

# Translation in Early Modern Diplomacy

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## 4 Can I have your word?

Foreign terms in seventeenth-century treaties of the Dutch East India Company\*

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## 4 Can I have your word?

### Foreign terms in seventeenth-century treaties of the Dutch East India Company\*

*Stefan Eklöf Amirell*

For almost two centuries, from the beginning of the seventeenth until the end of the eighteenth century, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was a major political and economic power in much of the Indian Ocean World and East and Southeast Asia. To effectively fulfil its main purpose – to generate profit from the long-distance trade between Asia and Europe – the company enjoyed a number of prerogatives normally associated with sovereign rulers or states, including the right to wage war, to engage in diplomatic negotiations, and to conclude treaties and other agreements with non-Christian parties. The VOC was thus not just a profit-generating company but also had state-like characteristics. For these reasons, the VOC and other European trading companies in the early modern period have fittingly been labelled “company-states” (Stern, 2011; Weststeijn, 2014; Phillips and Sharman, 2020).

More than any other actor in the early modern period, the VOC promoted the practice of international treaty-making in Asia. In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it concluded thousands of treaties and other formal agreements with states and rulers of varying size and importance in the Indian Ocean World (mainly in South and Southeast Asia but also in Persia, Arabia, and East Africa) and East Asia. The treaties were generally the result of diplomatic negotiations between, on the one hand, Asian or African rulers and other prominent figures and, on the other hand, VOC officials or other representatives of the company. Some treaties were signed literally at gunpoint or after devastating wars of conquest and destruction by the Dutch, whereas others were negotiated under more peaceful circumstances, sometimes at the initiative of Asian merchants and rulers eager to trade with the Dutch or to secure the political or military support of the VOC (e.g., Henley, 2002: 73; Weststeijn, 2015; Ittersum, 2018).

Regardless of the circumstances under which the treaties were negotiated, they all involved some degree of cross-cultural diplomacy and thus translation in both the linguistic and cultural sense of the term (Buden and

Nowotny, 2009; Bertacco, 2016; Hellman and Tremml-Werner, 2021). In these respects, the treaties that the VOC negotiated in Asia differed from the European context, where treaty-making had a long history before the onset of overseas expansion. In medieval times, Christianity provided a common religious and cultural foundation for international relations among the rulers of what from the late Middle Ages became known as Europe. In this context, international law developed, based on a common, mixed legal framework consisting of Roman, canon, and feudal law (Lesaffer, 2000). During the early modern period, the writings and international debates of scholars and jurists based in different European countries, such as Alberico Gentili, Francisco de Vitoria, Jean Bodin, Hugo Grotius, Samuel von Pufendorf, Emer de Vattel, and others, led to the emergence of a doctrine of international law that regulated relations between the European states, in theory at least. This international exchange of ideas in Western Europe was facilitated by the use of a common scholarly language – first Latin and later French.

Compared with the relative homogeneity of Western Europe in medieval and early modern times, the VOC's area of interest in Asia and the Indian Ocean was diverse, for example, with regard to language, religion, culture, customs, law, and political organisation. The negotiation of treaties and other forms of diplomatic relations between the VOC and Asian rulers thus depended on translation between Dutch (or other European languages) and various Asian languages, including Arabic, Persian, Malayalam, Malay, Javanese, Thai, and Japanese.

There has been some research on translation and language contact between Dutch in the early modern period and some of the languages that were used in Asia, particularly the Malay Archipelago. A recent overview of this research by Chris Joby suggests that the focus was on a handful of themes, such as the early dictionaries of Malay and Dutch, the translation of biblical and other Christian texts to Malay and other languages in the region, the efforts of the VOC to replace Portuguese and later Malay as the most widely spoken language in its sphere of influence, and the influence of Dutch on Malay and Indonesian, particularly with regard to Dutch loan words. Fewer studies, on the other hand, seem to have investigated the influence of Malay and other Asian languages on Dutch (Joby, 2022, where references to key studies in the field can be found).

Against this background, the more than a thousand treaties that the VOC signed with Asian rulers constitute a hitherto largely untapped source for studying translation and language contact between Dutch and Asian languages during the early modern period. Treaties provide a remarkable lens for studying questions of translation for at least five reasons.

First, treaties were almost invariably written in two or three languages, often with different scripts depending on the language. Most treaties that

the VOC concluded were thus written in both Dutch and the native tongue of the Asian party. Frequently, the treaties also featured a third language, one which served as a *lingua franca*, such as Malay in maritime South-east Asia. The process of treaty-making obviously involved translation and interpretation, but the different texts were not regarded as translations as such but as different versions of the same treaty text, all of which – at least in theory – were equally valid.

Second, treaties comprise a delimited and standardised corpus of text, which facilitates the comparison and analysis of particular prescriptions, terms, and phrases. Like other international treaties, most treaties and contracts concluded by the VOC followed a more or less fixed structure, starting with an introduction, followed by the main body of text, which consisted of a number of articles, followed by the signatures and seals of the treaty parties.

Third, because of the prolific treaty-making activities of the VOC, treaties were to be found everywhere throughout the VOC's sphere of influence and activity. The fact that they can be found so widely across Asia makes it possible to compare different treaty-making processes, including how different concepts and phrases were translated and used in different languages and contexts.

Fourth, treaties and similar contracts and agreements for the most part dealt with matters of economic and political importance, and we can therefore assume that great care was taken in formulating the text in each version. However, this does not necessarily mean that their words and meaning were identical. The quality of the translation and the level of intercultural communication and understanding varied between actors and situations. Sometimes, certain passages of the treaty texts were mistranslated or omitted, at times apparently deliberately. Such discrepancies between the texts in European and Asian languages are frequently noted by scholars (e.g., Resink, 1960; Clulow, 2014: 52–53; Gallop, 2016; Amirell, 2019: 70–71) but seldom analysed in depth.

Fifth, the original treaty documents have, to a relatively great extent, been preserved in colonial archives – in the case of the VOC treaties, for the most part, in the National Archives of Indonesia in Jakarta – which enables us to study the different versions of the treaties first-hand. Doing so, however, necessitates locating and consulting the original treaty documents rather than – as has been widespread practice among researchers since at least the nineteenth century – relying on published or (in recent years) digitised collections of treaties, most of which omit the non-European treaty texts. A study of the original treaty texts in different languages is beyond the scope of the present investigation, but such studies are currently being undertaken by a team of historians from Europe and Southeast Asia (led by the author) in the research programme Historical Treaties of

Southeast Asia, financed by the Swedish Research Council and hosted by Linnaeus University (Amirell, 2023a, 2023b).

In the following, a first analysis will be made of one particular aspect of translation and other forms of language contact in treaties between the VOC and Asian countries and rulers, namely the extent to which certain foreign terms were retained and thus not translated in the Dutch treaty texts. Based on a systematic analysis of the foreign terms listed in the first volume of the *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum* (Heeres, 1907), which contains the Dutch texts (transcribed mostly from copies in The Hague of the Dutch texts of the original treaties) of 190 treaties concluded between the VOC (and its predecessors) and Asian rulers between 1596 and 1650 (i.e., before the VOC's intensified expansion in the second half of the seventeenth century), the chapter aims to make some preliminary observations with regard to the kind of words retained in the earliest Dutch treaty texts and the possible reasons why they were not translated.<sup>1</sup> The chapter also analyses the degree to which such foreign terms were domesticated or foreignised in the Dutch texts (cf. Yang, 2010). In doing so, the chapter aims to contribute to recent research on language contact between Dutch and other languages in Asia, particularly the work of Christopher Joby (2020, 2022), while also extending the scope of this research geographically.

### **Methodological considerations**

The *Corpus Diplomaticum* consists of six volumes published between 1907 and 1955. The first volume, which is the object of analysis here, was compiled by Jan Ernst Heeres, an archivist and teacher (*hoogleraar*) at Leiden University. For this, Heeres relied mainly on the so-called extant contract books of the VOC, kept at the Dutch National Archives in The Hague. These contract books contain copies of treaties, contracts, and similar documents that were sent from the VOC headquarters in Batavia (Jakarta) to the Netherlands. Sometimes the original treaties were also sent to the Netherlands, but for the most part the originals were retained in the VOC's Castle of Batavia and are now kept at the Indonesian National Archives in Jakarta (ANRI, 2019). Moreover, many of the contracts signed by the VOC were not included in the contract books sent to the Netherlands – possibly because they were not deemed important enough or because the copies were lost at some point or simply because of administrative inefficiency.

Despite these limitations, the *Corpus Diplomaticum* is a good starting point for analysing the use of foreign terms in the Dutch treaty texts. The task is facilitated by the list of foreign words that Heeres compiled for the first volume of the series and the explanations of many of them in footnotes

throughout the book. In all, the list of foreign terms in the first volume includes 260. However, some of these are cross-references to other terms in the index, and some refer to others that were not used in the treaty texts but only in the footnotes or introduction texts provided by Heeres. Moreover, a few terms were proper or place names that seem to have been erroneously included in the index of foreign words. As a result, the number of relevant terms in the index is 211.

The relevant index entries have been categorised here by topic as follows (Table 4.1): 1) products, including both natural products (e.g., spices, plants, and vegetables) and manufactured goods (e.g., textiles); 2) titles, mainly official titles (civilian and/or military), noble titles, and religious titles; 3) coins and currencies of Asian and European origin; 4) customs and regulations, i.e., local terms for various customs, tariffs, and the like; 5) institutions, including manifestations of royal or other political authority as well as political and social castes or classes; 6) maritime terms, mainly the names of various types of boats (Asian as well as European) or boat equipment; 7) weights and measures, that is, more or less widely used terms for measuring weight, length, volume, or numbers; 8) sites and regions, including the names for certain types of buildings (e.g., a tollhouse) or parts of a country or port city (e.g. a village or harbour); and 9) other terms that do not fall into any of the other categories.

Table 4.1 Number and share of foreign terms listed in the *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 1 (Heeres, 1907) by topic.

<i>Topic</i>	<i>No. of Terms</i>	<i>Share of all Terms</i>	<i>Found in No. of Treaties</i>	<i>Found in Share of Treaties</i>
Products	62	29%	19	10%
Titles	52	25%	66	35%
Coins and currencies	22	10%	25	13%
Customs and regulations	16	8%	13	7%
Institutions	15	7%	25	13%
Maritime terms	13	6%	11	6%
Weights and measures	11	5%	21	11%
Sites and regions	8	4%	9	5%
Other terms	12	6%	11	6%
Total	211	100%	—	—

*Source:* Based on the list of foreign words and expressions on pp. 583–586, compiled by Heeres and selected and categorised by the author.

The numbers in Table 4.1 and the following analysis have some limits. First, some of the categories are relatively small, which makes it difficult to draw any real conclusions about each of them. Second, the index of foreign terms compiled by Heeres is not complete. For example, the word *pikol*, a widely used Malay measure of weight, is not included in the list despite appearing in several treaty texts (e.g., Heeres, 1907: 174, 216, 271; see further later). Third, the categorisation is by necessity somewhat subjective. Obviously, other labels could have been constructed instead of the eight topics (plus the residual category) used here. Moreover, some terms can reasonably be classified in two or more categories, such as the word *tael*, which could mean either a weight or a coin, or *bandar*, which means harbour, and as such is both a site and a maritime term.

With these reservations in mind, some interesting observations with regard to the terms in the different categories can be made allowing for some tentative conclusions about what types of foreign terms were used in the Dutch treaty texts.

### Analysis

Table 4.1 shows that the most common category of foreign terms in the VOC treaties were names of products (62 terms or 29 per cent of all terms), followed by titles (52 terms or 25 per cent). Together these two categories account for more than half the foreign words listed in the first volume of the *Corpus Diplomaticum*, whereas none of the other categories make up more than 10 per cent of the words in the index.

An analysis of the number of treaties in which the terms belonging to different topics appear gives a somewhat different picture (third and fourth columns in Table 4.1). Most of the foreign terms for certain products appear only once in one of the 190 treaties, and some treaties contain extensive lists of foreign terms for products that are not mentioned in any other treaty. For example, an appendix to a 1638 edict (*firman*) issued to the VOC by the Moghul emperor Shah Jahan lists 26 distinct products, including different kinds of spices, dyes, foodstuffs, and stimulants, none of which appear elsewhere in the collection of treaties (Heeres, 1907: 329–332). By contrast, some terms in the smaller categories, such as *real* (a Spanish or Portuguese coin), *ruha ruha* (a harbour fee, i.e., customs and regulations), *bicara* (council, i.e., an institution), and *baar* (a measure of weight) appear in several different treaties. Many titles likewise appear in several different treaties, such as *raja* (king, ruler, or lord), *kapitan laut* (admiral or fleet commander), and *orang kaya* (lit. ‘rich person’; chief or merchant-aristocrat). Foreign terms for titles appear in 35 per cent of the treaties (66 of the 190), which makes titles by far the most common category of foreign words if measured by the number of treaties in which they appear.

One or more foreign terms appear in 61 per cent of the treaties (116 out of 190). Most of the treaties in which foreign terms appear are from Southeast Asia (66 out of the 116), followed by South Asia (42). In addition, foreign terms appear in four treaties from Persia and Arabia and in four from East Asia. The share of treaties with foreign terms from each region is approximately the same as for each region's share of all treaties in the first volume of the *Corpus Diplomaticum*, possibly with the exception of East Asia, which has a somewhat lower number of treaties with foreign terms than expected from the region's share of all treaties (8 per cent of all treaties but only 3 per cent of treaties with foreign terms). This is unsurprising, given that regional divisions such as South Asia and Southeast Asia are modern inventions that were of no relevance, either to Asian rulers and merchants or to the VOC, in the seventeenth century. The extensive contacts over long distances in the Indian Ocean World and East Asia are also reflected in the complex etymology of many terms, involving long chains of borrowing and morphological and phonetical adaptation well before the arrival of the Europeans (e.g., Adelaar, 2004; Peacock, 2018). These circumstances make it difficult to provide information about the linguistic origins of the foreign terms, beyond the general observation that many, if not most, of them were adapted from Malay, Portuguese, or Persian.

With these general observations in mind, some further analysis of each of the nine categories of foreign terms can be undertaken.

### *Products*

Given that the VOC's chief occupation was the trade in products, mainly luxury goods of Asian origin, it is unsurprising that the names of various products are commonly found in the treaty texts. Many agreements specified the quantity of a certain product that was to be delivered to the VOC and the price that the company would pay for it. Products were also mentioned in connection with customs regulations and tariffs. Of the 62 products that appear in the list of foreign terms, the 52 that could be identified have been grouped into six subcategories: textiles (22), dyes (7), spices (7), other foodstuffs (6), stimulants (7), and others (3).

Most of the foreign words for products that could be identified (42 per cent) referred to textiles, particularly different kinds of cotton, such as *cassa*, *percallen* (*parcallen*), and *sarasse* (*serassen*), but also various types of silk, such as *armosjijnen* (*armozijn*) and *legia*. However, most of these terms for textiles appear only in 1 of the 190 treaties, and 10 of the 22 mentions of certain types of textile or fabric come from a treaty from 1649 between the VOC on the one hand and Aceh and other polities on the west coast of Sumatra on the other, in which the VOC agreed to purchase

a certain amount of pepper (3 *pikol*, or c. 186 kg; cf. Heeres, 1907: 157) in exchange for certain quantities of different textiles (Heeres, 1907: 530).

Given the importance of spices for the VOC in the seventeenth century, it may seem surprising that relatively few, only 7 out of 52, of the identified foreign words for products referred to spices. Some of these have survived in Dutch and other European languages until the present, such as *cardamom* and *curcuma* (turmeric), whereas others seem to have fallen out of use, either as a term or as a product, such as *hing* (*hingoe* or *foetida*) and *rampetter* (*ramputrie*), which according to Heeres was a kind of false mace (Heeres, 1907: 289, 311, 331).

However, the most important spices that the VOC traded in, such as pepper, cloves, and nutmeg, were already well-known in Europe and were thus not referred to by their names in Asian languages in the contracts. Pepper, for example, was referred to as *peper* in Dutch rather than the Malay word *merica* or *lada* or the Malayalam *kurumula*. The Moluccan spice clove was called *nagel* (nail; cf. the contemporary Dutch word for clove, *kruidnagel*, lit. ‘spice nail’) rather than *cengkih* (*cengkeh*), which was the Malay term. In several treaties with Banda, moreover, the endemic nutmeg was generally referred to only as *noten* (nuts, reflecting the nutmeg’s resemblance to a nut despite it being the seed of the tree *Myristica fragrans* rather than a nut) or sometimes as *notenmusschaet*, that is, ‘musk nut’ (nut that smells of musk), which in different versions was the common name for nutmeg in Europe by the seventeenth century (as well as in many European languages, today) (Heeres, 1907: 24, 476). Indigenous Southeast Asian words for nutmeg, such as the Malay word *pala*, by contrast, were not used in the Dutch treaty texts.

### *Titles*

Most of the titles that the Dutch (and other Europeans) encountered across Asia were not translated but were retained more or less in their original form, often with some morphological and/or phonetical adaptation. This is particularly the case for the various titles for senior civilian and military officials in different countries and regions. Some of the better-known examples are *sjahbandar* (*shahbandar*, *syahbandar*, meaning harbourmaster (and collector of tolls), originally a Persian title that was used throughout much of the Indian Ocean World), *capiteijn laout* (*kapitan laut*, lit. ‘sea captain’, a term with a hybrid Portuguese–Malay etymology meaning something akin to admiral and common throughout the Malay Archipelago), *wasier* (*vizier*, a high-ranking political advisor to the Persian shah as well as other Muslim rulers in West and South Asia), and *diwaan* (*duiwan*, *dewan*, a high-ranking official responsible for the collection of revenues in a province of the Mughal Empire) (Heeres, 1907: 11, 198, 269, 371).

The widespread use of these and other titles throughout the Indian Ocean World reflects the long-standing trade relations and linguistic and cultural exchange in the region, which dates back to long before the arrival of the Europeans.

Other titles referred to broader social groups, such as *mardijcker* (*mardijker*, free man, from Malay *merdeka*, free; i.e., manumitted slaves in the Malay Archipelago). The single most frequently used foreign term in the treaties is *orang kaja* (variously spelled *orang caya*, *orangcayen*, *orangcays*, *orangcaij*, *orangkaijs*, *orangkaja's orang kajein*, *orang kaya*), which was used throughout the Malay Archipelago to refer to the leading chiefs or merchant-aristocrats of a polity. The title is found in hundreds of places in the treaty texts and appear in 18 of the 190 treaties, mainly from the Moluccas (including several treaties with Ambon and Banda) but also in a treaty with Jambi and one with Malaka (e.g., Heeres, 1907: 26, 27, 30, 32, 60, 67, 71, 143, 155, 162, 175, 198, 201, 252, 258, 263, 307, 336, 403, 464, 475). The word *orang kaja* appears both in the main bodies of the treaties and in the introductions and signature sections, where it is generally used in conjunction with the personal names of signatories to the treaties. Despite the ubiquity of the term, no unified spelling seems to have been adopted by the Dutch between the first appearance of the term in a treaty from 1609 until the last in the period under study, in 1646.

A smaller number of titles referred primarily to religious functions, such as *imam*, and other titles signified mercantile and/or transport-related activities, such as *nachoda* (*nakhoda*, throughout the Malay world, a ship captain, owner or representative of the owner of a ship), *mucker* (*mukari*, in Persia, a person renting out camels) and *carabaen bassi* (*caravan-bashi*, the leader of a merchant caravan) (Heeres, 1907: 118, 188).

Another common title in the treaties is *raja* (*radja*, *ragia*, *raija*), which appears in sixteen treaties from both South and Southeast Asia. The word, derived from Sanskrit, had long been used as a royal (kingly or princely) title throughout South and Southeast Asia when the Europeans arrived. Although it generally (and in the present context of the VOC treaties) referred to male persons, it could also be used to refer to reigning queens, notably in Patani from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century (Amirell, 2011).

With regard to sovereign rulers, however, the Dutch and other Europeans translated the Asian titles into what they understood to be their European equivalent, king, despite the often very different connotations, meanings, and functions this office had in the societies with which the Dutch (and other Europeans) came into contact. The Dutch treaty texts thus generally refer to the ruler of a polity as *koninck*, *koning*, or *koningh* (king), and the term appears in hundreds of places in the first volume of the *Corpus Diplomaticum*. In addition, the rulers of Japan and Ceylon were referred

to as *kayser*, *keijser*, or *keiser* (emperor) (Heeres, 1907: 81, 309, 316, 344, 421, 516, 519). In the treaties with other countries and rulers, however, the imperial title was very unusual. Apart from an early reference from 1596 to “den Keyser van het ganse land van Java” (the emperor of the entire land of Java, referring to the ruler of the main Sultanate on the island, Mataram), it was used only in a couple of treaties with the ruler (Zamorin) of Calicut on the Malabar Coast, although in most treaties he was referred to only as king (Heeres, 1907: 4, 30, 206, 544). Likewise, arguably, the most powerful ruler with whom the VOC concluded treaties in the first half of the seventeenth century, the *shah* of Persia, was also referred to as king rather than emperor (e.g., Heeres, 1907: 183–191).

Some treaties do refer to rulers as sultans (*sulltan*, *zulltan*), but this title was not listed as a foreign word by Heeres, presumably because it was well-known to Dutch and other European readers. For the most part, the title sultan appears in conjunction with the title *koninck* (e.g., Heeres, 1907: 115, 226, 229), or, in the case of the reigning sultanah of Aceh in 1650, Safiatuddin Syah, who was described as “Hare Maij<sup>e</sup> Mamuelia Paducca Sirij Zulltan, regerende coninginne van ‘t vermaerde rijck Aetchin” (Her Majesty Mamulia Paduka Sri Sultan, reigning queen of the famous kingdom of Aceh) (Heeres, 1907: 538–539). Another reigning Muslim queen, that of Patani in present-day southern Thailand, Raja Biru, by contrast, was referred to only as queen (*konininginne*) in a short contract from 1601 (Heeres, 1907: 16).

The power and authority of the so-called kings varied greatly, from local strongmen with few royal attributes and little actual authority to rulers of old-established monarchies reigning over millions of people who had vast armies and centralised bureaucracies at their disposal. For example, the term *koninck* was used in the Dutch treaty texts to refer both to the shah of Persia (e.g., Heeres, 1907: 370) and to petty rulers in eastern Indonesia who often were little more than village or district chiefs. By treating such rulers as kings or sovereigns in the European sense of the term, the Dutch ascribed to them a position and an authority which they did not in fact possess, thereby contributing to upgrading their social and political status (Borschberg, 2011: 159). This discursive strategy on the part of the VOC had fundamental political and social consequences in the societies and regions with which the company interacted.

### *Coins and currencies*

In general, the names for currencies are seldom translated, although their morphology and spelling may vary between different languages. Against this background and given that many of the VOC treaties first and foremost regulated commercial relations, it is not surprising that there are numerous mentions

of foreign coins and currencies in the corpus. Some of these were European, with the *real* being the most commonly mentioned. The *real* was a silver coin, originally used in Spain in the Middle Ages but later also minted and used in Portugal, from where it spread with the Estado da India across much of Asia during the sixteenth century. In addition to a handful of treaties mentioning the *real*, there are also a few references to *reaal van aghten* (standard *real*) and *reaal piddangh*, translated by Heeres as *Rycxdaelders* (i.e., *rijksdaalder* or *rix daler*, the principal currency of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century). All of these references are found in contracts between the VOC and Southeast Asian treaty parties, more specifically Aceh, Ambon, and Patani, reflecting the widespread use of the *real* – both the term and the currency itself – in Southeast Asia when the Dutch arrived there.

However, apart from a few mentions of other European currencies, such as the English Rose Noble (*rosenobel* or *rozenobel*)<sup>2</sup> and the Portuguese *crusado*, most of the foreign currencies that appear in the treaties were of Asian origin. On Java, the Dutch discovered that small, thin coins made of inexpensive metal (usually copper or tin) with Chinese characters and a square hole in the middle, called *pitje* (*pitji*, *pici*) were widely used. Common throughout Southeast Asia since well before the arrival of the Europeans, they were used for transactions of low value. The coins were originally minted in China, but imitations were also produced in Southeast Asia, for example, in Cirebon on East Java. Nevertheless, when the Dutch settled on Java in the early seventeenth century, they found that there was a lack of coins of low value on the island, and to make up for this, and for the sake of making a profit, the VOC began to import large quantities of *pici*s from China and Japan (Millies, 1871: 156; Sluiter, 2004: 101–102).

*Pici*s were also referred to as *cassies* or *casges*, although this term seems to have had a broader meaning throughout South and Southeast Asia, where it was used to denote any coins of small value (Heeres, 1907: 105; cf. Kooijmans and Schoonevold-Oosterling, 2000: 60). Originally a Sanskrit word, the term spread across the Indian Ocean World in its Tamil form *kasu* or *kas*. The Europeans adopted it after they arrived in Asia, and it was written *caxa* or *caixa* in Portuguese; *cassies*, *kas*, or *kasje* in Dutch; *cache* in French; and cash in English. The use of this term to denote small coins or money may have influenced the development of the word cash in English into its current meaning of money, although the English term originally was derived from the word *caisse* in French (from Italian *cassa*, in turn derived from Latin *capsa*), meaning box, in the sense of a money box. In the eighteenth century, however, this older meaning of the word cash in English was replaced by the current one (Millies, 1871: 83; Frey, 1916: 38; Harper, s. v. “Cash”).

Other frequently used foreign terms for coins or currencies in the treaties include the *teijill* (*tael* or *tabil*; from Hindu *tola*), which in China was

called *liang* and which signified both a coin and a measure of weight used for silver. One *tael* was generally divided into ten *maes* (*mas*, *mes*, or *maas*), although the ratio, as well as the value and weight of the *tael*, varied across East and Southeast Asia and over time (Frey, 1916: 234; Millies, 1871: 86; Kooijmans and Schooneveld-Oosterling, 2000: 112). The treaties also mention several Persian coins, such as *dienaer* (*dinar*), *mamoedij* (*mahmudi*), as well as several coins used on the Coromandel Coast and in Goa in India. For example, a treaty with the king of Karnataka from 1646 refers to the sum of 8,000 *pardauws* (*pardao*), which, according to Heeres, was a gold coin divided into ten *fanums* (Heeres, 1907: 473). The term has a complex history and has been used to refer to several different coins used on the west coast of India since pre-European times. The word *pradao* is derived from the Sanskrit word *pratapa*, which means ‘splendour, majesty’. The term was subsequently appropriated by the Portuguese, when they started minting their own coins shortly after settling in Goa (Yule et al., 1903: 672–678).

### *Customs and regulations*

Several treaties refer to foreign terms for various customs, tolls, taxes, and regulations linked to the commercial relations between the VOC and the Asian treaty party. Such terms can be found in several treaties with rulers in Persia, on the Coromandel Coast, in the Malay Archipelago (Java and eastern Indonesia). For example, a treaty from 1630 exempted the Dutch from paying toll on their trade in several places on the Coromandel Coast, including exemption from “*sjoncans*, *melavisall*, *egomitij*, *digomitij*” or any other *sjoncans* (Heeres, 1907: 242). The latter word, also spelled *sjonkan* (in Malay) or *chungam* (in Tamil and Malayalam), was a general word for import and export duties levied by rulers in South and Southeast Asia (Kooijmans and Schooneveld-Oosterling, 2000: 32).

The foreign terms for tolls that were retained in the Dutch treaty texts often referred to particular kinds of tolls that were traditionally levied on trade in different parts of Asia, such as the frequently mentioned *ruba ruba* (*roba roeba*, *roeba-roeba*, *robbe robbe*, *rouba rouba*, *roube roubles*, *rubba-rubba*) (Heeres, 1907: 29, 87, 90, 119, 120, 409). The *ruba ruba* was a harbour or anchorage fee that was imposed on visiting ships in trading ports throughout the Malay Archipelago. According to Malay custom, the *ruba ruba* was paid to the king, but in some places, such as Indrapura, it was divided among the leading officials and chiefs. The *ruba ruba* provided an important income for rulers and chiefs; for some it was their main source of revenue (Kathirithamby-Wells, 1976: 69). In addition, one treaty from eastern Indonesia mentions a traditional Malay toll called *sirih*

*pinang* (*zijrij pinangh*), which means betelnut (that is, the betel leaves and areca nuts used for chewing betel), indicating that the toll was needed for the recipient – that is, the king – to be able to procure the ingredients for the stimulant (Heeres, 1907: 120).

However, despite the frequency of foreign terms for different kinds of tolls and the like, the Asian terms for these tolls were for the most part translated into the Dutch word *toll*, which is found in dozens of treaties. It may therefore be purely coincidental that some foreign terms were retained in some of the Dutch treaty texts. In other cases, however, it may have been seen as necessary to retain the foreign terms to distinguish between the various kinds of customs and duties, which often differed substantially from those that were common in Europe. Most references to customs regulated how much the Dutch should pay in tolls of different kinds or, in some cases, exempted them from these tolls.

### *Institutions*

Most of the foreign terms categorised here under the somewhat heterogeneous label ‘institutions’ had predominantly political functions, followed by religious ones (both of which often overlapped, making it difficult to categorise them as one or the other). Political institutions included official symbols of power and authority, such as the *cap* (*siap, siapp, tjap*), meaning seal, although the Dutch word *zegel* was used somewhat more frequently in the treaty texts, indicating that the Asian words for seal for the most part were seen as translatable. Another symbol of royal power, which seems to have had a similar function as the seal, was the so-called *handt van sandell*, which referred to an imprint in finely ground sandalwood of the hand of the ruler of Vijayanagar (Venkatapati Raya) in southern India in 1612 (Heeres, 1907: 104).

Other political institutions mentioned in the treaties include official letters, such as those conferring authority on officials or free passage for the person in possession of the letter (Heeres, 1907: 55, 251). One particular Malay institution that is frequently mentioned in the treaties by its Malay term is *bicara* (*bitchiaringe, bitschara, bitsjara, pitcaringhen, pitsjaringe*) (Heeres, 1907: 167, 178, 182, 193, 199, 265). Probably derived from the Sanskrit word *vicara*, meaning ‘thought’ or ‘discussion’, the modern word *bicara* means ‘to talk’ in Indonesian and Malay. However, in the treaty texts, it refers to a council among the leading chiefs of a country. The early VOC representatives in the Malay Archipelago seem to have considered the institution of the *bicara* as culturally unique or specific since in most instances they did not translate the term into Dutch, even though the Dutch word *raad* (council) would seem to have approximately the same meaning.

*Maritime terms*

Thirteen of the foreign terms have been categorised primarily as maritime terms, although some of the words in other categories, such as *nakhoda* (ship master or owner) and *bandar* (harbour) also have maritime connotations. Of the thirteen terms, nine refer to boats of different types, including both European and Asian ones. Portuguese terms were relatively frequent, such as *fust* (*fusta*, a small rowing and sailing boat) and *fregat de remos* (rowing frigate) (Heeres, 1907: 99, 310). Some terms also refer to parts of boats or maritime equipment, such as the words for oars (apart from *remos*, *pangayen*; Heeres, 1907: 59) and ship armament.

*Weights and measures*

Most of the eleven terms categorised here as weights and measures are the former, which occur in several treaties from Persia in the West to the Moluccas in the East. One of the most frequently mentioned is *baar* (*baer*, *bhaer*, *bahar*), which was commonly used throughout the Indian Ocean trading world, although its value differed from region to region (Kooijmans and Schoonevold-Oosterling, 2000: 15). Another measure of weight that was common in the Malay Archipelago was *pikol* (*picol*, *picoll*, *pikul*), which appears in several treaties from the region. It was not included in Heeres's list of foreign terms, probably by mistake, although he explained in a footnote that a *pikol* was equivalent to about 62 kilograms (Heeres, 1907: 157; cf. Kooijmans and Schoonevold-Oosterling, 2000: 91).

As in seventeenth-century Europe, a bewildering array of measures of weight, some of which had different values in different places, were used throughout Asia. In addition to the Asian measures, the treaties also referred to European measures, mainly the (Amsterdam) pound.

*Sites and regions*

This category consists of only eight terms, such as the Malay *balaijer* (*balai*, *balé*, *baileo*) or council house (cf. *bicara*, mentioned earlier); *mes-djid* (mosque, mentioned in a treaty from the Moluccas), *bandar* (harbour, mentioned in a treaty from the Coromandel coast), and *alphandigo* (tollhouse, from the Portuguese *alfândega*) (Heeres, 1907: 14, 540, 59, 154, 287).

*Other terms*

Among the 12 terms in the residual category are two animals, *loerij*, a kind of parrot (mentioned in a treaty from the Coromandel coast) and *chijser*

(Malay *cicer*, *cicir* or *sisik*), turtle or shell of turtle (mentioned in a treaty from the Moluccas (Heeres, 1907: 396, 470). There are also a few European words for weapons. In one treaty from Java, the Malay word *billibilan* (*beli-belian*) is used to denote trading goods (Heeres, 1907: 29). In all the other treaties, however, references to trading goods are made in Dutch, generally as *goederen* or *waren*.

### Concluding remarks

This chapter has been a first attempt to analyse the use of foreign terms in the Dutch texts of the many treaties and contracts that the VOC signed with Asian rulers. The study has been limited to the earliest period of Dutch trade and colonisation in Asia (up until 1650); a study of the second half of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries remains to be undertaken. Following the use of foreign terms over a longer period of time and in a larger number of texts is likely to yield further insights into how the language contact between the Dutch and various societies throughout Asia developed over time. Another fruitful topic that remains to be studied is the impact of the translators – what was their background and level of translation skills, what were their motives and interests, and how did their translations influence the understanding of the treaties. Yet another path of research will be to compare the Dutch and Asian versions of each treaty and to highlight possible discrepancies in the texts, including omissions, mistranslations, and differences in meaning and connotation of particular words or phrases (cf. Amirell and Manse, 2024).

The results of this limited study indicate that domestication rather than foreignisation was the dominant mode of integrating foreign terms in the Dutch treaty texts. Moreover, the study largely confirms some of the conclusions of recent research on language contact between Dutch and other languages in the Malay Archipelago in the seventeenth century, particularly a recent study by Christopher Joby (2022). The use of foreign terms in the treaties can primarily be described as code switching, which Joby argues was common in Dutch written texts from the Indonesian Archipelago in the seventeenth century. The Dutch used code switching not only as a discursive strategy but also because of a lack of vocabulary in their own language (Joby, 2022: 264). In the treaty texts, the lack of Dutch words is most obvious in the use of foreign words for natural and manufactured products of Asian origin, such as certain kinds of spices, dyes, and stimulants, as well as various kinds of cotton and silk. A further reason for retaining Asian terms for certain products may be a lack of knowledge on the part of the translators, although this aspect remains to be investigated.

Joby (2022: 265) moreover observed that code switching frequently involved morphological integration and phonological adaptation of foreign words when they were used in Dutch texts, a circumstance that is reflected in the treaty texts, which use a wide variety of different spellings of the same word, as well as the apparent ease with which many foreign terms were inserted in Dutch sentences.

Finally, with reference to Joby, his research showed that many Portuguese words were used in the Indian Archipelago, a circumstance that is also corroborated by this chapter. Foreign terms of Portuguese origin are thus found in several treaties from South as well as Southeast Asia. The most common Portuguese word is *real*, which probably reflects the widespread use of the Portuguese coin in the Indian Ocean trading world. In addition, however, several other Portuguese terms appear in the treaties, including institutions such as *castige* (*castigo*; punishment), titles such as *vigiadoor* (*vigador*; overseer) and other terms, such as *trocque* (*troco*; exchange) and *gasto* (*gastos*, expenditure) (Heeres, 1907: 159, 456, 462, 499). The fact that such terms were retained in their Portuguese form, despite the apparent ease of translating them into Dutch, indicates that they were frequently used in the regions where the VOC operated. In addition, the retention of Portuguese terms may also have been due to the translators' familiarity with the Portuguese language, since many of them had Portuguese-affiliated family or social backgrounds.

On a general level, Joby's conclusions about code switching in the Indonesian Archipelago are reinforced by this chapter. Looking beyond the region studied by Joby, moreover, the analysis here also shows that his observations are relevant for other parts of Asia, too, where the VOC operated, particularly South Asia, where foreign terms were used as frequently and in similar ways as in the Indonesian or Malay Archipelago. This result is expected, given that the modern geographical divisions, such as South or Southeast Asia or the Indonesian Archipelago, were largely irrelevant in the early modern era.

A final observation concerns the use of foreign words for titles. The analysis shows that titles, particularly of officials, chiefs, and other influential persons, were often used in their original form with no attempt to translate them into Dutch, nor, in most cases, to explain them. Again, this can be described in terms of code switching, including, in many cases, a tendency to integrate foreign terms in the Dutch text. However, an important and conspicuous exception to this tendency concerns the title of rulers, most of whom were referred to as kings (*koning* etc. in Dutch) or, less frequently, as emperors (*keizer* etc.). This rather consistent practice should not be understood as coincidental or as a manifestation of ignorance, arrogance, or plain eurocentrism on the part of the Dutch. Rather it should be

understood as a discursive strategy by which the VOC was able to implement its licence to conclude treaties with non-Christian rulers and thus to establish something akin to international relations with a large number of ostensibly sovereign 'kings' throughout Asia and the Indian Ocean world, stretching from the Arabian Peninsula in the West to Japan in the East. Doing so served to extend the VOC's power and influence and lay the foundation for Dutch colonial rule in the following centuries.

## Notes

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- 1 In addition, the volume includes a declaration of possession concerning the island of Saint Helena and a treaty with the king of Madagascar, all of which have been excluded from the present analysis, which is limited to treaties and contracts between the VOC and Asian rulers (Heeres, 1907: 256–257; 360–362). Neither have the treaties (and supplements to treaties) included in the appendix (pp. 542–551) been included in the analysis.
  - 2 According to Heeres (1907: 29), the term referred to an English gold coin, but according to Yule et al. (1903: 204), the term was used in VOC documents to refer to an imitation of the English coin minted in the Low Countries.

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