

# Russian Borrowings in English: Similarities and Differences in Lexicographic Description

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## 1. Introduction

The study of word origins enjoyed considerable popularity in the past, and etymologies, a traditional component of a dictionary entry, were often hotly debated, even though ‘the amateurs who, as late as 1900, filled the pages of popular journals with their conjectures on word origins, had no idea that they should have used their time reading rather than writing’ (Lieberman 2005: 158).

To contemporary dictionary users etymology sections seem to have less appeal. According to surveys carried out by Barnhart and Quirk, what is usually searched for is information on the meaning of words, their spelling, pronunciation and usage (qtd. in Hartmann 1987: 125). In response to the potential needs of users, general monolingual dictionaries do include brief etymologies, but more extensive references have been confined almost exclusively to etymological and historical dictionaries, on the assumption that they can engage the attention of scholars and students of the history of English only.

Word histories are, however, of great interest to metalexigraphers, or lexicographic researchers, who study various aspects of dictionaries and the dictionary-making process. The present paper focuses on one area for which etymological references are vital: foreign elements in the English lexicon. More precisely, I look at Russian borrowings recorded in dictionaries of English, and focus on similarities and differences in their lexicographic description. As the term ‘borrowing’ refers to different types of lexical importations—loanwords, calques, loanblends and semantic borrowings (Haugen 1950: 214–215)—it is important to highlight that this paper covers only loanwords proper, i.e., narrowly interpreted Russian borrowings.

## 2. A History of Russianisms in English

Anyone interested in the origins of English words knows that they come from a host of different languages, including both the well-known ones like Latin, French, Spanish, German, Italian or Japanese, and some lesser-known tongues like Swahili, Xhosa or Quechua. (See e.g. Hughes 2000: 370.) The foreign lexical items refer to practically every sphere of life, and most of them have been relatively well described in the literature.

Interestingly, Russian words have not received much attention. Papers on Russianisms are scarce, and they often concentrate on a single aspect of the borrowing process. (Cf. Stacy 1961, Benson 1962, Leeming 1968/9, Lehnert 1977, Wade 1997.) In spite of such marginal interest, borrowings from Russian have been mentioned in histories of the English language, but it is claimed that the words are rare and insignificant. (Cf. Serjeantson 1935, Francis 1965, Mencken 1982, Hughes 2000.) However, there is some evidence that Russianisms were steadily transferred into the English vocabulary. As they appeared, in some cases extensively, in printed sources, lexicographers started recording them in dictionaries, which are now indispensable resources for reconstructing past language contacts.

Dated quotations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (second edition, henceforth the *OED2*) show that the first words were borrowed in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by English merchants and ambassadors to Russia, most of whose accounts appeared in Hakluyt’s three-volume publication,

*Principal Navigations* (1598–1600). Figure 1 shows the numbers of Russian borrowings whose first instances in the *OED2* come from the period 1550–2000.

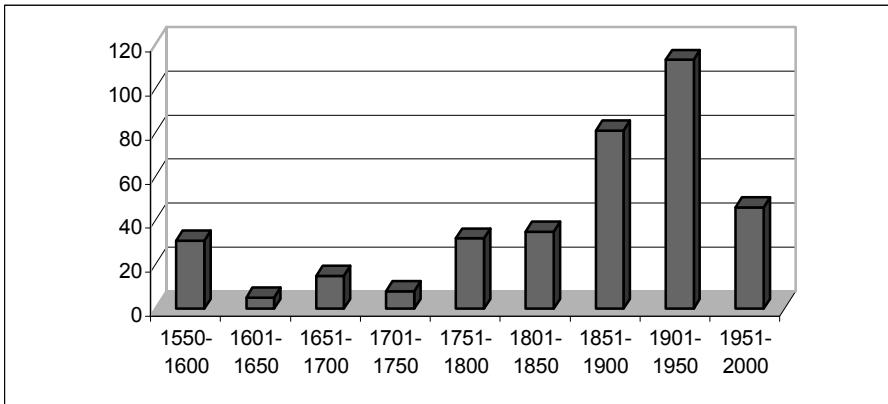


Figure 1. Distribution of Russianisms in the *OED2* (1550–2000).

In the next century the number of Russianisms dropped slightly, apparently because of intermittent relations between the British and Russian courts (primarily the execution of Charles I led to a decrease in English influence in Russia). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, more new Russian words appeared in English, mainly during the reign of Peter the Great, when Russia's contacts with the West became particularly intensive. The quantity of Russian words increased greatly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which can be attributed to immense and diversified interest in Russia and all things Russian. The violent political situation (the Crimean War, Decembrist uprising, Jewish pogroms), the growth of nihilism and communist ideology, scientific discoveries as well as the development of Russian literature must be viewed as contributing factors. Most loans were taken into English in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and their distribution is shown below.

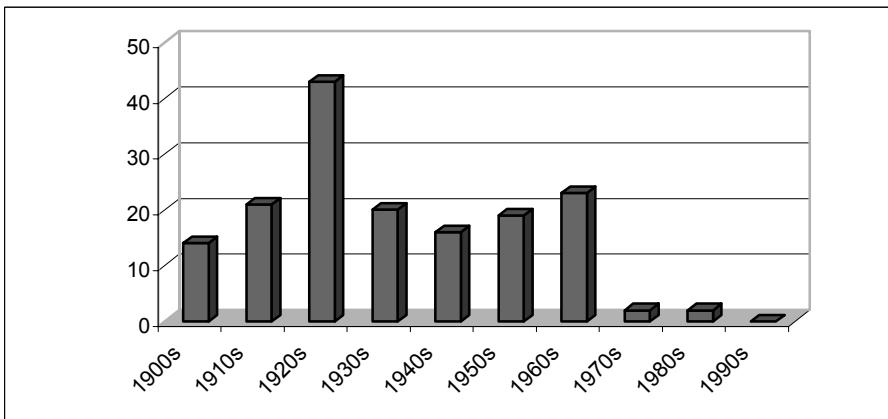


Figure 2. Distribution of Russianisms in the *OED2* (1900–2000).

The distribution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century loanwords is fairly even, except for a rise in the 1920s (the 1917 Revolution and its effects) and the 1960s (the launch of the first sputnik and the development of astronautics). Characteristically, towards the end of the century interest in Russian words decreases. The 1980s brought two keywords of the decade, *perestroika* and *glasnost*, but no other borrowings have become clearly recognizable since.

Three issues have to be emphasised at this point. First, not all periods of the history of English are equally well covered in the *OED2*, because the quotations come from a selection of sources and individual authors, primarily 'the best writers' (Finkenstaedt and Wolff 1973: 37–42, Willinsky 1994:

11–12, Brewer 2004: 13–15), which distorts the overall picture, and might also affect the number of Russian words recorded in each century. Second, the dates presented in the figures may be subject to change; as has been shown by Schäfer (1980: 66–69), nearly a quarter of all the headwords recorded in the *OED2* can be antedated, so that finding earlier textual occurrences for at least some Russianisms is probably a matter of time. Third, although it is clear that many of the borrowings are archaisms, their status in contemporary English is of no importance since I look at the items from the point of view of lexicographic practice. A description of the Russian borrowings which are used today can be found in Podhajecka and Piotrowski (2004).

### 3. Methodology of Research

My research material consists of the largest monolingual dictionaries of English. For British English, I took into account Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) and the *OED2*. I also consulted three volumes of the *Oxford English Dictionary Additions* (1993–97, henceforth the *OEDA*) for some recent vocabulary. As regards American English, I examined the *Century Dictionary* (1889–91 edition and Supplement, henceforth the *Century*) and three consecutive editions of *Webster's New International Dictionary*: 1913 (1909 edition and Addenda), 1953 (1934 edition and Addenda) and 2000 (1961 edition and Addenda); henceforth, *Webster's 1*, *Webster's 2* and *Webster's 3*, respectively. Three volumes of the *Barnhart Dictionary of New Words* (1973, 1980, 1990, henceforth the *BDNW*) complement the analysis of American dictionaries. Most of these works of reference are not 'historical' in the strict sense of the word, but the whole lexicographic corpus provided me with a valuable diachronic perspective. Regrettably, since Johnson's dictionary includes only three broadly interpreted Russian words (*czar*, *czarina*, *voivode*), it has not been referred to. From the dictionaries I excerpted over 500 words of Russian origin, and compared to linguists' low estimates this figure is indeed amazing. The most striking of my findings is, however, that the treatment of the same headwords in different dictionaries is not at all consistent.

It is worthy of mention that selecting Russianisms from the dictionaries was not an easy task. As will be shown in section 4.1, word origins are often described vaguely, so the entries had to be examined very carefully. Even the *OED2*, an unparalleled authority in terms of scholarly etymologies (Béjoint 2000: 58), had to be treated with caution, because a comparison of all the dictionaries showed that the routes did not always overlap. The selection of Russian words included several phases. From the above-mentioned dictionaries, some of which are now available in the electronic form and are thus easily searchable (the dictionaries that had to be literally 'read' page by page were *Webster's 2*, the *OEDA* and the *BDNW*), I excerpted headwords either etymologised as Russianisms (or Sovietisms) or defined in relation to Russia (or the Soviet Union). Next, I compared the lists of words and excluded calques (e.g., *five-year plan*), loanblends (e.g., *refusenik* or *Gorbymania*) and semantic borrowings (e.g., *pioneer*). Further criteria allowed me to leave out, for instance, specific technical terms (e.g., *achtaragdite* or *uvarovite*), toponyms (e.g., *Kursk* or *Scherbakov*) and proper nouns in the attributive position (e.g., *Molotov cocktail* or *Stanislavsky technique*). Then, to revise the etymologies of the remaining words, I worked with primary and secondary sources in English and Russian, of which the latter included Dal's (1880–82) and Vasmer's (1986) dictionaries. At this stage, indirect borrowings (e.g., *Kremlin* or *tsarina*) and etymologically irrelevant lexical items (e.g., *britska* or *mazurka*) were dropped. Finally, problematic words, for which no clear evidence was found, were taken at face value; in other words, their cultural identity was treated as a predominant factor. *Cosmonaut*, perceived here as a borrowing of Russ. *kosmonavt*, is perhaps the most conspicuous case. It has to be kept in mind, however, that every etymology presupposes a varying margin of error (Lieberman 2005: 239).

One might wonder why the historical perspective is so unclear. There are several reasons for this situation, primarily imperfect methods of early dictionary making (amateurish etymologizing), the complexities of Anglo-Russian language contact (communication filtered through other languages, mainly Latin, German and French), and formal affinities between Slavic languages (similarities not only between East Slavic languages, but also between their South and West Slavic cousins). As a result, discrepancies in the lexicographic description of the borrowings occur in most elements of the dictionary entry—etymology, spelling, pronunciation, and definition—but they are particularly visible

in the etymological references. (Cf. Podhajecka 2003.) In this context, it should not be surprising that for several loanwords, such as *caftan*, *shaman*, *pogrom* or *tsar*, controversies continue to this day.

The treatment of Russianisms will thus be analysed in four general areas: etymology, spelling, definition, and lexical coverage. Because of the differences in the pronunciation systems applied by British dictionaries (International Pronunciation Alphabet) and their American counterparts (the respelling system), this feature will not be discussed here. Moreover, for reasons of brevity, the dictionary entries quoted have sometimes been slightly simplified. Where necessary, Russian words have been transliterated into English according to the ISO transliteration standards. ISO symbols include, for instance, ж = ž, ц = c, ч = č, ш = š, щ = šč, я = ja, ю = ju, ë = ë, and x = ch. Still, the system of transliteration used in the dictionary entries has not been modified.

## 4. Contrasting Dictionary Entries

### 4.1 Etymology

Words spread through a chain of borrowings, hence it is important to specify which of the languages involved should be treated as the donor one. After Rot (1991: 38), I distinguish three sources of borrowings: genetic (or ultimate), primary historical (or intermediary), and historical (or direct). To illustrate the point, for the English word *saffian*, Russian is the direct source, Romanian is its primary historical source, and Turkish or Persian is its ultimate source (based on the *OED2*). I assumed that borrowings imported into English only directly from Russian would be classified as Russianisms proper. Such a framework is important, because etymology is a fundamental basis for the classification of foreign importations, and even tiny methodological discrepancies in the description of word origins may contribute to confusion. (Cf. Cannon 1987.)

My analysis shows that the ‘decoding’ of etymological routes is far more complicated than was expected. All the samples quoted below come from the *Century*, but similar etymological references can be found in any other dictionary. Thus, words of Russian origin are treated as:

- (1) direct borrowings from Russian, whatever the genetic source;  
**armiak** [Russ. *armyakŭ*, of Tatar origin] 1. A staff woven of camel’s hair by the Tatars. – 2. In Russia, a plain caftan or outer garment, made of armiak or a similar material, worn by the peasantry.
- (2) indirect borrowings, i.e., either the genetic source or one of the primary historical sources;  
**kvass** [= F. *kvass* = G. *kevass*, < Russ. *kvassŭ*, a drink so called.] A fermented drink in general use in Russia, taking the place of the beer of other countries. Common kvass is made from an infusion of raised rye flour or dough, or of other flour or baked bread, with malt. Finer kinds are made from apples, raspberries, or other fruit, without malt.
- (3) words describing European and Asian realia, but not etymologised;  
**sastrugi**, *n. pl.* A term current in Siberia for flutings or little ridges of windblown snow, running parallel with the direction of the air-currents, and now sometimes quoted in English. See **zastruga**. *Rep. Brit. Ass’n Advancement of Sci.*, 1900, p. 817.
- (4) words of uncertain origin, i.e., either obscure, unknown or etymologised in a vague way;  
**obarne†**, **obarni†**, *n.* [Origin obscure.] A beverage associated in texts of the sixteenth century with meath and mead, and in one case mentioned as a variety of mead.  
  
**araba** 1, **arba**, *n.* [Also **aroba**, = Bulg. *araba*, Russ. *arba*, < Hind. Pers. *arāba*, Turk. Ar. ‘*arabah*, a cart, wheeled vehicle.] A heavy, springless wagon, usually covered with a screen as shelter from the rays of the sun, drawn by oxen or cows, and used throughout north-western and central Asia, India, Turkey, and Russia, wherever Tatars have settled.
- (5) words derived from a historical source different from Russian;  
**yurt**, *n.* [Siberian.] One of the houses or huts, whether permanent or movable, of the natives of

northern and central Asia. Also **yourta**, **yourte**, **jurt**.

Many headwords are derived, either directly or indirectly, from Russian, but this is not always the case. Some words, such as *aoul*, *araba*, *barchan*, *caftan*, *dzeren*, *kefir*, *knez*, *sarlak*, *shaman*, *shor*, *tarpan*, *verst*, or *voivode*, are almost notorious for having non-Russian etymologies, because usually only one out of five dictionaries indicates their Russian origin. Other borrowings, such as *balagan*, *barukhzy*, *baidar*, *carlock*, *chum*, *corsac*, *dolina*, *gley*, *iconostas*, *Kalmuck*, *Katyusha*, *kendir*, *koumiss*, *olen*, *pogrom*, *rendzina*, *starost* or *zubr*, show an equal degree of variability, i.e., the Russian and non-Russian etymologies are found in roughly the same number of dictionaries.

The etymology sections can also be compared in terms of the detail of description. For instance, while *Webster's 1* and *3* provide the Russian etymon in most entries, a majority of Russian etyma in *Webster's 2* are lacking. By contrast, the *Century* and the *OED2* give detailed histories of the words, documenting the whole process of borrowing and the ultimate source of the loanwords, yet only the *OED2* provides succinct information on alternative etymological hypotheses and can guide users to the literature of the subject. Example (6) below illustrates etymologies for the entry-word *boyar*.

- (6) *Webster's 1*    **boyar** [Russ. *boiarin*']  
*Webster's 2*    **boyar** [Russ.]  
*Webster's 3*    **boyar** [Russian *boyarin*, from Old Russian, from Old Slavic *boljarinŭ*, probably from Old Turkish *boila*]  
*Century*        **boyar** [< Russ. *boyarinŭ*, pl. *boyare*, formerly *bolyarinŭ* = Bulg. *bolerin* = Serv. *bolyar* = Pol. *bojar* (> Turk. *boyar* = Hung. *bojár* = Lith. *bajoras* = MGr. *βοῦλάδα*, *βολιάδα*, etc.), < OBulg. *boljarinŭ*, appar. < *boliy*, great, illustrious.]  
*OED2*            **boyar** [a. Russ. *boyárin*, pl. *boyáre* 'grandee, lord':—earlier *bolyárin*, prob. f. OSlav. root *bol-* great; but Miklosich would connect it with Turkish *boj* stature, *bojlu* high; Dahl, and others, with Russ. *boi* 'war', which may have influenced the later form. The word occurs in Byzantine Greek as *βοῦλάδα*, *βολιάδα*; Bulg. *bolerin*, Serb. *bolyar*, Roman. *boiér*.]

It is obvious, however, that the lexicographic description depends largely on the criteria adopted by etymologists, so it is definitely genre-oriented. The *OED2*, as an historical dictionary, will thus include more exhaustive etymological information than a general monolingual dictionary. (Cf. Malkiel 1976: 10.)

#### 4.2 Spelling

Russianisms occur in a range of orthographic variants, and most spellings are, as a rule, recorded in the *OED2*. The other dictionaries, primarily the *Century*, *Webster's 2* and *Webster's 3*, also document a number of alternative spelling forms. In doing so, they sometimes show the influence of languages other than Russian, mainly Latin, German and French, though it is impossible to tell whether the given words were borrowed from those languages, or merely spelled under their influence. For instance, many members of Russian high society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were bilingual in Russian and French. (See e.g. *duma* / *douma*; *knout* / *knut*; *Doukhobor* / *Dukhobor*; *kulak* / *koulak*.) According to Leeming (1968: 7), the unsettled state of the 16<sup>th</sup> century English orthography may be to some extent responsible for problems with the interpretation of textual material.

Different spelling variants may be treated as different entry-words, which are either defined, glossed or left undefined, as the entries from the *Century* show below.

- (7) **berkovets**, n. [Russ. *berkovetsŭ*.] A Russian weight, legally equal to 400 Russian pounds, or 361 pounds 2 ounces avoirdupois. In other parts of Russia, where older pounds have not gone out of use, the value of this unit is somewhat greater. Also **bercowetz**.  
**bercowetz**, n. See **berkovets**.  
**berkowitz**, n. [G. *berkowitz*, repr. Russ. *berkovetsŭ*.] Same as **berkovets**.

There are also words (e.g., *ataman*, *ispravnik*, *kibitka*, *samovar* or *taiga*) recorded in only one distinct form, which requires some explanation. The answer is relatively simple. Russian loans taken into English had to be transliterated from the Cyrillic alphabet into the Latin one, which inevitably involved certain problems. Sometimes, in the case of borrowing through speech, the words tended to be transcribed rather than transliterated; and the first words taken into English, such as *kvass*, *tsar*, *rouble*, *moujik*, *kumiss*, etc., were probably imported in that way. Whichever method was adopted, however, it often resulted in idiosyncrasies in spelling. Vowels were usually rendered in a more or less faithful form, though there were exceptions to this rule, as in *barabara* (Russ. dialectal *barabora*), *barometz* / *boramez* (Russ. *baranec*), *knez* / *kniaz* / *knyaz* (Russ. *knjaz*'), or *sterlet* / *sterledey* (Russ. *sterljad*'). By contrast, Russian consonants were expressed by strings of characters which were entirely alien to the English spelling system. The most problematic Russian consonants were [c], [ž], [č], [š], [šč] and [ch], and they usually account for the array of awkward spellings, as example (8) illustrates below.

- (8)
- |                       |      |   |
|-----------------------|------|---|
| Russ. <i>car</i>      | [c]  | Eng. <i>ksar</i> , <i>tsar</i> , <i>czar</i> , <i>tzar</i>                            |
| Russ. <i>pirožki</i>  | [ž]  | Eng. <i>piroshki</i> , <i>pirotchki</i> , <i>pirozhki</i> , <i>pyrochki</i>           |
| Russ. <i>černožëm</i> | [č]  | Eng. <i>chernozem</i> , <i>tchernozem</i> , <i>tschernozem</i>                        |
| Russ. <i>aršin</i>    | [š]  | Eng. <i>arsheen</i> , <i>arshine</i> , <i>archine</i> , <i>arshin</i> , <i>archin</i> |
| Russ. <i>boršč</i>    | [šč] | Eng. <i>borsch</i> , <i>borscht</i> , <i>borsht</i> , <i>bortsch</i> , <i>borshch</i> |
| Russ. <i>barchan</i>  | [ch] | Eng. <i>barchan</i> , <i>barchane</i> , <i>barkhan</i>                                |

A few examples taken from all the dictionaries will show the variability in spelling more exhaustively (Table 1). It has been observed that *Webster's 1* includes few variants, whereas the *OED2* has most of them; the record is set by *koumiss*, which has 14 alternative spelling forms.

Table 1. Examples of variant spellings.

<i>OED2</i>	<i>Century</i>	<i>Webster's 1</i>	<i>Webster's 2</i>	<i>Webster's 3</i>
arsheen, arshine, archine	arshin, arshine, arsheen	Arshine	arshin, arsheen, arshine	arshin, arshine, archin, archine
tsarevich, czarevich, czarewi(t)ch, czarowitz, czarowitch	tsarevitch	Czarowitz	czarevitch, tsarevitch, czarowitz, czarowitch	czarevitch, tsarevitch
droshky, droshky, droitzschka, drojeka, droshka, droshke, droshki, droška, droškcha	droshky, droshky, droshkies, droshkies, drozhki	Drosky; droitzschka, droshke	droshky, droshky, droshky (Russ.), droshke (Ger.)	droshky, droshky
Samoyed, Samoit, Samoed, Samoïd, Samoïed, Samojede, Samoïede, Samoyede	Samoyed, Samoïed, Samoïde, Samoed, Samoït	Samoyedes	Samoyed, Samoyede	Samoyed, Samoyede

The way in which more recent Russian borrowings are spelled is more consistent, but irregularities can also be found. For example, the *OEDA* record such variants as *matryoshka* / *matrioshka* / *matreshka* and *niet* / *nyet*; while in the *BDNW* we can find *karakteristika* / *kharakterstika* and *sulfazin* / *sulphazin*.

Sometimes, as can be seen in Table 1, dictionaries include different orthographic variants as the main entry-words. The dissimilarity in form varies from negligible (*agit-prop* in the *OED2* / *agitprop* in *Webster's 3*; *polynya* in the *OED2* / *polynia* in *Webster's 1*) to fairly significant (*osseter* in the *OED2* / *osetra* in *Webster's 3*; *daggett* in the *OED2* / *degote* in the *Century*). Moreover, there are also morphological concerns. Russian loanwords, nearly all of which are nouns, were occasionally recorded in the plural form. Such collective nouns occur either with the Russianised inflectional ending (*Dukhobortsy*, *Khlysti*, *Staroobradsi*, *Starovertsi*), the typical English ending (*Dukhobors*, *Dukhoborts*), or both (*starover*, Pl. *starovers*, *starovery*). For entry-words in the singular, plural forms are sometimes indicated, for instance *bezpovovets*, pl. *bezpovovtsy* (*Webster's 2* and *3*); *chervonets*, pl. *chervontsy* (the *OED2*, *Webster's 2* and *3*); *holluschik*, pl. *holluschickie* (the *Century*, *Webster's 2* and *3*); *kromeski*, pl. *kromeskies* / *kromeskys* (*Webster's 2*) and *kromeskis* (*Webster's 3*) or *zemstvo*, pl. *zemstvos* (*Webster's 2*) and *zemstva* (the *OED2*).

### 4.3 Definition

In this section only selected issues will be touched upon, because a comprehensive treatment of all the definitions would not be feasible.

Some of the early borrowings seem to have been defined on the basis of the same textual sources, hence there are very few differences between the *OED2* and the American dictionaries. It seems that the newer the word is, the more divergent the definitions provided by the lexicographers are. In example (9), three definitions of *verst*, a culture-specific term, show the similarity in the defining style.

- (9) *OED2*                    **verst**, A Russian measure of length equal to 3500 English feet or about two-thirds of an English mile.  
*Webster's 1*                **Verst**, A Russian measure of length containing 3,500 English feet.  
*Century*                    **verst**, A Russian measure of length, containing 3,500 English feet, or very nearly two thirds of an English mile, and somewhat more than a kilometer.

In other cases, the definitions are fairly divergent, which refers not only to the wording of the text, but also to the division of meaning into senses. The use of typographical devices is of secondary importance, because it reflects mainly the dictionary format, i.e., printed or electronic. Corresponding entries from all the dictionaries are compared in example (10).

- (10) *OED2*                    **Samoyed, A.** **1.** One of Mongolian race inhabiting Siberia. **2.** Also with small initial. A white or buff dog belonging to the breed so called, once used as working dogs in the Arctic, and distinguished by a thick, shaggy coat, stocky build, pricked ears, and a tail curled over the back. Also *attrib.* **B.** *adj.* Of or pertaining to the Samoyeds. Also *quasi-n.*, their language.  
*Century*                    **Samoyed**, One of a race inhabiting the northern coast of Asia and eastern Europe, and belonging to the Ural-Altai family.  
*Webster's 1*                **Samoyedes**, An ignorant and degraded Turanian tribe which occupies a portion of Northern Russia and a part of Siberia.  
*Webster's 2*                **Samoyed, 1.** One of a Siberian Mongolian people, hunters, and fishers, related to the Finns in type [...] **2.** An Arctic dog of a basic breed originating in western Siberia. It has long been used by Samoyeds for herding reindeer and pulling sleds, and may be regarded as one of the oldest of domesticated dogs.  
*Webster's 3*                **samoyed**, also **samoyede**  
**1 plural samoyed** or **samoyeds capitalized a:** a Finno-Asian people of the Nenets district of the Arkhangelsk region of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics scattered along the coasts and islands from the White sea to the

Taimyr peninsula—called also Nentsi **b**: a member of such people  
**2** also **samoyedic** *-s capitalized a*: a group of Uralic languages spoken by the Samoyed people—see URALIC LANGUAGES table **b**: one of these languages  
**3 a** *usually capitalized*: a Siberian breed of medium-sized deep-chested white or cream-colored arctic dogs in coat and proportions much resembling the chow chow and long used by the Samoyeds for herding reindeer and pulling sleds **b** *-s often capitalized*: a dog of this breed

Dividing meaning into senses, in particular, deserves special attention, because my analysis shows that the lexicographers' decisions are by no means arbitrary. In other words, meaning discrimination is more concerned with the general lexicographic criteria (e.g., treating different grammatical categories as separate headwords) than with any clear-cut principles of semantics. Changes in the number of senses become particularly clear when we look at the entries from a diachronic perspective. This is illustrated both by example (10) and (11).

- (11) *Webster's 1* **Boyar**, A member of a Russian aristocratic order abolished by Peter the Great. Also, one of a privileged class in Roumania; English writers sometimes call Russian landed proprietors boyars.
- Webster's 2* **boyar**, A member of a Russian aristocratic order next to the *knezes*, or ruling princes, and possessed of many exclusive privileges. It was abolished by Peter the Great. Also, one of a privileged landholding class in Rumania;  
 - **boyarism, boyardism**  
 ⇒ English writers sometimes erroneously use *boyar* for any Russian landed proprietor.
- Webster's 3* **boyar, 1**: a member of a Russian aristocratic order that was next in rank to the ruling princes and was possessed of many exclusive privileges until its abolition by Peter the Great; **2**: a member of a privileged landholding class in Romania.

Sometimes there are considerable differences in the length and use of descriptive details. One of the most interesting cases is the word *Raskolnik*, whose meaning has been explained as follows:

- (12) *OED2* **Raskolnik**, A dissenter from the national Church in Russia.  
*Century* **Raskolnik**, In Russia, a schismatic; a dissenter. There are many sects of Raskolniks, most of them differing from the Orthodox Church by even greater conservatism in ritual, etc. Some sects retain the office of priest, while others are Presbyterian or Independent in polity; others, again, are of wildly fanatical and antinomian character.
- Webster's 3* **Raskolnik**, A dissenter from the Russian Orthodox Church and member of one of the several groups (as the Doukhobors, Khlysty) developing from the schism of the 17th century in protest against liturgical reforms—called also Old Believer, Old Ritualist.

Interestingly, the word was not allowed into *Webster's 1*, but it appeared in the 1913 Addenda, in an extremely informative, and fairly encyclopedic, entry (example 13). To my knowledge, this is one of the longest definitions accompanying a Russian loan.

- (13) **Raskolnik** n.; pl. **Raskolniki** or **Raskolniks**. [Russ. *raskol'nik* dissenter, fr. *raskol* dissent.] The name applied by the Russian government to any subject of the Greek faith who dissents from the established church. The *Raskolniki* embrace many sects, whose common characteristic is a clinging to antique traditions, habits, and customs. The schism originated in 1667 in an ecclesiastical dispute as to the correctness of the translation of the religious books. The dissenters, who have been continually persecuted, are believed to number about 20,000,000, although the Holy Synod officially puts the number at about 2,000,000. They are officially divided into three groups according to the degree of their variance from orthodox beliefs and

observances, as follows: I. ‘Most obnoxious’: the *Judaizers*; the *Molokane*, who refuse to recognize civil authority or to take oaths; the *Dukhobortsy*, or *Dukhobors*, who are communistic, marry without ceremony, and believe that Christ was human, but that his soul reappears at intervals in living men; the *Khlysty*, who countenance anthropolatry, are ascetics, practice continual self-flagellation, and reject marriage; the *Skoptsy*, who practice castration; and a section of the *Bezpopovtsy*, or priestless sect, which disbelieve in prayers for the Czar and in marriage. II. ‘Obnoxious’: the *Bezpopovtsy*, who pray for the Czar and recognize marriage. III. ‘Least obnoxious’: the *Popovtsy*, who dissent from the orthodox church in minor points only.

Two more entries, *kromesky* and *Skoptsi*, are worth mentioning here. It has been claimed that most definitions in the *OED2* and Webster’s dictionaries were worded on the basis of gathered quotations. (See e.g. Willinsky 1994, Morton 1994.) However, in *Webster’s 2* the headword *kromesky* is not supported by any quotations, and none of the citations in the *OED2* illustrate the need to roll *kromesky* in ‘calf’s udder’. Interestingly, this quaint detail was deleted in the revision process for *Webster’s 3*.

- (14) *OED2*                **kromesky**, A kind of croquette wrapped in bacon and calf’s udder, dipped in batter, and fried.  
*Webster’s 2*            **kromeski**, A kind of croquette wrapped in bacon and calf’s udder, dipped in batter, and fried.  
*Webster’s 3*            **kromeski**, A croquette wrapped in bacon, dipped in batter, and fried.

As to *Skoptsi*, *Webster’s 2* offers a brief definition, which needs cross-referencing with the entry-word *Raskolniki*. By contrast, the definition in *Webster’s 3* is independent, but the word is referred to somewhat vaguely as a sect highlighting ‘sexual abstinence’ (example 15). In fact, sexual abstinence derived from the fact that many members of the sect, both men and women, had their genital organs removed (Engelstein 1997: 5–6). To avoid such shocking expressions lexicographers apparently turned to a less explicit, but also less offensive, euphemism.

- (15) *OED2*                **Skoptsi**, An ascetic Russian Christian sect, known since the eighteenth century and now forbidden, given to self-mutilation.  
*Webster’s 2*            **Skopets**, pl. **Skoptsy**, One of a sect of the Raskolniki.  
*Webster’s 3*            **Skoptsy**, Members of an ascetic religious sect of dissenters from the Russian Orthodox Church dating prob. from the 18th century and stressing sexual abstinence.

#### 4.4 Lexical Coverage

Coverage in this paper refers to the scope of Russianisms that can be found in each dictionary. The number of entries in the *OED2*, encompassing both main and run-on entries, is cited after Weiner (qtd. in Piotrowski 1994: 91). It is different from figures mentioned by Willinsky (1994: 209), which illustrates ubiquitous problems with counting dictionary entries. (See e.g. Landau 2001: 109–110.)

Table 2. Coverage of Russianisms.

Dictionary	Number of Russian borrowings	Total number of entries
<i>OED2</i>	365	450,000
<i>OEDA</i>	21	9,000
<i>Century</i>	181	500,000
<i>Webster’s 1</i>	90	400,000
<i>Webster’s 2</i>	291	600,000
<i>Webster’s 3</i>	296	450,000
<i>BDNW</i>	34	22,500

Speaking of the coverage of the *OED2*, Curzan claims that ‘the *OED* successfully achieves its goal of immense comprehensiveness. It includes almost all words that appear in the general dictionaries both preceding it and coinciding with it, and it treats these words in a more detailed fashion. The lexical area where these dictionaries and the *OED* do not overlap is small indeed’ (2000: 100). However, my study shows that some discrepancies do exist. The *OED2* records 365 words of Russian origin, including items etymologised incorrectly (e.g., *barchan*, *caftan*, *knez*, *shaman* or *voivode*), which means that it does not include over 170 Russianisms recorded in the other dictionaries, of which 35 appear exclusively in the *Century*. Still, unlike the other dictionaries, the *OED2* supports each loanword with a range of illustrative quotations to show its currency in the language.

As has been mentioned, I consulted also the *OEDA* for some newer loans. However, few out of 21 Russianisms are recent importations, while most of them, e.g., *druzhina* (1879), *Gulag* (1946), *Lubyanka* (1938), *niet* (1925) or *Zemsky Sobor* (1902), are words overlooked in the compilation of the *OED2*.

The *Century* includes 181 Russian loans, which are sometimes accompanied by erroneous etymologies, but the definitions are helpful and consistent. Out of this group, 35 words, including such apparently rare borrowings as *aska*, *baliki*, *grivna*, *kobza*, *lesiy*, *oboz* or *rusalka*, cannot be found in any other dictionary in my corpus. Regrettably, these borrowings are not supported by any quotations, so it is hard to say whether the lexicographers had adequate textual evidence. On the other hand, the *Century* does not include a few easily recognisable Russianisms, such as *blin* (1889), *isba* (1784), *karakul* (1853), *nagaika* (1842), *Russki* (1858) or *sevruga* (1591). Several Russian-derived words (e.g., *kibitka*, *nerka*, *ruble*, *samovar* or *telega*) are accompanied by pictorial illustrations.

*Webster’s 1* records 90 words of Russian borrowings, though some are mis-etymologised. This is the case of *caftan* (Turkic), *protopope* (Greek), *shaman* (Tungus) or *ukase* (French). This group also includes such words as *britska*, *czarina* or *Kremlin*, here derived from Russian, which cannot be treated as an etymologically proven fact. *Webster’s 1* admits into its pages three ephemeral words, i.e., *mykiss*, *nerka* and *opolchenie*, which are not found in the subsequent editions.

*Webster’s 2* is the largest dictionary of English and, because of its immense coverage of both current as well as obsolete words, was for years regarded by many—even after the appearance of the third edition in 1961—as the dictionary *par excellence* (Landau 2001: 86). There are 291 words of Russian provenience in it, and the number visibly surpasses that of *Webster’s 1*, which should not be surprising. On the one hand, the 1917 revolution and World War I drew public attention, which clearly intensified the borrowing from Russian into English. On the other hand, the dictionary followed less restrictive inclusion criteria, so a number of *hapax legomena* (e.g., *chort*, *izvovchik*, *korova* or *molka*) were allowed into its wordlist. Moreover, several words in *Webster’s 2* have brand-new etymologies (*caftan*, *Calmucks*, *liman*, *parka*) or slightly modified forms, e.g., *Dukhoborts* (*Dukhobors* in *Webster’s 1*), *Ivan* (*Ivan Ivanovitch* in *Webster’s 1*) or *plet* (*plitt* in *Webster’s 1*).

The purpose of *Webster’s 3* was to record the standard English vocabulary of predominantly the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so all items that had gone out of use by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century were dropped. The dictionary, in Quirk’s words ‘a meticulously complete register of English vocabulary’ (qtd. in Morton 1994: 197), comprised approximately 450,000 entries in a single volume. It comes as a surprise that Russian borrowings recorded in *Webster’s 3* are as numerous as in *Webster’s 2*, even though the Soviet Union, with all the intricacies of its political and social system, aroused great interest in the American media. However, though the figures are almost the same, there are considerable differences in the selection of entries, because a number of outdated words (e.g., *besprizorni*, *garnetz*, *nefte* or *sotnia*) were left out, while new borrowings (e.g., *apparatchik*, *chum*, *makhorka* or *shashlik*) were included in the revision process for *Webster’s 3*. Interestingly, some of the newcomers (e.g., *blin*, *chinovnik*, *gusli* or *kovsh*) are by no means new, since they were attested in English texts as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Three loans which appeared in *Webster’s 1* but not in *Webster’s 2*, i.e., *Molokane*, *osseter* and *polynia*, were readmitted into *Webster’s 3* (as *Molokan*, *osetra* and *polynya*, respectively).

Three volumes of the *BDNW*, which to some extent supplement *Webster’s 3*, comprise 34 different Russian loanwords. Scientific and technical terms (*kalashnikov*, *katyusha*, *Lunokhod*, *Planetokhod*, *tokamak*) as well as Sovietisms (*gulag*, *karakteristika*, *psikhushka*, *zek*) are the most numerous types of these Russianisms.

## 5. Conclusions

To sum up, I looked at Russianisms recorded in monolingual dictionaries of English to check what treatment they were given. My research shows that the group of Russian borrowings encompasses 535 items, which show both similarities and differences in lexicographic description, but it is differences that are more interesting. The discrepancies characterise practically every aspect of a dictionary entry, such as spelling, pronunciation, grammatical information, etymology, use of labels and tags, defining style, division of meaning into senses or use of illustrative quotations. To present my findings briefly but consistently, I subsumed them under the four general headings of etymology, spelling, definition and lexical coverage.

As far as the etymology is concerned, the description of word origins is often incoherent and vague, and differences between dictionaries are considerable. In particular, a number of headwords have dissimilar etymologies in the *OED2* and *Webster's 3*. Of my lexicographic corpus, the *OED2* provides the most exhaustive information, but it is also the only historical dictionary proper.

Speaking of orthography, Russianisms were transliterated from the Cyrillic alphabet into the Roman one, unless they were phonetic loans that had to be transcribed, which resulted in frequent idiosyncrasies in spelling. In the most difficult cases, i.e., words whose Russian etyma had consonants such as [ž], [č], [š], and [šč], the dictionaries included several alternative spellings of the main entry-words. Again, there are significant differences in the scope and variability of forms.

The most similar definitions are found in Webster's dictionaries, which, as a family of dictionaries, make good material for lexicographic archaeology (Ilson 1986: 127–136). Apart from that, there are some affinities between definitions accompanying early borrowings and, in particular, culture-specific terms. In other cases, definitions are worded in sometimes strikingly divergent ways. (See e.g. *Samoyed*, *sovkhoz* or *vodka*.) The division of meaning into senses seems to depend primarily on the adopted lexicographic criteria.

As regards the coverage of Russianisms, there are some disproportions between the corresponding wordlists (Table 2). Interestingly, only 63 words appear in all the major dictionaries, while as many as 187 occur only once, so they may be treated as ephemeral lexical items. In the diachronic perspective, obsolete words were usually dropped, but even a contemporary dictionary, *Webster's 3*, includes a handful of archaisms (e.g., *ikary*). Russian loans in the dictionaries of new words, i.e., the *OEDA* and the *BDNW*, are fairly infrequent.

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# Selected Proceedings of the 2005 Symposium on New Approaches in English Historical Lexis (HEL-LEX)

edited by

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Heli Tissari, and Tanja Säily

Cascadilla Proceedings Project    Somerville, MA    2006

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