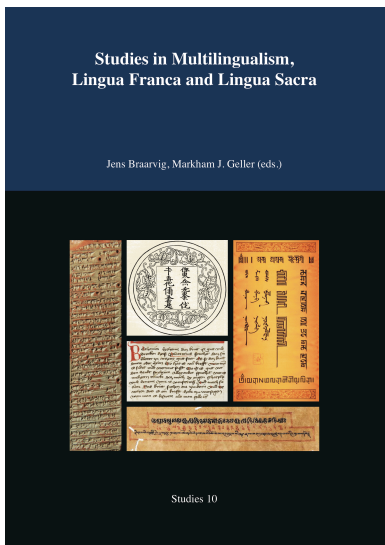


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## Studies 10

*Reinier Salverda:*

Empires and their Languages: Reflections on the History and the Linguistics of Lingua Franca and Lingua Sacra



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## Chapter 1

# Empires and their Languages: Reflections on the History and the Linguistics of Lingua Franca and Lingua Sacra

*Reinier Salverda*

### Introduction

This contribution on lingua sacra and lingua franca comes in four main sections. Section 1.1 will set out the linguistic and historical preliminaries necessary for our investigation. In section 1.2, we will take a closer look, first, at the historic Lingua Franca that was spoken for centuries around the Mediterranean; then also at the development and properties of lingua franca as a general category in modern linguistics. In section 1.3, we will explore the varieties of lingua sacras and the sources of their sacredness; then next go on to discuss the linguistic properties of lingua sacra, in particular with respect to sociolinguistics, speech act performatives and orality.

Our interest in the history of lingua franca and lingua sacra is a contemporary one, and while examining a range of historic cases we will start from a modern *point de vue*, using concepts, categories and analyses from contact linguistics. Beyond history and linguistics, we will draw also on disciplines such as anthropology, cultural history, theology, the social history of language, *Wissensgeschichte*, global intellectual history, and so forth. Underpinning this eclectic approach is the endeavor to assemble our findings on lingua franca and lingua sacra into an integrated framework of investigation, using a systematic Jakobsonian, functional-structural approach to the study of language.

Throughout, our focus will be on questions such as: What are the characteristic properties of lingua sacra, and of lingua franca? What connection, if any, is there between the function or purpose each of them serves and their linguistic form and structure? And what about their history and the difference in *longue durée* between the two—lingua sacra often as a stable, continuous symbolic cultural capital down the centuries, while lingua franca appears to enjoy a different kind of longevity: not continuous but intermittently and recurrently, more like a weed that will always grow anew, however much one tries to cut it back.

In section 1.4, we will look into the historic interaction of lingua franca and lingua sacra, and look forward to what is the ultimate purpose of this contribution, viz. to serve as a springboard towards studying the role, the interplay and the dynamics of lingua franca and lingua sacra in the empires of the Ancient World.

## 1.1 Multilingualism in Linguistic and Historical Perspective: Preliminary Considerations

### 1.1.1 Introduction

Lingua franca and lingua sacra are two very different notions, involving very different disciplines and domains of knowledge. On the one hand, lingua franca—as a vehicle necessary for bridging gaps of communication and comprehension between speakers of different languages—clearly belongs within the domain of linguistics, and today it has a central place in the study of multilingualism and language contact. In contrast, however, lingua sacra or “sacred language,” is currently only of marginal interest to linguists, though it does occupy an important place in the history of religions, ideas, cultures and civilizations, and in social and political history—domains, where lingua franca is mostly absent.

Meanwhile, from the history of languages we learn that at the end of Classical Antiquity it was St. Jerome’s *Vulgate*, his translation of the Bible into Vulgar Latin (at that time the lingua franca of the West Roman Empire), which was used to spread the Christian religion across Europe. For this translation St. Jerome did not use the elegant classical literary Latin of the golden age of Cicero and Seneca, but rather the common, much debased, corrupted and simplified lingo spoken in his own time—a choice justified by St. Augustine with a resounding missionary argument: “*Melius est reprehendunt nos grammatici quam non intelligent populi*” (It is better for our grammarians to reproach us than for the masses not to understand).<sup>1</sup> In later centuries, this Bible Latin became the lingua sacra of the Roman Church, and this elevation has been a powerful force for the *longue durée*<sup>2</sup> of this language and for its maintenance until today. A comparable case from early modern history concerns Hebrew, which in eighteenth-century Europe served simultaneously as the lingua sacra of Judaism and as the lingua franca of the Jews living in many different countries of the diaspora.<sup>3</sup>

So what else do we know of such language constellations, and what insights do we have that can help us to understand them? How, for example, did the particular, historical Lingua Franca that used to be spoken all round the Mediterranean, become a byword for the general category of lingua francas? Which lingua francas and which lingua sacras do we encounter in history; how were they used and by whom; how did they function; and what linguistic properties did they have? And, from a more general perspective: could it be that with lingua franca and lingua sacra we have to do not with two actual languages, but rather with different roles, uses or functions of language—instances, perhaps, of De Saussure’s distinction between the *esprit de clocher* and the *force d’intercourse*,<sup>4</sup> two very different and counteracting, although not mutually exclusive forces, the interaction of which generates the dynamics of language in history?

These and other such questions will be discussed in this contribution, the purpose of which is to try and clarify the notions of lingua franca and lingua sacra, defining their place in history and in linguistics, as well as the conceptual networks around them. But, faced with the very different disciplinary perspectives mentioned above, we will also have to explore how these may be combined into an integrated approach that can do justice to both, and

<sup>1</sup> Wolff (2003, 50).

<sup>2</sup> In the sense of Braudel (1972).

<sup>3</sup> Levi (1785–1787). Cf. Barnett (1935–1939).

<sup>4</sup> De Saussure (1972, 281).

contribute to our understanding of the dynamics and interaction of lingua franca and lingua sacra. As a framework for this investigation we will adopt a systematic structural-functional approach to linguistics along the lines of Jakobson's *Linguistics and Poetics*.<sup>5</sup> This will involve us in questions such as: What can we say about the characteristic linguistic features of lingua sacra and lingua franca? What, if any, is the connection between their linguistic form and the function they serve? And what about their histories, evolution, dynamics, and the difference in *longue durée* between lingua sacra and lingua franca?

As for the structure of this contribution, in this first section, we will discuss the linguistic and historical preliminaries necessary for our investigation. In the next section, we will take a closer look, first at the historic Lingua Franca as spoken for many centuries around the ports of the Mediterranean until the beginning of the twentieth century; then also at the development of lingua franca as a general category in modern contact linguistics. In section 1.3, we will explore the notion of *lingua sacra* as well as the linguistic features associated with it. In the closing section, our focus will be on the dynamics of lingua franca and lingua sacra in contact in history, as a springboard towards studying the interaction of languages and empires in the Ancient World.

### 1.1.2 Linguistic Preliminaries

#### On language(s) and linguistics in general

The following preliminary assumptions and considerations appear to me crucial when studying language(s), multilingualism, lingua franca and lingua sacra in modern (contact) linguistics.

**(1) *Language is always much more than “just” language*** Every language comes with its own characteristic and richly varied structures, the operation of which involves all kinds of underlying mechanisms of our minds and our brains. But every language also comes with many other equally significant characteristic aspects: with symbolic power and with meaning, content and information; with a context in culture and history plus a range of functions to serve in communication; with implications in the interaction between people, in relation to the conventions of the relevant social setting; but also as a marker of its speakers' identity, class, personality, intentions, gender, ideology, education, and so forth. Each of these different aspects—in fact, anything that is humanly possible, ranging from emotion, imagination, reason, worldview and religion through to politeness, humor, attitude, health, cooperation, trust, misunderstanding, prejudice or outright hostility and aggression—can exert its influence and leave a trace in the shape of the language concerned or in the linguistic behavior of its speakers, in its structure, content or vocabulary; its sound shape, tone of voice and silences; its social register, style or choice of words; in meanings expressed or implied in speech acts; and in its use and functioning in context.

The discipline of modern linguistics is no less complex and diverse in character. As Ferenc Kiefer and Piet van Sterkenburg have demonstrated with their collection of keynote lectures for the five-yearly international conferences of the *Comité International Permanent de Linguistes* (CIPL), over the century since the *Cours de Linguistique Générale* of

<sup>5</sup>Jakobson (1987). Cf. Salverda (1999, 51–53).

Ferdinand de Saussure<sup>6</sup> the discipline of linguistics has taken an enormous flight.<sup>7</sup> With 32 very different major subject areas, the landmark 10-volume Elsevier *Encyclopedia of Linguistics*<sup>8</sup> mirrors the complexity of our object of investigation, language. So does the Blackwell *Handbook of Linguistics* by Aronoff and Rees-Miller,<sup>9</sup> which is just one volume in a series of 35 authoritative handbooks, each containing between thirty and forty expert chapters, which, taken together, cover all the major subdisciplines within linguistics today. The same holds for CIPL's *Linguistic Bibliography Online*, published by Brill, and its vast, annual coverage since 1949 of scholarly publications from all subdisciplines of theoretical linguistics, both general and language-specific, from all geographic areas, and with special attention to non-Indo-European, endangered and extinct languages. What these various tools of the trade demonstrate is that the study of language today is as wide-ranging, diverse and complex a field of inquiry as the object, language, with which we are concerned.

**(2) Language is never just “a” language** With an estimated 7,000 languages in the world today,<sup>10</sup> broadly divided into 250 very different language families, of which the Indo-European family, containing some 439 languages and dialects, is just one,<sup>11</sup> linguistic diversity is a basic fact of life all around the world. The large majority of the world's population today are living in situations where having a multilingual repertoire is a daily, “normal and unremarkable necessity.”<sup>12</sup>

Now, if we combine this enormous diversity of languages with the complexity of the discipline of linguistics which we noted above, we will quickly run into a myriad multiplicity of questions and problems for investigation—testimony to the ongoing growth, expansion and deepening of the domain of linguistics. Note, for example, that while Aronoff and Rees-Miller's *Handbook of Linguistics* contains just one single chapter on the subject of multilingualism,<sup>13</sup> the later *Handbook of Bilingualism and Multilingualism* by Bhatia and Ritchie needs no fewer than 36 expert chapters to cover the key issues involved in this subfield alone.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, in the opening chapter of this *Handbook*, John Edwards, in an attempt to bring some order to the discussion, presents an ecolinguistic typology and classification of different situations of multilingualism.<sup>15</sup> There is a clear need for this, as it is extremely difficult to arrive at tenable comparisons and generalizations, since so many language situations are so very different in so many respects. So, it makes good sense to start from a range of in-depth case studies, based on careful observation, comparison, and solid description. But at the same time, we cannot simply restrict ourselves to doing case studies, studying each and everyone of all those very many and very different languages individually, in and by themselves in all their unique and rich variety, however fascinating this would be. Amidst all this linguistic diversity, there is a clear need to ensure coherence of approach, and for

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<sup>6</sup>De Saussure (1972).

<sup>7</sup>Kiefer and van Sterkenburg (2013).

<sup>8</sup>Asher and Simpson (1994).

<sup>9</sup>Aronoff and Rees-Miller (2001).

<sup>10</sup>See <http://www.ethnologue.com>, accessed April 3, 2017. Cf. Calvet (2011).

<sup>11</sup>Janson (2002); Fischer (2005); Breton (2003).

<sup>12</sup>Aronoff and Rees-Miller (2001, 512). Cf. Baker and Jones (1998).

<sup>13</sup>Aronoff and Rees-Miller (2001).

<sup>14</sup>Bhatia and Ritchie (2013).

<sup>15</sup>Edwards (2013).

this we will need a common ground and a shared focus of inquiry. In my view, we have this in the human language faculty. But this notion is not discussed in Bhatia and Ritchie's *Handbook* (see further below, in subsection (4)).

**(3) *The perspective of time*** At this point, we may ask how old multilingualism and linguistic diversity really are. It is not just the world of today which is multilingual; the past has had its fair share too. Many languages have vanished, and from Anglosaxon and Etruscan via Ostrogothic, Punic and Sumerian to Tocharian, Vandal and Wiradhuri we can draw up a long list of extinct languages<sup>16</sup>—some of which we may still know today, if they have been preserved in writing and deciphered; while others we may still know of, if at some point somebody has cared to leave a mention or a name.

When we travel back in time, what we find is that, at each and every stage of the written record for the past 5,000 years, there have always been many languages in the world. Three millennia BCE, Uruk in Sumer, the city of Gilgamesh and cuneiform writing, was a large multilingual metropolis<sup>17</sup>—and so were many other city states in the Ancient Orient, such as Babylon, Ebla, Hattusa, Mari, Niniveh, Nippur or Palmyra. Ever since those ancient times, monolingualism may have been a most powerful dream, ideal or norm,<sup>18</sup> but the fact is that there has always been linguistic diversity in the world. Going back in time from today's multilingual New York<sup>19</sup> and London<sup>20</sup> to the time of Uruk, we can track its existence at all intermediate stages of known history—in eighteenth-century Europe,<sup>21</sup> the Renaissance,<sup>22</sup> and the Middle Ages<sup>23</sup> no less than in the Roman Empire,<sup>24</sup> the Celtic and the Germanic world,<sup>25</sup> the Hellenistic World,<sup>26</sup> Persia,<sup>27</sup> the Phoenician Mediterranean,<sup>28</sup> as well as the pre-classical Orient,<sup>29</sup> and beyond this along the Silk Road and farther.<sup>30</sup> As Rankin put it: “It is not easy to assume the monolingual uniformity of any inhabited area in ancient time.”<sup>31</sup>

And before Uruk? Here, as Steven Fischer has observed,<sup>32</sup> there is “an absolute boundary of linguistic reconstruction” in “the teeming linguascape of 10,000 years ago.” Beyond that boundary, we move into evolutionary time—when it may well have taken very long indeed, from the earliest beginnings of language (perhaps about 100,000, or possibly 200,000 years ago)<sup>33</sup> until the final assemblage of the disparate components—such as vocal imitation and language play, signaling behavior and communicative interaction, speech sound

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Austin (2008); Haarmann (2006); Moseley (2007; 2010); Price (1998).

<sup>17</sup>Crüsemann (2013, 32, 190, 260, 311). Cf. Bienkowski and Millard (2000, 84, 174–175).

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Borst (1995); Phillipson (2003).

<sup>19</sup>García and Fishman (1997).

<sup>20</sup>Salverda (2006).

<sup>21</sup>Haskins Gonthier and Sandrier (2007).

<sup>22</sup>Burke (2004); Peersman (2014).

<sup>23</sup>Richter (1994); Smith (2005); Wolff (2003).

<sup>24</sup>Adams (2003); Sawyer (1999).

<sup>25</sup>Schrijver (2013); Rankin (1987).

<sup>26</sup>Walbank (1992); Ascherson (1996); Harrison (1998); Munson (2005).

<sup>27</sup>Frye (1963, 48).

<sup>28</sup>Fontana and le Maux (2007); Garbini (1988); Ruiz Darasse and Luján (2011).

<sup>29</sup>Soden (2006); Aruz (2008).

<sup>30</sup>Beckwith (2009).

<sup>31</sup>Rankin (1987, 9).

<sup>32</sup>Fischer (2005, 84).

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Janson (2002).

production, the use of structured and meaningful units and verbal memory, plus the growth of the brain, of the so-called “speech organs,” and of the neural mechanisms required for this—which eventually evolved into our human faculty of language.<sup>34</sup> A common assumption here is that “languages with grammars and vocabularies similar to today’s have been spoken for at least 40,000 years.”<sup>35</sup>

With linguistic diversity of such substantial character as ancient as that, one can understand why Fischer has come to reject the notion that there has ever been one single protolanguage,<sup>36</sup> just as much as the idea of monogenesis, that is, the hypothesis that all languages in the world today derive from one single source language or *Ursprache* that was once shared by all mankind.

**(4) Our human language faculty** If, now, on the one hand, with Fischer, what we are looking for is no longer that putative, single, universal but nonexistent *Ursprache*, then, at the same time, we must also note, conversely, that the unfettered variation and multiplicity of languages which we encounter in Bhatia and Ritchie’s *Multilingualism Handbook* does not, in and of itself, offer a coherent and unified focus of inquiry. So, somewhere in between these two extremes we shall have to find a way forward, making the most of what we know, and using anything we can that modern linguistics has to offer in ideas, expertise, data, methods, concepts and theories about language and languages.

In my view, in the investigation of linguistic diversity our primary focus should not just be on all those very many languages taken individually, however fascinating that is, but rather go beyond this to the underlying human language faculty, which enables us humans to generate all those very different languages, and also to cope with and overcome—however (im)perfectly, as the case may be—the differences, gaps and barriers between those languages. We humans do not come into the world equipped with a single, particular, fully-fledged language. We are born unfinished, helpless and dependent on others, but fortunately endowed with all kinds of abilities, faculties and senses—one of which is the human language faculty. And as Wilhelm von Humboldt (1836, lxvi—“*Die Sprache ist das bildende Organ des Gedanken*”),<sup>37</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure (1972, 26—“*la faculté de constituer une langue*”) and Noam Chomsky (1965, 4—“*the Humboldtian conception of underlying competence*”) have pointed out over the past two centuries, it is this human language faculty which constitutes the unifying focus that should be at the centre of investigation within the multi-faceted discipline of linguistics, and which should ultimately enable us to make sense of that 7,000-fold complexity of languages that exists in the world in which we live.

The same holds true when we are studying *lingua sacra* and *lingua franca*, and so the question that should concern us here is: What can these two tell us about the capabilities, the structure and functioning of our human language faculty?

### On *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* in contact linguistics

**(5) The centrality of language contact and contact linguistics** Given the pervasive presence and extent of linguistic diversity all round the world, everywhere we go we will find

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<sup>34</sup>Cf. Fischer (2005).

<sup>35</sup>Janson (2002, 4).

<sup>36</sup>Fischer (2005, 56).

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Aarsleff (1988, xix).

languages and their speakers in contact, and people for whom having a multilingual repertoire is an everyday living reality and necessity. That makes language contact a central and crucial phenomenon in everyday life.

The problem this poses for linguistics is a major one: How is it possible for us humans to handle this enormous complexity and diversity at all? How can our language abilities, our minds and brains, our language faculty cope with this? How can we overcome all the obstacles and barriers that are facing us here?

Yet, the point is: We can. And we do so through language contact. That is to say, however deeply each one of us may be stamped by the imprint of our mother tongue, the fact is that no one is for ever locked into their own particular language: we can always find ways to escape from this prison house. That makes language contact—and our ability to overcome gaps and barriers between languages—one of the most intriguing feats of human behavior there is.

The study of language contact today constitutes a major area of interest in linguistic research, as we can see in Yaron Matras's *Language Contact*<sup>38</sup> and in Raymond Hickey's *Handbook of Language Contact*.<sup>39</sup> This field of study was inaugurated early last century by "the omniscient Hugo Schuchardt,"<sup>40</sup> a pivotal figure in modern linguistics, who inspired an important tradition of Central European multilingual scholarship carried forward by members of the Prague Linguistics Circle. By the middle of the twentieth century Uriel Weinreich published his *Languages in Contact*,<sup>41</sup> and demonstrated how language contact can affect all levels, elements and dimensions of the languages and language systems involved.<sup>42</sup> From 1996 contact linguistics has had its own encyclopedia, *Kontaktlinguistik*,<sup>43</sup> which details the research program, historical development, major contributions, geolinguistic scope and disciplinary perspectives of this subfield—which is by no means general knowledge, not even among linguists.

Today, stimulated certainly also by the seminal *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics* of Sarah Thomason and Terrence Kaufmann,<sup>44</sup> this is a thriving field, with its three basic "laws" of language contact formulated by Peter Nelde: (i) contact between languages is always contact between human beings speaking those languages; (ii) language contact is always asymmetrical and unequal; and (iii) language conflicts are never "just" about language, but always also about other matters, such as religion, land, race, power, water, food, resources, and so forth.<sup>45</sup>

As for the research questions that contact linguists are interested in, Els Oksaar has given an important programmatic statement:

Contact linguistics research today is a broad interdisciplinary area of research. From a macro-analytic perspective, language contact originates from cultural, economic, political and scientific contact between ethnic and demographic groups. Micro-analytically considered, the starting point and the medium of

<sup>38</sup>Matras (2009).

<sup>39</sup>Hickey (2010).

<sup>40</sup>Jakobson and Waugh (1979, 178). Cf. Spitzer (1922); Meijer and Muysken (1977); Gilbert (1980).

<sup>41</sup>Weinreich (1953).

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Weinreich (2013 [1957]; 1968).

<sup>43</sup>Goebl (1996–1997).

<sup>44</sup>Thomason and Kaufman (1988).

<sup>45</sup>Nelde (1997).



these contacts are multilingual people who speak, besides their mother tongue, another or several other languages (dialects, sociolects). Language contact arises from the direct or indirect social interaction of speakers, influenced by the units of the communicative act and its sociocultural context. Appropriate topics for language contact are all levels of language system and language use at which changes arise when two or more languages, dialects or sociolects come into contact. Included in investigations today are also psychological, sociological, cultural, political and geographical aspects and conditions of language contact, when it is a question of determining not only *what* is at issue in a case of contact, but also *how* and *why* which contact phenomena arise or have arisen. This complex of questions has only been systematically formulated since the early 1950s.<sup>46</sup>

**(6) *The necessity of lingua franca in language contact*** When we now take a closer look, the question is: How does this contact between languages and their speakers actually work? And what sort of mechanisms and processes does it involve? A good starting point here is offered by Larry Trask, who defines language contact as:

Any change in a language resulting from the influence of a neighboring language of which the speakers of the first have some knowledge; the passage of linguistic objects or features from one language to another. The effects of contact may range from the trivial to the overwhelming, and may involve vocabulary, phonology, morphology, syntax or just about anything else. The simplest contact is borrowing, but far more radical types are possible, including (for example) metatypy, the creation of non-genetic languages and (the ultimate) language shift.<sup>47</sup>

And indeed, in language contact, it seems that almost anything can happen. Language contact comes in many different shapes, forms and modes, and may have the most diverse effects: not just coexistence of languages, borrowing and bilingualism (active and passive), but also linguistic and cultural transfer, imitation, interference, corruption, innovation (or its rejection in purism), accommodation, diglossia, convergence, code switching, (de- and re-)structuration, pidginization, creolization, language mixing, (mis)translation and (mis-)transmission, asymmetric interaction, attitudinal reactions (positive or negative), linguistic rivalries, interventions of power and repression, language endangerment, destruction and loss of knowledge of other-language civilizations, or even linguisticide.

The central fact here is that, in language contact between people of a completely different mother tongue and culture, we humans are capable of reaching out, adapting our language, constructing comprehension, and producing some sort of agreement—or not, as the case may be. But whatever the outcome of language contact, the need to do something to overcome the barriers hampering it is clear and pressing. Thus, language contact “forces people to develop adaptive strategies such as creating and using a lingua franca.”<sup>48</sup> Or, as John Edwards put it: “In such a world [sc. ‘of many languages,’ RS] lingua francas and

<sup>46</sup>Oksaar (1996, 2).

<sup>47</sup>Trask (2000, 183). Cf. Weinreich (2013 [1957]).

<sup>48</sup>Calvet (1981). Cited in Coulmas (2001, 574).

translation are required.”<sup>49</sup> This statement about the necessity of lingua franca, in the first paragraph of the opening chapter on core concepts of multilingualism in the *Handbook* by Bhatia and Ritchie,<sup>50</sup> is a mark of the central place which lingua franca has in multilingualism studies, and especially within contact linguistics today.

Indeed, lingua franca and translation—arising as they both do from need and necessity—provide us with two great methods for overcoming gaps and barriers between languages in order to achieve some form or degree of communication and understanding. There are other such methods—people may engage in language learning; they may adapt and accommodate their language behavior; engage in code switching, or borrow words from the other language; develop a pidgin, or produce a new interlect or interlingua; or perhaps they will go over, partially or completely, to the other language<sup>51</sup>—but always, lingua franca is one of the strategic options we have in our linguistic repertoire when we need to establish communication across a language barrier.

About the general notion of lingua franca, and about the historic Lingua Franca of the Mediterranean we will have more to say below, in section 1.2.

**(7) *Terra incognita: the problem of lingua sacra*** What we do not find in contact linguistics, however, is lingua sacra. Or at least, all we find in Goebel’s *Kontaktlinguistik* is just one single statement, in the chapter about languages in contact in Sweden: “Finnish has been the lingua sacra for most Saami speakers.”<sup>52</sup>

The Finnish referred to here is the language of Laestadianism, a Low Church revivalist movement that developed in the Finnish-speaking Torne Valley during the nineteenth century and spread over the Northern Calotte. As Bodrogi explains, this concerns the Tornedalians in northern Sweden, a linguistic minority of some 50,000 people, originally Finnish speaking, but landed in Sweden because of a repartition of Finland between Russia and Sweden in the eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup> During the nineteenth century they were subject to a very strong Swedish policy of assimilation, which outlawed the use of Finnish in school. However, in small village communities, Finnish—that is: Tornedalian Finnish, also known as Meänkieli—always remained in use as the home language. Then, by the middle of the nineteenth century, up came a strong identity movement led by Lar Levi Lastedius, whose mother tongue was Swedish, with Sami as his second language, while he also spoke excellent Finnish. “The Finnish language he used has become the lingua sacra (sacred language) of Pietism and has remained so ever since among the Sami as well.”<sup>54</sup> It is this fact, viz. that Meänkieli was the language of religion, which since the 1980s has successfully been used to revitalize Finnish as the language of identity of this minority language community. And today, this has been officially approved in the Swedish Language Law of the year 2000.

Beyond this, however, one will find nothing on lingua sacra in Goebel’s *Kontaktlinguistik*,<sup>55</sup> or in contact linguistics in general.<sup>56</sup> Lingua sacra also does not come up in Price’s

<sup>49</sup> Edwards (2013, 5).

<sup>50</sup> Bhatia and Ritchie (2013).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Salverda (2003).

<sup>52</sup> Goebel (1996–1997, 972).

<sup>53</sup> Bodrogi (2008).

<sup>54</sup> Bodrogi (2008).

<sup>55</sup> Goebel (1996–1997).

<sup>56</sup> Matras (2009); Hickey (2010).

*Encyclopedia of the Languages of Europe*,<sup>57</sup> nor in Johnston's standard work *Ancient Religion*.<sup>58</sup> Darquennes and VandenBussche offer a useful contribution on the sociology of language and religion, but no discussion of the notion of *lingua sacra*.<sup>59</sup> The single reference to *lingua sacra* in Goebel's *Kontaktlinguistik* above remains the telling exception: a historic case of language repression, religious resistance and language revitalization.

The problem is: as linguists, we do not have a working view of what *lingua sacra* really is, or what its specific linguistic features are. Crystal appears to be the only modern linguist to have taken a scholarly interest in sacred and religious languages,<sup>60</sup> and we would be really hard put to determine that this or that particular language is indeed a sacred language, or state why this is so, or why not. Also, as things stand, it would appear that *lingua sacra* is rather more a belief about language, and that this has to do, essentially, with religion and with sacralization—hence, more a category in religious studies than in (contact) linguistics. So, if we are interested in *lingua sacra*, we shall need to look beyond contact linguistics and draw on studies in other fields—in theology and the history of religion, in cultural anthropology, cultural history, biblical scholarship and philology—in order to come to grips with the notion “sacred” and the factors involved in this.

About these and other questions concerning the notion of *lingua sacra*, we will have more to say in section 1.3 of this contribution.

### 1.1.3 Languages(s) in History: Considerations and Approaches

**(8) *The longue durée of lingua sacra and lingua franca*** As the examples above—about Uruk, Fischer and Finnish—demonstrate, when it comes to language, we cannot do without history.

When we now turn to the historical disciplines and the study of language in history,<sup>61</sup> we encounter a variety of perspectives, ranging from historical sociolinguistics and the social history of language through cultural history and the history of civilizations, of religion, of ideas, thought and ideologies, to Global Intellectual History and *Wissensgeschichte*. Common to them all is the view that, when looking at language, the dimension of time is crucial. Our central focus, correspondingly, will be on language phenomena and developments of the *longue durée*.

Here, to begin with, we note that having the status of *lingua sacra* may contribute enormously to the longevity of the language in question. This is certainly the case with Latin, which—as the language of the Christian message of salvation, of the Bible as God's word, of the Book, of the liturgic rituals, and of the Church as institution—enjoyed a cumulation of sacredness which has ensured it a very long afterlife as a (or perhaps *the*) major language of culture and civilization in European history.

But in the case of *lingua franca* too, we may well be looking at a very much longer time-span than is often thought. The original *Lingua Franca* of the Mediterranean may have some connection to the Vulgar Latin spoken in late Antiquity all around what was then—for more than five hundred years, from 100 BCE till about 600 CE—“*mare nostrum*.”<sup>62</sup> During

<sup>57</sup>Price (1998).

<sup>58</sup>Johnston (2007).

<sup>59</sup>Darquennes and VandenBussche (2011).

<sup>60</sup>Crystal (1956).

<sup>61</sup>Goad (1958); Ostler (2005); Haarmann (2006).

<sup>62</sup>Abulafia (2011, 211).

that long period, it was the spoken Latin of soldiers, colonists, slaves, traders, sailors and the common people, always in contact with other languages,<sup>63</sup> that was widely used as the common linguistic currency around it—not least in North-Africa with its five hundred Roman towns, where in the fifth century this *lingua franca* Latin, now upgraded to *lingua sacra* of the Bible and Christianity, had its fiercest champions in the church fathers St. Jerome and St. Augustine. When, after the fall of the West Roman Empire, North Africa came under Byzantine rule, this linguistic legacy endured for centuries. And after the eighth century Arab Conquest, the new rulers often maintained the existing administrative systems and the literate elites running them; so the Latin language continued to be used alongside the dominant Arabic; and by the twelfth century, as the Andalusian cartographer Al-Idrisi reported, Latin was still in use in the city of Capsa, not far from Carthago in North Africa.<sup>64</sup>

Now it is true that for the historic *Lingua Franca* spoken in North Africa, Thomason and Elgibali have given the fifteenth century as the date of its earliest record in writing.<sup>65</sup> But this leaves wide open the possibility that the spoken use of this language was by then already very much older. Here—unlike in Italy, where Roman Latin developed through spoken Vulgar Latin into early Italian<sup>66</sup>—one could not speak of direct continuation, descentance or filiation. But the fact that some form of late Vulgar Latin, in contact with Arabic, was still around in North Africa by the time the Crusades began, seems relevant and needs to be taken into account when studying the *Lingua Franca*.

Put differently: while on the European continent its sacredness as *lingua sacra* ensured the continuity of Latin as a language of culture, religion, law, administration and learning throughout the Middle Ages and well into the modern era, in contrast around the Mediterranean the longevity of the original *Lingua Franca* appears to have resided in its potentiality: every time it was needed in a multilingual contact situation, it could be readily made up again, the same communicative necessity triggering the same impulse to bridge the language gap, and this, again and again, would produce the *Lingua Franca* anew. We seem to have here two very different kinds of *longue durée*—with *lingua sacra* Latin growing and functioning, tree-like, as a stable and continuous, central social, cultural and powerful symbolic capital lasting through the centuries, whereas *lingua franca* Vulgar Latin enjoyed quite a different kind of longevity, not continuous but intermittent and recurrent, as a practical and disposable ready-made, unstable, spoken and marginal, but very necessary and extremely adaptable—like a weed that will always grow up again, however much one tries to cut it back.

On this reading, *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* can both achieve *longue durée* and longevity for the particular language concerned—though certainly by very different routes, mechanisms and chains of transmission.

**(9) Sociohistorical linguistics and cultural history of language** For the further study of languages in history, a relevant field is that of Historical sociolinguistics, which is the “investigation of language in relation to society from times before the human voice is recorded.”<sup>67</sup> There is a conundrum here: when we aim to reconstruct the realities of the spoken world

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<sup>63</sup> Adams (2003).

<sup>64</sup> Raven (1993, 229).

<sup>65</sup> Thomason and Elgibali (1986).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Smith (2005).

<sup>67</sup> Richter (1995a, 132).

of the past, we can only do so on the basis of the surviving written documents.<sup>68</sup> But more is possible here than one might think, in particular when we adopt the strategy of socio-historical linguistics as defined by Larry Trask:

The application of the concepts, techniques and findings of sociolinguistics to the problems of historical linguistics. The idea is that the observed properties of contemporary speech communities, such as variation, the social significance of variants, and social stratification, must also have been typical of earlier speech communities, and hence that what we can learn by studying change in progress today can be usefully applied in elucidating earlier language change.<sup>69</sup>

In this domain, Richter has demonstrated how, with good use of the available medieval records written in Latin—however marginal, fragmented, corrupted or biased these may be—, one can in fact uncover a lot of interesting information about the other languages that were spoken at the time, and find out who spoke what language to whom, when, where, how, about what and why, in the early medieval world outside the chronicles he studied.<sup>70</sup> On this basis, Richter has established that, within a century of the Norman Conquest, the Norman-French elite in England—a small minority in a sea of Anglosaxon speakers—had to send back their sons to France in order to acquire proper French, which was not possible in England. And this in turn means that, however dominant and persistent until today (e.g. in British legal and parliamentary formulas), the Norman-French language has always remained the foreign language of a small ruling elite and did not become the language of England.

Comparable findings have been reported from the cultural history of the vernacular languages of early modern Europe by Peter Burke,<sup>71</sup> Michel de Certeau<sup>72</sup> and Willem Frijhoff,<sup>73</sup> who on the basis of the available historical records have delved deeply into the sociopolitical, cultural and historical side of those languages and the individuals and communities using them, thus shining a new light on processes such as the rise of the vernaculars, community formation, linguistic unification and the beginning of state formation in early modern Europe. As it turns out, when exploring such language issues in cultural history we can find out much more about the sociolinguistics of the past than previously thought, in particular about linguistic diversity and the range of languages spoken back then. Here too, even though we do not have recordings, the surviving texts can inform us about the coexistence of different languages, and about the linguistic and communicative interactions that were going on at the time.

Of special interest here is the role, mentioned above by Els Oksaar,<sup>74</sup> of intermediaries in language contact. This involves questions such as: What kinds of bilinguals were there, who were they, what was their status, what levels and kinds of contact did they participate in, and what was their linguistic repertoire? What do we know about the language(s) and

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<sup>68</sup>Cf. Piggott (1968, 13).

<sup>69</sup>Trask (2000, 315). Cf. Trudgill (2010); Bergs (2014); Peersman (2014); Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2014).

<sup>70</sup>Richter (1995b).

<sup>71</sup>Burke (2004).

<sup>72</sup>Certeau (2002 [1975]).

<sup>73</sup>Frijhoff (2010).

<sup>74</sup>Oksaar (1996).

language varieties they used? How do such contact processes roll out over time in the course of history? And what do we know about the go-betweens and intermediaries involved—at court, the elite, learned scholars, diplomats, Jews, medical men and well to do travelers; but also, the merchants, missionaries and skippers who may have been educated (i.e. knew how to read and write); and beyond that, in the streets, markets and harbors, the common people, sailors, soldiers, fishermen, traders, peasants, slaves and prostitutes.

We will come back to these and similar questions in the two main sections of this chapter.

### **(10) *The history of ideas and the sacralization of languages in nineteenth-century Europe***

As we noted earlier, the issue of *lingua sacra* does not come up in contact linguistics. Neither does it in historical sociolinguistics. We will therefore have to move beyond those disciplines and look elsewhere.

To begin with we note that, from the Renaissance onwards, and alongside the vernaculars discussed by Burke<sup>75</sup> and Frijhoff,<sup>76</sup> there has been a long tradition of studying the three sacred languages of Christianity—Hebrew, Greek and Latin.<sup>77</sup> Much later, for the nineteenth century, we have Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*<sup>78</sup> and Maurice Olender's *Languages of Paradise*.<sup>79</sup> These two studies both take their approach from the history of ideas and ideologies, and demonstrate in detail how, on the ideological basis of Herder's *Origin of Language*,<sup>80</sup> all around Europe the national language became the epitome of the national spirit; how then, at the conference of Vienna in 1815, the vernacular languages of the major European nations (instead of their religions, as in 1648 at the Peace of Westphalia) were taken as the fundamental principle of political state-building; and how in the course of the nineteenth century the special status of those state languages was reinforced by all available institutions and mechanisms of national culture and society.

What we see here is a post-Latin sacralization of the major European vernaculars, turning them into a new but now secular kind of *lingua sacra* within their respective states, the essential vehicle of the standardization and centralization characteristic of the nation state formation and imperialism of Modern Europe. The same analysis can be applied to the publication by David Levi in London of *Lingua Sacra*,<sup>81</sup> his three-volume work on the grammar and lexicon of Hebrew. With this title, Levi underlined and reasserted the sacredness of the Hebrew language, and thus, just like the ideology of linguistic nationalism in Herder's *Origin of Language*, Levi's book heralded a religiously inspired, anti-Enlightenment backlash.

As analyses of nineteenth-century language ideology the case studies by Anderson and Olender fall well outside, but are a necessary and valuable complement to the domains of both contact linguistics and historical sociolinguistics (this *contra* James Milroy's statement that ideology has no place in linguistics;<sup>82</sup> it certainly has in the history of languages).

**(11) *Sanskrit as the language of the gods*** Yet another perspective, this time focused on a sacred language from outside the European orbit, is presented in the work of Sheldon Pollock

<sup>75</sup>Burke (2004).

<sup>76</sup>Frijhoff (2010).

<sup>77</sup>Cf. Auvray (1960); Sawyer (1999).

<sup>78</sup>Anderson (1991 [1983]).

<sup>79</sup>Olender (1992).

<sup>80</sup>Herder (1772).

<sup>81</sup>Levi (1785–1787).

<sup>82</sup>Milroy (2014).

on Sanskrit as the language of the gods.<sup>83</sup> According to Pollock, the deep-seated belief in the sacredness of Sanskrit, together with the widely proclaimed perfection of this language, has proved immensely influential in the history of Indian civilization. Over thousands of years, and despite half a millennium of Buddhist and vernacular resistance, the cultural preponderance of Sanskrit vis à vis the other languages of the Indian subcontinent, together with its enormous weight in terms of culture, history, learning, and supporting belief systems, have all strongly contributed to the dissemination of this “language of learning” and the Hindu-Buddhist culture associated with it, to the farthest corners of the Indian cultural sphere of influence throughout Asia.<sup>84</sup>

We will come back to Sanskrit as a *lingua sacra* in section 1.3. What is worth mentioning here is the parallel which Pollock draws between, on the one hand, the spread of Sanskrit culture throughout Asia plus the great time-depth of civilizational processes involved, and, on the other, in pre-modern Europe, the dynamics of vernacularization vis à vis Latin.<sup>85</sup> As Pollock explains:

Latin (like Sanskrit) shaped the revolution [i.e. the rise of the vernacular languages, RS] far more profoundly than it was shaped by it. Vernacular literacy everywhere in Europe for centuries to come not only presupposed and was mediated by Latin literacy (being able to read and write the vernacular without being able to read and write Latin must have been a rarity), but the very sense of what literature meant as a cultural form was taken from Latin.<sup>86</sup>

The forms and conventions of Latin literature have had a very long afterlife in the European vernaculars which came to the fore during the Middle Ages. The French Song of St. Alexis, the German *Minnesänger*, the Castilian *Cid*, Dante’s *Divina Comedia*, Occitan lyrics and the Anglo-Norman poets are all “subsequent and secondary phenomena to be analyzed in terms of the primacy of Latin.”<sup>87</sup> In effect, Latin literature continued as a living tradition, offering a fertile frame of literary reference for writers in the vernaculars, certainly until the end of the eighteenth century, for example, with Diderot and Goethe.<sup>88</sup> Exactly the same hegemony of Latin we encounter in the field of language study, where for many centuries Latin grammar was the model of universal grammar,<sup>89</sup> even if the discovery, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, of so many non-European languages—Tupí in Brazil,<sup>90</sup> Malay in the Indonesian archipelago,<sup>91</sup> Japanese, Chinese, the languages of India, if not the Arabic and Hebrew with which European scholars had been familiar for far longer—should have brought home that this was as incorrect as the idea that the earth is flat and the sun moves around it.

The point made by Curtius and Pollock about the hegemonic afterlife of the Roman Empire is clear enough. Taking “hegemonic” in the language-historical and political sense

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<sup>83</sup>Pollock (2006; 2013).

<sup>84</sup>Pollock (2006, 542).

<sup>85</sup>Cf. also Ostler (2007, ch. 11).

<sup>86</sup>Pollock (2006, 452).

<sup>87</sup>Pollock (2006, 452).

<sup>88</sup>Cf. Curtius (1953).

<sup>89</sup>Cf. Michael (1970).

<sup>90</sup>Kraus and Ottomeyer (2007, 289–290, 461).

<sup>91</sup>Swellengrebel (1974–1978).

of Antonio Gramsci,<sup>92</sup> we see that in almost any sphere of life and culture across Europe, Latin models have continued to dominate for many centuries after the rise of the vernaculars, not just in the field of language and literature, but also in church, school and learning, in law, administration and government, in engineering, architecture and the sciences. And not just within Europe. For centuries too, the general outlook on the newly discovered worlds outside Europe was dominated by the classical model of imperial colonization developed by European scholars such as Sepúlveda, on the authority of Aristotle's *Politics* and biblical divine law.<sup>93</sup> This in turn reinvigorated the classical Roman idea of Empire which, through the modern empires of the European expansion, has remained powerfully alive until this very day, in particular through their *mission civilisatrice*.<sup>94</sup> Its hegemonic status comes out clearly in the challenge addressed to the British Empire (which was consciously built on the Roman model) by an unknown Indian, Nirad Chaudhuri, in 1951: "*Civis Britannicus sum*, because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by [...] British rule."<sup>95</sup>

When it comes to the afterlife of these classical ideals, or models, whether the language concerned is Latin or Sanskrit, we really are looking here at developments of the very *longue durée*. A notion like *lingua sacra*, to my mind, is cut from this same cloth: it is a hegemonic idea, of ancient standing, with a very long afterlife and vitality, surviving the test of time, and thus even if it may not quite stand the scrutiny of modern linguistics, *lingua sacra* is a notion no less significant in language history than *lingua franca*.

#### 1.1.4 Language Is the Key

**(12) *Language history and Wissensgeschichte*** Having the status of "sacred language"—as we saw earlier in the case of Tornedalian Finnish, and as Pollock's contribution to Global Intellectual History has demonstrated for Sanskrit and Latin<sup>96</sup>—clearly is a very strong force for the development, dissemination, cultivation, maintenance and longevity of the particular language concerned, and of the traditions of culture, learning and transmission associated with it. Such "sacredness"—together with the belief systems and societal values behind it, the symbolic power of the relevant language, its historic and cultural weight, its status as a written language, its function as a normative model in culture—is a key factor in long term civilizational processes, and may help to understand the hegemonic role acquired (or not) by the language in question. In this respect, Pollock's analysis—as Cooper commented<sup>97</sup>—provides a basis on which to analyze and compare similar longterm developments in other parts of the world, such as Hellenization, Indianization, Sinicization, Christianization, Islamization and Romanization. All these are far reaching and complex civilizational processes, involving power, religion, symbols, cultural transmission, writing and, crucially, language. And all are of very *longue durée*.

On this basis we may draw a comparison between Anglicization as a longterm cultural aftereffect of the British Empire with its *Pax Britannica*,<sup>98</sup> and Romanization as a long

<sup>92</sup>Gramsci (1971, 333, 416; 1985, 164–165). Cf. Pollock (2006, 520–521).

<sup>93</sup>Grafton (1992, 136). Cf. Salverda (2004, 77).

<sup>94</sup>Pagden (2002, 158–159).

<sup>95</sup>Chaudhuri (1991 [1951], 2).

<sup>96</sup>Pollock (2013).

<sup>97</sup>Cooper (2013, 286–287).

<sup>98</sup>Cf. Crystal (2000a); McArthur (1998); Phillipson (2003).



term trend in the Ancient World, with a similar imperial power and culture behind it. In this respect, there is nothing new: just as the Romans in Gallia wiped out the Celts and the Celtic wisdom and knowledge their Druids possessed,<sup>99</sup> so too, the modernization which Macauley brought to India, however attractive it may have been to Chaudhuri,<sup>100</sup> was at the same time also a direct attack on the ancient native Indian traditions of education, learning and cultural transmission.

Seen from this perspective, language history and the contact it involves are central to *Wissensgeschichte* and its processes of knowledge transmission.<sup>101</sup> It goes without saying that decipherment, historical philology, and their painstaking detective work on languages, writing and the practices involved, are indispensable here.<sup>102</sup>

The same goes for translation, for example, of god names, a well-known channel of transmission and assimilation from one culture into another, witness the equation, at Palmyra in the third century CE, of the Anonymous God (developed from the local Bac/alshamên, the Lord of Heaven), with the Greek Zeus Hypsistos and the Roman Iuppiter Optimus Maximus.<sup>103</sup> Going beyond philology and translation, here we aim to explore what contribution a particular *lingua franca* or *lingua sacra* has made to the transmission of *Wissen* in history. To this end we will need an analytic framework that can bring together Global Intellectual History<sup>104</sup> with the history of language(s) and language contact. This will require, on the one hand in contact linguistics, that we take on board issues of cultural, societal and political symbolism to do with a language's sacredness, and conversely, when doing *Wissensgeschichte*, that we include the role and contribution of intermediaries to cross-cultural contact and transmission, as advocated by Smith.<sup>105</sup>

**(13) Language contact and the transmission of Wissen** A short excursion into the domain of translation may be useful at this point. In Borges's tale, *Averroes Search*,<sup>106</sup> the focus is on Averroës as an intermediary between different languages and cultures, who, while translating Aristotle's treatise on comedy from Greek into Arabic, misses out on the very notion of comedy, of which he has no experience, so that—even if in the courtyard outside there is a comedy going on under his very eyes—he ends up adapting Aristotle's notion to what he can think of in his own language and culture.

Apart from reminding us of the immense contribution of Arabic civilization to modern world culture through many centuries of translation, knowledge transfer and cultural crossover,<sup>107</sup> Borges's story also serves as a parable of the mishaps that can befall ideas, stories, knowledge, beliefs and practices while they are traveling wherever they may find a curious and receptive audience. In translation—no less than in the domain of *lingua franca*—language is never “just” language; it always crucially involves the transmission of knowledge and content; and the very processes of interpretation, transmission, critical commentary and reception may bring along all sorts of interference, distortion, innovation, corruption and

<sup>99</sup>Rankin (1987, 114–129); Cunliffe (1988, 123–124).

<sup>100</sup>Chaudhuri (1991 [1951]).

<sup>101</sup>Cf. Renn (2014); Sarasin (2011).

<sup>102</sup>Cf. Pope (1975); Robinson (2009).

<sup>103</sup>Drijvers (1976, 26–27).

<sup>104</sup>Moyn and Sartori (2013).

<sup>105</sup>Smith (2013, 86, 98).

<sup>106</sup>Borges (1998).

<sup>107</sup>Cf. Woodcock and Saoud (2007); Al-Khalili (2010).

further arbitrariness, through which the content that is conveyed and translated is at the same also being refracted and transformed.

Leaving aside the more general vicissitudes and disruptions to which *Wissensgeschichte* is exposed, such as the destruction of books,<sup>108</sup> this is how the transmission of languages and cultures has worked for millennia: through such slow, long term contacts, chains of local exchanges and continuities of language, of knowledge, of stories, of culture, in a never ending process of Chinese whispers, with all the errors and misunderstandings (creative or otherwise) this may cause—and which can bring about enrichment and the creation of new meanings<sup>109</sup> as well as defiguration, destruction even, of the knowledge content so conveyed. A case in point is the migration—from ancient times, over many centuries, through countless markets and other meeting points, relayed by innumerable travelers, traders and story tellers—of the stories about Alexander (Iskandar), which travelled east through Persia and India and far beyond, to the Spice Islands of Indonesia; plus the counter migration of Indian fables to the west, through Persia and the Orient to Europe, which has enriched western literatures from Aesop and the Arabian Tales of Shehrazad to the present.<sup>110</sup>

In our globalized world of today—when it seems as if travel, trade and technology have more or less done away with difference and distance in time and place; when English is so globally dominant that other languages may hardly seem necessary anymore; when the disappearance of “remoteness” brings very serious threats to the future of many smaller languages in faraway places;<sup>111</sup> when one can almost instantly be in contact with anyone anywhere, and when even the language obstacles in cross-cultural contact seem to have been overcome by Google Translate App—it is not yet too late to look back towards that millennia old world and study the everyday social language mechanisms and contact processes by which it used to function. As, for example, Stuurman has done in his comparative study of intermediaries involved in cultural contacts of the past such as Herodotus, Sima Qian and Ibn Khaldun.<sup>112</sup>

Language is the key here, and in our further pursuits it will have centre stage, as the tracer element on which we will focus our inquiry into the dynamics of contact and the ensuing transfer, transmission and translation of knowledge. An issue of particular relevance in this context is how *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* appear to be connected to two very different chains of transmission. To find out more, our focus here will be on the points of contact, the bridges from one language into the next, as well as the intermediaries by and through whom knowledge is conveyed into new languages, cultures and societies. In my view, this is how language history, and the history of language contact we envisage, can make an important contribution to *Wissensgeschichte*.

<sup>108</sup>Cf. Báez (2008); Canfora (1989).

<sup>109</sup>In the sense of Raymond Williams (1979, 176–177).

<sup>110</sup>Cf. Salverda (1996, 51–52).

<sup>111</sup>Crystal (2000b); Harrison (2007); Moseley (2007; 2010); Skuttnab-Kangas (2000).

<sup>112</sup>Stuurman (2013).

## 1.2 Lingua Franca: History and Theory

### 1.2.1 Lingua Franca Today

**(1) *English as the global lingua franca*** To begin with the present, one of the reasons for the interest in lingua franca today is the position of English as the dominant international language of the world.<sup>113</sup>

In almost every domain of life, English is very widely used today: news and information, popular culture, fashion and consumerism; the internet, the digital world, social media, mobile phones and apps; trade, finance, logistics, air travel and tourism; sports, medicine, health care and education; world politics, international organizations, intelligence and communication; science, technology and military power; law, standards and regulation; etcetera.<sup>114</sup> Having a common language of contact for as many people as possible is a basic necessity in a world where some 7,000 different languages are spoken today—as is particularly evident in multilingual mass conurbations such as New York<sup>115</sup> and London with its three hundred different languages.<sup>116</sup> English is the most chosen foreign language in the world today; and already by the year 2000 the business of teaching English was worth an estimated 7.8 billion pounds a year. With 1.35 billion people on Facebook today, enormous numbers of people are now everyday users of some form of English. Driven by the ever intensifying flow of information, the main trend in global communication is the use of English as the central lingua franca between speakers of the most diverse languages, “the first truly *global language* ever to exist.”<sup>117</sup> English today is at the top of the world’s language pyramid, the dominant working language of the United Nations, the European Union and many other international bodies; and the official or unofficial second language of very many states around the world.<sup>118</sup> It is not the intrinsic quality of the English language that is behind this status, but rather its cultural, historical, political and technological weight, its clout as the language of Empire, and not least its phenomenal rise over the past half century under the super power umbrella of the United States.

It is this shared English lingua franca, with the rich, open, diverse and dynamic culture that comes with it, which today is the powerful and lasting legacy of the British Empire—just as, 1500 years ago, the Roman Empire left the world its Latin language, with a concomitant rich, dynamic and lasting culture and civilization. And just as Latin began to change when it was spoken by and with people speaking different mother tongues,<sup>119</sup> so too in the case of English. Through centuries of such contact the English language has undergone dramatic changes, turning from a typical Germanic language with a rich and complex morphology into a predominantly analytic language with little morphology; its vocabulary transformed by massive importation from French, Latin, Greek and a hundred other languages;<sup>120</sup> and with dramatic changes in pronunciation. Over the last 200 years alone, spoken English has moved away from French-style pronunciations such as *Birón*, *balcóny*, *contéplate*, *obléeged*, *un-*

<sup>113</sup>Crystal (2000a); Jenkins (2014); Kachru (1996); Meierkord (2006); Ostler (2010); Phillipson (2003); Seidlhofer (2009).

<sup>114</sup>De Swaan (2001); Salverda (2002).

<sup>115</sup>García and Fishman (1997).

<sup>116</sup>Salverda (2006).

<sup>117</sup>Crystal (2000a).

<sup>118</sup>Monde (2012, 112); McArthur (1998).

<sup>119</sup>Adams (2003).

<sup>120</sup>Cf. Yule and Burnell (1996 [1886]).

*spiled* and *agreements* to a much more heavily word-initial stress pattern and a much more open pronunciation of the vowels, as in *Býron*, *bálcony*, *cóntemplate*, *oblige*, *unspoilt* and *agreements*.<sup>121</sup> Such vernacularizations were going on throughout the former British Empire, where English, used in communication between speakers of widely different linguistic background, was usually learned informally from the colloquial varieties spoken by sailors, soldiers and colonists, and indigenized in contact with speakers of local languages, giving rise to all kinds of New or World English.<sup>122</sup>

**(2) *Perspective*** In this second section, in an attempt to move beyond the specific case of English, and in order to further define the notion of *lingua franca*, we will start from Cremona's distinction of two different senses of the term, the first historical, the second generic.<sup>123</sup> First, we will take a closer look at the original, historical *Lingua Franca* that used to be spoken around the Mediterranean. Then, secondly, we will undertake a critical exploration of *lingua franca* as a generic term in contact linguistics, its definition, its characteristic features, structures and processes, as well as the network of notions this concept is part of.

### 1.2.2 The Historical *Lingua Franca* of the Mediterranean

**(3) *Descriptions and questions*** The original *Lingua Franca* “was one of the languages which Gulliver tried out on the Lilliputians.”<sup>124</sup> It was part of the impressive multilingual repertoire he had acquired as a student in Cambridge and Leiden, as a ship's surgeon, a traveler and an ardent learner of languages. And he did try them all when he came to Lilliput, far out in the Indian Ocean somewhere near the Indonesian archipelago: “High and Low Dutch, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and *lingua franca*; but all to no purpose.”<sup>125</sup>

In the linguistic literature, different and divergent descriptions have been given of this *Lingua Franca*. Cremona for example, states:

The name ‘*Lingua Franca*’ is probably an Italianization of Byzantine Greek and Arabic forms meaning ‘Frankish language,’ that is, ‘language of western Europeans,’ especially French, Occitan, Catalan and Italian (since the Byzantines and the Arabs had applied the term ‘Franks’ to all the Crusaders whatever their ethnic origins), ... the ‘Mediterranean *Lingua Franca*’ was a spoken pidgin language used for communication between Romance-speaking western Europeans on the one hand, and Arabs (and later Turks) around the shores of the Mediterranean from at least the fourteenth c. onwards.<sup>126</sup>

In contrast, Hancock discusses:

The extinct Sabir or Sabeir, which gained impetus in the Middle East during the time of the Crusades, and which existed in various forms in many Mediterranean ports for several centuries. Known also as the *Lingua Franca*. Basically

<sup>121</sup> White (1986 [1950], 29). Cf. Whiteley (1938, 246–248, 267).

<sup>122</sup> Siegel (2013, 518–519).

<sup>123</sup> Cremona (1998, 303).

<sup>124</sup> Lockwood (1972, 142).

<sup>125</sup> Swift (1970, 26).

<sup>126</sup> Cremona (1998, 302–303).

a pidginized variety of Provençal, influenced lexically by French, Catalan, Italian, etc., and various languages of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>127</sup>

Similarly, in Perego we read:

Les auteurs paraissent s'accorder en général pour appeler 'sabir' un mélange de différentes langues romanes, de grec, d'arabe et de turc en usage dans les ports méditerranéens. Le type même du sabir est donc la 'langue franque.'<sup>128</sup>

More recently, Trask has taken the view that:

The original Lingua Franca was a variety of Italian, laced with words from a number of other languages, used as a trade language in the eastern Mediterranean in the late Middle Ages.<sup>129</sup>

The descriptions above present us with a number of difficulties. While Cremona and Trask speak of Lingua Franca, Hancock and Perego are using a different term, *Sabir*, though apparently for the same thing. Hancock agrees with Cremona that this was a pidgin, while Perego describes it as a mixed contact language involving Romance, Greek, Turkish and Arabic. For Trask, the Lingua Franca was a variety of Italian, but for Hancock and Cremona it had a different basis, involving Provençal, Catalan, Occitan as well as French. There is no unambiguous agreement here,<sup>130</sup> and we cannot exclude the possibility that the Lingua Franca itself may have been polymorphous and chameleon-like, shifting and shading depending on location, time, speakers and the other language(s) involved. For the moment though, we note the point made by Jeff Siegel:

Progress in the study of languages in contact has been hindered by terminology often as unfixed as some of the languages it is used to describe.<sup>131</sup>

This holds in particular for core notions such as *creolization*, *koinè*, *contact language* and *language mixing*, and Siegel quotes Mühlhäusler to the effect that in the study of language mixing we are faced with "a conceptual mess aggravated by a terminological mess." To remedy this, what we need is "an attempt to clarify some of the terminology used to describe language contact and mixing."<sup>132</sup>

That is what the present exploration is about: a clarification of the relevant terms and concepts, in order to get a better grip on the Lingua Franca.

**(4) *About the Franks and their language*** Some authors have suggested that the term *lingua franca* may be linked to *porto franco* (freeport); Lingua Franca would then be "the language of free trade." While this may apply to the global English of today, the original sense of the term Lingua Franca is, as Cremona says above, "the language of the Franks."<sup>133</sup>

<sup>127</sup>Hancock (1971, 516).

<sup>128</sup>Perego (1968, 598).

<sup>129</sup>Trask (2000, 196).

<sup>130</sup>Cf. also Whinnom (1977).

<sup>131</sup>Siegel (1985).

<sup>132</sup>Siegel (1985, 357).

<sup>133</sup>Cf. also Cifoletti (2004, 15).

Note here that *franqui*, *faranji* or *feringi* was the Arabic name for people from western Europe—a usage we also encounter in Italian, for example with the *Farangi* (Franks, Europeans, Christians) living at the Mughal court under Shah Jahan and Shah Aurangzeb, and mentioned in Manucci's *Storia di Mogor*.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, in the old *sabir* of colonial Algiers, the term used to denote the French from France was *Frankaouis*.<sup>135</sup> From Arabic, this usage was adopted into many eastern languages as well: *Farangi* in Persian, Amharic and Urdu, *Firangi* in Hindi, *Parangi* in Tamil, and further afield *Farang* in Thai.<sup>136</sup> It is this name that has become attached to the language that was used for many centuries throughout the Mediterranean, in the Arabic world and beyond, in many different shapes and admixtures, in contact, trade and intercourse with those Franks.

The Franks were the strongest political power to emerge in medieval times after the demise of the West Roman Empire. In 732, with the battle of Poitiers, it was the Franks under Charles Martel who halted the Islamic advance on the European continent, and if they hadn't, we might now all be writing the European languages with Arabic script, as is the case today with the Persian language (Farsi, Iranian). From then on, the Franks were the driving force of a most powerful expansion in all directions, to the north with the incorporation of Frisia under Charles Martel; to the east into the Slavonic world; to the south into the Romance world; then later, in the eleventh century, beyond this, and into the Middle East. When Charlemagne was crowned emperor of Rome in the year 800, his Frankish empire stretched all the way from the Frisian Sea in the North down to the Mediterranean and into Italy;<sup>137</sup> and from the eighth century onwards, there was a thriving slave trade from Verdun to Cordova.<sup>138</sup> Also, crusades were undertaken regularly into Spain, against the Moorish kingdoms there.<sup>139</sup> Contact and conflict between Arabs and Franks thus predate the Crusades into the Holy Land by many centuries—and throughout those centuries, there would always be the need for *Lingua Franca* to facilitate their exchanges.

The question here is: What do we know of the language spoken by those Franks? In the Franks' heartlands in the former Germania they were speaking their own Germanic language, Frankish.<sup>140</sup> But when they settled in Gallia, it was a different matter.<sup>141</sup> Like all the other Germanic tribes who settled there, such as the Burgundians, the Alamans, the Goths and later the Normans, they were christianized and romanized, shifting to Gallo-Romance, which eventually became French. The process was in full swing in the sixth century, when bishop Gregory of Tours wrote his *History of the Franks* in a plain and unadorned style, "*sermone rustico*," "the everyday spoken Latin of Gaul in the sixth century," a vernacular which he himself called provincial.<sup>142</sup> By the early ninth century, the Franks in Gaul had completed this linguistic and cultural shift and were aware that they were speaking something different from Latin:<sup>143</sup> at the Synod of Tours in 813, priests in Francia were called upon to do the church prayers in the vulgar tongue, the *lingua romana rustica*, since the written standard

<sup>134</sup>Manucci (1986).

<sup>135</sup>Lanly (1970, 52).

<sup>136</sup>Ostler (2005, 407).

<sup>137</sup>Smith (2005, 190); Chaliand and Rageau (2010, 203).

<sup>138</sup>Smith (2005, 27, 209).

<sup>139</sup>Baumont (2011).

<sup>140</sup>Hutterer (1999, 304–316).

<sup>141</sup>Cf. Wallace-Hadrill (1985).

<sup>142</sup>Thorpe (1974, 38–41).

<sup>143</sup>Wolff (2003, 80).

Latin of Rome and of the Carolingian Renaissance had become incomprehensible to the illiterate common people.<sup>144</sup> This situation—with the people in Germania, like Charlemagne himself, continuing to use their traditional Frankish Germanic, while Gaul was dominated by Romance and French—was consolidated in Charlemagne's language policies.<sup>145</sup> In consequence, *Lingua Franca*, the so-called “Frankish” language used in Mediterranean contacts with the Arabs and others, was not the original Germanic dialect, but rather some form of Romance, of which quite possibly neither the Franks nor the Arabs were native speakers.

**(5) *The Italian connection*** We must also, however, consider the view of Trask that the *Lingua Franca* was a variety of Italian.<sup>146</sup> After all, it does make a difference whether the basis of the *Lingua Franca* was supplied by romanized Franks or instead by vulgarized Italians. So what can we say about this Italian hypothesis?

First of all we must think here of Dante and his interest in the spoken vernacular of his own time; how he began to write the vulgar tongue instead of literary, cultured and elegant Latin; and how in this he was followed by writers of the various other national Renaissance movements in Europe who championed their own vernaculars. We must think also of the great trading empires of Venice and Genua stretching into the Levant, the Black Sea and the Silk Roads; and of the many Italians who went abroad in early modern history—Marco Polo to China, Christopher Columbus to the Americas, and Antonio Pigafetta, who sailed out on the first circumnavigation with Magellan and as a true Renaissance man sampled word lists of the languages spoken in the lands they visited. Ever since Dante they all took their languages with them wherever they went, speaking Italian in many different varieties and dialects,<sup>147</sup> as well as pidgin Italian and *Lingua Franca*, with varying admixtures of other Romance and Arabic elements. During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, Italians played their role in the Elizabethan Renaissance in England, where today an Italian-based variety of the *Lingua Franca* survives, known as *Polari*;<sup>148</sup> but also in India, where the Taj Mahal was built by an Italian architect; and throughout the Ottoman empire, where Italian became the language favored for contact and transactions between Europeans and Orientals.

In view of this expansion, together with the prestige and the impact of the Italian Renaissance, Trask's suggestion that Italian was the basis of the *Lingua Franca* is certainly not implausible.<sup>149</sup> Even so, this leaves open the possibility that other languages, such as Provençal and Catalan, Spanish, French and Portuguese may have been influential too in shaping the *Lingua Franca*, in different locations, times and social settings. In this respect, it is worth mentioning Abulafia's reminder that “It would be a mistake to think of *lingua franca* as a language with formal rules and an agreed vocabulary; indeed, it was its fluidity and changeability that expressed most clearly the shifting identities of the people of the early modern Mediterranean.”<sup>150</sup>

<sup>144</sup>Lanly (1970, 330–331). Cf. Richter (1995a, 105, 118); Smith (2005, 24–27, 37).

<sup>145</sup>Cf. Richter (1995a, 108).

<sup>146</sup>Trask (2000).

<sup>147</sup>Toso (2008).

<sup>148</sup>Hancock (1984); Baker (2002).

<sup>149</sup>Cf. Cifoletti (2004, 18).

<sup>150</sup>Abulafia (2011, 487).

What we must take into account here is a key feature of *lingua francas* which we noted above in subsection (1) for English in the Hobson-Jobson dictionary of Anglo-Indian usage,<sup>151</sup> viz. their easy adoption and incorporation of words from many other languages.

**(6) *No man's language*** Having come this far, it would appear that things are beginning to shift and change. For, if the “Franks” were not really the Franks, but could be anyone from western Europe; if their language was not a Germanic dialect, but some form of Romance; if their *lingua romana rustica* was not the same as the *Lingua Franca*, while spoken Italian may have been involved too in its development—then what can we say about the *Lingua Franca*?

There is considerable indeterminacy here, and we must acknowledge—as Dakhliia has documented<sup>152</sup>—how little we really know, and how unstable, variable, and undefinable the real *Lingua Franca* has always been. A relevant circumstance here is the paucity of data we have. In this respect, we note, first of all, that the *Lingua Franca* was always used in far away places, with strangers across the sea, for barter in the streets, the brothels and the markets—rather than in the metropolis, where Latin was the dominant mode of written culture, in church and in the chancelleries, at court and in the world of learning. Secondly, what we are dealing with here, long after its demise, is a language that may have been spoken for centuries, but was always ignored, condemned, even loathed.<sup>153</sup> So even if we have an idea of who were speaking the *Lingua Franca*, it is very much harder to see who might have written down this language. At the time, if one was able to write at all, one would have written in Latin; and if one was literate in Latin, as Dante was, one might have moved into writing Italian; but writing *Lingua Franca*—who would, or could do this, and who would ever read this? Latin literacy and its cultural prestige were a formidable barrier to acknowledging the vernaculars of poets and scholars, and all the more so to writing the debased *Lingua Franca*, the spoken lingo of illiterate sailors, fishermen and market traders. Thirdly, we must take into account the *longue durée*, and note that, if one of the first people to write Italian was Dante, he was certainly not the first to speak it. The diversification of Latin into Italian and the other vernaculars had started centuries earlier.<sup>154</sup> On the same reasoning, *Lingua Franca* too will have begun to be spoken much earlier than the time of its first recording in writing. Taken together, these three factors—of distance, of sociocultural prestige, and of time—go a long way towards explaining why there is so little and so late that has come down to us, and why we only have written records of *Lingua Franca* dating from the fourteenth century onwards and not earlier.

Beyond the paucity of data there is, however, another consideration—as Dakhliia has made clear,<sup>155</sup> taking her cue from a Franco-Amerindian contact vernacular, now long extinct, about which the missionary Paul le Jeune wrote in a letter in 1632: “The Frenchmen who spoke it supposed it to be good Indian, and the Indians believed it to be French.”<sup>156</sup> Such a confusion is less uncommon than it may seem at first sight. It is well known that language names used in the past do not tell us what exactly they referred to: in general, if someone's speech was called *Lingua Franca*, then in the absence of language data we cannot

<sup>151</sup> Yule and Burnell (1996 [1886]).

<sup>152</sup> Dakhliia (2008).

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Posner (1966, 245).

<sup>154</sup> Richter (1995a).

<sup>155</sup> Dakhliia (2008).

<sup>156</sup> Hancock (1977, 512).



tell from this label alone what it was they (and/or their interlocutors) were actually speaking (or hearing). Moreover, it would appear that the name *Lingua Franca* was given by others than those who actually spoke it. The Synod of Tours, at any rate, described the speech of the Franks as *lingua romana rustica*, and I am not sure that the Franks themselves used the term *lingua franca* for their own language. But since they were known as “Franks,” it would have been common for others with whom they were in contact, such as the Arabs and Byzantines, to then call their language the *Lingua Franca*. On this logic the term *Lingua Franca* could have denoted the *lingua romana rustica* of the Synod of Tours; but since “Franks” also meant Europeans in general, the term *Lingua Franca* could equally include and refer to other languages such as Italian or Provençal. Eventually this will lead us to Cremona’s scenario above—viz. that the term *Lingua Franca* was used by the Arabs as a label for the speech of the Franks with whom they were in contact, and then later borrowed (and Italianized) by the Italians. This scenario may well reflect the complex history of the *Lingua Franca*, but it does not give us a clue as to what language this really was.

More specifically, Lejeune’s comment gives rise to the following question: What were those French and Native American Indian people thinking at the time, when they both believed to be speaking each other’s language, and used the name of the other’s language as a label for their own speech? Applying this question to the *Lingua Franca*, Dakhliya comes up with some very interesting reflections. Did the Franks, and the speakers of other languages they were in contact with, perhaps believe, just as in Lejeune’s case, that they were speaking each other’s languages? So, did the Franks, when they spoke *Lingua Franca*, think that they were actually speaking the local eastern contact language, while conversely the Orientals believed that they were using the language of the Franks? Could it be that the *Lingua Franca* was an attempt by Arabs and others at reproducing Italian, or at any rate an Italian-based variety of Romance, when they were speaking with the Franks? Or conversely, was the *Lingua Franca* the result of the Franks’ resorting (when they could not speak Arabic) to using a simplified “foreigners’ talk” in order to communicate with the Orientals they met, in the belief that this was how one did this? So, was this perhaps a case of mutual adaptation and accommodation in a contact situation?<sup>157</sup>

Underneath all this is a basic question: What does it mean to use the name of somebody else’s language to describe one’s own speech? As Dakhliya argues, in the case of *Lingua Franca*, if this language name was given not by those who spoke it but by others, and if for those naming it, it was not their own language, then the conclusion can only be that what we have before us here is *no man’s language*.<sup>158</sup> With *Lingua Franca* we have before us a language of which no one will say “this is my language.” At best, it is somebody else’s language, like gibberish, or double dutch, gobbledygook, slang, etcetera. It has no native speakers, it just serves as a communicative tool, an occasional bridge between native speakers of other languages; and for those who speak it, it is not a badge of their identity.

With this new notion of *no man’s language* Dakhliya takes her distance from much modern thinking about language. Established ideas concerning national standard languages are not relevant here, simply because *Lingua Franca* is not a national language: there is no nation, no cultivation, and no standard here. The same goes for the core notions of modern linguistics—such as de Saussure’s notion of the *langue* as a structured whole in and by itself, as well as structural linguistics and its conception of the object of inquiry as an autonomous

<sup>157</sup>Dakhliya (2008).

<sup>158</sup>Dakhliya (2004).

formal system.<sup>159</sup> What we need instead, in order to come to grips with the Lingua Franca, is a view of language as a tool, useful and effective in verbal interaction; spoken for the purpose of communication, in contact, trade and exchanges; made up and fit for purpose on the occasion, but readily disposable afterwards.

**(7) Basic points: Schuchardt and after** We now turn to where any study of lingua francas in modern linguistics has to begin, that is, with the first scholarly examination of the historical Lingua Franca, the pathbreaking article of 1909 in which Hugo Schuchardt established a range of fundamental points.<sup>160</sup>

To begin with, as he saw clearly, the Lingua Franca was a trade language born from exigence and need. Today this is widely accepted, as we saw above with Edwards<sup>161</sup> and Calvet,<sup>162</sup> but Schuchardt was the first to formulate this crucial point. His conclusion of 1909 is also worth noting: *panta rhei*, that is: in Lingua Franca everything is always in flux, there is immense variation and fluidity, in time, location, composition, data, forms and usage—the same point as we find today in Abulafia.<sup>163</sup>

Secondly, with respect to the characteristic features of the Lingua Franca, Schuchardt established that it was a reduced form of Romance, with a highly simplified grammatical structure, typical of pidgin languages, with admixtures from different other languages in a lexicon that was largely Italian-based but with important Spanish contributions, plus some Provençal elements and a very few Arabic words. An example is the expression *Mi andar* (Me go), constructed from bare Romance roots (basic concepts, almost): *Mi*, a first person singular personal pronoun in the accusative, together with *andar*, a verb in the infinitive, in a simple two-word sentence with no morphology, no case or inflection. As Perego put it—“le système pronominal est réduit à sa plus simple expression (*mi*: je, me, moi); le verbe ne comprend que deux formes: un present-futur (*mi andar*: je vais) et un passé (*mi andato*: je suis allé).”<sup>164</sup> Further such reductions—a turn from synthetic forms to analytic syntax, and the lexicalization of grammatical relations—can all be found in the Lord’s Prayer in Lingua Franca.<sup>165</sup>

Thirdly, Schuchardt identified geographic variation and dialects within “the Lingua Franca itself, as it was spoken along the North African coast. In the west, *L<sub>t</sub>* was unquestionably Spanish; in the east, *L<sub>t</sub>* was Italian; in the center was a transition zone showing varying degrees of relexification.”<sup>166</sup> Similarly, temporal variation was identified by Lanly in his monograph of 1970, in which he described the *sabir* in use in North Africa during the French colonial era, spoken in the backstreets of Algiers, as *Langue franque à base du Français*, with admixture of elements from Italian and Spanish plus some Arabic. Lanly saw this as a new, nineteenth-century variety and continuation of the original historic Lingua Franca. Of particular interest here is the historic parallel Lanly drew between, on the one hand, this *sabir* as it developed in contact with colonial French as spoken in Algiers—which was very different from the metropolitan French of faraway Paris—, and, on the other,

<sup>159</sup>Cf. also Labov (1971).

<sup>160</sup>See Schuchardt (1909).

<sup>161</sup>Edwards (2013).

<sup>162</sup>Calvet (1981).

<sup>163</sup>Abulafia (2011).

<sup>164</sup>Perego (1968, 599).

<sup>165</sup>Cf. Hancock (1984).

<sup>166</sup>Schuchardt (1980, 66).

the development in Gaul, far away from the schools and the literary culture of metropolitan Rome, of the vulgar Latin spoken from the second and third centuries CE onwards by Roman soldiers and colonists settling there, who had “abandoned the complicated structure of classical Latin”<sup>167</sup> and mixed it in with words, sounds and turns of phrase they adopted from Gallic.<sup>168</sup>

Contact is the key factor here, and beyond Lanly’s parallel there is a more general suggestion, viz. that, actually, any speaker is capable of producing such variation, and will if necessary always be able to resort to such reduced forms when a language barrier occurs in a contact situation.

**(8) Further questions** Our findings thus far: The historical Lingua Franca was widely spoken around the Mediterranean, and clearly a matter of the *longue durée* in the sense of Fernand Braudel.<sup>169</sup> It was a pidgin built on roots deriving from the various Romance languages of the Mediterranean, mixed in with Arabic. For many centuries it was used in many different locations and between many different parties, but always for communication and negotiation in contact, trade, war, diplomacy, exchange of prisoners etcetera. Over time, under the impact of a succession of Romance languages and their speakers as these made their way across the Mediterranean, the language shows enormous change and variation. The same goes for its geographical variation—depending on their dominance, we get an influx of Italian, Provençal, Catalan, Occitan, Spanish or Portuguese. With all this variation, there is no common or fixed standard, and the general impression is one of shifts and changes—not just in the language itself, but also in its history, geography and social setting. *Panta rhei*, indeed.

Beyond this, however, many questions are still wide open. For example, there is the interesting issue of its geographical dissemination. Matras, referring to the “medieval Romance-based pidgin spoken around the Mediterranean coastal regions, termed Lingua Franca,” has called the idea that all other lingua francas are derived from this basis “the most speculative hypothesis, which is quite impossible to either prove or disprove.”<sup>170</sup> This may be so for the idea of monogenesis; but when it comes to the issue of diffusion, we may consider, first, how Arends has convincingly argued for the historical spread of Lingua Franca, together with Spanish, Portuguese and Ladino, by Sephardic Jewish traders from the Italian freeport of Livorno all the way to Brazil and Surinam in the seventeenth century.<sup>171</sup> Secondly, to the east as well, from about 800 CE, there were Jewish trading networks running all the way from Charlemagne’s Aachen, Cordoba in Spain and Tangiers in North Africa, through the Arab world, via the Baghdad of Harun al-Raschid down to Calicut in India and over the sea to Kuang-chu in China, but also overland from Byzantium along the Silk Roads, north of the Black Sea,<sup>172</sup> via Khazaria, Kashgar and Khotan to Chang-an and Kai-feng in central China—which was the site of a synagogue built in 1163, and where there still was a Jewish community in the 1850s.<sup>173</sup> Thirdly, as we know from the Hobson-Jobson dictionary

<sup>167</sup> Wolff (2003, 50).

<sup>168</sup> Lanly (1970, 328–332).

<sup>169</sup> Braudel (1972).

<sup>170</sup> Matras (2009, 284).

<sup>171</sup> Arends (1999, 203).

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Ascherson (1996).

<sup>173</sup> Gilbert (1969, 21–22). Cf. Chambers (2008, 35–36). See Halbertsma (2002) for the early arrival of Christians and Muslims in Tang China.

of Anglo-Indian slang, the term commonly used by British traders operating in Asia for the interpreters they employed—a role often fulfilled by the Portuguese speaking go-betweens already established there—was *lingoa*.<sup>174</sup> Given these glimpses from history, we may consider that Gulliver's use of the Lingua Franca as an alternative to Latin, French, Spanish and Italian on the island of Lilliput was, perhaps, not so strange after all; and that the diffusion hypothesis dismissed by Matras may well merit further investigation.

Another issue concerns the question: Is the historic Lingua Franca still in use today? There does not appear to be a clear end date for this language, and the question may be hard to answer—but why is that so? Several possibilities come to mind here. Was Lingua Franca, a maritime and coastal lingo mostly used in harbors and at markets, perhaps too marginal and ephemeral even for its demise to be noticed? Has it simply vanished, thrown away as the disposable tool it was, too unstable and too variable to survive, a disparate collection of spoken varieties belonging to the slums and the harbor riffraff, with no support in writing, in education, or from a native speaker community, and was it done down by strong normative pressures against this *no man's language*? Or is the explanation a practical one—was it simply because, after the end of the Age of Sail and the ensuing decline of language contact in harbor conditions, there was no longer the communicative need which there had always been for Lingua Franca? So, conversely, might it be that Lingua Franca does not really have an end date, as it can always be revived when people from different language background in migratory contact meet and need to communicate across language barriers? These are open questions, which invite reflection, speculation, and further research.

### 1.2.3 Lingua Franca as a Conceptual Category in Contact Linguistics

In the second part of this section, we will now consider lingua franca as a category, focusing on the current understanding of this concept within linguistic theory; its definition and place within a network of related concepts within contact linguistics; and relevant distinctions such as *langue francque*, *sabir*, *langue véhiculaire* etcetera.

**(9) On lingua francas in general** The question before us is: What is *a* (rather than *the*) lingua franca? This time there appears to be considerable agreement; the authors whose views on the historic Lingua Franca we discussed above, have all four distilled the same key point, defining the concept of lingua franca as a contact language used by people who do not speak each other's language, for interaction and communication in all kinds of situations: trade, war, markets, colonization, and so on.

Thus, by way of extension, abstraction and generalization,<sup>175</sup> we move from history to concept. As Cremona has it, a lingua franca is “a language widely used for intercommunication among different linguistic groups (e.g. Akkadian in the Middle East in the 2nd millennium BCE, Greek in Classical and Christian times, Latin in much of medieval Europe, Swahili in East Africa, English in many parts of the globe).”<sup>176</sup> Similarly, Trask notes that lingua franca is

A language which is routinely used in some region for dealings between people who have different mother tongues. In the past this term was often applied to any

<sup>174</sup>Which, incidentally, also gave us the term *linguist*. Cf. Yule and Burnell (1996 [1886], 517–518).

<sup>175</sup>Cf. Perego (1968, 600).

<sup>176</sup>Cremona (1998, 303).

*interlect*, even a *pidgin*, but today is more usually restricted to a mother tongue, though possibly to a version different from that used by native speakers.<sup>177</sup>

Matras agrees:

The term *lingua franca* refers to languages that are used for interethnic communication, that is, in interactions in which the participants have diverse background languages.<sup>178</sup>

English is by no means the only *lingua franca*. There are, in fact, many other such contact languages, on all the continents of the world.<sup>179</sup> In Australasia today, we have Chinese, Malay, Tok Pisin and Kriol. In the Americas, Chinook (an Indian-French-English mixed language on the NW Pacific coast of the USA), Guarani, Nahuatl, Quechua, and Tupí. In Africa, Afrikaans, Ewe, Hausa, Nigerian Pidgin English, an Arab-based *sabir* in the Sudan, Swahili, and everywhere on the coasts of Africa “des *sabirs* dits commerciaux.”<sup>180</sup> In the Middle East, Arabic and Turkic. And in Europe, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Russenorsk and Spanish. In the Ancient World too, *lingua francas* were used: Akkadian, Aramaic, Atlantic Celtic, Greek, Latin, Pāli, Persian, Phoenician and Sanskrit. And along the Silk Road, in the early centuries of the Christian era, Khotanese “was the language of trade along the Silk Road, until it was replaced by Soghdian speech and script as the *lingua franca* of the bridge between West and East.”<sup>181</sup>

All these languages, from all phases of history, and in use across wide regions on all the known continents, have been (and often still are) extremely useful for contact and communication between speakers of widely different linguistic background.

**(10) *Research perspectives*** There is a variety of reasons why linguists such as Matras, Hicks, Trask, Weinreich and others have taken to the study of *lingua franca*, pidgins, creoles and language contact. To name a few scholars working in this domain: Mühlhäusler<sup>182</sup> and Calvet<sup>183</sup> have made important contributions to (post-)colonial linguistics, that is, the study of how many of these languages emerged under conditions of colonial power, control and inequality; Thomason and Kaufman have established how, when studying these languages, the conditions of emergence and use of these languages must systematically be taken into account, since the linguistic outcome of language contact always depends on the historical context and circumstances in which they arise;<sup>184</sup> Hagège has focused on what he calls the dialogic species and its creole laboratory, which provides insights into basic properties of the human language faculty;<sup>185</sup> and Bickerton<sup>186</sup> has leapt from creolistics to studying the roots of language under his bioprogram, with its central focus on the universal endowment and language abilities of the human species.

<sup>177</sup>Trask (2000, 196).

<sup>178</sup>Matras (2009, 275).

<sup>179</sup>Cf. Ostler (2005, 604–605). Also Samarin (1968); Hancock (1971; 1977); Foley (1988); and Michaelis (2013).

<sup>180</sup>Perego (1968, 597).

<sup>181</sup>Cf. Rowland (1974, 21).

<sup>182</sup>Mühlhäusler (1997).

<sup>183</sup>Calvet (2002 [1974]; 1981; 2011).

<sup>184</sup>Thomason and Kaufman (1988, 212).

<sup>185</sup>Hagège (1990).

<sup>186</sup>Bickerton (2009; 2014).

The following three observations may offer some background and perspective here. First, these languages are topical, important for their role both in world history and in the world of today. Apart from the phenomenal rise of English as the first global lingua franca, there are many other such trade languages. The interest in these languages is recent; there has been a long history of neglect, during which these languages were often much maligned, the butt of sociocultural and political *dédain*.<sup>187</sup> Today, they are better known and receive more recognition; they are used in literature (Rushdie, Chamoiseau), where creole and *créolité* is celebrated for the raw energy of its broken language and oral poetry, with “Caliban tearing up the pages of Prospero’s magic book,”<sup>188</sup> as David Dabydeen put it, adding: “It’s hard to put two words together in creole without swearing.”<sup>189</sup> At the same time, however, there often still is enormous cultural resistance and prejudice against what for many people is no more than the spoken patois and street lingo of the uneducated and the illiterate. All this reflects the world we live in: as it changes and gets smaller, contact increases, and so does the need for a common vehicle for communication.

Secondly, studying these kinds of languages serves the purpose of critical scrutiny and scholarly hygiene within linguistics: Creoles and lingua francas defy conventional and established ideas and theories about language, providing counter examples that contribute to the testing and falsification of linguistic theories. Thus, for example, Schuchardt disproved the Neogrammarian Hypothesis, and also dismissed Saussurean structuralism. And in more recent times, Weinreich<sup>190</sup> and Labov<sup>191</sup> precede Dakhli<sup>192</sup> in arguing that the study of language contact, transfer and interference serves to disprove the rigid formal and abstract notion of system that dominates in much of twentieth century structural and generative linguistics.

Thirdly, we are witnessing here the “birth of new languages,”<sup>193</sup> which stand out by their intriguing features and pose a clear investigative challenge. They are new in the sense that they are not based on a single transmitted, ancestral variety of language, but on a combination of source languages. Their genetic affiliation or linguistic parentage can therefore not easily be determined, and does not fit easily into the existing schemes of comparative-historical (or structural) linguistics.<sup>194</sup> Put differently, pidgins, creoles and lingua francas invite new analyses, ideas and perspectives as to their emergence and development, their structure and use, and the sorts of complexities they exhibit. Studied in this way, they may contribute to the development of new insights into core aspects of verbal behavior and the human language faculty, and how these operate under specific socio-historical and political conditions.

Such questions are the subject matter of the new field of contact linguistics which grew quickly at the end of the twentieth century, and is today in full flow. With its new knowledge and insights, its new discoveries and its important theoretical issues and debates, contact linguistics has much to offer if we want to come to grips with lingua franca.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. the pejorative use of “*Fatma*’s” as a disdainful term for Islamic women (Lanly 1970, 42).

<sup>188</sup> Dabydeen (1990, 9).

<sup>189</sup> Dabydeen (1990, 4).

<sup>190</sup> Weinreich (2013 [1957]).

<sup>191</sup> Labov (1971).

<sup>192</sup> Dakhli (2008).

<sup>193</sup> Foley (1988).

<sup>194</sup> Matras (2009, 277).

**(11) *Lingua franca as part of a network of notions: necessary distinctions*** As a category in modern contact linguistics, the notion of *lingua franca* is now being applied to the study of other languages with comparable properties, of the present as well as of the past. So our first question must be: What are those properties?

According to Matras a *lingua franca* can be a pidgin, but it can also be a creole, and could equally be an already existing language.<sup>195</sup> The question is, how exactly are these various notions linked? In his dictionary of linguistics, Trask constructs an interesting trail of links and references, running from *lingua franca* to *pidgin*, *creole*, *interlect* and *koinè*, via *Greek* and *Aramaic*, *language contact* and *crystallization*, to *linguistic convergence* and *models of linguistic descent*.<sup>196</sup> Following his lead, we will below explore the network of concepts within modern contact linguistics that *lingua franca* is part of.

We do so in four steps. Our first step here is to do away with the notion of “mixed language.” Trask defines this as “A language which does not descend from a single ancestor in the normal way but which has instead been assembled by combining large chunks of material from two (or more) existing languages: one type of non-genetic language. The term is commonly applied only to mother tongues and not to pidgins, which otherwise may have a similar origin, and it is not usually applied to creoles either.”<sup>197</sup> To which he immediately adds a critical note: “At least since the days of Hugo Schuchardt in the late nineteenth century, linguists have wondered whether mixed languages truly exist, and many linguists have doubted their reality,”<sup>198</sup> and “the term *mixed language* has sometimes been applied far more broadly to any language which has been significantly influenced by another such as English, but this broad usage seems objectionable, since in this sense there are hardly any unmixed languages.” One can only agree—all languages are mixed, as Sapir noted, so this is a meaningless label, for which we have no use.

Our next step is to consider the notion of *koinè*. “This term refers to a variety of a language that serves as a means of communication among speakers of related varieties or dialects; in effect, a *koinè* is a *lingua franca* used among speakers of related dialects. There is, however, a general understanding that the role of a *koinè* entails a certain amount of structural leveling and cross-dialectal accommodation, processes that occur much more easily when the speech varieties involved are related and to some extent mutually comprehensible.”<sup>199</sup> From history we know that *Koinè Greek* was the general, simplified Greek commonly used throughout the Hellenistic world in the post-Alexandrian era, spoken everywhere in an area far larger than its original homeland in Greece and Macedonia, and which included settlements around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, in Egypt, the Middle East, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Persia, and all the way to the Indus, where it was used in the inscriptions on the Pillars of Asoka.<sup>200</sup> The point here is: a *koinè* can serve as a *lingua franca*, as it did in the Hellenistic world, but not conversely: the historic *Lingua Franca*—even if it had regional and temporal variation—was not a *koinè* and was not used between speakers of related varieties of a language. On the contrary, it was used precisely between speakers who did not have a language in common.

<sup>195</sup>Matras (2009, 275).

<sup>196</sup>Trask (2000).

<sup>197</sup>Trask (2000).

<sup>198</sup>Trask (2000, 214–215).

<sup>199</sup>Matras (2009, 276).

<sup>200</sup>Cf. Walbank (1992).

We come a lot closer, thirdly, when we consider the relationship between *lingua franca* and pidgin. According to Price a pidgin is

a contact vernacular [...] for purposes of intercommunication, frequently in trading contexts but sometimes for other reasons (e.g. communication between masters and servants or slaves), in situations involving speakers of two or more languages, each of which contributes something of its pronunciation, grammar or lexicon to the pidgin. Pidgins are restricted languages in the sense that their range of functions and their vocabulary are significantly more limited than those of more conventional languages and that they have a simplified grammar lacking many of the features of the languages from which they derive. Nevertheless, a pidgin is not unstructured but obeys widely accepted conventions of pronunciation, grammar and lexical meaning.<sup>201</sup>

In line with this view, Matras observes that “pidgins might be seen as a kind of makeshift *lingua franca*.”<sup>202</sup> Thus, to some extent, the notions of pidgin and *lingua franca* overlap.

In this context, fourthly, what about *lingua franca* and creole? The question matters, because many creoles arose in colonial language contact situations, giving rise to English-based, French-based, Spanish-based, Portuguese-based, Dutch-based and Arabic-based creoles,<sup>203</sup> with a range of typical “broken language” features.<sup>204</sup> A creole language derives from a pidgin, when this comes into use as the first language of a community, develops an expanded vocabulary and a more elaborate grammar, and by that process evolves into a creole.<sup>205</sup> More in detail:

Creoles derive typically from pidgin languages but, whereas a pidgin is an accessory language and no one’s first language, a creole arises when a pidgin becomes the mother tongue of a speech community. The simple structure that characterized the pidgin is carried over into the creole but since a creole, as a mother tongue, must be capable of expressing the whole range of human experience, the lexicon is expanded and frequently a more elaborate system evolves.<sup>206</sup>

Here, again, we encounter a degree of overlap, this time between *lingua franca* and creole.

Given the overlap we encounter here between *lingua franca*, pidgin and creole, if we are to contribute from linguistics to a better understanding of languages in contact, we do need clear and careful distinctions that can help to disentangle the confusion of distinct but partially overlapping notions.

What is needed here is the distinction between function and structure. As Matras put it, “The principal challenge facing the study of contact languages is to relate their particular structural profile to the circumstances of their emergence and the purpose for which they are created and used”—and his own view that, “the term ‘*lingua franca*’ remains strictly

<sup>201</sup>Price (1998, 358).

<sup>202</sup>Matras (2009, 277).

<sup>203</sup>Matras (2009, 278–280).

<sup>204</sup>Matras (2009, 281).

<sup>205</sup>Price (1998, 358).

<sup>206</sup>Todd (1990, 2–3), cited in Price (1998, 105–106).



confined to the sociolinguistic role of the language concerned, with no direct implications as to its structural composition.”<sup>207</sup> Thus, lingua franca is a role of language, a function or purpose, viz. to serve as vehicle for contact and communication, whereas pidgin and creole have to do first of all with the form and structure of the language variety concerned.

This provides us with a useful basic distinction. But things are more complex, and given the overlap that often occurs between lingua franca, pidgin and creole<sup>208</sup> we must ask, what exactly is the relation between function and structure here? Is there perhaps a correlation between, on the one hand, a language’s role as lingua franca and, on the other, aspects of its structure, for example, a more analytic syntax, less inflection and an influx of foreign vocabulary?

The answer comes in two steps. First of all, pidgins and creoles emerge to serve the same purpose of contact and communication as lingua franca, but a lingua franca does not necessarily have to be a pidgin or creole: it can also be an existing language such as Latin, English or French—so there is no necessary, bi-unique connection between function and structure here. But secondly, even so, in practice a close connection between the two is quite common: lingua francas often are pidgin or creole, and in particular, the historic Lingua Franca definitely was a broken form of language, a pidgin built from Romance roots, simplified and reduced so as to serve the purpose of facilitating contact and communication across a language gap or barrier.

**(12) Core features of lingua franca** From the preceding discussion of the historical Lingua Franca and of lingua francas in general, the following core features emerge.

The first, and essential, point was established by Schuchardt: In Lingua Franca everything is always born of necessity, in a situation of contact between speakers of different language background, that is, always in a multilingual situation where everyone needs, and therefore also converges toward, one central vehicle for communication.

Secondly. The central purpose to be served by a lingua franca is for spoken interaction and oral communication across language barriers in a contact situation. What is needed is interactive behavior that can produce results in the market and on the street. Here, it would seem, anything goes. Do as Gulliver did, trying out his whole linguistic repertoire, in order to overcome the language barrier, choosing the language or communication instrument that offers the best returns. It all depends on the situation.

Thirdly, the key point is: the simpler the better. The key example from the original Lingua Franca is *Mi andar*. Do not go in for elaborate code, just stick with basic communication—that is the first priority, which overrides all niceties of form, rules and regulation. If necessary, we can reduce the structures of our verbal behavior and our language, using only basic roots, key words and short utterances, thus making a pidgin with broken down and restricted morphology, syntax, phonology and lexicon, all aiming for maximum comprehensibility.

Fourthly, as for the manner and channel of transmission, note that the broken language variety used as lingua franca is a readymade instrument for practical use; a disposable variety of language, very necessary but handled without care, easily discarded and quickly forgotten afterwards; not standardized, not taught in school, not one’s own, always somebody else’s language—in fact *no man’s language*. Its preferred channel of transmission is in the streets

<sup>207</sup>Matras (2009, 276).

<sup>208</sup>Cf. Trask (2000).

and markets, the harbors, the drinking houses, the brothels, the plantations, in the army and on board ships—with the *lingua franca* as the unregulated core of the oral culture that thrives there.

Fifthly, note that in practice a close connection between function and form, purpose and structure, is very common and prevalent. This means that we will always have to inquire into the concrete relationship between on the one hand the social role and purpose of a language variety in contact, and on the other hand the specific structural consequences this may entail.<sup>209</sup> It is this very complexity which we also encounter in the case of the mixed language varieties that arose in Dutch-Malay language contact during the colonial era in the Dutch possessions in the Indonesian archipelago, where it is always that particular mix, at that time and place, in that context and setting.<sup>210</sup> There are, in other words, no standards and no fixed language rules here, only variation; *lingua franca* is always flexible and adaptable.

With these intriguing properties, *Lingua Franca* is the polar opposite of the solemn *Lingua Sacra*, which, moreover, usually strongly benefits from being written. More about this in the next section.

### 1.3 *Lingua Sacra: History and Theory*

#### 1.3.1 Religions and their Languages

**(1) *Introduction: religions and their languages today*** In London today, as in many other mass conurbations around the world, we encounter a wide range of different religions.<sup>211</sup> Nothing new here: ever since the ancient city of Uruk five millennia ago,<sup>212</sup> there have always been many gods in our cities, many creeds, many faiths and beliefs.

Take Mithras, the old Iranian sun-god, imported from the East in the first century CE by the Romans as the god of mysteries, and worshipped all over the Roman empire as late as the fifth century, especially by soldiers who disseminated his cult throughout Europe to places as far away as Martigny, Mainz and London.<sup>213</sup> Today long dead and forgotten, Mithras was present in Londinium almost two thousand years ago, amidst a wide range of other creeds, cults and religions, alongside Roman gods, romanized Celtic deities, Germanic gods, Greek and Oriental ones, right next to the Christian god as well as prehistoric animistic beliefs.<sup>214</sup> In Rome itself this was no different: the eternal city was never monotheistic and offered hospitality to gods from Etruria, Greece, Israel, Egypt, Palmyra and many other places,<sup>215</sup> while the Roman Empire created the necessary traveling conditions.

Today, this is as common as it has ever been. In London today, as one of the after-effects of the British Empire, many gods are being worshipped: Allah and God, Dieu, Jahweh, Theos, Bog, the Hindu pantheon, the Buddha, Ganesha, and many more. There are also very large Anglican, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox cathedrals in London, as well as the largest mosque of Europe (in Regent's Park), the largest Sikh temple (in Southwark), and the largest Hindu temple (in West London). Even Zoroastrianism, one of the oldest

<sup>209</sup>Cf. Thomason and Kaufman (1988, 212–213).

<sup>210</sup>Salverda (2013).

<sup>211</sup>Cf. Morton (2000).

<sup>212</sup>Cf. Crüsemann et al. (2013).

<sup>213</sup>Johnston (2007, 101–102).

<sup>214</sup>Green (1983).

<sup>215</sup>Scheid (2007, 112, 116).

religions, established by the Iranian prophet Zarathustra long before our common era, is being practiced in London today—its high priest of the ritual of fire and light working as a baggage handler at Heathrow airport.<sup>216</sup>

So many gods, so many languages. In London's religious domain, multilingualism is a pervasive reality today: more than twenty languages other than English are regularly used for religious services, ranging from Afrikaans, Amharic, Arabic and Aramaic, Chinese, Danish and Dutch through Farsi, French, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Patois, Punjabi and Russian to Sanskrit, Spanish and Turkish.<sup>217</sup>

Of these languages the following eight belong to what are traditionally considered to be *lingua sacra*: Classical Arabic, Aramaic, Chinese, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Punjabi, and Sanskrit. Two more can be added if we assume that "Russian" is actually the Old Church Slavonic of the Russian Orthodox Church, and that the Amharic mentioned above is actually Ge'ez, an Ethiopian Semitic language in use as a liturgical language by Ethiopian Jews in the Orthodox Tewahedo and by Ethiopian Christians in the Catholic church. Altogether then, about half the languages on the list above can be considered *lingua sacra*.<sup>218</sup>

The other half are languages which are used for religious services within the relevant linguistic communities. The Dutch language, for example, is used to celebrate the Christian religion within the Dutch speaking community living in London. But note that using Dutch—or Afrikaans, Danish, French, Italian, Spanish and Turkish—for a religious service does not automatically turn that language into a *lingua sacra*. That is, we will have to make a distinction here between a language of religion such as Hebrew, and languages used for a religious service such as Dutch.

With respect to the first of these two categories, the languages of religion, there often seems to exist a one-to-one correlation between language and religion. For Moslems, Classical Arabic is the only true language of Islam, since the Koran is quite literally the Word of God himself. No human being can truly comprehend it, no translation is possible, and no other language can be used in acts of worship, and for this reason, Classical Arabic is *the* sacred language of Islam, even if the Koran has been rendered into more than a hundred languages, including Chinese, Dutch, English, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Persian, Polish and Spanish,<sup>219</sup> and even if the Muslim community in London, although unified by Islam and their worship of "the same God in the same sacred language" (Koranic Arabic), is culturally heterogeneous and linguistically diverse, speaking English and/or Punjabi, Urdu, Mirpuri, Pashto, Gujarati, Bengali, Hindi, Somali, Malay and a host of other Asian and African languages.<sup>220</sup>

For other languages, however, the correlation may not be as strictly bi-unique. Sanskrit, for example, is the sacred language not only of the Vedas and Hinduism, but also of Mahayana Buddhism and of Jainism. Conversely, even if Buddhism's most important canon is in Pāli,<sup>221</sup> there are also Buddhist canons in Classical Chinese, Sanskrit and Tibetan. Thus, Sanskrit is *a* (and not *the*) sacred language of Buddhism. Meanwhile, Classical

<sup>216</sup>Salverda (2006).

<sup>217</sup>Cf. Salverda (2006).

<sup>218</sup>Cf. Wikipedia s.v. "Sacred Language": [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_language), accessed July 7, 2017.

<sup>219</sup>Salverda (2006).

<sup>220</sup>Baumann (1996, 123–126).

<sup>221</sup>Bouquet (1954, 139); Trask (2000, 244).

Chinese is the language not only of Confucianism and Buddhism but also of Taoism. And in Christianity too, multilingualism is everywhere, and right from the beginning.

The Bible comes in a number of sacred languages—of which two are Semitic, viz. Aramaic-Syriac and Hebrew, while the other two are Indo-European, respectively *koinè* Greek, “the post-classical variety in which the New Testament is written” and which is the liturgical language of Greek Christianity,<sup>222</sup> and Ecclesiastical Latin, the language of St. Jerome’s *Vulgata* and the dominant liturgical language of the Roman Catholic Church. In addition, there is the long-standing tradition of Bible translation, a case of customer-friendly multilingualism in support of outreach and missionary purposes, beginning early on with translations into Armenian, Gothic, Old Church Slavonic, Coptic—“a form of ancient Egyptian, written in the Greek alphabet, which died out as a spoken language in about the fourteenth century, but is still used today as a liturgical language by Coptic Christians”<sup>223</sup>—and into very many other languages.<sup>224</sup> There is no strict, one-to-one correspondence here between language and religion: Latin is only one of the *lingua sacras* of Christianity.<sup>225</sup> It is also the universal language of the Church, alongside the many vernaculars which—since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)—may be used to celebrate Mass if the liturgical texts, translated from Latin, have been legitimately approved within the Roman Catholic world church.

At this point we are moving into the second category distinguished above, the languages for religious service. When these are used, for example when the *Lord’s Prayer* is translated into Dutch, this translation does not in and by itself turn Dutch into a sacred language. Equally, when the German linguist Johann Christoph Adelung, in his *Mithridates*, presented the Lord’s Prayer in 500 different languages,<sup>226</sup> this did not turn each of those 500 into *lingua sacra*. For religious people and church members, however, this may be different, and the sacredness of the original may carry over onto the translation. An interesting example is the Bible in the Early Modern Dutch *Statenvertaling* of 1637, today still in use amongst ultra-orthodox Calvinist denominations in the Netherlands, who do not see it as a translation but as God’s Word itself.<sup>227</sup> Here, the translation can partake in the sacredness of the original, with Dutch functioning as a *lingua sacra* in the same way as Latin, that is, as the language of God’s Word, in a Dutch that is marked by archaic, at times even incomprehensible, formations, and by a precise and solemn delivery within the liturgical ritual of the church.

### 1.3.2 So What Makes these Languages Sacred?

**(2) *Ancient conceptions of sacredness: clearing a space for investigation*** Having identified a number of existing *lingua sacras*, from Arabic to Sanskrit, our next question is: What can we say about their sacredness? What is it that makes or made those languages sacred? What concepts, distinctions or factors are involved in saying that a particular language is a *lingua sacra*?

<sup>222</sup>Trask (2000, 144).

<sup>223</sup>Trask (2000, 75).

<sup>224</sup>Cf. <http://www.ethnologue.com>, accessed April 3, 2017.

<sup>225</sup>Cf. Auvray (1960); Sawyer (1999).

<sup>226</sup>Adelung (1806–1817).

<sup>227</sup>Cf. Willemyns (2012, 88, 93).

In section 1.1, we noted how the notion of *lingua sacra* takes us into new territory: viz. the domain of what is held *sacred* by people in the domain of religious language—a vast and rather complicated field of deeply-held socio-cultural ideas, beliefs, traditions and values about language and its magic, power and symbolism. So, before we proceed, we will have to consider the existence and impact of these age-old beliefs about the sacredness of language.

To begin with the Bible, note that this a vast repository of stories concerning language. There is, to begin with, the notion of the *logos spermatikos*—that is, the creative language and the words spoken by God at the Creation, from which the world emanates.<sup>228</sup> On account of this story, present both in the opening chapters of Genesis and in the final Book of Revelations, God's language is presented as the Alpha and the Omega of the biblical universe—an interesting use of the alphabet as a metaphor to signify His eternity.<sup>229</sup> Then, next, Adam receives from God the gift of language. And what a gift that was: an instrument for naming and labelling, which brings order to the world around us; an instrument also for communication and dialogue with our fellow men, for question and answer, for satisfying one's curiosity, for seduction, deceit, lies and storytelling; as well as an instrument for dialogue with God, in prayer, confession, grace and worship, but also revelations, commandments, injunctions, lessons and parables, and finally punishment and expulsion from Paradise. Thus, not only is language—from which the universe emanates and with which mankind can make its own worlds—god-given; it is also clearly a most powerful instrument which can serve every imaginable purpose, function or endeavor.

The Bible is also the source of a number of conceptual traditions concerning language and the plurality of languages. In the Old Testament, the book of Genesis tells the story of the Babylonian confusion of tongues which God inflicted as a punishment upon those who had the audacity of building the Tower of Babel—thus keeping mankind divided, while simultaneously asserting the immense power of monolingualism and a monopoly of language.<sup>230</sup> In the New Testament though, things were rather different. When Jesus was crucified, there was a multilingual sign on the cross, in Hebrew, Greek and Latin—giving us the three sacred languages of the Bible.<sup>231</sup> Later, at Pentecost, the Apostles could suddenly speak in many previously unknown tongues, reflecting age old practices of ecstatic religious glossolalia.<sup>232</sup> There is an acceptance here of multilingualism which underpins the missionary tradition of translating the Bible into other languages so as to spread God's Word around the world.

We should not underestimate the continuing influence of these ancient conceptions, or the implications they have for the sacredness of language. But we should also see these conceptions for what they are: myths—that is, religious ways of coming to terms with language and multilingualism. They may be ancient and powerful, but they are and remain myths. In our evolutionary times today, no one can seriously maintain that the universe did indeed emanate from God's Word; that language really was God's gift to mankind; that the snake did actually speak to Eve; that Hebrew was the language of Paradise; that the world has ever been “all of one tongue,” and so on. And while the Bible holds a rich collection of such viewpoints, these go off in all directions, and do not constitute a consistent body of testable

<sup>228</sup>Cf. Kelly (1978, 18).

<sup>229</sup>Cf. also Garbini (1988, 102).

<sup>230</sup>Cf. Borst (1995).

<sup>231</sup>Cf. the gospel of John XIX, 19–10; Auvray (1960); Richter (1995a, 67).

<sup>232</sup>New Testament: Acts 2. Cf. Williams (1981, 72).

propositions. Historically, furthermore, it is precisely from these and other such religious preconceptions that the discipline of modern linguistics has had to emancipate itself—in a secularization process beginning in the eighteenth century with the *Encyclopédie* and its systematic empirical investigations of language and languages, then continuing in the nineteenth century with the breakthrough and formidable successes of historical comparative linguistics. At this point we may ask—from a *Wissensgeschichtlich* point of view—whether “sacredness” and the practice of calling language (or a language) “sacred” are perhaps tied in with this early modern secularization process. Could it be that “sacredness of language” is a notion belonging to the speculative eighteenth century, just like its ideas on the origin of language, the plurality and the harmony of languages, or the ideal language? And how was this connected to the assertion of Judaism and Jewish orthodoxy in the eighteenth century, which went hand in hand with the promotion of the Hebrew language as its *lingua sacra*?<sup>233</sup> Are we looking here at an early modern sacralization of language, in an attempt perhaps to counter the ongoing disenchantment of the world by the Enlightenment?

However this may be, for us, today, “sacredness,” based as it is on biblical or religious grounds, would appear to be just a belief, at best a speculative and pre-scientific notion, not an object of scholarly investigation. But then, if these biblical notions are no longer valid or relevant, the whole question of *lingua sacra* may be wrongly conceived and *mal posé*—and in that case, shouldn’t we reject the whole idea of “sacredness,” and abandon our pursuit?

My answer to this question is no—not until we have first investigated what we can say, from a linguistic point of view, with Crystal<sup>234</sup> and Jakobson,<sup>235</sup> about the characteristics of *lingua sacra*.

**(3) *Varieties of lingua sacra and sources of sacredness*** A practical starting point for such an investigation is provided by the article on “Sacred Languages” in *Wikipedia*,<sup>236</sup> which invites many questions. Is *lingua sacra* actually an identifiable kind of language or category of language use? How are sacred languages different from non-sacred languages? If Latin is a sacred language, what does it mean to say so? When, or how, can we say that something is actually the Word of God? If Sanskrit is a sacred language, then why? Is it, as Pollock says, because it is the language of the gods? Or perhaps because of some writing, scripture or a book that within the context of the relevant religion is held to be sacred? So, is sacredness perhaps a concept that only holds within the domain of religion or even within the particular religion involved?

For an exploration of these questions we will now first take a closer look at the varieties of *lingua sacra* and the factors involved in their sacredness.

**(3.1) *Sacred and profane: the mana of language*** As a first step, we take the distinction between “sacred” and “profane” as developed in the comparative anthropology of religion, in particular in the work of Mircea Eliade.<sup>237</sup> In Eliade’s *Patterns in Comparative Religion* the central notion is that of “Hierophanies,” that is, items which manifest something which

<sup>233</sup> Levi (1785–1787).

<sup>234</sup> Crystal (1956).

<sup>235</sup> Jakobson (1963).

<sup>236</sup> Wikipedia s.v. “Sacred Language”: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_language), accessed July 7, 2017.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Eliade (1957, 9). But note Piggott’s caveat: in ancient times “they did not see things divided into sacred and profane” (Piggott 1968, 15).

is sacred, “*das ‘ganz andere’*.”<sup>238</sup> There is an immense variety and diversity of such hierophanies, since almost anything can be sacred—trees, rivers, the wind, the sun, the stars, ancestors, war, objects, locations, views, sounds, gestures, images, shells, horses, stones, events, games, and so on. So too can language.

Eliade’s work does not contain a separate chapter on “sacred languages,” but it does offer a lot of information on incantations, spells, names, formulas, words on paper—all sorts of things which one can do in and with language, with a symbolic power governed by practices of *mana* and *taboo*. It is not the language itself that is sacred here—rather, the sacredness of a language is determined by its *mana*. As far as I can see, the *mana* of language involves, first of all, the intrinsic symbolic power of a word, a speech sound, a tone of voice, a chant, curses, a prophecy, and so on; secondly, its *mana* may be enhanced by rituals and practices necessary to achieve the intended effect, for example, in magic or in divination (such as initiation, the use of fixed formulas, the requirement of precise, correct and unchanged repetition in mantras and chants, the strict observation of the secrets, sanctions and exclusions required by *taboo*); and thirdly, its mystical dimension may involve meditation, visions, mysteries, revelations and ecstasies, all focussed on the spiritual and creative powers of language, going from symbolism to *das Numinöse* and eventually the ineffable, in grammars of creation, real presences, gnosis, and the deepest inner intensities of belief, myth and revelation.<sup>239</sup>

This *mana*-aspect of language may have come down to us from magical thinking and ancient times, but it is alive and well today, and can be observed in everyday language behavior; and in the religious domain it exists in more concentrated and intensified form in *lingua sacra*.

Here, with Crystal,<sup>240</sup> we can envisage a linguistics of religious language. Having opened this field of investigation, we shall discuss it further below, in subsection (4). In the meantime, we shall continue to explore here in subsection (3) what other sources, beyond *mana* and *taboo*, there may be for the sacredness of *lingua sacra*.

**(3.2) *Ancientness of language, and of religions: the time factor in sacredness*** Amongst the sacred languages mentioned above, we note that Amharic, Arabic, Aramaic, Avestan, Chinese, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Latin, Russian and Sanskrit are all venerable, ancient languages of religion, and have been in use as such for a very long time. Their ancientness, longevity and very *longue durée* definitely underscore and enhance their sacredness. A thousand years, it would appear, is indeed no more than a blink in the eyes of the Lord. New languages, at any rate, do not quickly become *lingua sacra*, whereas dead languages, such as Latin, Classical Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac (the liturgical language of the Syrian Jacobite Church), do remarkably well as liturgical language.<sup>241</sup>

The time factor may go far deeper yet. The ancientness of a language may be linked to some beginning, or at least to a very significant moment in time long ago—an initial text or foundational event, perhaps the start of a new era and calendar such as we find in the major religions of the world. Here it is not the ancientness of the language which ensures its sacredness; the decisive factor appears to be the longevity of the relevant cults and religions—the tradition and continuity of devotion and worship, perhaps of some long lost ancestor deity

<sup>238</sup>Eliade (1997 [1958], 8).

<sup>239</sup>Cf. Steiner (2001).

<sup>240</sup>Crystal (1956).

<sup>241</sup>Trask (2000, 200). Cf. Trask (2000, 25, 80, 148).

on the list of dead gods in Mencken's *Prejudices*.<sup>242</sup> Once a religion or cult is gone, the names of its gods as well as their languages will be forgotten too; whereas, conversely, for the Tornedalian Finnish in Sweden their religion was the inner core and decisive factor in the maintenance and revitalization of their Meänkieli language.

An example of the kind of cultic *longue durée* involved in *lingua sacra*, is the persistence of magical practices in the butter letter from Fryslân, a mishmash of writing, signs and symbols, written at the end of the eighteenth century by a village pastor, and in use until well into the twentieth century to ward off evil, and to break a witch's spell on the butter. Its writer used ancient Hebrew, Greek and Latin symbols, rituals and liturgic formulas—such as *amen Adrata Bldrata Boldat Belial*—all dead and incomprehensible, but full of age-old magical power.<sup>243</sup> Here, instead of the decline of magic observed by Thomas,<sup>244</sup> what we witness is the continuity of such magical practices, incorporated somehow into the village religion, facilitated by a written text, and enduring long after the Enlightenment could have put an end to it. Those symbols and formulas may have been dead letters all along, but the belief in their efficacy as a remedy against witchcraft kept them alive as *lingua sacra*.

**(3.3) Rituals, repetition and incomprehensibility** The cultic words and symbols, the formulas in ancient sacred languages and the magical practices used in the Frisian butter letter go back a very long time. Like this letter, at one time or another, Etruscan script, Egyptian hieroglyphics, *Mene Tekel*, secret signs in an unknown language, Greek and Latin charms, alphabet magic, spells and curses written backwards, formulas such as *Hocus Pocus*, *Sesame open up* and *Sim Sala Bim*, etcetera were used for religious or magical purposes.<sup>245</sup>

The astounding longevity of these practices testifies to the crucial importance of keeping the formulas concerned always and unchangeably the same. The underlying belief is that “the repetitive statement of certain words can produce the reality stated.”<sup>246</sup> All that matters is exact repetition—a feature we often encounter in *lingua sacra*.

Note, however, that this unchangeability requirement on *lingua sacra* sits uneasily alongside the fact that language is a dynamic entity, always in flux and in change. As a consequence, within a few generations, a sacred text, formula or ritual may become dated; its archaisms and ancient character causing obscurity and incomprehension; and triggering a need for exegesis, interpretation and clarification. This is not really a problem, however, since one doesn't have to be able to understand what is said in those texts, as long as they are precisely and faithfully repeated and delivered. In view of this, we may wonder whether a language or text, in order to qualify as sacred, actually has to be incomprehensible. The answer to that is no, but it sure helps: incomprehensibility is definitely an asset for a *lingua sacra* and its longevity. The incomprehensibility may even be deliberate: codes, cryptography, secret languages and many other forms of language play can be used by initiates to keep outsiders out and to keep their cult and its secrets hidden from the uninitiated.

Rituals are there to ensure the precise repetition and delivery of always the same sound in the same way. The effort to maintain the original formula and keep it unchanged tends to be supported by strong sanctions—against accepting the change and dynamics of language;

<sup>242</sup>Mencken (1958, 143–147).

<sup>243</sup>Cf. Terpstra (1972).

<sup>244</sup>Thomas (1971).

<sup>245</sup>Cf. Reuter and Scholz (2004).

<sup>246</sup>Williams (1981, 204).



against the use of an updated version in contemporary language; and against the translation of a sacred text into the common language or a vernacular. For many centuries, Church Latin thus withstood Dante's vernacular revolution and maintained its monopoly as *lingua sacra* of Christianity. William Tyndale was burnt at the stake, in Vilvoorde on 6 September 1536, for daring to translate the Bible into English.

**(3.4) *Lingua sacra, sacred books and the word of God*** Yet another source of sacredness in *lingua sacra* is the existence of a Sacred Book or Text. Avestan, for example, is the language of the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, written down in the third century CE.<sup>247</sup> Similarly, for Muslims, Classical Arabic is the only true language of the eighth-century Koran—which therefore has always dominated over colloquial Arabic as spoken in many different varieties throughout the Islamic world. Another interesting example is Sikhism, with a sacred book dating from the eighteenth century, and with Classical Punjabi (already different from the various dialects of Punjabi that exist today) as its *lingua sacra*, even if a plurality of other languages, such as Sindhi, Sanskrit, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, some Persian and Arabic, is also used in these holy scriptures.

Here, again, it is not the language itself that is sacred. Rather, its sacredness derives from a text that is holy. The term often used for these languages is “canonical languages.”<sup>248</sup> The classical canonical languages—such as Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, Pāli and Sanskrit—are languages of the major religions. Since these are extremely reluctant to allow the use of the vernacular, this gives a very restricted definition of the term “canonical”—a term to be used if and only if it is the original language of a sacred text, and only the language of that sacred text. These languages are often not understood by the congregation, with the result that they can be “endowed with a sacred quality and creative power.”<sup>249</sup>

Religion plays a very powerful role here, as it is ultimately the holiness of the Book which underpins the status of its language as *lingua sacra*. The Sacred Book, in turn, is often sacred because it is accepted as the actual Word of God—whether this is in Sanskrit as the Language of the Gods,<sup>250</sup> or in Classical Arabic as the sacred language of Islam, or in the many languages of the Bible, or most recently, in the Korean language, of which the Unification Church's founder, Sun Myung Moon, has said—a very strong claim indeed—that Korean is “the language closest to God's Heart.”<sup>251</sup>

**(3.5) *Writing and canonization*** The sacred character of *lingua sacra* may also be due to the writing and the script in which the texts of a religion are couched.

Writing in itself can bestow prestige, as we can see in the story in Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* of the headman who pretends he can read so as to enhance his status within the tribe by the power, magic and worship attached to writing and reading.<sup>252</sup> Nothing new here—since time immemorial, religious and magic powers have been ascribed to the invention of writing. “Many ancient cultures attributed the origin of writing to divine intervention”,<sup>253</sup> and Crystal mentions Toth, Nabu, Odin and Brahma as gods of script and writ-

<sup>247</sup>Bouquet (1954, 106).

<sup>248</sup>Cf. Williams (1981, 204).

<sup>249</sup>Williams (1981, 204).

<sup>250</sup>Pollock (2006).

<sup>251</sup>Cf. Wikipedia s.v. “Sacred Language”: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_language), accessed July 7, 2017.

<sup>252</sup>Lévi-Strauss (1955).

<sup>253</sup>Beard (2007, 137).

ing.<sup>254</sup> Writing carries great symbolic power, and for many centuries, the Sybilline books in the Etruscan language, Egyptian hieroglyphics and Gothic runes have all been invested with magical powers.

So, we must consider the question: Is the sacredness of *lingua sacra* due to the script and writing it comes in? Fact is that most of the existing *lingua sacras* are written. Aramaic, Sanskrit, Greek, Hebrew have all been written for thousands of years. Writing preserves, gives permanence, and makes a visual and symbolic impact, which carries great prestige. Power and religion have always been a driving force in the spread of writing and scripts. It is writing which confers sacredness on a language; and this may even, as for example in Hebrew, require a special “sacred literacy.”<sup>255</sup> So, in view of this, shouldn’t we stop speaking of sacred language, and instead only talk about sacred writing, sacred texts, or sacred books?

Note that Bouquet says that ancient script and writing are not necessarily, and have not always been, *ipso facto* sacred as such.<sup>256</sup> Writing and its invention may well be tied into the organization and continuity of ancient institutions that one could not run very well without it—administration, law giving and taxation, the school, the library and archives, architecture, religion, foreign affairs and the army.<sup>257</sup> Very often the origin of writing appears to have been secular, and there is “no evidence in the ancient civilizations of the Indus valley, of Mesopotamia, or of China that writing was restricted to or specifically associated with religious purposes.”<sup>258</sup>

Even so, even if writing does not have a religious origin, “much ancient writing is connected with sacred affairs, events, and persons”,<sup>259</sup> and “Literacy, both in ancient and modern times, has been closely associated with religion.”<sup>260</sup> From small beginnings—sentences inscribed on stones, bowls, walls, prayers, invocations, charms, “answers given by sacred men and women on behalf of a deity”<sup>261</sup>—slowly grew a larger and more varied literature. The result—as Bouquet’s anthology documents—is an extensive amount of material that has come down to us from many different cultures, periods, languages and scripts, of sacred writings and religious literature, ranging from sayings of the deity, prayers, invocations, charms and formulaic spells through hymns, myths, liturgies, prayers, instructions and codifications, prophesies and revelations, all the way to stories and dramatic representations.<sup>262</sup>

Eventually, this process produced sacred books, validated and canonized by a religious community that sets its seal on the standard compilation of the relevant sacred literature. And this is the core point here: the crucial role of canonization processes. It is not just the symbolic power of writing; behind those sacred books there has always been an authority, a process of selection, and a decision about the canon they are part of.

Again, then, it is not the language itself that is sacred. Rather, it is the writing and the script, together with the relevant canonization process, which determine the sacredness of the texts and books concerned, from which *lingua sacra* takes its sacred character.

<sup>254</sup>Crystal (1956, 13).

<sup>255</sup>Spolsky (2009, 37).

<sup>256</sup>Bouquet (1954, 20–26).

<sup>257</sup>Cf. Kramer (1959).

<sup>258</sup>Bouquet (1954, 21).

<sup>259</sup>Bouquet (1954, 1).

<sup>260</sup>Bouquet (1954, 21). Cf. Haarmann (2007, 22).

<sup>261</sup>Bouquet (1954, 22).

<sup>262</sup>Bouquet (1954, 22). Cf. also the written materials in Reuter and Scholz (2004).

**(3.6) *Lingua sacra before the written word*** As we see, many sacred languages have the weight of a long written tradition behind them. For these languages, the combined power of writing, tradition and longevity ensures a cumulation of sacredness, or as we might say today, an accumulation of symbolic and cultural capital.<sup>263</sup>

Writing also offers sustainability and endurance. Without it, many sacred texts would not have been preserved. We shall never know the oral traditions of the Druids, since “the Celtic world, like the rest of barbarian Europe, was one of non-literate oral tradition, which was the time honoured and socially approved mode for the conservation and transmission of law, genealogy, story, song and myth in the vernacular,” and “the Druids were specifically concerned with the preservation and continuance of this ancient convention, which avoided the use of writing.”<sup>264</sup> There is a caveat here: writing may enhance the sacredness of a language and may also be crucial to ensure its preservation and survival, but equally, *lingua sacra* is not necessarily and not always a written language.

So what about religions without writing? How do those religions manage without the accumulated and institutionalized power of writing and tradition? Are there oral *lingua sacras*? How do these work, and what can this tell us about *lingua sacra* in general? Are our findings about written *lingua sacra* applicable here, when there is no sacred book? Or, if not, in what way are oral *lingua sacras* different?

In this domain of oral *lingua sacras* we encounter a wide variety of verbal behavior: chants, hymns, celebrating mass and liturgies; sermons, lessons and oral delivery of myths and epics; prayers in holy locations, murmured by a sea of voices; re-enactments and other spoken performances with kathartic or healing impact; oracles, prophecies, mysteries and rituals; the use of magical formulas, riddles, taboos; garbling, abracadabra and other incomprehensibilities in secret spoken languages.

This takes us well beyond the classical written canonical and liturgical languages, to the category of “secret esoteric languages”—a special category of language, which is used to converse with the powers of the unseen.<sup>265</sup> At their core, these have to do with what Williams calls “sacred sounds.” Words like *Amen* and *Hallelujah*, for example, which have always been retained unchanged in their original sound shape and have never been translated, are sacred because of the “virtue [...] deemed to be inherent in the sound.”<sup>266</sup>

Utterances of such sacred sounds can be a “release from an ‘overwhelming psychic pressure’” and “a spontaneous expression of the inner experience.”<sup>267</sup> An example is glossolalia in the New Testament story of the effusion of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles’ speaking in tongues,<sup>268</sup> which is at the root of Pentecostalism and other forms of charismatic Christianity. In glossolalic trance utterances there may be a lot of unintelligible speech, pseudo-words, transformed by all kinds of poetic devices and speech permutations, with vowel and consonant changes of a sometimes very complicated nature, frequent alliteration and rhyme, protraction and repetition of vowels, and often special stress and intonation patterns, peculiar sing-song rhythms and melody, etcetera.<sup>269</sup> Similar phenomena occur in the language of the possessed, as in *Jamaican Maroon Spirit Possession Language*, spoken by

<sup>263</sup>Bourdieu (2001).

<sup>264</sup>Piggott (1968, 12–13).

<sup>265</sup>Williams (1981, 204).

<sup>266</sup>Williams (1981, 204).

<sup>267</sup>Williams (1981, 205).

<sup>268</sup>Williams (1981, 225–226).

<sup>269</sup>Williams (1981, 169, eqs.).

Jamaican Maroons, the descendants of runaway slaves in the mountains of Jamaica, during their Kromanti Play, in which the participants are possessed by their ancestors and speak like they used to long ago.

Mantras too can achieve such a language-transcending effect, since “the very repetition of the mantra may be thought to release creative power.”<sup>270</sup> In the case of ancient Sanskrit mantras this has been ascribed to the fact that they share significant features with other “fringe linguistic phenomena—like the recitation of prayers, the chanting of magical spells, or the ecstatic experience of speaking in tongues.”<sup>271</sup> In Sinhalese mantras, for example, “Sanskrit expressions, Pāli words and classical Sinhalese literary forms are employed, while in exorcist rites a polyglot mixture of ancient and modern languages is used.”<sup>272</sup> And as with glossolalia, it is by virtue of their lack of meaning and/or unintelligibility that mantras have power and efficacy in exorcism.<sup>273</sup>

All this is supported by the ancient Sanskrit belief that the spoken word is a thing of great power, that the utterance of the mantra is itself an act, and that by saying the OM mantra we can overcome any difficulty.<sup>274</sup> “OM,” or rather “AUM,” one of the oldest and best known Sanskrit mantras, transmitted through a longstanding practice of devotion from ancient times to the present, owes its mantra-qualities—and its sacredness—to spiritual vibration and the mysticism of sound.<sup>275</sup> Not only is this mantra always repeated with the same sound always produced in the same way, but in addition, within the syllable, each sound value is given its symbolic interpretation:

Thus, ‘A’ represents the waking consciousness, ‘U’ the inner world of dreams, ‘M’ the dreamless state of deep sleep, and beyond these states is the highest consciousness of all, *turiya*, and this all-encompassing consciousness is represented by a combination of that one syllable AUM and the silence into which the final ‘M’ subsides.<sup>276</sup>

Invested with this elaborate sound symbolism, the mystery and grandeur of “AUM” is that it is “the Whole,” which is “invisible, ineffable, intangible, indefinable, inconceivable, not designable, whose essence is the experience of its own Self.”<sup>277</sup> In this way, the “AUM” mantra is “the one profound and all-embracing vibration of the sacred sound OM,” in fact “the seed-syllable of the universe.”<sup>278</sup>

The key into all those “sacred sounds” is the mysticism of sound. There is a deep link here—at the level of dream language and the subconscious—between glossolalia (the language of the angels), mantras (demon language) and shamanic (or spirit) language.<sup>279</sup> And we may speculate that in these sacred sounds we encounter the full force of the original *mana* from time immemorial which gives a spoken lingua sacra a sacredness of its own, more ancient and therefore much deeper and stronger than that of a written text.

<sup>270</sup>Williams (1981, 204).

<sup>271</sup>Thompson (1997, 589).

<sup>272</sup>Tambiah (1968, 176).

<sup>273</sup>Cf. Williams (1981, 203).

<sup>274</sup>Thompson (1997, 590).

<sup>275</sup>Williams (1981, 206, 209).

<sup>276</sup>Williams (1981, 205).

<sup>277</sup>Cf. Eliade (1958 [1958], 123–124).

<sup>278</sup>Govinda, in Williams (1981, 205).

<sup>279</sup>Williams (1981, 203).

This type of sacredness is very different from that of the preceding sections. It has to do with orality, with the power of the voice, of ritual repetition and oral tradition, with sound symbolism and mysticism—through all of which vocal energies can be activated and channelled into mantras, or into a liturgy, a Gregorian chant, a religious performance, and so on.

We will come back to this matter below in subsection (4.3) of this section, where these and other questions concerning *lingua sacra* and orality will be discussed.

**(3.7) Sources of sacredness** In the preceding subsections we have discussed a network of notions of which *lingua sacra* is part. In the process, we have distinguished various categories of *lingua sacra*—sacred languages, canonical languages, liturgical languages and languages used for religious purposes. We also encountered a great variety of *lingua sacra*—secret, esoteric languages; demon language, language of the angels, shamanic spirit language; religious language; language of rituals; verbal magic, mystical language, glossolalia, sacred sounds, and so on. The list could probably go on, as it would appear that there is no limit to the religious inventiveness and credulity of humankind.

We also identified a range of sources of sacredness, viz. (i) *mana* or *taboo*, with language as a hierophany; (ii) ancientness of language, in combination with longevity of the cult associated with it; (iii) ritual, exact repetition, plus a concomitant archaic character of the language used; (iv) incomprehensibility, Delphic character, perhaps deliberate secrecy, hence the need for exegesis; (v) a Holy Book or sacred text; (vi) writing and canonization; (vii) spoken practices such as mantras, glossolalia, chants, spells, prophecies, all to do with orality.

Sacredness thus comes in different shapes and modes, and can be linked to many different things. What we have before us is a broad complex of relevant factors, where sacredness cuts right across the whole spectrum. Again and again, it is the source—*mana*, ancientness, tradition, ritual, archaisms, incomprehensibility, secrets, writing, book, canonization, religion, orality—which ensures the sacredness of the *lingua sacra* in question. Thus, sacredness is an attribute: it is not the language itself which is sacred, but something else that makes it so.

### 1.3.3 A Linguistic Perspective

**(4) Introduction** The central question of this third section is: What is a sacred language, what is it that makes it a sacred language, and how is it different from language in general? So far, in subsection (1) above we have surveyed which sacred languages there are in the world of today; in (2) we examined ancient biblical preconceptions and myths about sacredness, and in (3) we discussed a variety of sacred languages plus a range of factors that ensure their sacredness.

The question now before us in this subsection (4) is: What can we make of the findings above in today's modern linguistics? Is *lingua sacra* a viable category of language? Suppose it is a type of language or language use with specific functions and structures that is in some sense comparable to *lingua franca*, then what linguistic features and which functions are characteristic of the language forms and behaviors used as *lingua franca*? Is a general definition of the concept of *lingua sacra* possible? How can we make this work in linguistic analysis? What distinctions and concepts can help us to get a better grip on sacred languages?

And how do we bridge the gap between the disciplines involved in *lingua sacra* versus *lingua franca*, such as contact linguistics and the religious-anthropological insights reported above?

What we need, in other words, is a linguistic perspective, that can help us in going beyond all those varieties of *lingua sacra*. To this end, and following on from the discussion of the linguistics of religious language in Crystal (1956), we adopt the framework of functional-structural linguistics as developed by Jakobson<sup>280</sup> in our search for the characteristic properties of *lingua sacra*. Since this is a first step, we will restrict our inquiry to the following three soundings into the major dimensions of Sociolinguistics, Speech acts, and Orality.

**(4.1) *The sociolinguistics of lingua sacra*** The investigation of language and religion as a sociolinguistic field of study is a new and recent development.<sup>281</sup> It is a complex field, involving links with fields as diverse as anthropology, theology, linguistics, language management, colonization, standardization, social history and identity discourses. Within this complex field we will focus here on the issue of *lingua sacra*, and our first question is: Can we apply a sociolinguistic criterion to determine the sacredness of a *lingua sacra*?

It would appear the answer to this question is yes. Let us start, first, from the situation where the religious community and the language community at large share the same vernacular (as is often the case in the Protestant nations). In this case we can define *lingua sacra* as a matter of in-group communication within that religious community, involving a special religious vocabulary, special practices and rituals, incomprehensibility even. Now, secondly, compare the alternative: a religious community which has a *lingua sacra* that is different from the everyday vernacular used by both the believers and the world outside—as, for example, the exclusive use of Latin in the Roman Catholic Church up until the Second Vatican *Concilium*.

In the first case, the *lingua sacra* is a different use of the same vernacular; in the second case it is a different language altogether. But in both these cases, what sets the *lingua sacra* apart is a matter of using a solemn register, a special vocabulary, archaic formulas, prescribed rituals and liturgy, etcetera. Whether the language serving as *lingua franca* is Latin or a vernacular, it is marked as “religious” (i.e. used for worship), and different from the language used in the outside world. This way, we can define *lingua sacra* as an in-group phenomenon in use for worship within the relevant religious community, a language with a religious monopoly that is protected through all kinds of in-group behavior, such as: exclusivity (only for the initiates); authority (a privileged priesthood of interpreters who keep the secrets and know precisely the texts, the formulas and their established meaning); ritual transmission (via liturgy, catechism and rote learning); and sanctions (against using the vernacular, or against translation of the sacred texts). And note that changing (or attempting to change) any of these social practices can be matter of serious contestation, as we know from Frisian.<sup>282</sup>

At the same time, through such institutionalization and its practices a religion and its language can become a crucial factor in the sociocultural vitality of the language community concerned, as we have seen in the revitalization of Finnish amongst a Piëtist community in north Sweden.<sup>283</sup> In the religious communities of London, it is often the priests performing

<sup>280</sup> Jakobson (1987).

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Darquennes and VandenBussche (2011); Spolsky (2009).

<sup>282</sup> Zondag (1987), see further below in section 1.4, subsection (1).

<sup>283</sup> Cf. Bodrogi (2008).

the services, rituals and liturgies of worship in the sacred language who maintain the purity of this language. Having the role of *lingua sacra* can enhance a particular language's chance of survival, maintenance, longevity or continuity.<sup>284</sup>

Spolsky's comparative sociolinguistic analysis of language in the religious domain can tell us a lot about the social function, role and use of religious language, and offers valuable insights into religious language as an in-group phenomenon, plus the social practices and conventions surrounding this. This is obviously useful and valid. But note that—as we found in the case of London's 23 “languages for religious purposes”<sup>285</sup>—while those languages all clearly belong in the domain of the sociolinguistics of language and religion, the fact that they are used for religious purposes does not in itself turn a language into *lingua sacra*. It is not the domain and social purpose that makes a language sacred, but rather, it would seem, this depends on the intrinsic symbolic power which that language has for its community.

That is to say, there is more to *lingua sacra* than social setting, usage and conventions. Here, sociolinguistics can only go so far. Or, more precisely, while the sociolinguistics of religion and language is necessary, it is not sufficient. There is a need to make further distinctions here within the domain of religious language, and for this, we will need to look beyond sociolinguistics, into issues involved in symbolic behavior.<sup>286</sup>

**(4.2) *Lingua sacra and speech act theory*** In our next sounding we will take a closer look at *lingua sacra* from the point of view of speech acts and performative language use.

An important first consideration here is that in *lingua sacra* it is not the language as such which is sacred; also, it is not the language as a whole, but rather, the particular speech act which is being performed. When the Pope in Rome delivers his *urbi et orbi* blessing in 70 different languages, it is his act of blessing as God's representative on earth which guarantees its sacredness. It is the specific religious speech act performed by the Pope that is sacred, rather than the language in which it is delivered. This example triggers the question: How does *lingua sacra* work? If it is a certain *use* of language that is sacred here, as in the performative analysis of Austin,<sup>287</sup> what is it in the Pope's blessing that makes it sacred? And what about other speech acts in the domain of religion and language? In short, what contribution can a speech act analysis make to our understanding of *lingua sacra*?

From the point of view of speech act theory, *lingua sacra* constitutes a wide-ranging domain of language acts and practices, such as prayer, worship, glorification, baptism, naming, consecration and blessing, confessing and forgiving, the sacraments, oaths, bans, cursing, purification and exorcism, etcetera—all of which are used in religious rituals.<sup>288</sup> Together, they constitute a collection of exclusive, usually prescribed formulaic speech acts, in a specific language or register, to be uttered according to precise instructions, within a community of fellow initiates, in particular settings (e.g. a consecrated location), and by a serving priest, who has the competence and authority to enact the particular speech act in conformity with the canonical liturgy of the church as institution.

This approach provides us with interesting insights into the characteristics of religious speech acts, which by analogy can be applied to the sacred languages of other religions.

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<sup>284</sup>Cf. Spolsky (2009, 31).

<sup>285</sup>Trask (2000).

<sup>286</sup>Cf. Bourdieu (2001).

<sup>287</sup>Austin (1962).

<sup>288</sup>Crystal (1956).

A mantra, for example, can be described as a performative utterance which relates to the ritual action which it accompanies, conferring divine status on its practitioner and divine significance to the action, while situating the participants in key events of their religion.<sup>289</sup>

Here, speech act/performative analysis of lingua franca makes a necessary contribution, which usefully complements the sociolinguistic analysis above. It makes clear that what is sacred here is not the language as such, but rather a range of religious speech acts, specific acts of meaning, symbolization and communication performed in and with language. Note, however, that as its focus is primarily on liturgic rituals and the rules governing it, speech act analysis does not have much to say on sacred performances as in prophecy, glossolalia, chants, hymns, visions, revelations and oracles. These are also part of oral lingua sacra, and as such deserve to be taken into consideration. Thus, it would appear that, like sociolinguistic analysis, speech act analysis is necessary, but not sufficient for an analysis of lingua sacra. So, again, we will need to look further, if we are to do justice to the full range of sacred language.

**(4.3) *Lingua sacra and orality: on the power of mantras*** In our third sounding, we will be following on from our discussion of non-written religions and their languages in subsection (3.6) above, and look into the domain of orality for religious purposes—as, for example, in confession, chants, prayers, blessings, sermons, readings, liturgies, performances, mantras, trance utterances, glossolalia, prophecies, visions, revelations, oracles, and so on.

An interesting testimony to the special status of ancient and sacred sounds is the story of Friedrich Max Müller, the famous nineteenth-century Sanskrit scholar, who shortly after the invention of the phonograph in 1888 was invited to speak a few words into the new machine, and the first thing he wanted to record was: “*Agnim ile purohitam Yajnasya devam ritvijam—hotaram ratnadhatamam* [i.e. Agni I worship—the chief priest of the sacrifice—the divine priest—the invoker—conferring great wealth].” These words, as he explained, were the first verse of the *Rig-Veda*, “the oldest hymn in the world,” which he himself, together with Sayāna’s commentary, had edited between 1849 and 1873, to make it widely known in the east and the west, and to help the Hindus in recovering the original spirit of their religion.<sup>290</sup>

There is a deep symbolic value to this story, for here this oldest hymn of the world, after millennia of oral transmission and ritual repetition by Hindus in India, was now being reproduced and disseminated in late nineteenth-century England, with the use of modern technologies, in printed book form and on the phonograph, with the same aim as in the tradition of devotion, viz. to ensure its longevity by capturing as exactly as possible the most ephemeral of events, the speaking voice and the momentary sound it produces—but with pride of place clearly going to the oldest and most sacred of them all.<sup>291</sup> Mantras such as “OM” enjoy a similar special status, as we saw in subsection (3.6) above. In the tradition various reasons have been adduced for their sacredness: not just their ancientness, but also the use of sacred sounds, of sound symbolism, the mysticism of sound, the deep psychological impact sounds may have, perhaps even the true *mana*?

Here, we will restrict discussion to mantras. Going beyond the views from tradition, the question here is: Are mantras sacred? If so, what is it that makes them so? What can we

<sup>289</sup>Thompson (1997, 576).

<sup>290</sup>Chaudhuri (1974, 145, 262–263).

<sup>291</sup>Chaudhuri (1974, 146–147).



say about mantras from a linguistic point of view? What is so special about the use of such sacred sounds? What can we say about the power of orality—the use of the voice, sound, speech and other oral means and modes, plus the impact they can have—that we encounter in the varieties of *lingua sacra*?

Of great interest here is the tradition of the Sanskrit grammarians in India who, understanding the importance of the Vedic mantras, very early on, in the grammar of Pāṇini (500 BCE), developed a precise phonetic analysis and description of the correct pronunciation of those mantras, and thus managed to make those sounds repeatable exactly.<sup>292</sup> We find the same in the ceremonial ritual of the Arval Brethren, an ancient priesthood in Rome, which has left us a careful description (anno 218 CE) of their annual festival, with precise instructions for the sacrifices, processions, meals, dances, the liturgy, the invocations and the archaic and often incomprehensible Latin hymns to be chanted. All this—as Bouquet relates—had been “handed down unchanged from remote antiquity,” through “correct recitation,” which was “held to be extremely efficacious in obtaining the desired result.”<sup>293</sup> Of comparable interest is the very ancient Uruk instruction (in Akkadian) for the ritual procession of a statue of the god Anu, which details the precise words the priests must use (and also how often this must be done and where exactly) in the hymns and incantations they had to recite, beginning with the blessing “*Anu rabū šamē u ersetu likrubūka*” [Great Anu, may heaven and earth bless you!].<sup>294</sup>

Oral ritual, and its precise description, in the service of correct pronunciation and the exact and unchanged repetition of a mantra, necessary to ensure its efficacy, would seem to be of basic importance here, and a good key into the study of oral *lingua franca*. The study of the sound structure of ritual utterances may reveal complex phonological patterns which we find more widely in oral traditions—as Williams<sup>295</sup> and Thompson<sup>296</sup> have demonstrated—such as we find in glossolalia, the language of the angels, and in shamanic spirit language. Another basic aspect involves the apparent meaninglessness of many mantras, which may be due to their endless chanting repetition. The philosopher Frits Staal has gone much further here, claiming that both the lack of meaning and the incomprehensibility of mantras are “pre-linguistic, akin to music, and in structure more similar to the syntax of bird-song than to the syntax of human language.”<sup>297</sup>

Thus, along this dimension of orality, we can study the specific properties of sound and voice (sound quality, phonological patterns, repetition, correct pronunciation, sound symbolism) which are characteristic of oral rituals and which are put to use and channeled into the varieties of oral *lingua sacras*. Similarly, along the social dimension we see religious language as an in-group phenomenon, marked by specific, religious social uses of language and the conventions surrounding this. And along the pragmatic-discourse speech act dimension, *lingua sacra* turned out not to be a particular language as a whole, but rather a collection of performative speech acts within it.

As we see, all three soundings above produce useful insights into important dimensions of sacred language, which demonstrate the value of sociolinguistics, speech act theory and

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<sup>292</sup>Malmberg (1991, 38–39).

<sup>293</sup>Bouquet (1954, 33).

<sup>294</sup>Bouquet (1954, 40–41).

<sup>295</sup>Williams (1981).

<sup>296</sup>Thompson (1997).

<sup>297</sup>Staal (1989, 279).

orality studies for the investigation of *lingua sacra*. The challenge here is to go beyond these three and find out more about other kinds of oral sacred performance and their intrinsic symbolic force, as for example in prophecy, glossolalia, revelations, hymns, incantations, spells and curses, which are all part of oral *lingua sacra* too.

We need all three approaches; each on its own is necessary, but not sufficient; only the combination will do; that is why we have argued that they need to be brought together into an integrated Jakobsonian functional-structural analysis.

**(5) *On the linguistic properties of lingua sacra*** In conclusion, we now come to the same questions we faced earlier with respect to *lingua franca*. What can we say about the characteristic properties of *lingua sacra*? In what way is *lingua sacra* different from language in general? What features of language behavior, usage, form and structure are distinctively associated with *lingua sacra*? What linguistic consequences follow from this *lingua sacra*-function for the forms of language?

A crucial opening point: just like *lingua franca*, *lingua sacra* is not a particular language in history, but a generic concept defining a role or function of a language. Thus, *lingua sacra* is a vehicle serving a religious purpose, while *lingua franca* serves the purpose of bridging a gap or barrier in a contact situation in which speakers of different languages need to communicate with each other. In addition, *lingua sacra* and *lingua franca* each have a range of characteristic properties associated with them, so it seems useful to proceed here by way of comparative and contrastive clarification. This way, we can establish the following significant differences:

First, whereas *lingua franca* is born of necessity and is needed as a bridge in language contact with strangers, *lingua sacra* is an in-group language within a community of fellow believers, exclusively used and shared with other initiates. While *lingua franca* is an occasional and disposable *no man's language* with very low status, *lingua sacra* has traditionally always been invested with great symbolic, cultural capital or power.

Secondly, *lingua franca* is above all an instrument of occasional spoken communication where, as Schuchardt noted, all is fluid and in flux. The first priority here is practical and effective communication, overriding all niceties of form, rules and regulation. What matters here is what Gulliver did: try out anything and use whatever works to overcome the language barrier. In contrast, *lingua sacra* is firmly set apart by its solemn register and delivery. Here, what matters is perfect realization: everything has to be correct or else it would be invalid, ineffective, or worse, counterproductive. The emphasis therefore is on keeping the language unchangingly the same, and to this end a wide range of prescriptive practices is used, of power, discipline and control, of canonization, symbolism and sanctions on incorrectness, of rituals and rules governing their enactment, the roles and behavior of participants at the appropriate time and place, in the right context, and so on.

Thirdly, as we noted earlier for *lingua franca*: the simpler the better. As we can see in the example of *Mi andar*—what works here is a pidgin form, the use of reduced and broken language, made up as the need arises. In contrast to this, what matters in *lingua sacra* is the exact execution of the proper forms of language; precise repetition and pronunciation according to a fixed norm, which allows no change or variation; not one tittle or one jot. As a consequence, *lingua sacra* begins to diverge from the spoken language and quickly becomes dated; fixed formulas and archaisms begin to flourish; and the religious language becomes

intransparent and incomprehensible—though this may only improve its niche-position as a lingua sacra.

Fourthly, each of the two is linked to a very different channel of transmission: lingua franca to a free-for-all-in the streets, the harbors and the markets versus lingua sacra as the language of worship within a religious or otherwise restricted environment, such as the church, the congregation, or the school.

Finally, in lingua franca, as we saw earlier, there is often a close connection between its communicative function and its free, uncanonical and adaptable linguistic forms. Likewise, in lingua sacra we find a strong connection between its “sacred” function and the solemn rituals and fixed formulas used to serve this purpose.

All in all, the contrast with the properties we noted at the end of section 1.2 for lingua franca could not be greater: the two are almost polar opposites.

#### 1.4 The Dynamics of Lingua Franca and Lingua Sacra in History: Analyses and Perspective

This final section comes in four parts. First, we will be taking a look at what can happen in the contact between lingua franca and lingua sacra. Secondly, to get a grip on the dynamics of their interaction, I will outline two distinct historic scenarios, one concerning lingua sacra, the other for lingua franca. Thirdly, in this context, as a special case that merits attention, we will consider the Dutch colonial empire in South East Asia (1602–1949) and the complex historical interaction of its languages. And finally, looking forward, we will see how our findings may serve as a springboard into the Ancient world.

**(1) *Lingua franca and lingua sacra in contact*** The first thing to note here is that our explorations confirm that the social history of languages is rather more complex than De Saussure envisaged, with his suggestion concerning the *esprit de clocher* versus the *esprit d’intercourse* from which we started. In this respect, the development of contact linguistics since Schuchardt and of functional-structural linguistics since Jakobson have been instrumental.

As a result, today we know much more about multilingualism, language contact, lingua franca and lingua sacra than De Saussure. The least we can say here is that it is too simple to think that everything can be derived from the binary opposition of lingua franca and lingua sacra as two elemental forces and their bifurcation in the history of languages. There is more to it than just these two; they are in complex interaction, not only with each other, but also with other dynamic forces in language history, such as religion and power.

A second point, no less crucial, is that lingua franca and lingua sacra are two different roles or functions of language, tendencies which, if taken to their extreme, can become polar opposites. Quite often though, a particular language functions simultaneously as lingua franca and as lingua sacra, in which case the two roles will complement each other. An interesting example is Occaneechi. As the historian Robert Beverley Jr. reported, in his *History and Present State of Virginia*, this language, no longer used in daily life, was cultivated for religious and ceremonial purposes by Native Americans. As he wrote, the “priests and conjurers” of the Virginia Indian Tribes “perform their adorations and conjurations” in the Occaneechi language, much “as the Catholics of all nations do their Mass in the Latin.” He also stated that the language was widely used as a lingua franca, “understood by the

chief men of many nations, as Latin is in many parts of Europe”—even though, as he says, the Occaneechis “have been but a small nation, ever since those parts were known to the English.”<sup>298</sup>

The same confluence of the roles of *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* can be seen in the adoption, by St. Jerome and St. Augustine in the fifth century CE, of *lingua franca* Vulgar Latin as the *lingua sacra* of Christianity. In the eighteenth century, similarly, Hebrew was presented by Levi as the *Lingua Sacra* of Judaism,<sup>299</sup> while at the same time, according to Eliakim ben Abram alias Jacob Hart, it was also the *lingua franca* of the international Jewish community in diaspora.<sup>300</sup> A rather more secular example comes from the nineteenth century, with the adoption of the vernaculars as the official languages of the nation states of Europe.<sup>301</sup> In each of these cases, the same language is functioning simultaneously as *lingua franca* and as *lingua sacra*. Such a confluence of roles will do much to enhance the power of monolingualism.

In contrast, when the roles of *lingua sacra* and *lingua franca* are fulfilled by different languages, this may lead to tensions, perhaps even mutual exclusion. Here we may think of Koranic Arabic or Latin (until the Vatican Council), both functioning as the *lingua sacra* of their respective religions, and both quite different from and in opposition to the surrounding *lingua franca* vernacular. In this constellation, when the *lingua sacra* is maintained with strong exclusion of the vernacular *lingua franca*, one consequence could be that the vernacular ends up completely neglected, in flux, without any stability or standard; while, conversely, it could be the *lingua sacra* which ends up fossilized and incomprehensible (though no less sacred) to its believers; in between these two extremes, the outcome could also be a dynamic balance of *lingua sacra* and *lingua franca* in a situation of unequal but more or less stable diglossia.

Such was the case for the Frisian language for most of the past five hundred years. From the fifteenth until the twentieth century, the Frisians spoke their own language within their own rural community, alongside Dutch which was the language of the law, the church, the school, learning, the media, the towns and social advancement.<sup>302</sup> During those centuries the Frisian vernacular held out and did well as the common language in its own oral domain, where it was a marker of cultural and ethnic identity. At the same time, Frisian did not function as *lingua sacra*, the Bible was not translated into Frisian until the middle of the twentieth century, and even today it is still not easy for the Frisian vernacular to become accepted in the religious domain with its long-established frontiers of diglossia.<sup>303</sup>

As we can see, *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* as roles or functions of language and as forces in history are by no means always mutually exclusive: they may be the same language, or they may be two different languages; the two roles may co-occur and co-exist in diglossia; they may overlap to varying degrees, or they may be in competition and conflict.

But in all these various cases—and this is our third point here—, what we have before us is a situation where *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* are in contact with each other, along

<sup>298</sup>Beverley (1947 [1705]).

<sup>299</sup>Levi (1785–1787).

<sup>300</sup>Barnett (1935–1939).

<sup>301</sup>Anderson (1991 [1983]); Olender (1992).

<sup>302</sup>Cf. Salverda (1998).

<sup>303</sup>Cf. Zondag (1987).

a scale of language contact which runs from total exclusion, through various degrees of co-existence and overlap to the complete confluence of the two roles.

**(2) *Two scenarios*** When we now proceed to look at the role of *lingua sacra* and *lingua franca* in the historical dynamics of languages, we note, to begin with, that empires do not have to be linguistically homogeneous. Indeed, they usually are quite diverse in their linguistic make-up. The more diverse they are linguistically, the greater the need for and pressure towards *lingua franca*, as a common vehicle for communication between the various linguistic and cultural communities within that empire. That is to say, empires need a *lingua franca* for their day-to-day functioning and for their survival. A *lingua franca*, on the other hand, merely requires a language contact situation in a multilingual context. They thrive on trade, contact and exchange—which is also how the historic *Lingua Franca* has spread far and wide around the world. But they do not depend on an Empire for their survival. The reverse is not the case, however: there are no empires without a *lingua franca*, and no empire can function or survive without a *lingua franca*.

The same asymmetry appears to hold for religion, which always needs a *lingua sacra*, and always comes with one. But here too, the reverse is not the case—a *lingua sacra* may well survive long after the corresponding religion has vanished.

The point is that when *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* interact, they do so not only with each other, but also with power and religion. So, when we explore the dynamics of *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra*, we will need to factor in the role of those other two major forces in history, as well as the asymmetries just noted. This is not a matter of *either-or*, as is clear from the scale of language contact we envisaged above. If we now add to this the factors of power and religion, this will necessitate a multi-factor analysis, plus, of course, further careful historical case studies, since in actual history, many other motives than sacredness and necessity, power and religion (such as convenience, practicality, politics, the missionary impulse, or simply the power of numbers) may play a role as well in language contact.

Here, as a first step, we will restrict ourselves to what happens when the two different roles of *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra* are distributed differently in history. Our findings on the dynamics of their interaction in history can be grouped under two distinct scenarios, one for *lingua sacra*, the other for *lingua franca*.

**(2.1) *Scenario 1: the hegemonic expansion of one's lingua sacra*** This first scenario occurs when the *lingua sacra* of a particular religion is imposed and disseminated in the belief of its sacredness or its divine origin. The same goes for empires when they, as part of their *mission civilisatrice*, impose and disseminate their core language as the single, unifying, official language for all their subjects and activities.

The paradigm case here is that of Classical Arabic and Islam. From the Arabic Conquest onwards, Islam was disseminated using Classical Arabic as its *lingua sacra*. Through expansion and contact Arabic subsequently became the *lingua franca* in the many countries that make up the Islamic world. This development was reinforced by the fact that Arabic was not only the language of the mosque but also the *lingua franca* of science and scholarship.<sup>304</sup>

The same hegemonic scenario holds for Latin and its expansion throughout the Roman empire (and later also via the Church); Sanskrit in India; *koinè Greek* as Alexander's linguistic heritage in the Hellenistic world; as well as for the French, English, Russian, Spanish

<sup>304</sup>Cf. Al-Khalili (2010); Pagden (2002, 55); Spolsky (2009, 45).

and Portuguese languages of the European empires of the modern world. In these various cases an existing lingua sacra (or language of power) eventually became the lingua franca, and stayed on as the lasting legacy of the relevant empire or religion.

Sooner or later, though, once that lingua sacra has become established as the lingua franca, it will (like any other vernacular) go into a further process of change, in the case of Koranic Arabic diversifying into the different varieties of Arabic (Egyptian, Moroccan, Iraqi), just as Latin diversified into the Romance vernaculars, and Sanskrit *mutatis mutandis* the same. This diversification may be accompanied by further processes of pidginization and creolization.

Even then, however, this is not an *either-or* situation, since very often the varieties of language involved—the unchanging lingua sacra and the ever changing lingua franca—may well continue to be used alongside each other.

**(2.2) Scenario 2: adopting an existing lingua franca** The second scenario concerns the adoption of a pre-existing and widespread lingua franca, either as the lingua sacra of a religion, or as the official language of an empire—even if the ruling elite or priesthood is itself of a different linguistic background. As a consequence, the language in question will undergo a process of status upgrade, regulation and standardization, and may well become a written language, with the rituals, canonization, institutional support and sanctions attendant upon this.

The paradigm case here is the adoption, for missionary purposes, of the Vulgar Latin lingua franca, the common language of the ordinary people throughout the Roman Empire, as lingua sacra by St. Jerome and St. Augustine, in an attempt to reach the masses of the population.

In the Ancient world, similarly, Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Jews before it became the lingua sacra of the Talmud,<sup>305</sup> and at the time of Darius, the Aramaic language, with its widespread trading networks and its efficient writing culture, was chosen as the lingua franca of his Persian empire.<sup>306</sup> As further examples we may think of England after the Norman Conquest, when the French-speaking ruling elite had to accept Anglo-Saxon as the common language of contact; and in China during the Mongol era, when the Mandarin language continued to be the lingua franca throughout the Chinese empire.

In the western Christian tradition, St. Augustine's missionary adoption of the vulgar tongue has had a long-lasting influence. In essence, his point was taken up in Dante's vernacular revolution, and the Bible translations this stimulated in German, Dutch, English and so many other vernacular languages. The same scenario was followed too in contacts with peoples and cultures in the new worlds discovered outside Europe. When the Portuguese arrived in Brazil in the sixteenth century, they adopted the widespread Tupí language for contact with the native Indians. A Tupí grammar was produced by the Jesuit José de Anchieta in 1595, and eventually Tupí became the basis for the lingua franca of eastern Brazil, the *lingua geral*.<sup>307</sup> St. Augustine's command also applied to the Dutch seaborne empire in South East Asia. When the Dutch arrived in the Indonesian archipelago around 1600, they found both Portuguese and Malay firmly established as lingua francas, and adopted these

<sup>305</sup> Cf. Gianto (1999).

<sup>306</sup> Daniels (1996).

<sup>307</sup> Cf. Kraus and Ottomeyer (2007, 289–290, 461).

for contact and trade. They also—like the Portuguese did with Tupí—proceeded to translate the Bible into these two *lingua francas*.

**(3) An exceptional case? The Dutch colonial empire and its languages** For the further development of the two scenarios above, the case of the colonial Dutch East Indies (1602–1949) and its languages merits a closer look, as it has been so very different from the standard European pattern of imperial language policy, where Spain, France, Portugal, Russia, Germany and Great Britain have all imposed the language of their own metropolis on their overseas colonies.<sup>308</sup> Indeed, such an imposition, in line with the expansionist scenario 1, would almost seem to be the default option of imperialism, witness also the fierce criticism by Bousquet of what he, after extensive investigation, saw as the fundamental error in Dutch colonial policy: the absence of a *mission civilisatrice* for its own language in its colonial possessions.<sup>309</sup>

The Dutch clearly—and intriguingly—handled this matter very differently from the other European empires, and did not follow scenario 1. So, what did they do instead—and why?

When they arrived in the Malay archipelago, they found both Malay and Portuguese already well established there as *lingua francas*. As for Portuguese, this was used in the contact of Dutch traders during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with Mestizos and non-Indonesian Asians, with slaves, and in Batavia also in the church, with fellow Christians.<sup>310</sup> In addition, the Dutch had the Bible translated into Portuguese, first in parts by Joao Ferreira d’Almeida and printed in Amsterdam in 1681, then again, much improved, in 1693 in Batavia (present-day Jakarta), and finally, completed and printed in two volumes, in Batavia in 1748–1753. This Portuguese translation was still reprinted in 1959, even though the Portuguese language in the Dutch East Indies had been on the wane from around 1800.<sup>311</sup>

The other *lingua franca* was indigenous Malay. In use all around the archipelago, without an empire of its own, but widespread and extremely useful as a language of contact everywhere, it was adopted by the Europeans who came to Indonesia for trade—first the Portuguese and Spanish in the sixteenth century, followed a century later by the Dutch and the English. Malay was the *lingua franca* for traders and sailors in all the harbors of the archipelago, and widely used between the VOC and its Indonesian and Chinese trading partners.<sup>312</sup> This language too was used by the Dutch for Bible translation—beginning with the gospel of Matthew printed in Enkhuizen in 1629; followed in 1668 by the New Testament in Bazar Malay, the spoken *lingua franca* of the archipelago. The first complete Malay Bible, translated by Melchior Leijdecker and revised by Werndly, but this time in the High Malay written language and not in Bazar Malay, was printed in Latin script in Amsterdam in 1733, followed by one in Malay-Arabic script in 1758.<sup>313</sup> But note that the acceptance of Malay by the Dutch for Bible translation did not turn Malay into *lingua sacra* (except perhaps for the small numbers of Indonesians converted to Christianity). Throughout the entire colonial period Malay, which was spoken in contact situations everywhere and by everyone, always remained the *lingua franca* with the widest benefits across the archipelago. In that

<sup>308</sup>Groeneboer (2013); Sneddon (2003); Salverda (2004; 2008; 2013).

<sup>309</sup>Bousquet (1939).

<sup>310</sup>Cf. Taylor (1983).

<sup>311</sup>Swellengrebel (1974–1978, 10–11).

<sup>312</sup>Swellengrebel (1974–1978, 8).

<sup>313</sup>Swellengrebel (1974–1978, 11).

extremely multilingual area, Malay simply outcompeted its rivals by adapting, incorporating and assimilating what other languages might offer, as we can see in the very significant borrowed elements from Portuguese, Sanskrit, Dutch, Arabic and other languages detailed in the Indonesian etymological dictionary by Jones.<sup>314</sup>

Alongside Portuguese and Malay, as a third language, there was Dutch, which—as the language of the VOC, the first multinational company in the world—gave access to a vast trading network spanning the oceans from New York and Dutch Brazil to Amsterdam, and from the Baltic and the Mediterranean all the way along the coasts of Africa, Arabia, Persia and India to the Malay Archipelago, the Spice Islands, and beyond to China and Japan.<sup>315</sup> Throughout the colonial era, Dutch remained the language of power and the official language of the colonial rulers. But the Dutch always remained a small minority, amidst very many other peoples and cultures; moreover, they kept the Dutch language for themselves and for the native elites they worked with; and they did not invest in Dutch language education for the Indonesian people, as this was judged to be too expensive, too difficult and too dangerous. Thus, Dutch never became the *lingua franca* of the archipelago.<sup>316</sup>

In this language constellation, the general *lingua franca* was and remained Malay, for which, given the multiplicity of multilingual contact situations, there always was a strong demand. Here lies the difference with Tupí in Brazil, which after its adoption by the Portuguese was also used and standardized for Bible translation, and also widely used as *lingua franca*. But where Malay continued to rise, Tupí or *lingua geral* began to decline under the impact of Portuguese settlement in the early nineteenth century, when the Portuguese court and the aristocratic elite of its landowners went into exile under Napoleon and transplanted their society from Portugal to Brazil. Speaking their own language, they no longer adapted to the indigenous *lingua franca*, and brought an infusion of modernity and Europeanness that was closely associated with Portuguese. At the expense of the existing *lingua geral*, Brazil thus switched to Portuguese under the expansionist scenario 1.

For Malay, in contrast, it was scenario 2 that kicked in, when this *lingua franca* was chosen in the 1860s by the Dutch to serve their endeavor to unify and modernize the vast Indonesian archipelago as part of the Dutch colonial empire. In the process, Malay was standardized by the Dutch, with a standard grammar and dictionary, and its spelling regulated using the Roman alphabet (and not Arabic script). Widely used in the army and the administration, the schools and the media, the usefulness of Malay as *lingua franca* continued to increase, while in contrast, the Dutch language of the ruling elite became the symbol of colonialism, much as Afrikaans in the 1960s became the symbol of Apartheid. From 1928 the Indonesian nationalists united behind Malay, and in the end, at the time of Indonesian independence in 1945, Dutch was abolished, and Malay, as Bahasa Indonesia, adopted as the national language of the Indonesian Republic.

**(4) *Venturing into the Ancient World*** Looking back, what we have done in this contribution is to bring together, from contact linguistics and the history of language and religion, contemporary knowledge and information on *lingua franca*, *lingua sacra* and their characteristic properties. In the process, on the basis of a variety of historic cases, we have scrutinized and refined the conceptual and methodic toolkit which we use to study *lingua sacra* and *lingua*

<sup>314</sup>Jones (2007).

<sup>315</sup>Cf. De Groot (2005).

<sup>316</sup>Cf. Salverda (2013).



franca. We have also identified two distinct historic scenarios for lingua franca and lingua sacra and their interaction and dynamics within empires.

Now, looking forward, this contemporary basis provides us with a springboard into the past, whether it is as a heuristic or to test these findings against situations of multilingualism in other times and places than we have discussed so far.

In this respect, my contribution has proceeded in the same spirit and with the same strategy as envisaged by Gwendolyn Leick in her groundbreaking volume on *The Babylonian World*. As she spells it out:

We can only experience the remote past in a tentative and fragmentary way and through the lens of our contemporary patterns of thought. How we think about history always reflects our contemporary preoccupations. The Babylonian world seen through the eyes of the leading specialists in the field at the beginning of the third millennium AD brings into focus areas of concern typical for our time: ecology, productivity, power relations, economics, epistemology, scientific paradigms, complexity.<sup>317</sup>

Notwithstanding Piggott's caveat that "the Mediterranean from the fifth century BCE to the early centuries CE was emphatically not our own world",<sup>318</sup> I agree with Leick that we inevitably see the world of the past through a modern lens or prism. It is our contemporary interests that have shaped the various domains of expertise and scholarship which are dealt with in her book: land use, agriculture and urban development; material culture, architecture, the textile industry and the import of exotic raw materials; economy, society and politics, power, environment and gender issues; palace and temple; religion, gods and goddesses, witchcraft, divination and incantations; intellectual life, writing, letters, mathematics, astronomy, lexicography and literature; and international relations between Babylonia and Egypt, the Levant, Jerusalem, the Hittites, the Persians and the Assyrians.

But, remarkably, in her book we do not find a discussion of that most Babylonian of them all: language. Whereas precisely language is, and has always been, the key to any knowledge and understanding we may have of the lives, culture, ideas, beliefs and practices of those ancient Babylonians.<sup>319</sup> And also, they themselves have produced interesting linguistic analyses of their language.<sup>320</sup>

But when—à la Leick—we pursue our own very contemporary interest in multilingualism and language contact in the Babylonian world, our starting point cannot be the ancient preconceptions and myths, long since abandoned, about language as a divine gift at the creation, a sacred force in history and with multilingualism as a punishment from on high. We do not see better if we put on those ancient spectacles.

What we really need here are modern insights, from contemporary contact linguistics and the history of language contact, if we are to get to grips with the dynamics of lingua franca and lingua sacra in the empires of the past. That is what I have attempted to assemble here, as a springboard towards studying empires, their language constellations and contact situations, in the Ancient world.

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<sup>317</sup>Leick (2007, 3).

<sup>318</sup>Piggott (1968, 14).

<sup>319</sup>Bienkowski and Millard (2000, 89). Cf. Pope (1975, 85–122).

<sup>320</sup>Gragg (1995); Jacobsen (1974).

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