50. Lingua Franca

1. Definition

It is on the basis of function alone that a language is considered to be a lingua franca, by which term is designated any lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues, for whom it is a second language. Applicable to all situations where linguistic communication is difficult or impossible, it applies as well to areas characterized by extreme dialect differences as to those with different languages in the normal sense. Any form of language can be used with this purpose. Natural languages spoken beyond their native boundaries are the best-known examples, but dialects have spread in the same manner. Examples of the latter are Fijian, based on the Bauan dialect, and Yawelmani, the latter used amongst speakers of Yokuts on the Tule River Reservation in California. Such languages of common intercourse become established informally, as in any instance of second-language acquisition, or formally in some context of education. In the latter case the languages are usually written, exemplified by Latin, a vital lingua franca up to the end of the Middle Ages, and Arabic throughout the Islamicized world to this very day. Writing as well as specialized function may also have been responsible for the longevity for Aramaic as a common medium of intercommunication in the Near East, from at least the 6th century B.C.

2. Spheres of Use

Languages and dialects have their spheres of use extended as a consequence of a variety of social phenomena. Some of these are conquest, colonization, migration, trade, commerce, and religion; in the case of the Tukano, an ethnic language (i.e. vernacular), in the Northwest Amazon basin, the means may have been marital alliances in addition to other factors. Conquest creates the need for an instrument of communication when the military force is made up of linguistically diversified personnel (due to the use of slaves, mercenaries, and enforced subjects — a common phenomenon until the modern era) or when the conquerors must administer a linguistically heterogeneous area. Hindi (earlier known as Hindustani), linguistically undifferentiated from Urdu, probably owes its role to this process in India; another example is Lingala, based on Lobangi, which was spread as a result of the occupation by the Belgians of what is now Zaire. Hausa in West Africa, Swahili in East Africa, and Malay in the East Indian Archipelago are examples of languages spread by commerce; but trade has not been wholly free of conquest and even enslavement. The religious diffusion of lingua francas is illustrated by all the major religions (e.g. Arabic, Latin, Pali); and in the modern period local languages have been adopted in missionary work (Bulu by the Presbyterians in the Cameroun; Käte, Guraget, and Kuanua by Lutherans in New Guinea).

Neither number of speakers, manner and mode of use, nor quality of comprehension are defining characteristics of a lingua franca; but all these factors determine the social and linguistic consequences of its use. Similarly, a language or dialect acquired as a second language by other speakers does not thereby become automatically a lingua franca, but only when the latter linguistically diversified populations use this second language amongst themselves (illustrated by the use of Djula in the Ivory Coast). Widespread use may lead to the adoption of the lingua franca as mother tongue, which is an example of language shift, or to the reduction of inter-ethnic bilingualism and eventual death of competing languages. (Speakers of closely related Gbaya languages in the Central African Republic have been observed using Pidgin Sango rather than their mother tongues.)

3. Typology

Lingua francas have not been systematically typologized with respect to specialized functions, since no such typology of functions yet exists (cf. art. 35, 73). Nonetheless, a number of terms have had a certain currency; the following are just a sample. For nonspecified functions of more-or-less brief duration or intensity there are contact language, con-
tact vernacular, marginal language, auxiliary language, and in French langue d'appoint. (The designation 'contact' also avoids the pejorative implications of such terms as pidgin and jargon.) The only specialized function that has attracted nomenclatural activity is trade: hence, trade language, trade jargon, bazaar X (as in 'bazaar Hindi'), and in German Verkehrssprache. Vehicular language (from French langue vécuiliaire), is synonymous with lingua franca, although the francophone meaning includes any language of education. Similarly, international language and world language apply to lingua francas originating in the standard languages of politically and economically dominant nations, contrasting — according to context — with vernacular or tribal language: hence the ethnocentric meaning 'language of civilization.'

A standard language (cf. art. 44) in a modern political state (such as Russian in the ethnolinguistically diverse Soviet Union and standard Japanese in a nation with dialects so diverse that some of them are mutually unintelligible) is no less a lingua franca than any other for its being the official instrument of communication and education, and it retains this function until the disappearance of competing languages. Indeed, the goal of complex societies is to achieve de facto monoglottism by language planning. At the other end of the scale (micro- as opposed to macro-sociolinguistic), a third language used by two persons on only one occasion or habitually (as in ethnolinguistically mixed marriages) is also a lingua franca for those speakers. It is only because the term is primarily a technical one that it is considered inapplicable: in this case the speakers may be said to have a common language.

A special case of language planning is the creation of planned (therefore, artificial) auxiliary languages (cf. art. 49), such as Esperanto. (The expression 'the local Esperanto' is metaphorical and parallels the history of the use of lingua franca as a functional designation. Volapük, another such created language, has been used generically, and frequently pejoratively, of various forms of pidginized lingua francas.) Another kind of deliberate action in sociolinguistic affairs is the attempt to create a union language by amalgamating material from several dialects (cf. art. 80, 165), with one a base, into one idiom more-or-less accessible to most speakers. Such attempts, undertaken mostly by those providing people with translations of the Bible, are similar to processes undertaken in nationalistic movements for the creation of standardized languages. As with all conscious attempts to influence the form and use of language, this phenomenon is associated with literacy first of all, as well as with the dissemination of ideas with modern technology.

It is not true that lingua francas are necessarily based on languages of a social group in a dominant position with respect to others. Although this has been true in the histories of several lingua francas, the histories of others have had very different social parameters. Sango and Lingala are indigenous lingua francas that arose as labor languages at the end of the 19th century when European colonizers brought with them an extremely polyglot foreign work force; the slaves who built the pyramids may also have created their own means of communication.

4. Lingua Franca and Language Structure

Since lingua franca indicates an aspect of the use of any language, it suggests nothing about the structure of that language. This applies to any language with a specialized use: any language can be a contact or trade language, for example. However, the nature of contact and trade can lead to different kinds of linguistic consequences; there was a great difference between the socially restrictive and almost ritual trade in the 19th century along the New Guinea coast that led to Hiri (i.e., 'trade') Motu and the fur trade in Canada during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Thus, in the emergence of a lingua franca, a language can become pidginized (cf. art. 46, 59, 82), which is one of the aspects of linguistic adaptation when communication is severely put to test. In such circumstances a jargon (cf. art. 43) may emerge (an unstable and highly idiosyncratic form of speech), like the one called 'Scandinavian' or 'Baltic' used by seamen on the Baltic Sea until World War II. The term is used with pejorative connotations and in some circumstances is synonymous with lingo, which itself may also designate foreigner talk. Trade jargon therefore implies pidginization, but trade language does not. (One can give a linguistic example of a pidgin, jargon, or lingo, but not of a lingua franca. For the latter, one can only cite an act — an instance of use.) 'Jargon' persists in some language names (e.g. Chinook Jargon, which emerged during the complex period of
contact between Indians and Europeans, on the one hand, and between Indians, on the other, in the North American North West), where pidgin would be more appropriate. Pidgins, not by their structure but by their function, are by definition lingua francas. When they become native languages, they are called creoles. The sociolinguistic circumstances that lead to the emergence of pidgins causes them to have the characteristics of mixed, hybrid, or compromise languages, but all lingua francas are vulnerable to linguistic influence and change.

5. Lingua Franca and Language Change

Since the existence of a lingua franca is a function of bilingualism, the consequences for the speech community which it creates can be substantial — even eclipsing. For example, a lingua franca can replace indigenous languages. And when it experiences change — because of having been spoken for centuries as a second language — it can alter patterns of language distribution and pose problems for determining language relationships. Thus, if the historical forms of English were to disappear, leaving only the ‘colonial’ varieties (viz. Krio, African Pidgin English, Tok Pisin, etc.), the genetic relations of the latter would be problematic indeed. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the ‘simplified’ forms of certain contemporary languages result from lingua francas of the past — from pidginization, not necessarily from pidgins.

What happens to languages that serve as lingua francas can happen to dialects used for the same purpose: some of their peculiarities are ‘levelled’ and they borrow extensively. In this process there emerges a koiné (German Gemeinsprache, also used of lingua franca), a form of speech for which it is difficult if not impossible in the long run to sort out regionalisms and borrowings. Owing its name to the Greek lingua franca dating from the 3rd century B.C. the term can be applied to the forms of standard languages, such as English and German, that have emerged since the Middle Ages. The various dialects of Norwegian and Italian that came to North America in the recent past could also have produced new languages if the socio-cultural circumstances had been different.

Lingua francas have undoubtedly characterized the history of human beings since the time — millennia ago — when large speech communities began to influence smaller ones, and they will continue to emerge as human beings adapt to changing social and linguistic situations. Modern technology, which makes possible, for example, simultaneous translation of conferences and dubbing in films, will not eliminate lingua francas. Indeed, modern needs have created some nonlinguistic ones, such as the international safety symbols, but some of the earliest writing systems may have been ideographic lingua francas, and the writing system of China is to this day an ideographic ‘lingua franca’ (cf. art. 140). The sign language attributed to the Plains Indians in North America may have emerged in the earliest period of the trade generated by Europeans.

As a technical term, lingua franca owes it existence to the Lingua Franca (also known as sabir) that was used in the Mediterranean basin in the 17th century (if not earlier) and up to the end of the 19th. Said to have been a mixed language, including elements from Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, and Persian, it seems to have been based in its earliest history on some Italian dialect or dialects. Given the uncertainty of its genealogy, the plural forms linguae francae and lingue franche must be considered affectations.

6. Literature (selected)


Heine, Bernd (1968) Afrikanische Verkehrssprachen, Köln.


Reinecke, John E. ([1938] 1964) “Trade jargons and creole dialects as marginal languages”, in: Lan-


51. Elaborated and Restricted Codes

1. Introduction
2. The Codes
3. Assessments of the Codes
4. Persistence of the Codes
5. Conclusions
6. Literature (selected)

1. Introduction

Basil Bernstein’s work on class and linguistic codes (cf. art. 68) has been extremely influential in sociological and educational circles. However, his theoretical stance has not always been completely clear. In his earlier work, Bernstein appeared to support the so-called “deficit” view of lower-class speech, but more recently he has been careful to note that this is not the import of his studies. He points out himself (1971) that his initial studies were obscure, ambiguous and conceptually weak. Whether through ambiguity or misinterpretation, it is fair to say that Bernstein’s codes have been associated with a deficit approach.

In one of his early papers, Bernstein (1959) alluded to the work of Schatzman and Strauss (1955). Their investigation of class differences in speech was one of the first systematic studies here (perhaps the first: see Dittmar, [1973] 1976, 4, and Robinson, 1972, 150, who also mentions a “neglected” work by Fries, 1940, on class and language). Schatzman and Strauss interviewed lower- and uppermiddle-class people in Arkansas who had witnessed a tornado. The lowerclass respondents were found to transmit much less information about this frightening event than were those of the middle class. There was little attempt to “set the scene” and respondents did little more than reconstruct the event in personal, particular and concrete terms. There was also a great deal of digression; persons were mentioned who were unknown to the interviewer. Lowerclass respondents appeared to assume that the interviewer shared contextual information, and their communications suffered because of this. The authors baldly stated that such informants “literally cannot tell a straight story or describe a simple incident coherently” (336). Middle-class interviewees, on the other hand, were seen to reconstruct events in logical and meaningful ways.

2. The Codes

It was from this background that Bernstein began his work on class and codes. In two early papers, he introduced the terms “public” and “formal language.” The former was characterised by its emphasis upon “the emotive rather than the logical implications” of language (1958, 164). Ten attributes of public language were then provided (1959, 311): short, simple and often incomplete sentences with poor syntax; simple and repetitive use of conjunctions; frequent use of commands and questions; rigid and limited use of adjectives and adverbs; infrequent use of impersonal pronouns; statements in the form of implicit questions (e. g., “It’s only natural, isn’t it?”); frequent use of categoric statements (e. g., “Do as I tell you”); frequent use of idiomatic phrases; low-order symbolism; much implicit meaning. Users of public language were thus seen to have few syntactic and lexical alternatives, and to be restricted to concrete, non-symbolic expression in which much is taken for granted (i. e., is implicit; cf. Schatzman/Strauss).

While public language was seen to be available to both lower and middle classes, the latter also have access to formal language.