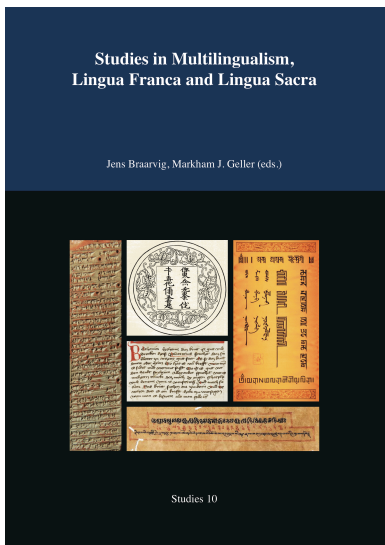Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge
Studies 10

Markham J. Geller and Jens Braarvig:
Introduction

In: Jens Braarvig and Markham J. Geller: *Studies in Multilingualism, Lingua Franca and Lingua Sacra*
Online version at http://mprl-series.mpg.de/studies/10/

Introduction

Markham J. Geller and Jens Braarvig

Communication across borders, in connection with diffusion of knowledge and commerce, usually requires a lingua franca. Historically a number of such common languages, written or spoken and often the languages of great empires and religions, have influenced the various national languages of their users formally and conceptually, making communication possible beyond national and ethnic borders while serving the purpose of sharing knowledge, even globally. On this basis, we have decided to put together a number of studies related to lingua franca and its counterpart lingua sacra to see how they operate within various multilingual environments.

The study opens with two theoretical contributions of Salverda and Braarvig, which present the essential arguments for lingua franca within both non-European and European contexts, from antiquity through modernity. Reinier Salverda leads off with actual theories of lingua franca and lingua sacra in modernity, with his own examples derived from various literary genres within the humanities and social sciences (e.g. anthropology, cultural / intellectual history, *Wissensgeschichte*, etc.), ending with a few thoughts on lingua franca in antiquity. Jens Braarvig, on the other hand, delves into a discussion of dependent languages, drawn from a wide variety of examples known from written records before c. 1500 CE. Braarvig explores the multi-faceted relationships between a dominant lingua franca and other (minor) languages which are bound to it through commerce, administration, religion, warfare, and other kinds of political and social relationships.

The first case studies in this volume treat aspects of historical situations and literatures related to multilingualism within a European context. These individual studies are presented thematically rather than chronologically or geographically, and since such patterns of semantic and linguistic influence are easiest to determine in more recent periods, we begin with European languages in close proximity and showing influences on the deepest levels of semantics as well as lexicography and grammar. The first example, therefore, concerns the intimate relationships between Latin and German, as explained by Kurt Gärtner, who provides a detailed summary of loanwords and loan concepts between Latin and medieval German. Gärtner's study leads naturally into that of Kathrin Chlench-Priber, who describes the translations of Konrad of Megenberg from Latin to German, and how Konrad adopted Greek and Latin terms into German as technical vocabulary, but that these coined terms never succeeded in entering spoken German.

At the same time as these efforts to translate Latin or Greek into German were taking place, Slavonic scholarship was busy translating religious and scientific texts into Church Slavonic after the introduction of Christianity into Eastern Europe, resulting in Church Slavonic's widespread influence in the East. This leads us to a second category of language related to lingua franca, which can be classified as lingua sacra, characterized by the formal adoption of a language for the dissemination of sacred texts, either as the primary language of holy scriptures or as a translation of religious texts. In some cases, the cate-

gories of lingua franca and lingua sacra overlap (e.g. Arabic), although often with a primary and secondary status, so that either a lingua franca becomes adopted as a lingua sacra or vice versa; in this way, an already widely spoken language can be used to translate sacred texts (e.g. Targumic Aramaic or Syriac) and develop a new status as lingua sacra—also used in liturgy—or a language used to compose holy texts becomes used as a lingua franca (e.g. Sanskrit). Two examples of this phenomenon provided by Florentina Badalanova Geller are somewhat unusual and not normally considered in this connection, namely Old Church Slavonic and Turkish, very different examples of the use of a lingua sacra reflecting both biblical and parabiblical traditions which also found their way into popular narratives. She brings evidence from Slavonic texts being used in both Christian and Muslim contexts to convey holy texts and stories from canonical scriptures in local languages (e.g. Bulgarian or Russian), with the assumption being that these were the original languages of these accounts, as reflected in the "domestication" of biblical toponyms and personal names into the localities of the translators and narrators. In a second contribution, Badalanova Geller presents the unusual case of a Turkish poem originating from an Alevi community in Bulgaria which was designated as "Quran," with the language showing a mixture of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. Daniel Andersson's article also deals with translation and reception in seventeenth-century England, but in this case he describes the earliest translations of Arabic into English.

The next case studies refer to older traditions from the Near East, with questions raised about writing systems and ancient languages in contact, and although the semantics of ancient Near Eastern texts are not yet always perfectly understood, there is a wealth of data being constantly re-evaluated by modern scholarship. In fact, writing systems can vary greatly within cuneiform syllabaries as well as within alphabets, as shown by the extensive data produced by Klaus Wagensonner's study of Sumerian orthographies from the end of the second millennium BCE (the so-called Middle Assyrian period), long after Sumerian ceased to be spoken but retained its status as the classical language of scholarship, incantations, and liturgy. Wagensonner argues that the processes of translating Sumerian into Akkadian contributed to the survival of Sumerian, even if orthographies no longer reflected the standard writings of earlier periods. A short paper from Mark Geller questions whether Semitic roots could have been identified by Mesopotamian scholars writing in syllabic cuneiform script, or whether it was the invention of the alphabet (first attested in Ugarit) which first drew attention to the three-root radicals of Semitic languages. Although this might reflect psycholinguistics, the evidence of ancient lexicography forms the basis for the present argument that syllabaries had to find other kinds of ordering principles than those known from alphabetic scripts.

This point has ramifications for other aspects of lingua franca, since great cultural languages often exported their writing systems to other languages, and particularly important in this connection was the Aramaic writing system which diffused all over Eurasia. The question is whether the *scriptura franca* of the alphabet was also the first writing system to order words according to *radicals* of roots. A good case can also be made for the lists of roots (*dhātu*, "elements") of all Sanskrit words in the Indian grammarian Pāṇini (c. 400 BCE), whose *Dhātupaṭha* would be the first to employ the idea of verbal roots.[1]

---

[1] In *Pāṇini* you have the word *dhātu*, which means "place" (where you put or place something; the root(!) being *dhā-* "to place," related to τίθημι, θήσις), best translated as "element." The Dhātupāṭha is an ordered list to which

Jan Tavernier adds to the discussion by contrasting the multilingualism of Elam and the relationships between Elamite and its neighbors, Sumerian and Akkadian, with the more elaborate multilingualism in the same region under Achaemenid rule, in which Aramaic (rather than Persian) was adopted as lingua franca. This paper shows that relationships between a lingua franca and other languages can vary greatly within the same region over time, and that Elamite existed alongside Sumerian and Akkadian for some two millennia prior to the emergence of the Persian Empire. The next contribution dealing with Mesopotamia also views the role of lingua franca over an extended period, but in this case from antiquity into modern uses of language. Lutz Edzard takes a highly original approach to Semitic (and European) languages within the registers of treaties and diplomatic correspondence, through which he compares famous treaties in antiquity between Egypt and its northern neighbors (i.e. Mesopotamia and Anatolia), but then making the surprising leap into comparisons of treaties between the modern State of Israel and its neighbors (e.g. Security Council Resolution No. 242); for modernity, Edzard compares translations of diplomatic texts between Hebrew, Arabic, and Amharic with versions in Italian, Spanish, French, Chinese, and Russian. Edzard concludes that modern translations of such documents, even after millennia of experience, cannot entirely prevent misunderstandings between versions of the same documents.

Alexandra von Lieven's paper, the final contribution to the Near East, counters the usual perception that Egyptians in Roman Egypt were enthusiastic learners of Greek; she presents clear examples of Greeks who learned or attempted to learn Egyptian, for a variety of reasons, among these being Cleopatra VII. She also highlights instances of texts which appear to be translations from Greek into Egyptian, although the translators themselves and their specific motives are unknown.

The focus of contributions now shifts to the India and Central Asia, beginning with Velizar Sadovski's comparisons between the liturgical and ritual texts of the Veda and Avesta and how motifs were catalogued within learned environments. Comparisons between these literatures demonstrate remarkable parallels and similar patterns, showing how religious motifs can cross boundaries and cultures. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst's survey of the scope and variety of extant texts found in the Silk Road site of Turfan presents a remarkable picture of multilingualism in a cross-road of competing cultures. This article catalogues more than twenty different languages and scripts preserving Manichaean texts in Turfan, which makes this place into a unique repository of examples of lingua franca and lingua sacra. The Turfan scenario contrasts sharply with the picture of multilingualism from ancient China, which is the next region under consideration.

William Boltz's paper finds no evidence of multilingualism or lingua franca in pre-imperial China, prior to political unification in the third century BCE, and even after unification, little evidence of multilingualism can be found apart from that introduced by the advent of Buddhism to China in the second century CE. Boltz documents the virtual silence of Chinese sources regarding non-Chinese languages and foreign scripts. Jens Braarvig's second contribution to this volume examines the process of Buddhism being imported into China and Tibet through the medium of Sanskrit, but with somehow different results and methods. In both cases, the introduction of Buddhist texts into Chinese and Tibetan cultures involved translation and the invention of new vocabulary, but with very different results

---

any word can be reduced, hence the equivalent of the modern term "root." The concept in the form of *dhātu* is known at the time of Pāṇini, that is, c. 400 BCE.

based on the respective recipient cultures. The discussion raises many important issues of reception history, both on the level of lingua franca and lingua sacra. A somewhat different picture is posed by Vladimir Tikhonov, who discusses how non-Chinese peoples of East Asia used Chinese as both a lingua franca and lingua sacra (for Buddhism and Confucianism). In fact, Chinese as lingua sacra was so heavily influenced by Sanskrit that it became referred to as Buddhist Hybrid Chinese, which spread throughout East Asia. Moreover, classical Chinese functioned as a lingua franca for administrative purposes until the late nineteenth century, in addition to its traditional role as lingua sacra. The final contribution in this collection, by Lars Pharo, shifts our attention to the West, to the phenomenon of lingua franca and lingua sacra in the Americas from the sixteenth century, which is a highly complex linguistic environment in which regions with numerous indigenous languages were invaded by Europeans speaking other languages. The contacts and competition between languages produced many instances of loanwords and loan concepts which make for invaluable case studies of multilingualism in this region.

This unusual selection of topics related to lingua franca and lingua sacra are far from representing the last word on these themes, but the present study is intended to re-open the discussion of the topic from a multidisciplinary and multi-faceted perspective, both on the levels of theory and actual examples from various regions in which lingua franca and lingua sacra have played key roles in cultural exchange. Although the scope of the volume is global, drawing examples chiefly from recorded historical cultures, it shows that there are many topics still awaiting further study within the broad spectrum of universal comparative philology. The present collection of articles shows how complex a theme multilingualism remains and that we are far from having the full picture of how complex relationships between languages in close contact and proximity reflect deep-seated exchanges of information and cultural norms.