Chapter 3

Theoretical background

3.1. Why borrow?

Of the Russian loans in Estonian the present work will only treat lexical loans, not semantic ones. Cases of emphatic foreignization by suffixation of Estonian words with Russian or quasi-Russian suffixes, a process not uncommon in modern Estonian, especially in slang are not treated, as they belong to the realm of morphology (cf. 2.2.1.2. Morphology).

Reasons why words can be loaned can be divided into two major groups: external and internal factors.

External factors are those where the donor language is the cause of the borrowing by virtue of the higher (or different) cultural level of its speakers, where the two major reasons are necessity: words are borrowed by the recipient language due to the need to name new objects and concepts (most common) and, second, prestige (less common). Internal factors are those where the internal linguistic factors of the recipient language cause it to borrow words, e.g. in the case of taboo or insufficient differentiation.

One of the most common reasons why words are loaned is the introduction of a new object or concept: the Baltic Finns learned the use of the sickle from the Slavs; together with the new tool they borrowed the Slavic word. Similarly after the Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1940 a new political system was introduced. Words pertaining to this system were often loaned from Russian directly (e.g. Est. prikaas ‘order’ < Russ. приказ ‘id.’). Words referring to technology and other phenomena that require a high level of mental and linguistic abstraction like Est. finants ‘finance’, masin ‘machine’\textsuperscript{107} and aatom ‘atom’ are often borrowed (cf. HOCK 1986, 384).

Along with a new religion new ecclesiastical terms are often borrowed if that religion has a different liturgical language. After the 1840s, when many Estonian peasants converted to Russian Orthodoxy, Russian loanwords concerning the new Orthodox religion passed into the

\textsuperscript{107}Where this later received the additional meaning of ‘automobile’ due to Russ. машина ‘id.’.
language, though many of these disappeared again after the re-conversion movement in the 1880s (many of these words were only used and only survive in the sociolect of Orthodox Estonians).

Other words are not borrowed so often and seem to require more motivation for them to be adopted. The most important motivation for this is prestige, though perhaps in our case this is not very important as Russian was never considered particularly prestigious among the Estonians. Due to their nature these so-called luxury loans also age quickly. ‘Prestige’ is a notion often invoked when no particularly persuasive reason for borrowing can be found (cf. LASS 1997, 186); often we will not be able to say why a particular word was borrowed.

There are various internal factors conducive to borrowing; amongst them are the following:

3.1.1. Low frequency

Relatively infrequent words of the vocabulary are less stable and more subject to oblivion and replacement. However, the semantic field is hardly ever exactly the same in the donor and in the recipient language, and therefore it is hard to say whether e.g. kari ‘moth’ was borrowed from Russ. корь because the genuine word koi was used little, or whether there is some small difference between the two. In any case kari is now obsolete, and koi is again in use.

3.1.2. Taboo

The desire to avoid (and replace) words that are considered socially unacceptable for various reasons can be very strong. In Estonian cases are found where taboo names for animals have been borrowed from Russian. In the secret jargon of fishers in Hanila in western Estonia many animal names have been replaced for taboo reasons (specifically, not to endanger their fishing luck) by Russian loans: karova ‘cow’ < Russ. корова ‘id.’, koška ‘cat’ < Russ. кошка ‘id.’, puika ‘bull’ < Russ. бык ‘id.’, vinja ‘pig’ < Russ. свинья ‘id.’ (LOORITS 1939, 51-52, 55-56). Mentioning the names of these animals by their Estonian names was considered unlucky, regardless of what kind of animal it was (LOORITS 1939, 47-48). NIRVI (1944, 100) records volk ‘wolf’ (< Russ. волк ‘wolf’) in Simuna and Kose.

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108 Not only in Hanila: in Tarvastu on the western shore of Lake Võrtsjärv möss ‘mouse’ < Russ. мышь ‘id.’ has been registered (LOORITS 1939, 70).

109 ‘Niemand durfte die Tiere am Fischerstrande bei ihren estnischen Namen nennen, dafür hatten sie ihre eigenen Namen. Geschah es, dass jemand zu dieser Zeit am Strande, ob er nun ein Verwandter oder ein Fremder war, unverschons oder absichtlich ein Tier bei seinem richtigen estnischen Namen nannte, dann gab es unbedingt eine Strafe: vollständiges Untertauchen (Hanila).’ (LOORITS 1939, 47-48).
As a bridge from euphemism (taboo for politeness reasons) to slang there are foreign swearwords, that seem to be less offensive, as they do not have the same emotional load as those in the mother tongue.

Slang, by its very essence, has a constant need for new synonyms, as affective words lose their expressive power (e.g. Est. alfons ‘gigolo; pimp’ < Russ. альфо́нс ‘id.’, pakaa ‘bye’ < Russ. покá ‘id.’). A perusal of modern Estonian literature shows that Russian loanwords are often used in slang and to create a Soviet-era feeling (cf. e.g. the novels of Peeter Sauter or Kaur Kender), as well as in historical novels to create a Tsarist atmosphere (Jaan Kross). In post-1990-literature popular Russian foreign words are quickly retreating in the path of English ones: e.g. in KERTTU RAKKE’s 2000 short story collection ‘Kalevipoeg’ the only Russian foreign word is pohhui (<Russ. по хуй) ‘damn’ (p.100); amongst the English ones are kamoone ‘come on’ (pp. 32, 46), kaad teemd ‘Goddamned’ (pp. 93, 96), fess ‘yes’ (p. 91), vai nott ‘why not’ (p. 87), fakk ‘fuck’ (p. 87) and däämd ‘damned’ (p. 97).

### 3.1.3. Insufficient differentiation

Often speakers of language A with knowledge of language B can feel that their language does not differentiate as well and can borrow the word from language B: Estonian had the word tasku ‘pocket’, the semantic field of which covered all types of pocket. Estonian then borrowed Russ. кармáн ‘pocket’ as karman and gave it the meaning ‘deep pocket (usually on men’s clothes)’. In Estonian kandma means ‘to carry’, but nessima, borrowed from Russ. нести ‘to carry’, has the meaning ‘to put somewhere together; to carry something heavy’. Similarly robustama, borrowed from Russ. рабóтать ‘to work’, has the meaning ‘to work quickly, carelessly’ (all examples from Must 1956, 130). Often these loans, borrowed with a view to differentiation, have some element of negativity.

### 3.1.4. Snobism

Proof of knowledge of foreign languages can cause words to be borrowed. In a way this is the opposite of slang, as slang terms are often loaned from languages with unfavourable associations. In present-day Estonia Russian has no snob appeal, but some of the 19th century loans might have been borrowed for such reasons, though it has to be kept in mind that many of the loans from this period seem to be borrowed due to the paucity of political and cultural terms in 19th century literary Estonian.

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110 In older literature one finds many Russian loanwords which have not found an entry in any dictionary.
There are indications that in the interwar period some well-educated Estonians cultivated a Russian accent in their spoken Estonian out of pretentiousness (cf. ARISTE 1939, 5).

3.1.5. Comic effect

Sometimes words are borrowed to achieve a comic effect (cf. WEINREICH 1974, 60). An example from the Estonian writer JAAN KROSS (2001, 6): ‘Ma mäletan paari kirjanikust tuttava omaaegset jutju: tosina aasta eest oli neid kirjanike üleliidulise kongressi ajal Kreml keldri pois kuuekümne tollase rubla eest tollastele pissatelitele müüdud’. (‘I remember such stories of a writer friend of mine. about 10 years they had been sold to such pissatels (< Russ. писатель ‘writer’) during an All-Soviet writers’ congress in the cellar shop in the Kremlin for 60 roubles’). The slang terms now being borrowed from English (see above) often have the same comic effect, though it might not have been intended as such.

3.2. The borrowing scale

The now classic work by THOMASON and KAUFMAN (1988, 74-76) has a useful 5-tiered scale (simplified to 4-tiered in THOMASON 2001, 70-71), where the probability of borrowing lexical and structural elements is shown relative to intensity of contact. The scale applies to borrowing by speakers of one language with varying degrees of familiarity with another language, not to shifters of one language to another. The 5 tiers are:

1) With casual contact there is lexical borrowing only. Content words are borrowed, where non-basic vocabulary is borrowed before basic vocabulary.

2) Slight structural borrowing accompanies slightly more intense contact. Now function words like conjunctions\(^{111}\) and adverbial particles are also borrowed. Minor phonological, syntactic and lexical semantic features occur. New phonemes are found in loanwords only.

3) More intense contact: more structural borrowing. Prepositions and postpositions are borrowed; derivational affixes can be abstracted from borrowed words (cf. Est. -nik). Inflectional affixes may enter the language, but will remain confined to borrowed items. Pronouns and numerals may be borrowed. In phonology the phonemicisation of allophonic alternations may take place. In syntax postpositions might be borrowed in a prepositional language or vice versa.

\(^{111}\) In colloquial Estonian the conjunction a ‘why’ is an allegro form of aga ‘id.’, though in south-eastern dialects it is also partially a loan from Russ. a ‘and; while, eh?’ (MUST 2000, 19).
4) Strong cultural pressure: moderate structural borrowing, where new distinctive features may occur in native vocabulary; new syllable structure constraints in native vocabulary; word order change; new cases might be borrowed.

5) Very strong cultural pressure leading to heavy structural borrowing. Significant typological disruption including phonetic changes, loss of phonemic contrasts and morphophonemic rules, changes in word order rules and e.g. from flexional toward agglutinative morphology.

For the influence of Low and High German on Estonian we find features from the fourth stage and possibly even from the fifth, though for example no pronouns or numerals were borrowed (stage 3), nor conjunctions from stage 2.\textsuperscript{112}

The influence of Russian, though, never reaches a higher stage than 3.\textsuperscript{113} Russian influence varied with time: in the last years of Soviet power word order in certain varieties of written Estonian was aligning itself to that of Russian. To properly assess the influence Russian has had we must ascertain to what extent Estonians knew Russian; whether passively or actively and what their attitude to Russian was and is (Estonians were well known in the former Soviet Union for being proud of their minimal knowledge of Russian as well as having, both percentage-wise and absolutely, the least number of mixed marriages of all the union republics. Cf. 2.1.). Russian influence on Estonian syntax has not been researched to any great degree (cf. 2.2.1.3. Syntax). One could expect structural borrowing only in the periods 1880-1919 and 1940-1990, though there must be a certain time lag, as people would have to learn Russian well before they could carry over Russian forms into Estonian. So now, even though Russian is no longer an official language, there are still many Estonians for whom Russian, though not a second mother tongue as Soviet planners were wont to call it, is a language they know very well indeed. Indeed for men in the Soviet army it was at times the only language they spoke for years.

Shift of Russian to Estonian has been very rare, though precisely such a shift is now expected of Russians by many Estonians under the concept of ‘integration’. Shift of Estonian to Russian is only common of Estonians in the Russian parts of the ex-Soviet Union (to what extent such returning Estonians have had an effect on Estonian has not been researched; cf. JOHANSEN 1962, 82, RAAG 2000, 278-279). Shift of Estonian to Russian is rare. There were,

\textsuperscript{112} THOMASON and KAUFMAN do not claim that all elements of one stage must be borrowed before another stage can be reached. Latvian, for example, where the influence of Low and High German is of similar intensity as in Estonian, has borrowed its (tier 2) conjunction un ‘and’ from G. und (KARULIS 1992/II, 453).

\textsuperscript{113} Here we must differentiate between the Estonian treated in this work (i.e. the literary language), and dialects and the spoken language, where some elements from higher tiers of the scale can indeed be found.
though, groups of bilinguals in the Alutaguse region (cf. 2.1. Russia and Sweden fight over the Baltic).

3.3. Loanword identification

All major dictionaries of Estonian (cf. 4.1. Major sources) have been examined, and all words which do not have an acceptable etymology and for which for some reason Russian origin suggests itself have been the subject of closer scrutiny. What are these reasons? For younger loanwords Russian origin is usually obvious, as the phonotactic structure of the words rules out genuine Estonian origin. For older words, which have been adapted to a great degree, this is less easy. Attempts to fine-tune the method for identifying loanwords have been neglected in Uralic studies. A note-worthy exception is KOPONEN 1998, though his methods have been the target of considerable criticism (KOIVULEHTO 2001, 2001a, 2001b; NIKKILÄ 2001).

An attempt to discover indications of Russian phonotactic restrictions in Estonian words has been described in BLOKLAND 2002.

By perusing the two etymological dictionaries of Estonian (EEW and RAUN 1982), MUST’s (2000) work on the Russian loans in Estonian dialects, and practically all books and articles by e.g. PAUL ARISTE, JALO KALIMA, VALENTIN KIPARSKY, JULIUS MÄGISTE, J.J. MIKKOLA and ANDRUS SAARESTE and others who have written extensively on Russian loans in Finnic and Estonian all words deemed to be Russian loanword were excerpted. It has been checked whether Russian loans in other Finnic languages such as Finnish (cf. PLOGER 1973) or Votic also occur in Estonian. Slavic loans in Latvian have also been examined to some degree, as parallel loans in Estonian are not unlikely.

Other reasons for assuming Russian origin could be possible are limited geographical distribution (e.g. southern or eastern Estonia, where the word must have been borrowed from a southern or eastern dialect into the literary language to gain admittance in the present

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114 As CAMPBELL (1998, 64) puts it: ‘Words which violate the typical phonological patterns (canonical forms, morphemic scheme, syllable structure, phonotactics) of a language are likely to be loans.’

JOHANNES AAVIK, one of the language reformers from the 1920s, did not always take the phonotactic restrictions of Estonian into account when constructing new words, and that is probably the main reason why many of the words he created were (subconsciously) unacceptable to the public (cf. e.g. AAVIK 1924, 42-48).

115 HINDERLING (1981) has emphasized the usefulness of the Latvian lexicon in confirming the German origin of various loans in Estonian.
work), semantics (pertaining to Russians, Russia or the Soviet-Union), and age (e.g. a loan recorded only after 1945 points to possible Russian origin).