

What Is a Lingua Franca? Two definitions

What is a lingua franca?

A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, by David Crystal

lingua franca: A term used in sociolinguistics, and often in everyday speech, to refer to an auxiliary language used to enable routine communication to take place between groups of people who speak different native language; also sometimes called an interlingua. English is the world's most common lingua franca, followed by French; but other languages are also widely used. In East Africa, for example, Swahili is the lingua franca; in many parts of West Africa, Hausa is used.

The original Lingua Franca

from "linguafranca03.txt" (9 pages)

<http://www.uwm.edu/~corre/franca/edition2/lingua.2.html>

Lingua Franca was a pidgin, a trade language used by numerous language communities around the Mediterranean, to communicate with others whose language they did not speak. It is, in fact, the mother of all pidgins, seemingly in use since the Middle Ages and surviving until the nineteenth century, when it disappeared with hardly a trace, probably under the onslaught of the triumphant French language, leaving only a few anecdotal quotations in the writings of travelers or observers, an imperfect French/Lingua Franca vocabulary (1830) meant for settlers in the newly annexed territory of Algeria, and some other rather strange detritus which I have tried to put together in the Glossary in a consistent fashion. The only oral survival of which I am aware for certain is the initial numerals of Lingua Franca in the mouths of the present-day children of Jerusalem, who use them as a counting-out rhyme, innocently unaware that they are not mere nonsense syllables, but the sad remnant of a once highly useful means of communication, an informal Mediterranean Esperanto. Like other pidgins, it had a limited vocabulary and a sharply circumscribed grammar, and lacked those things, such as verb tenses and case endings, that add specificity to human speech.

The language was never written. No poetry, no folktales, no translation of the Bible, just a way to sell the merchandise you had to offer, or haggle for a better price on its purchase.

Observers noted that the words constituting this pidgin were mainly of Romance origin, in particular, Italian, Spanish and Occitan, a language occupying an intermediate position between Spanish and French. *Non venir ancora journo di sancto di vos outros?* ("Hasn't your holiday arrived yet?") politely enquired one speaker of another. Note particularly the use of an uninflected infinitive where some kind of past tense would be needed in all "normal" languages. Apart from a few curious and tantalizing quotes of this kind, Lingua Franca seemed to be lost forever, since it died before the advent of the tape recorder or of anthropologists anxious to record a moribund form of human speech, however bizarre, and even laughable, it may have seemed.