

Lingua Franca – a not so simple pidgin

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1. Introduction

The existence and documentation of Lingua Franca, allegedly the earliest European pidgin, is subject to much debate. Linguists from Schuchardt (1909) onwards offer contradictory theories regarding its place and date of origin and its evolution, with later research (Minervini 1996, Selbach 2008) questioning whether the evidence suggests that the contact language spoken across the Mediterranean and in North Africa was instead an L2 approximation of Italian, or one of its dialects. I would posit that Lingua Franca was an established pidgin, widely used in the Barbary regencies in North Africa from the 16th-19th centuries, and that the particular population and linguistic makeup of the region was key to the pidgin's spread and duration.

Lingua Franca was an almost exclusively oral language which originated presumably in late medieval times for speakers of, amongst others, Italian and its dialects (Venetian and Genoese, in particular), Spanish, Provençal, Portuguese, Arabic, Turkish and Berber. Given its oral (and, now, dead) status, the evidence for Lingua Franca's existence is, by definition, circumscribed and limited. The corpus is minimal. As Whinnom (1977) states: "our specimens are especially sparse and tantalizing, spread across the centuries from 1300 to 1850" (Whinnom, 1977: 5). Often, excerpts are incomplete in what they reveal lexically and / or grammatically. The father of creolistics and an early scholar of Lingua Franca, Hugo Schuchardt, compared the pidgin to the great 'Seeschlange' (sea snake), a mythical creature, never seen but partially and fleetingly and yet much-discussed and opined on.

Mit besonderer Leichtfertigkeit und bei jeder Gelegenheit spricht man naemlich seit 50 oder vielleicht seit 100 Jahren von der 'lingua franca'; es ist fast die Geschichte von der grossen Seeschlange, die keiner gesehen hat

'For the last 50 or maybe 100 years people have been talking about 'lingua franca' without much thought and on every conceivable occasion; it is almost like the story of the great sea snake who no one has ever seen.' (Schuchardt, 1883:282, trans. Lutz Marten).

Rachel Selbach, a creolist, updates the analogy, comparing Lingua Franca with the Loch Ness Monster (Selbach, 2008: 2). It is a valid comparison. Both are well-known, regularly discussed, subject to speculation and even conspiracy theories, but with little basis or evidence, for the speakers' opinions. Cremona gave his sustained research project into Lingua Franca, some of which was never published, the working title, "Sherlock". Expert creolists like Schuchardt (1909, trans. 1980), Keith Whinnom (1977) and Robert Hall Jr. (1966) disagree vehemently with, and detract from, one another's theories, while rarely substantiating their strongly-held opinions.

A hallmark of pidgins is their simplicity. Yet *Lingua Franca* has complex, contradictory and contentious roots. Its very name provokes debate, with theories that the term comes from the Arabic, the Byzantine, or is of Romance origin (Kahane & Kahane, 1976). Commentators from the 16th – 19th centuries offer similar but different formulae for its constituent languages including Italian (or some of its various dialects - Venetian, Tuscan, Genoese, Sardinian and Sicilian - as Italian was not until the late 19th century an established entity), Spanish, French, Provençal, Turkish, Arabic and Portuguese. Given that it was allegedly an exclusively oral language, the source languages attributed to *Lingua Franca* often depend on the speaker's own linguistic background, as well as where the language was overheard or reported to have been spoken. For example, Cervantes, a slave in Algiers for several years, confirms the linguistic mix as:

lengua que en toda la Barberia y en aun Constantinople se halla entra cautivos y moros, que ni e morisco ni castellano ni de otra nación alguna, sino una mexcla de todos las lenguas, con la qual todos nos entendemos...

‘the language which throughout Barbary and even in Constantinople is used between Arabs and captives, which is neither Morisco¹ nor Catalan, nor any other nation's language, but rather a mix of all languages and which everyone can understand...’

(Cervantes, Miguel, 1605. *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, Part 1 Ch. 41; my translation)

Its spread, both geographical and temporal, was remarkable: throughout the eastern Mediterranean, into the Levant and along the Barbary Coast of North Africa (in the ports of Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers as well as possibly into Morocco). The further West one travelled, the more Spanish the pidgin became, according to one of its earliest reporters, Diego del Haedo, a Spanish priest who spent several years in Algiers (Haedo, 1612). Further East, *Lingua Franca*'s more Italian character is reflected in its alternative nomenclature in the Levant, for example Levantine Italian and Levant Venetian (Rousseau, ed. Cranston, 1991; Byron, ed. Murray, 1922; Baglioni, 2013). This is likely a continuum or development of the earlier jargon (based on Venetian), dating back to the 15th century, spoken on the Dalmatian coast, in Greece and on islands like Chios and Crete. Confusingly, it was also known as *franco*.

The predominance of Italian inevitably poses the question of whether *Lingua Franca* was actually just an L2 version of Italian – foreigner talk or an interlanguage (Selinker 1972), though the fact that many of the commentators referring to it are themselves Italian would seem to bely this. Nevertheless Italian was the principal language of diplomacy, trade and the nautical domain. In the case of the former two, much of the documentation which dates from the 16th- 18th centuries is in Italian, even in French and English chanceries (Cremona, 2002: 26-27). Some documents from these sources seem to confirm that *Lingua Franca* was used in writing. The “Italian” used appears to offer lexical and grammatical evidence of *Lingua Franca* rather than of a more standard language.

¹ Moriscos were Muslims expelled from Spain in the late 16th century who spoke a language called *aljamiado*, Spanish but with a strong Arabic influence

2. What's in a name?

According to Kahane and Kahane in their article, *Lingua Franca: the story of a term* (1976), the original and eponymous Lingua Franca was a trading language (Kahane & Kahane, 1976: 26), between Europeans and Arabs across the Mediterranean. This is a theory that has been proposed and upheld by many researchers, despite the fact that there appears to be scant if any evidence to substantiate it. There are no trading documents in Lingua Franca, no accounts of trading conversations overheard in Lingua Franca, and nor does the later compilation of the pidgin's lexicon include trade terminology, with barely a mention of monetary terms, or merchandise. Despite this, I believe the pidgin plausibly evolved on the Barbary Coast from the nautical jargon spoken by sailors, merchants and significantly corsairs. This nautical jargon would have been Romance-based, and Italian terms were dominant in the maritime domain (Kahane & Tietze 1954: viii).

The etymology of the term itself, *lingua franca*, is also much debated. Kahane and Kahane (1976) detail the numerous possible derivations for the pidgin's name. The *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (FEW) interprets *franca* as free (FEW, 2002). As such, *lingua franca* was a free language which could be spoken (and understood – to some degree) anywhere, and escaped the linguistic regulation to which other languages were subject. This would account, in part, for Lingua Franca's apparent lack of rules. The expansion to mean any language of commerce came into being because the term was translated as 'free language' just as *porto franco* was translated as 'free port'. Schuchardt (1909, trans. 1980) cites an article discussing Lingua Franca and its successor, *Sabir*, by MacCarthy and Varnier (1852) who claim that Lingua Franca received its name because of the freedom from taxes it 'enjoyed' in all ports. Other linguists interpret *Franca* as *Franc*, meaning French. Robert Hall (1966) claims that the term derives from the era of the Crusades. The French played a significant role in the religious conflict and their language became dominant in the Levant and into North Africa. Hall maintains that much of the commerce across the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages came from South Eastern France, stretching from the port of Marseilles as far North as Genoa. Provençal, according to Hall (1966) (and much disputed by many others), was a key linguistic constituent in the original Lingua Franca (Hall, 1966: 3).

Another etymological hypothesis is that the name Lingua Franca is rooted in the East, and the Byzantine tradition. The word, *phrangika*, from the Greek, was a term used in the Byzantine region to denote the West, Occidentals and their languages. The early language of communication between the Byzantine Empire and Rome was Latin, which the former termed *Latinum* or *Francum*. The vernacular, which emerged and spread in commerce and diplomacy, from the early thirteenth century, was given the same name (Kahane & Kahane, 1976: 26). Western Europe was, for much of the Middle Ages, in thrall to the Venetocracy which endured until the eighteenth century. *Phrangika* came to mean Venetian as much as Italian, or indeed, any Western language (Kahane & Kahane, 1976: 31). An alternative derivation for Lingua Franca, espoused by Schuchardt (1909, trans. 1980), is from the Arabic, *lisān al-farangġ*. *Al-farangġi* initially referred to Latin and then, to describe the trading language employed largely by Jews across the Mediterranean. It later came to encompass the languages of all Europeans, but particularly Italians (Kahane & Kahane, 1976: 40). By the eighteenth century, *Franco* and *Lingua Franca* were both terms used in the West to describe the vernacular spoken

across the Levant and into North West Africa. Italian was at the base of the Levantine dialect while what was spoken in North Africa had Spanish roots. Algiers had long been the crucible of Mediterranean piracy. There the two linguistic varieties merged. An influx of Arabs expelled from Spain, European renegade-corsairs and their fellow European captives (over a quarter of a million European slaves held there in the 17th-19th centuries (Davis 2004)) led to the increase in domains and usage of *Lingua Franca*.

3. Polyglot Barbary

North Africa had long-established contact with predominantly both Spain and Italy. The Muslim invasion and occupation of Sicily from the 9th to the 11th century and the brief Norman occupation of the African coast in the mid 12th century led inevitably to mutual linguistic exchange between Italian and Arabic, as did ongoing trade across the Mediterranean (Rossi 1928: 143). Prior to the end of the sixteenth century, and the establishment of the Turkish Regencies of Algeria, Tunisia and Tripoli, there were already multiple Romance language communities across North Africa. Spanish *Presidios* – or fortified bases – existed in Morocco, and in Algeria (both in Oran and in Mers-el-Kebir) and were such linguistic enclaves. French was spoken in the *Bastion de France* in Algeria, Genovese (or Ligurian) on the island of Tabarka, Italian and Spanish in the Tunis port of La Goulette or La Goletta, and Spanish, Italian and French alternated in Tripoli depending on the controlling power – Spain, Italy or the Knights of Malta (Cremona, 2001: 290). According to Gosse (2012), the expulsion of thousands of Moors from the Iberian peninsula in 1492 by the Spanish king, Ferdinand II, had a profound effect on the North African countries to which they returned. The countries were “barely able to support a few poor tradesmen, farmers and merchants, were thrown several hundred thousand proud, civilized and warlike people with no available employment, a large measure of ambition and a passionate itch for revenge” (Gosse 2012: 11). Motivated by revenge and a desire for compensation for their lost property in Spain, the Moors declared war on Spain, and, by association, western (Christian) Europe. Gosse highlights the critical assets exploited by these Moors, “they knew the language, they were familiar with the Spanish trading habits, and they had unlimited information in the persons of their compatriots left behind in Spain” (Gosse 2012: 12). Thus, a substantial portion of the Barbary population was already familiar with a Romance language, if not a pidginized version of it. A truce between François I of France and Ottoman Emperor Suleiman in the early 16th Century (Cremona, 2001: 290) facilitated and promoted trade between Europe and North Africa and Levant, with commercial centres set up in Sidone, Aleppo and Tripoli (in Syria) as well as Algiers and Tunis. Barbary also became a centre for European renegades (or *renegadoes* as they were known in *Lingua Franca*), who quickly acquired power and status given the economic benefit their pirate commerce brought to the Regencies. Plantet offers the stark truth that the state of the finances of Algiers depended exclusively on the proceeds of piracy (Plantet 1889: xx). Haedo’s early 16th century account confirms the trickle-down effect of corsair activity on Algiers’ economy:

“All of Algiers is happy then, because some merchants buy many of the slaves and goods that the corsairs bring with them, and other merchants sell clothing and provisions to those who come home from the sea, because many of them buy new clothes. And all is eating and drinking and triumphing” (Garcès 2012: 158).

The vast majority of these renegades came from Italy, particularly Venice and Genoa, Spain and the islands of the Mediterranean. Plausibly, communication among these and fellow renegades from other countries and the residents of Barbary would have been through a pidginized Romance, *Lingua Franca*. The renegades' status meant that inevitably their principal language of communication would extend into many domains of Barbary life.

4. Italian as a lingua franca

Italian was the principal diplomatic language between Europeans and Turks across the Ottoman Empire for much of the 16th, the whole of the 17th and first half of the 18th century. Migliorini in his history of the Italian language cites the 1582 work of Girolamo Muzio, entitled *Battaglia in difesa dell'italica lingua* (Battle in defence of the Italian language):

Andate alla Corte del Signor de' Turchi & ritrovate chi sappia latino: ritrovatane appresso il Re di Tunisi, nel regno del Garbo, di Algier, & in altri luoghi; la nostra lingua ritrovarete voi per tutto.

‘Go to the Court of the Sultan of the Turks, and you find there people who speak Latin, you'll find it around the King of Tunis, in the Kingdoms of Gerba and Algiers, and in other places; our language you will find everywhere’ (Migliorini, 1960: 380-1; my translation).

Further evidence of the diplomatic use of Italian is provided by two treaties between France and Ottoman territories – Tunis (1666) and Constantinople (1672), both written in Italian (Cremona, 1996, 85-97). Lewis (1999) relates how correspondence was conducted between Queen Elizabeth I and the Ottoman Sultans, Suleiman, Mehmed II and Selim. The Sultan was referred to as the *Gran Signor*, an Italian title. His correspondence was in Turkish, and “a contemporary translation was provided in Italian which the English could understand; the reply was drafted in English, sent in Italian and presumably translated into Turkish”. (Lewis 1999: 14)

French Chanceries opened in many North African ports and cities of the Levant. They facilitated trade opportunities for French merchants and seafarers and offer a wealth of documentation including legal contracts, transactions, registrations of debt, claims, captures at sea and wills. The French Chancery in Tunis held documents dating from 1582 relating to French but also many merchants and seamen of other European nationality, and Tunisian merchants whether Turkish, Arab or Jew, testifying to the commercial and corsair character of the city. Cremona (2002) calculates that of the approximately 15,000 documents preserved in the registers, two thirds are written in Italian. As a general rule, documents are only written in French if all those named in the document were French. If any participant were of a different nationality – including

Tunisian, Arab, Turkish, Jewish, Italian, Greek, Spanish, English, Flemish etc, the document is written in Italian. The proportion shifts to predominantly French only at the end of the seventeenth century (Cremona 2002: 27).

Cremona provides yet more evidence of the centrality of Italian, and its reach. Two English business partners in dispute over the wording of a contract registered their protests to one another through the French Chancery in 1628. These were all recorded in Italian. Finally, exasperated and keen to set sail having learned of Algerian corsairs off the coast of Tunis, one of the men, John Barker, the Captain of the Golden Cockerel, implores the French Consul to engage a reliable translator to translate the original English of the agreement into Italian, “accioché ognuno le possa intendere e fare vedere il dretto delle nostre differenze a chi le tiene” (so that everyone can understand and show who is right in this dispute) (Cremona 1997: 59-61; my translation).

The registers from the English consulate in Tunis date from 1675. They are in the vast majority written in Italian, as are those of the Tripoli Consulate. The latter’s title is even recorded in Italian as is the 1679 appointment of a new Consul, Thomas Baker.

Nel nome del onnipotente e Signor Iddio, Libro de Reggsitri della Cancellaria dell’Illmo Sig Thomaso Bacher, per l’Invit[tissimo Rè della Granda Bertagna [*sic*]; et Difensor della Fede, Carlo 2do, Console nella città et regno in Tripoli di Barbaria, l’anno 1679 adi 17 aprille, giorno del suo possesso in detta carica.

‘In the name of the all-powerful Lord God, the register of the Chancery of the worthy Mr. Thomas Baker, by his Majesty the King of Great Britain and Defender of the Faith, Charles 2nd, the Consul of the city and Kingdom of Tripoli of Barbary, on the 17th of April in the year 1679, the day he came into possession of this role’ (NA, 161/20, f^o184; my translation).

Writing in 1675, the anonymous author of *Histoire Chronologique du Royaume de Tripoly* (manuscript in 2 volumes (nn. 12219-12220) held in the National Library of Paris), stated that,

à Tripoly et dans les autres villes de Barberie ils sont en habit court et ils se servent presque toujours de la langue italiaenne pour ce qu’elle est assez connue en Barberie

‘in Tripoli and other Barbary cities they are in court dress and they almost always use Italian as it is well known throughout Barbary’ (Anonymous, 1675: manuscript 12219, p.175).

Almost a century later (1757), Knecht, the English Consul, who wrote a guidebook for his successors to the complicated maze of diplomatic relations in Tripoli, enumerated among the responsibilities a ‘hasnadawr Grande’ ed un hasnadawr Piccolo’ – a greater treasurer and a lesser treasurer (Pennell, 1982: 97; my translation). The combination of Arabic and Italian to describe the role is revealing. Regarding the celebration of Muslim festivals such as Bayram and Ramadan, the Consul was expected to attend with

the Pasha and greet him, kissing his hand and wishing him, “Buona Festa, vostra Eccellenza” (Pennell, 1982: 104). Knecht suggests to later Consuls that the issuing of passports to British subjects “be made out in English and Italian” (Pennell, 1982: 102) and that the designation for a ship’s licence in port was “pattenta netta (or pattenta brutta)” – a clean (or not clean) licence (Pennell, 1982: 103; my translation).

Italian was then the *de facto lingua franca* among merchants and seafarers around the Mediterranean, as well as the diplomatic language between its European, Ottoman and Arab coastlines. Braudel suggests that as early as the 16th century Italian was the language of commerce throughout the Mediterranean (Braudel 1987: i., 121). The language of consular documents appears to be predominantly (official) Tuscan Italian but given the plethora of non-native writers of the documents, gallicisms and other Italian dialectal elements are evident. In his comprehensive analysis, of language, especially Italian, used in the Chanceries (predominantly the French Chancery) of Tunis in the 16-19 centuries, Baglioni (2010, continuing the work of Cremona,) concludes that the Italian used by non-native speakers could be examples of Lingua Franca. He does, however, qualify this observation by stating that the variations of Italian found in the documents might be instead individual versions of ‘standard’ Italian rather than mere alternatives of a separate pidgin (Baglioni 2010:268).

The reach of written Italian intimates a similarly widespread use of spoken Italian. Although those working in the consulates and chanceries would have been educated and literate, it is not improbable that Italian was also spoken by many of the inhabitants of the coastlines of the Mediterranean. This Italian would have necessarily been subject to rather more variation, dialectal differences and would have been more a foreigner talk than Italian *per se*. Could this, in fact, be the Lingua Franca, as described by many a traveller, priest and diplomat? No more than a version of foreigner talk – ‘corrupted Italian. I believe it is possible that the pre-pidgin or jargon form of Lingua Franca may well have resembled or even been one and the same as the ‘street’ or rather sea Italian identified here. This hypothesis must take into account the fact that Italian as a language did not exist until the late 19th century. Conversely, what appears to be the variation of Lingua Franca spoken in the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean – Greece and modern-day Turkey – is often termed Levant Italian, or Levantine Venetian.

5. Barbary Lingua Franca

Haedo was a Spanish priest who travelled through North Africa and spent time in Algiers, and wrote *Topographia e historia general de Argel*, written at the end of the 15th century, and published in 1612. Haedo’s observations and citations of Lingua Franca are some of the earliest of the Barbary States pidgin. Describing the linguistic situation in Algiers, Haedo (1612) refers to the two principal languages, Arabic and Turkish, before discussing at length the third. Haedo does not differentiate between the influences of European languages on Lingua Franca in Algiers, other than perhaps his ordering of the source languages, respectively Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. This may be because, at the time of the late 16th century, Haedo had not been further East in Barbary (to Tunis or Tripoli) so he was unaware of geographical variation.

La tercera lengua que en Argel se usa, es la que los moros y turcos llaman franca, o hablar franco, llamando ansi a la lengua y modo do hablar christiano... porque mediante este modo de hablar que esta entre ellos en uso, se entienden con los christianos, siendo todo el, una mezcla de varias lengua christianas, y de bocablos , que por la mayor parte son Italianos, y Espanoles, y algunos Portugueses...

‘The third language spoken in Algiers is what the Moors and Turks call *Franca*, or *hablar franco*, calling thus the language and way of speaking of the Christians...because with this language they can communicate with the Christians, since it is a mix of various Christian languages and vocabulary, being mostly Italian and Spanish and Portuguese’ (Haedo Ch.XXIX, ff.23 verso – 24 recto; my translation).

Almost contemporary with Haedo was the French redemptionist priest, Pierre Dan, who travelled to Algiers in the 1630s in a bid to free French slaves captured at sea by Barbary pirates. His description of *Lingua Franca*, like that of Haedo’s lacks any sense of variation within the pidgin, and suggests a jargon-like quality to it: *un barragoüin facile et plaisant, composé de Français , d’Italien & d’Espagnol* (a simple and jolly gibberish made up of French, Italian and Spanish (Dan 1637:93; my translation). La Condamine was a French traveller whose account of his 1731 journey to Algiers is recorded in an article by Marcel Emerit, published in the *Revue Africaine* 98 (1954: 354-381). La Condamine states that *Lingua Franca*, which he refers to as *la mauresque*, is the national language of Algiers. He notes that although the Turks use Turkish amongst themselves, all contact with Europeans is conducted in *Lingua Franca*. La Condamine attests that it is spoken throughout the Levant and the ports of the Mediterranean. He identifies regional variation, suggesting that what is spoken in Algiers is much more influenced by Spanish than the *Lingua Franca* found in Tripoli, characterised as a mix of Provençal, Greek vernacular, Latin and "Italien corrompu" (corrupted Italian) (Emerit 1954: 375). Blaquiére, author of *Letters from the Mediterranean*, stated that Ahmed, ambassador for the Bey of Tripoli, Qaramanli in Spain, spoke Italian ‘*particularly well*’ (Blaquiére, 1813:94). A few years later, in 1818, Lyon recorded that “*a bad Italian is generally spoken by the Inhabitants of the town; so that Christians have not much difficulty in transacting business*” (Lyon, 1821: 13). Despite the aforementioned regional variation of *Lingua Franca* within Barbary, it seems inevitable to acknowledge that Italian was a key lexifier of the pidgin. Given the preeminence of Italian in commercial, diplomatic and legal spheres, texts require careful analysis to confirm that the *Lingua Franca* - a discrete pidgin rather than poor imitations of Italian – existed. Yet the apparent ubiquity of this independent means of communication, mentioned by a plethora of travellers, diplomats, priests, imprisoned slaves – men (and women) at every level of society, serves to confirm its very existence.

6. Levantine *Lingua Franca*

Lingua Franca is often asserted to have spread across Barbary and the Levant, with very little substantiation in the case of the latter. Nevertheless there are a number of authors who refer to varieties of *Lingua Franca* found along the Eastern Mediterranean coastlines and into today’s Middle East. According to the French philosopher Rousseau (1712-1754, ed. Cranston 1991), a mastery of Italian allowed him to understand the

vernacular spoken by many inhabitants of the Levant. While staying in Neuchatel as a young man, Rousseau happened to meet a Greek monk who claimed to be the Archimandrite of Jerusalem, and who was travelling around Europe to raise money for holy sites. The latter spoke no French but “Rousseau’s knowledge of Italian enabled him to understand the *lingua franca*, or bastard Levantine Venetian, which the traveller spoke”. (Cranston, 1991: 96). Lord Byron, the English poet, on a grand tour of Europe in the first decade of the nineteenth century also referred to the Levantine pidgin. Writing to Frances Hodgson, the future author of ‘The Secret Garden’, Byron expounds on his linguistic competence: “my current tongue is Levant Italian, which I gabble perforce. My late dragoman spoke bad Latin, but having dismissed him, I am left to my own resources, which consist in tolerably fluent Lingua Franca” (Byron, ed. Murray, 1922: 29).

According to Philip Mansel (2010), the Abbé Prévost, a French Abbot, traveller and author of ‘Manon Lescaut’, described Lingua Franca in 1775, as ‘in use among seamen in the Mediterranean and merchants who go to trade in the Levant and which is understood by people of all nations’ (Mansel, 2010: 14). In his “histoire générale des voyages...” Prévost describes the companions of the Capitaine du port a Mocha, Yemen who come to meet the French mission arriving there in 1708 as

un interprête Banian, qui parlait la langue Portugaise, et qui était vêtu de blanc, avec une belle ceinture brodée et une écharpe de soie sur son épaule, et d’un Hollandais du Comptoir, vêtu a la Turque, qui parlait la langue Franque

‘an Indian interpreter who spoke Portuguese, dressed in white with a beautiful brocade belt and a silk scarf around his shoulders, and a Dutchman from the trading post, in Turkish dress, who spoke lingua franca’ (Prévost, 1752: 292; my translation).

Antoine Galland, cited by Mansel, is best known for his translation from the Arabic of “The Thousand and One Nights”. He worked for several French ambassadors to the Ottoman Empire, spending several years in Smyrna and Constantinople at the close of the seventeenth century (Raynard, 2012: 97-102).

Galland describes the variation of Lingua Franca spoken by Jews:

Ils se servent de ce qu’ils ont apporté de l’Espagne, laquelle approche plus du portugais que de l’espagnol, que chacun entend assez bien parce qu’ils y mettent des mots italiens, et ainsi ils n’ont point de peine à se faire entendre aux marchands.

‘They use the language they have brought from Spain, which is more like Portuguese than Spanish. Anyone can understand it pretty well because they substitute Italian words, and thus have no trouble being understood by traders’ (Galland (ed.) 2010; 150; my translation).

Levant Lingua Franca – or its pseudonyms Levant Italian or Levantine Venetian – clearly shares lexifiers and features with its Barbary relation. Its function as a means of communication between Arabic speakers and Europeans for matters of commerce predominantly. Galland's above assertion (2010) suggests that variation is a key element of the pidgin, which enables rather than hinders understanding, and does not seem to diminish the pidgin's viability.

7. The authoritative source?

The predominant source for Lingua Franca lexicon is the anonymously written *Dictionnaire* (Anonymous, 1830), written as a manual for French forces as they sought to colonise Algiers. Although the existence of such a dictionary does much to dispel detractors of the pidgin, it is not as authoritative as it might be. Little is known about the *Dictionnaire*. The lack of a named author has led to speculation as to the identity and nationality of its compiler, or perhaps compilers. Cifoletti (2004) assumes the author(s) to be French but with an impressive knowledge of Italian. The orthography appears to be French: round back vowels /u/ are often rendered as <ou>, as in the cases of *locou* 'crazy', *mouchou* 'very' or *festouk* 'pistachio', and the Italian geminate 'zz' is rendered as 'tz' in *matza* 'kill'. The *Dictionnaire* features both a wordlist and a set of *dialogues*, a collection of phrases and dialogues intended to help the soldiers communicate with the residents of Algiers. It comprises just over 2,100 words, the vast majority of which derive from Italian. Other languages significantly represented include Spanish, French / Provençal, Portuguese and Arabic. The only other lexical inventory within the Lingua Franca corpus is a much earlier document, compiled by the Spanish priest, Serrano in Algiers in 1670. His Lingua Franca wordlist, *Nombres de las cosas en Argel*, 'Names of things in Algiers' is Arabic-, rather than Romance-dominated, and seems more likely to be a variant form of Arabic (Serrano, 1670). He also includes numbers that appear to be Arabic in Roman orthography. Numbers hardly feature elsewhere in the corpus, other than in the *Dictionnaire* where they resemble Italian numbers only in French orthography: *ouno* 'one', *doué* 'two', *tré* 'three', *quatro* 'four' (Anonymous, 1830).

The *Dictionnaire* cannot be considered a wholly reliable, or at least, definitive source of Lingua Franca lexicon. While it clearly sets out to be comprehensive, often providing multiple alternatives for each meaning, drawn from various Romance languages the *Dictionnaire* does not account for the full extent of the pidgin's variation. Such variation would seem inevitable, both diachronic and geographic, given the plethora of source languages, the several centuries of recorded existence in the Barbary States and the extent of its geographical spread, would seem inevitable. In terms of place, the location where Lingua Franca was recorded influences the form used. The constituent populations of each city-state often seem to correspond with the linguistic variation of the Lingua Franca spoken there. However, such factors did not imply a consistent choice of lexicon. Lingua Franca's most consistent feature is its inconsistency.

8. Conclusion

Lingua Franca's status as a pidgin, rather than a jargon or mere 'foreigner talk' seems indisputable, despite – or perhaps because of – its variation over time and space. A pidgin spoken for nearly 300 years, and perhaps written too, across the Mediterranean, into the Levant and predominantly along the coastline of North Africa by multiple linguistic communities, people of diverse social standing, religion, education and

occupation, inevitably manifests lexifying, grammatical and even nomenclature differences. The divergent sources offered for the original term, Lingua Franca, only reinforce this. Its existence on the Barbary Coast would seem inarguable given the sheer number of commentators bearing witness to its centrality in commerce and daily life, and the plethora of linguistic examples (as well as the publishing of the *Dictionnaire* (Anonymous 1830). Indeed, it seems reasonable to conclude that this embodiment of Lingua Franca represents the most established and comprehensive variety of the pidgin.

The key to the establishment of Lingua Franca in the North African regencies and its sustained usage appears to lie in the linguistic makeup of the urban populations. The combination of Arabs with an understanding of Romance languages, European (majority Italian) renegades who quickly acquired wealth and status, and thereby penetrated the Arab power structures, and the significant European slave population made a Romance-based contact language indispensable. Earlier references to *franco* may well describe an earlier stage of the pidgin, or a jargon, a less formed or reduced version of the Barbary Lingua Franca. Whether Lingua Franca was ever more than an oral pidgin remains to be seen. Further analysis of Chancery texts may yet prove that it was written down, and provide more information of linguistic features. Cremona's 'Sherlock' working title remains a guiding principle.

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