Clare Griffin

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An Early Modern Dutch How-To Guide to Russian Trade

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This article uses a case-study of a Dutch translation of a Russian book of tariffs and trading laws from 1724 to examine how language shaped and was shaped by global trade. In the early modern period shifting trade routes brought new commodities with new names, imperial expansion reified imperial terms as the norm for imperial-controlled products, and both joined old terms for the technicalities and legalities of international trade. All those terms had to be arranged within texts, tables, and books, and rearranged in translations vital to international trade. Such mercantile texts aimed not for definitive and lasting translations, but rather translations that worked in the immediate and fleeting context trade required. Comparing these two books shows how the semantics of commerce were shaped not only by linguistics but the expediencies of trade. Examining this unexpected and as-yet unused textual pairing demonstrates the interconnected nature of linguistic, mercantile, and material changes in the early modern global world.

Keywords: Global history; trade; Russia; The Netherlands; translation

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This article uses a case-study of a Dutch translation of a Russian book of tariffs and trading laws from 1724 to examine how language shaped and was shaped by global trade. In the early modern period shifting trade routes brought new commodities with new names, imperial expansion reified imperial terms as the norm for imperial-controlled products, and both joined old terms for the technicalities and legalities of international trade. All those terms had to be arranged within texts, tables, and books, and rearranged in translations vital to international trade. Such mercantile texts aimed not for definitive and lasting translations, but rather translations that worked in the immediate and fleeting context trade required. Comparing these two books shows how the semantics of commerce were shaped not only by linguistics but the expediencies of trade. Examining this unexpected and as-yet unused textual pairing demonstrates the interconnected nature of linguistic, mercantile, and material changes in the early modern global world.

The early modern world saw a massive reorganisation of trading routes, with the Americas and Eurasia linked for the first time, and East Asia-Western Europe trade being recentred around sea routes that skirted Africa. This caused major social and economic changes, but also required a shift in language. Colonialists, traders, and other interested parties had to learn or invent new words for new things. And if, as often happened, those objects became a part of global trade, those names had to be organised, incorporated into systems of commodity types, laws, and economics. In the increasingly bureaucratic world of the early modern period, as the Empires sought to control the world around them, merchants trading such goods had to deal not only with those new commodity terms but also older words for coinages, official weights and measures, legal concepts, and administrator's positions and titles. Language, then, was essential to globalisation.

Language is an issue of communication and so must be specific, to name this thing and not that thing, but also general, to allow us to tell others the difference between those things. As Lydia H. Liu has argued regarding legal language, all terms for new concepts being translated are the result of "negotiating commensurability," working out how two languages can be comprehensibly connected at a specific point.[1] In international mercantile circles, the negotiation of a clear and comprehensible translation was key to trading success, especially when trading in a location with a very different local tongue to their own. A good translation would

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[1] LIU: "Legislating the Universal," 152–153.

facilitate legal (for a given value of legal) purchase, transport, and sale of desired goods and a healthy profit margin; a poor one could lead to jail, expulsion, unhappy customers, and bankruptcy. When it came to translation for trade, the stakes were high.

We can see such a striving for successful linguistic negotiation between very different languages in trade between the Russian Empire and their Western European contacts. In 1724 an Amsterdam printer put together a little volume in Dutch called *Regulation for all persons of high and low standing, merchants and captains, in the loading and unloading of the ships in the ports of Great Russia. Also with the tariff for incoming and outgoing goods for the ports of St Petersburg, Vyborg, Narva, Archangel, and Kola*.[2] This text, preserved in two copies in the Stadsarchief Amsterdam, is a collection of Russian trade regulation documents from 1724 created from a printed Russian book that first compiled those regulations.[3] In the text I will use the term *The How-To Guide to Russian Trade* and in the footnotes I will indicate which version I am referencing by using short forms of their titles in the respective languages: *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo* for the Russian and *Reglement van laden en lossen* for the Dutch. This text, in both the original Russian and the Dutch translation, were aimed at an international merchant readership, to help traders navigate trade in and out of Russian ports.

Russian-Dutch relations of this period give us a specific view of language and translation in a trading context. By the 1720s, Amsterdam had long had strong trading connections with Russia. Indeed, Russia's great northern trading port of Archangelsk, major entrepôt for traders and goods coming from the West until the early eighteenth century, was founded after Dutch merchants active in the region found a suitable site in 1582.[4] Predating and outlasting the importance of Archangelsk to Russia-West trade were the Dutch themselves. Major scholar of early modern Russia-Dutch trade relations Jan Willem Veluwenkamp claims that from the late sixteenth century until the mid-eighteenth century the Dutch were the most important commercial nation dealing with Russia.[5] By the early eighteenth century, the role of the Dutch in Russian society went beyond commerce. Peter the Great, who ruled Russia from 1696 until his death in 1725, himself spent time in the Netherlands, purchased the Dutch scholar Frederik Ruysch's anatomical collection to form the basis of his Kunstkamera

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[2] Stadsarchief Amsterdam, collection no. 78, Archief van de Directie van de Oostersche Handel en Reederijen: Item 399, *Reglement van laden en lossen en tarief van inkomende en uitgaande rechten van de havens Petersburg, Viborg, Narva, Archangel en Kola* (Amsterdam, 1724). [Regulation for all persons of high and low standing, merchants and captains, in the loading and unloading of the ships in the ports of Great Russia. Also with the tariff for incoming and outgoing goods for the ports of St Petersburg, Vyborg, Narva, Archangel, and Kola].

[3] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo, Vyborgskogo, Harvskogo, Arkhangelogorodskogo, Kol'skogo, portov* [Tariff for the ports of St Petersburg, Vyborg, Narva, Archangel, and Kola] (St Petersburg: Senate, 1724) ББК 65.03(2)51-861.1, Yeltsin Presidential Library, St Petersburg, https://www.prlib.ru/item/372726 [Accessed 17.03.2021].

[4] KOTILAINE: *Russia's Foreign Trade and Economic Expansion in the Seventeenth Century*, 18.
On Russia's trade with Western Europe in the early modern period see also ZAKHAROV: *Zapadnoevropeiskie kuptsy v Rossii. Epokha Petra I*. On Russian-Dutch trade through Archangelsk see in particular VELUVENKAMP: *Archangel'sk: Niderlanskie predprinimateli v Rossii 1550–1785*.

[5] VELUWENKAMP: "Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Family Networks," 206–223.

museum, and was very invested in translating naval works from Dutch.[6] By the 1720s, the Russians and the Dutch were heavily involved with each other.

Despite the long history of Russian-Dutch relations, language remained a major barrier. Few Dutch people – including Dutch traders – knew Russian, and few Russians – including merchants and customs officials – knew Dutch. According to Pepijn Hendricks and Jos Schaeken, around 15 Russian dictionaries, language manuals, and phrasebooks for Dutch, English, German and French speakers were created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[7] Some of these did deal with trade – Tönnies Fenne's 1607 manual includes words of traded goods, and also some example conversations regarding trading – but were not books about trade.[8] Despite the increasing availability of such dictionaries, foreigners learning Russian remained rare across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Translations like the Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* were then hugely important. Yet the 1724 *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* is the only merchants' handbook in Dutch translation to guide them in that trade. That a Dutch merchant would want such a text is understandable, but until 1724 apparently no one had decided to fill that need.

The status of these two texts as printed, and the place Russian-Dutch relations in the history of Russian printing, is also significant. Although there was an earlier attempt to create a printing industry in Russia in the late sixteenth century, it was really under Peter the Great that Russian printing took off.[9] As Simon Franklin has established, Peter used a monopoly on the printing press technology within the Empire in the first two decades of the eighteenth century to create near-unforgeable decrees and other official documents that could also be produced in large numbers for distribution across the massive territory of the Empire.[10] It was only later that printing began to be used to produce a broader range of texts, and even then official institutions like the Senate and the Academy of Sciences long played a major role in the print industry. Printing in sixteenth-century Russia had taken place in Moscow; printing for eighteenth-century Russian official institutions initially took place in Amsterdam and only later shifted to St Petersburg and (to a more limited extent) Moscow. For example, I. V. Kopievskii published a Latin-Russian glossary, a Russian-Latin-German and a Russian-Latin-Dutch dictionary in Amsterdam between 1699 and 1700; Jacob Bruce's 1717 Russian-Dutch dictionary was printed in St Petersburg.[11] The two versions of the *How-To Guide to Russian Trade*, the Russian printed in St Petersburg and Moscow, the Dutch in

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[6] On Ruysch's artefacts in the Kunstkamera collection see ANEMONE: "The Monsters of Peter the Great"; on naval translations see CRACRAFT: *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture*, 78.

[7] HENDRIKS & SCHAEKEN: *Tönnies Fenne's Low German Manual of Spoken Russian*; on the genre of phrasebooks (*razgovorniki*), see MIRONESKO BIELOVA: "The Phrasebook ['razgovornik'] as a Communication Tool for Medieval Russian Travelers."

[8] HENDRIKS & SCHAEKEN: *Tönnies Fenne's Low German Manual of Spoken Russian*. See for example "Van laken kopenschop," (on buying cloth), 451–60.

[9] See in particular BOGATYREV: "Special Issue: The Journeys of Ivan Fedorov."

[10] FRANKLIN: "Printing and Social Control in Russia 1: Passports; FRANKLIN: "Printing and Social Control in Russia 2: Decrees"; FRANKLIN: "Printing Social Control in Russia 3: Blank Forms."

[11] BRUCE: *Kniga leksikon ili Sobranie rechei po alfavitu c roccijskogo na gollandskii iazyk*. On this text, see CRACRAFT: *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture*, 290; BOSS: *Newton and Russia: The Early Influence*, 64 and 66.

Amsterdam, then sit in an established geography not only for trade relations, but also for the history of Russian printing.

The direction of translation is much more unusual. Up until his death in 1725, Tsar Peter the Great had a number of practical and legal documents from a number of Western European languages translated into Russian, which joined the religious works, herbals, maps, newsheets, and a variety of other Western European texts translated into East Slavic languages from the Medieval period on.[12] It was only later in the eighteenth century that works began to be translated out of Russian, but mostly literary works like the French translations of Aleksandr Sumarokov's plays.[13] Generally speaking, we have more examples of the former than the latter: much was translated into Russian in this period; only select materials were translated out of Russian. It took a rising European interest in Russian literature for translations out of Russian to be normalised. Lisa Hellman writes of moving the history of early modern Chinese-European translation "from court to port"; our Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* moves us instead from salon to port, underlining that, perhaps especially in the expanding trade networks of the early modern world, translation and ports went together.[14] This trade book then is an oddity as an early translation out of Russian that was also a technical rather than a literary text.

The Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* for merchants thus was a creation of what we already know about printing, trade, and translation in the 1720s, yet is also a different kind of document. We should then consider what this text can tell us about trade and translation in the multi-lingual world of early modern global commerce. Is the priority of this text to explain Russian terms and concepts to the reader, thus making them better aware of Russian trade terminology? Or to translate Russian terms and concepts into Dutch, thus conveying the contents to the Dutch reader without educating them on Russian semantics? How does it deal with commodity terms that originate in languages other than Dutch or Russian? Answering these questions will lead us to a better understanding of how early modern merchants navigated the practical sematic difficulties of their lives.

The Text

In order to think about this previously unstudied text, we need to set out its contents, how they relate to other Russian documents of the time, and consider its genre.[15] The Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* consists of a Dutch-language front page followed by Dutch translations of Russian trade documents from 1724, making up a total of 88 printed pages. The translator is unknown, but it was sold by Cornelius Lelyvelt (alternatively Lelivelt) (1695–

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[12] On Petrine era translations, see for example CRACRAFT, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture*, 78; LOBACHEV: "Indexing Books in 18th-century Russia". For earlier translations from Western European languages into Russian, see for example MAIER: "Newspaper Translations in Seventeenth-Century Muscovy"; WATSON: *Tradition and Translation*; JANSSON & WAUGH: "Muscovite Acquisition of Books from Poland in the Late 1640s to Early 1650s".

[13] RJÉOUTSKI & OFFORD: *Translation and Propaganda in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*.

[14] HELLMAN: "Learning (on) Local Terms", 33.

[15] To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever published on either the Russian or the Dutch versions of this text.

1733*)*, a publisher and bookseller active in Amsterdam in the 1720s.[16] This specific collection of Russian documents corresponds to a Russian-language compilation of the same texts, also produced in 1724, a copy of which can be found in the Yeltsin Presidential Library.[17] The copy in the Yeltsin Presidential Library states that the book was printed in St Petersburg by the Senate on 26th March 1724, and reprinted in Moscow on 7th September 1724; the Dutch copy only mentions the first Russian printing and that the Dutch copy was printed in Amsterdam sometime in 1724.[18] The Dutch version was then produced from the St Petersburg edition sometime after 26th March but before the end of 1724.

Both the Russian and the Dutch versions collect together: an order setting out 41 rules of trade promulgated by Peter the Great on 31st January 1724; two alphabetical tables of Tariffs for regularly traded goods, one for imports and one for exports; an order by Peter the Great also from 31st January 1724 on payments of tolls; and another order by Peter the Great setting out further rules regarding specific kinds of goods (especially luxury goods). The final document is undated in these books, but it is partially published in the document collection *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire* and dated in that collection to 31st January 1724.[19] These are not the only trade regulations created between 1st January and 26th March 1724, nor even the only trade regulations from that period that concerned foreign merchants or foreign trade.[20] Rather, this is a selection of regulations that the Senate in St Petersburg and an Amsterdam printer thought were sufficiently vital to form the basis of a guidebook for the use of foreign merchants.

The genre of a text substantially affects how we read and translate it: electronics manuals and the works of Shakespeare are both objects of reading and of translation, but very different ones. Our *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* collects together two kinds of official Russian documents: laws and tariffs. Those documents are similar in origin and aim – created by the Russian bureaucracy to enforce compliance with trade laws – but present different reading experiences – one set to be read as a continuous narrative of law, another to be referred to as needed. Collected together in one volume, they become another genre of text: the business handbook. According to Daniel A. Rabuzzi, 12,000 such books were published in Europe between 1470 and 1820, making it a major genre.[21] These works were often anonymous (or effectively so) and contained both relevant trade data and also advice, such as how to conduct oneself in a business environment. Our *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* fits the first two criteria here, but not the last. There is no section directly addressing how to behave as a foreign merchant in Russia, but some of the laws included in it give implicit indications of appropriate behaviour. We can then see this text in terms of laws, official trade data, and

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[16] http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/ecartico/persons/23190 [Accessed 17.11.2021].

[17] https://www.prlib.ru/item/372726 [Accessed 17.11.2021].

[18] *Tarif SanktPeterburgskago*, 43; *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 1 and 88.

[19] *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii* [Complete collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire, hereafter *PSZ*] 45, http://elib.shpl.ru/ru/nodes/226-t-45-kniga-tarifov-1830#mode/inspect/page/129/zoom/5. [Accessed 17.03.2021].

[20] See for example *PSZ* 7, 31st January 1724, 241–249.

[21] RABUZZI: "Eighteenth-Century Commercial Mentalities."

business texts, as it connects not only the Netherlands and Russia, but also the worlds of officialdom and of trade.

The Audience

Language learning, multi-lingualism, and translation were areas that shifted hugely across the early modern period in Russia. There were two issues: how many non-Slavs could function in Russian, and how many Russians could function in non-Slavic languages? I say here "function" rather than speak, write, or know, deliberately. The patterning of language in this period and context was such that various communities interacted with each other through intermediaries, phrasebooks, and limited written or oral skills. They "knew" languages, but to use that verb alone conceals the nuances of the kinds of functionality they employed.

The ability of early modern Russians to function in various languages was due to changing cultural norms. Before the eighteenth century, elite Russian culture had little time for what we would now call literacy even in Russian or Old Church Slavonic, and even less so in other languages. The Russian elite and the Tsar were decision-makers and warriors, not scribes, and they delegated the manual labour of writing and the unglamourous task of reading to servitors.[22] That began to change over the course of the seventeenth-century, as the Western European idea of literacy as elite habit became popular and as heavier interactions with Western Europe led to a need for more competent translators and interpreters.[23] This trend was fuelled by the Europhile tendencies of Peter the Great, pushing literacy forward as he also encouraged study abroad. It continued under Catherine the Great (r. 1762–1796), whose reign heralded the beginning of the remarkable trend of Francophilia amongst the Russian elite, an enthusiasm for a language and a nation that had virtually no standing in Russia even a century earlier.[24] Early nineteenth-century elite Russian culture as literate and French-functioning was the result of a phenomenal trajectory away from a primarily oral Russian culture towards a more literate and foreignized one. But in 1724, where we lay our scene, the Russian elite still primarily functioned in other languages indirectly, via expert middle-men translators and interpreters.

The history of foreigners functioning in Russia and in Russian also underwent remarkable changes in this period. In the fifteenth century, learning Russian was a privilege, and one then granted solely to the preferred traders of the Hansa.[25] At least by the end of the sixteenth century this had changed, with the Englishman Mark Ridley producing a Russian-English dictionary. This dictionary did attempt to create a general view of common Russian and English words, but also included thematic word lists, a common strategy in this era of

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[22] GRIFFIN: "Bureaucracy and Knowledge Creation".

[23] For example, the establishment of the Slavo-Greco-Latin Academy in 1685, an institution in part aimed at creating a translator corps. See in particular CHRISSIDIS: *An Academy at the Court of the Tsars: Greek Scholars*.

[24] ARGENT & OFFORD & RJEOUTSKI: "The Functions and Value of Foreign Languages in Eighteenth-Century Russia".

[25] MAIER: "Foreign-Language Specialists in Muscovite Russia (16th and early 17th Century)", 191.

Russian bilingual dictionaries.[26] Such dictionaries did not translate into a broad Russian-speaking expat community in Russia. Jos Schaeken has examined the papers of one such unusual European who learnt Russian from a private tutor.[27] Significantly, Schaeken's un-named language student specifically wanted to learn to write phrases used in official letters. Alongside the trajectory of more Russians becoming more functional in non-Slavic languages, more Western Europeans became more directly functional in Russian, but that functionality was limited and often aimed at fulfilling particular tasks, rather than obtaining some abstract concept of fluency.

These issues of functionality take us to issues of social history and community. Peter Burke has argued that language helps make a community, that the language or languages spoken by a particular group helps bind them together.[28] He particularly points to the rise in use of Dutch and the standardisation of Dutch in grammar books in the seventeenth century.[29] The existence and language of the Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* were shaped by the previous century of the development of the Dutch language. Yet there was more to the Dutch merchants' linguistic community than this. Our Dutch book could be picked up by any Dutch reader, but it was designed to appeal specifically to Dutch merchants dealing with Russia. We know that these men knew little Russian, but we also know that they were plugged into networks of translators, interpreters, language teachers, and trading contexts that required and allowed them to function in Russia in a way the average denizen of Amsterdam would not have. Dutch merchants were not bound together by *knowledge* of Russian but by their ability to *function* in Russian-speaking contexts, in part via texts like the *How-To Guide to Russian Trade*.

Untranslatable Commodities

One major issue in creating and translating trade texts in the post-1500 world was commodity terms. In the aftermath of the early European invasions of the Americas, goods from Afro-Eurasia began to circulate the Americas and those from the Americas to circulate Afro-Eurasia.[30] This was an expansion and rearrangement of the long-distance trade interactions of the premodern world, which had linked sub-Saharan Africa with the Mediterranean world, and Western Eurasia and East Asia, for centuries.[31] The novel commodities made available by those new trade routes required a linguistic intervention. Returning to Liu's concept of "negotiating commensurability," our Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* allows us to see

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[26] Several are included in the dictionary attributed to Mark Ridley. STONE: *A Dictionarie of the Vulgar Russe Tongue, Attributed to Mark Ridley*.

[27] SCHAEKEN: "On Language Learning and Intercultural Communication in Seventeenth-Century Russia."

[28] BURKE: *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*.

[29] IBIDEM, 83.

[30] On early modern global trade see for example GERRITSEN & RIELLO: *The Global Lives of Things*; GRIFFIN: "Disentangling Commodity Histories"; PEREZ-GARCIA et al.: "Big Data and 'New' Global History."

[31] For a recent work engaging with the idea of global medieval trade, see BERZOCK: *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa*.

how Russian administrators and Dutch translators negotiated in naming valuable commodities, a linguistic exchange vital to desired material exchanges.[32]

Some commodity names were translated in the Dutch edition. Looking through both documents we find arsenic (Russian: мышьяк/mysh'iak, Dutch: the Latin term arsenicum), mercury (Russian: ртуть/rtut', Dutch: the Anglicized quicksilver rather than the Dutch kwikzilver), and sal ammoniac (Russian: нашатырь/nashatyr', Dutch: the Latin term sal ammoniac).[33] As such chemicals were available in some quantity across the globe, each language has different words for them; as they are available in varying quantities and qualities in different regions, they have also been traded for centuries. Other commodity terms were also translated: human hair (Russian: волосы человеческие/volosy chelovecheskie, Dutch: Menschen-Hair), traded to produce the then-fashionable wigs essential to elites across Europe.[34] Hair, human or otherwise, is again common enough that all languages have their own word for it. When a commodity was common enough to have a local term but its global distribution was sufficiently uneven to be traded, then a translation into a pre-existing term was made.

However, when a commodity was from outside Europe, especially when it was a new commodity for Afro-Eurasia like those from the Americas, then something different happened. Cardamom, a spice made from plants native to South and South East Asia and known in Western Eurasia since the ancient period, has distinctly similar names in both languages: in Russian it is кардамон/kardamon; in Dutch it is cardamom.[35] Tobacco, that famous American commodity known and used across Afro-Eurasia from the sixteenth century on, also has markedly similar terms in both languages: in Russian табак/tabak; in Dutch toebak.[36] Tobacco is neither a Russian nor a Dutch word, rather it is a term adopted from Spanish, itself possibly originally taken from the Caribbean language Taìno.[37] A now less well known American commodity, sassafras, can also be found in these documents as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was a valued medicament across Western Eurasia, under a name first given to it by the French and then adopted across Afro-Eurasia.[38] The term in Russian is дерево сасофрасъ/derevo sasofras, sassafras wood; in Dutch it is sassafras.[39] In these latter two cases then, the Dutch and the Russians both spoke a commodity language of the Atlantic World. As these commodities were grown and produced outside of the Netherlands and the Russian Empire the terms for them in both Dutch and Russian were markedly similar, as the foreign term followed the object it named through global trading channels.

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[32] LIU: "Legislating the Universal", 152–153.

[33] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, 8, 9, 12; *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 25 and 48.

[34] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, section on imported goods, 3. *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 34.

[35] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, section on imported goods, pages 5. *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 28 and 29.

[36] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, section on imported goods, 15; *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 53. Although tobacco use was restricted in Russia during the seventeenth century, cf.: ROMANIELLO: "Muscovy's Extraordinary Ban on Tobacco".

[37] BOOMERT: "Names for Tobago".

[38] GRIFFIN: "Disentangling Commodity Histories".

[39] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, section on imported goods, 3; *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 30.

As commodities retained their original names whilst they made their way to the Russian Empire, so commodities exclusively or substantially sourced from within the Russian Empire also retained Russian names abroad. One such term can be found in these texts: sable. The Russian *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* lists several kinds of sable fur in its outgoing goods section, all under the term соболь/sobol'.[40] We find this term in the Dutch version under the category pelterey (pelts): allerley Sobels (all kinds of sable).[41] The Dutch term then differs from the Russian only in the alphabet used, the orthography (with the change of "o" to "e"), and the addition of a Dutch plural ("s"). Sable is the Slavic term for the popular luxury fur of the eponymous mammal which, due to the expansion of the Russian Empire, eventually lived almost exclusively within Russian-controlled territories, in particular Siberia and the Russian Far East. East Slavic principalities were the major source of sables to Western Europe even before Muscovy's conquest of the Khanate of Sibir' in the 1580s, with indigenous Siberian peoples paying tribute to East Slavic rulers in sables from at least the late fifteenth century.[42] Sables were exported to Western Europe in substantial quantities: in 1662 alone Russia exported over 15,000 pelts.[43] Sables were not from the historical East Slavic lands, not initially hunted by Slavs, nor were they only named sables. The Solon people (an Evenk group) provided the Qing empire with this commodity, themselves naming it *biskal*, and Qing administrators calling it *seke* in Manchu and *diao* in Chinese.[44] It was the combination of Moscow's domination of the trade from Northern Asia to Western Europe along with its Eastward-facing colonialism swallowing up the sables' original habitat that meant that to Western Europeans sables were a commodity with a Russian name.

Russian Officialdom

Alongside commodity terms, the *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* is concerned with Russian law and Russian official customs practices. Outside the long lists of commodities for import and export and the sections on what constitutes a luxury good, the rest of the book deals with payments, customs officials, and rules for merchant behaviour, all of which were specific to the Russian Empire. This is hugely important: knowledge of commodities is useless without an ability to function within the context of trade officialdom and correctly interact with bureaucrats whose decisions could sink an entire trade deal. This, then, presents another significant challenge, another negotiation of commensurability, to establish how Dutch merchants should understand the nature and titles of key Russian civil servants.

The sections of the *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* that are continuous narrative laws rather than tables include a number of Russian official words and concepts, including, unsurprisingly, customs officials. Rather more surprising is how the Dutch text translates such terms. One of the decrees in its Dutch version specifies the role of "de Tollbediende of Zelowalnik

[40] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, section on imported goods, 21.

[41] *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 72.

[42] See for example MARTIN: *Treasure of the Land of Darkness*, 81.

[43] KOTILAINE: "Competing Claims," 289.

[44] ROUÉ & MOLNAR: *Knowing our Lands and Resources*, 118; CHIA: "The Solon Sable Tribute, Hunters of Inner Asia and Dynastic Elites at the Imperial Centre," 26–27.

(*Inspecteur*)," "the customs official or *tselovalnik* (inspector)".[45] *Tselovalnik* (*tselovalnik* sng; *tselovalniki* pl) is equivalent to a swornman, someone who has taken an oath to serve the tsar. It is derived from the word "kiss" (*tselovat'*), as Muscovite oaths were taken by kissing a cross, a practice used in the East Slavic lands from at least the twelfth century.[46] This title was used well into the eighteenth century.[47] Here, the Dutch text is specifying that the title of the Russian customs officials merchants will encounter is *tselovalnik*. It then also further explains the meaning of this – a *tselovalnik* is the particular kind of customs official that inspects goods. The Dutch text takes one concept – customs officials – and explains it to us three times, with their general position, Russian title, and Dutch equivalent title.

We would expect this explanation of *tselovalnik* the Dutch version gives us to be absent from the Russian text, as Russian readers would recognise such a common form of official. Yet even the title itself absent from the Russian text, with the relevant section calling them only "таможенные служители" (*tamozhennye sluzhiteli*), "customs servitors."[48] Indeed, *tselovalniki* worked in any number of different areas of governance, particularly in financial and policing roles in towns. Referring to them just as *tselovalniki* here in the Russian would be confusing and pointless, as not all *tselovalniki* were have been customs officials even as customs officials were *tselovalniki*. For that matter, other Russian-Dutch texts translate customs officials' titles without referring to the *tselovalniki*: Fenne's *Low German Manual* translates таможник/tamozhnik (customs officer) as tollner (customs officer).[49] The Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* is then more specific than Russian text but actually at the expense of clarity.

This situation echoes one described by Lisa Hellman in the context of eighteenth-century trade in the Chinese port then called Canton, present-day Guangzhou. As Russian business handbooks were translated for Dutch merchants dealing with Russia, so Cantonese-English dictionaries were created for European merchants active in China. Speaking of the translation choices made in those dictionaries, Hellman writes that certain terms

[A]re either vague or become short explanations rather than translations per se. In the Blake dictionary, for example, an erhu fiddle only become [sic] 'a musical instrument', whereas a go board is explained as 'a game board which is used with white and black stones or men'. As the words chosen for the dictionaries were not part of a European tradition for music, games, or clothes, they also pose the question of what knowledge a trader would have access to, or even want access to.[50]

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[45] Emphasis in the original. *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 82.

[46] MIKHAILOVA & PRESTEL: "Cross Kissing".

[47] AKELEV & WILSON: "The Barber of All Russia"; KAMENSKII: "Do We Know the Composition of the 18th Century Russian society?"

[48] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, decree of 1724, 30.

[49] HENDRICKS & SCHAEKEN: *Tönnies Fenne's Low German Manual of Spoken Russian*, 52.

[50] HELLMAN: "Learning (on) Local Terms," 44.

Particularly interesting for our purposes, she goes on "Such examples include the word for a civil servant 'a man who has passed the imperial examination'."[51] This is markedly similar to the Dutch translation of customs officials as "the customs official or *tselovalnik* (inspector)." In both cases, foreign merchants needed to know who these officials were in order to trade successfully, but the Chinese or Russian context was seen as sufficiently Other that rather than finding the closest equivalent term in the target language it was considered that a better sense of the concept could be given with a short explanation. These rather awkward translations then stemmed not from linguistic incapability, but rather from expediency.

Dutch Arrangements

We can further examine how the Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* prioritizes the immediate needs of traders by moving from looking at words and phrases to looking at the structure of the text. In broad overview, the Dutch text follows the structure of the St Petersburg printing of the Russian original. All the documents included in the Russian are present in the Dutch, in the order of the original, with no notable excisions or additions of paragraphs or documents. The clearest demonstration of how the text simultaneously follows the Russian original and departs from it on an organisational level is in the tables of imports and exports. Looking at this section of the text, we can again see substantial effort on the part of the translator to move this text towards the needs of the Dutch merchant readership.

Organisation is hugely important to how we use texts. From Buzzfeed listicles to the fractured timelines of postmodern novels, what comes next shapes our experience of reading and using texts. This was particularly important during the eighteen-century's boom in reference texts, with Samuel Johnson stating in 1756 that arranging materially alphabetically was a key feature of the age; he was speaking of Europe, but Hellman sees this principle at work in China as well.[52] Lynda Mugglestone has argued of such texts that "order was central to the utility of a reference work".[53] If we cannot find it, we cannot use it. Alphabetic organisation required a huge input of time and effort. Without the benefit of modern word-processing software which allows us to reorder text quickly, efficiently, neatly, and even automatically, any organisation of a text had to be done by hand.

The import/export tables of our *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* follow the eighteenth-century trend for arranging reference texts, and give us a case-study of how that practice worked out across languages. Those tables are alphabetical in each version, according to the alphabet of each respective language. The Russian version uses 25 Cyrillic characters in contemporary alphabetical order to create 24 sections ("и" and "i" sharing a section) including the letters "i," and "θ" that are no longer used in modern Russian but excluding characters like "ъ" that cannot be used to start a word. This reflects a specific moment in Russian orthography. Up until the end of the seventeenth century, Russian used 44-45 characters including the "i" and

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[51] IBIDEM.

[52] MUGGLESTONE: "Ranging Knowledge by the Alphabet," 207; HELLMAN: "Learning (on) Local Terms," 46.

[53] MUGGLESTONE: "Ranging Knowledge by the Alphabet," 215.

"θ."[54] The Russian *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* represents an alphabetical arrangement based on the short-lived Petrine civil script, introduced in 1708.[55] It was already defunct by 1755 when the Russian scientist M. V. Lomonosov produced a grammar book using only 30 letters, removing both the "i," and "θ" completely.[56] Interestingly, Peter the Great consulted with printers in Amsterdam on the orthographic reforms that created the Petrine civil script, as they were in part brought in to make Russian more easily printable.[57] Items in the Russian import/export tables are then arranged alphabetically by their Russian names according to a specific early eighteenth-century orthographical moment.

When the import/export tables were reproduced in the Dutch version of the *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* they were rearranged according to the 23 characters of the early modern Dutch alphabet. For example, when the Russian term for arsenic, мышьяк/mysh'iak, was translated into the Latin term used in the Dutch, arsenicum, it was moved from under the Cyrillic letter "м/m" to under the Latin character "a," relocating it several pages from its original place in the list.[58] This would have required substantial time and effort. The translator would have had to make a list of all the items in the Russian text translated into Dutch, then group them into their alphabetical arrangements in the target language. The import/export tables, although they contain the same items in an alphabetical arrangement in both texts, were actually painstakingly deconstructed and reconstructed in the production of the Dutch translation.

The rearrangements do not stop there. In the Russian original, we find multiple labelled sub-sections within the alphabetical sections. In the imports table we find wine (віноградные пітья/vinogradnye pit'ya) and cloth (сукна/sukna); in the exports we find soft items (мягкая рухлядь/myagkaya rukhlyad'), which includes a further sub-section of furs (мехи/mekhi) and ship sails by size (машты карабелные мерою/mashty karabelnye meroyu); both import and export tables include sub-sections on bread (хлебъ/khleb').[59] The Dutch version also includes labelled sub-sections in the import table, yet those sections do not line up with the Russian. Sub-sections such as Droogeryen (drugs), and Verstoffen (dyes) were innovations to the text created for the Dutch translation.[60] Items were also typically double-listed in the Dutch version. For example, arsenic is listed both under the sub-heading of drugs and individually, putting it in both the As and the Ds.[61] The compilers of both the Russian and the Dutch versions of the *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* felt that thematic sub-sections within a general alphabetical arrangement were an important organising device, yet had different priorities for which kinds of goods should be so highlighted.

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[54] HOLLAND: "Russian Orthographic Reform," 14–15.

[55] IBIDEM.

[56] CRACRAFT: *The Petrine Revolution in Russian culture*, 294. Some of these characters are still used in other Cyrillic alphabets, such as that presently used for modern Kazakh.

[57] IBIDEM, 269.

[58] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, 12; *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 25.

[59] *Tarif Sanktpeterburgskogo*, import/export tables, 2, 13, 16, 22, 23, 27.

[60] *Reglement van laden en lossen,* 29, 55.

[61] *Reglement van laden en lossen*, 25 and 29.

Those labelled sub-headings are related to the kinds of goods of substantial value to Russian officialdom and the Dutch mercantile community respectively. The Russian export sub-sections of soft items and furs includes not only sables, but also other similar commodities such as Siberian squirrel. The Russian state made a substantial amount of money from their fur exports, especially those furs on which they had a near-monopoly in Europe because the habitat of the free-living animals from which the fur was taken lay within the Russian Empire. The Dutch import sub-sections on drugs and dyes highlight items that had a very high price-per-weight, important when filling a merchant ship with a specific weight limit. The labelled sub-headings are then not there merely to indicate groups of items, but rather to help the reader navigate quickly to "big-ticket items" of specific interest because of their high profits. Although the Russian and Dutch versions make different decisions about what to highlight, they both make the decision to aid navigation to key items and facilitate that navigation using similar methods.

The decision to reorder the subsections when translating the *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* into Dutch takes us back to its purpose and its audience. Veluwenkamp has argued that, as knowledge of commodities and markets were key to commercial success, merchants typically specialised in a particular kind of goods in order to know that area of trade better. They were running a boutique, not a Walmart. This did not mean they would never source anything out of their usual area – money has no prejudice – but rather that they practised a commercial behaviour that was typically highly specialised but was also flexible when necessary.[62] Having then a full list of commonly-traded goods and their tariffs that was also arranged to facilitate locating information on particular groups of commodities allowed merchants of various specialisations to focus in on their target, and so making the Dutch *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* a more valuable item for potential purchase. The alphabetic organisation identified as important by Johnson, Hellman, and Mugglestone, in the Russian-Dutch trading context was significant but also multiply adapted. Moving from one alphabet to another necessitated textual reorganisation to maintain alphabetical order, but more than that, alphabetical organisation, in both versions of the *How-To Guide to Russian Trade*, was only a starting point for an ordering of knowledge based on trade priorities and not linguistics.

Conclusion

The *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* in its Russian and Dutch versions gives us an important case-study of how a mercantile reference book was constructed and reconstructed across two languages in an era of global trade. This book, its original creation, its translation, and its audience all serve to underline Hellman's statement on the importance of ports to early modern histories of translation. Peter the Great wanted naval manuals translated from Dutch for his state-building plans, and French intellectuals enjoyed editions of Sumarokov's plays. Yet alongside these desired translations, merchants required translation for their livelihoods. In a world where cardamom from South Asia could be sold next to fur from Siberia and tobacco from the Americas, the wheels of commerce were greased by linguistic support for material exchanges. There was no globalisation without linguistic innovation.

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[62] VELUWENKAMP: "Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Family Networks".

The kind of innovation formed in the context of ports and trading hubs was shaped by community priorities, not linguistic principles. In Archangelsk, St Petersburg, and other Russian Imperial ports, trade was conducted and regulated by non-fluent merchants and officials functioning in a multilingual environment. The Dutch translation of terms does not aim at a neat encapsulation of a foreign term in a single Dutch word, but rather to convey as helpfully as possible the meaning and significance of that term. The Dutch translation of tables does not aim at fealty to the original, but rather utility to the audience. The presence of what seems like awkward phrasing and heavy-handed reorganisation then is not evidence of linguistic incapacity. Rather, it is evidence of substantial capability for linguistic innovation informed by readers' priorities.

The *How-To Guide to Russian Trade* also shows us the intersection of early modern practices of organisation and translation. The import/export tables in both editions use the same strategies of alphabetic organisation and categoric sub-sections, even as that information could be conveyed in other arrangements. They differ in the principles of how that organisation is applied, which sub-sections should exist and how they should relate to the rest of the list. Words are rarely translated in a vacuum, and here the vital context of the rush to profits shaped how words were arranged and rearranged. Individual terms are the building-blocks of texts or, perhaps we should say instead, discrete words are the remnants of a disarticulated body of language. How they are put together is as important to understanding their translation as the word itself.

Overall, these two texts tell us of the mercenary linguistic environment of the early modern port translation. There is no interest here in creating a general principle of language, or a definitive translation. These texts were not meant to make a meaningful contribution to the development of either language or to Russian-Dutch translation practices. Rather, they were created and informed by immediate and specific mercantile needs. That led to a deliberately limited kind of meaning. The non-fluent actors of early modern Russian-Dutch trade did not need definitive, they needed immediate. In the shifting early modern global world of trading laws, commodities, and empires, language was for right now, not forever.

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