unfortunately, and for various reasons, it was not possible to bring together all the papers in one volume, which would have been the best way of presenting our multidisciplinary interaction on the topic of multilingualism to a wider public. The collection of chapters in the present volume are all from scholars involved in research on the ancient southwest-Asian world (sometimes called the ancient Near Eastern world), or in theological disciplines where the issue of multilingualism also has a significant impact. The volume thus mainly investigates how multilingualism functioned in ancient contexts, and particularly in the spheres of religion and culture. We hope to publish a second volume from this project in which the linguistic and educational perspectives will also be disseminated. Eventually, the two volumes will be a representation of our very fruitful deliberations on the topic of multilingualism in ancient and contemporary contexts.

The present volume was edited by the three scholars of the original planning team who are engaged in research on ancient materials. What is contained in this volume is original research by all contributors, based on the extensive work that each is doing in her/his field of specialisation. After presentation of the essays at the colloquium in September 2019, all contributors were requested to finalise their manuscripts, taking into account the feedback from the colloquium, and cross-referencing the inputs that they have heard. After receiving the final manuscripts, the editors gave further feedback to the contributors, and the final revised versions were included in the draft manuscript that was submitted to the publisher, African Sun Media.

The publisher then submitted the whole volume, before publication, for peer reviewing to four anonymous specialists, who provided further valuable feedback and suggestions, which have been included in the final manuscript by the authors and editors. The editors want to express their appreciation to the four anonymous peer reviewers for their excellent evaluations and thorough feedback. It is clear that they took our work seriously, that they are specialists in the various fields of ancient studies, and that they are committed to the communal task of delivering high-quality scholarship. We thank them, as well as Wikus van Zyl of African Sun Media who facilitated contact between the reviewers and the editors.

We would hereby also like to acknowledge the financial support of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung (Bonn) for the organisation of the initial colloquium (with travel costs etc. covered for participants from European countries). We also acknowledge a grant received from Subcommittee A of the Stellenbosch University Research Development Division which covered a substantial part of the costs for the publication of this book. The very professional publication service provided by African Sun Media, under the able guidance of Wikus van Zyl, is also acknowledged here.

The book is organised in the following manner: After an opening chapter by Angelika Berlejung, in which she puts the matter of multilingualism and language choice in the ancient Near East on the table, the rest of the chapters are arranged according to geographical areas in the ancient southwest-Asian world. Herbert Niehr, Izak Cornelius, Laura Gonnermann, Felix Hagemeyer, and Gideon Kotzé cover various aspects of the linguistic landscape in ancient Anatolia and the Levant. The Mesopotamian regions are the focus of the contributions of Renate Marian Van Dijk-Coombes and Karen Radner, while Louis Jonker focuses on Achaemenid Persia. Roman and early Christian contexts are addressed in the contributions of Jeremy Punt, Marco Frenschkowski, and Marius Nel.

Two studies move beyond the ancient contexts, namely that by Roderich Barth who focuses on languages of emotion from the perspective of the philosophy and history of emotions, and by Alexander Deeg who addresses the issue of multilingualism in liturgies of the early Christian church. After suggestions from the peer reviewers, the editors decided to include a final section which could potentially build a bridge towards critical engagement with linguists and educationists on the matter of multilingualism, and which could explore the implications of the present study on ancient contexts for modern-day debates. The editors requested that one of the participants in the September 2019 colloquium, Mbulungeni Madiba (specialising in multilingualism in education, and presently the dean of the Education Faculty at Stellenbosch University) would do so in a final section of this volume.

In this way, the road forward is paved to engage with scholars of contemporary studies on multilingualism, particularly in education. While the last chapter, which was also peer reviewed before publication, will summarise the arguments of each contribution, this introduction does not offer – as is customary in the introductions of anthologies – such summaries. The volume ends with an index, containing references to the names of sites/cities/places, kings, gods and goddesses, and a selection of relevant subjects in the fields of multilingualism and ancient studies.

The hope is hereby expressed that the reader will find the deliberations on multilingualism in ancient contexts stimulating enough to take the debate further into contemporary discussions.

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