Did You Speak Harbin Sino-Russian?

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In memory of Alina Jabłońska

Introduction

Pidgins—their development, disappearance, or subsequent creolisation—are a fascinating phenomenon in the parts of the world that experienced long-term foreign intrusion and its consequences, one of which was contact between two or more linguistic groups, usually of unequal power. Colonisers did not learn the language of the colonised, who often were perceived as inferior, while the colonised people did not or could not master a foreign language in their own country. In most cases, pidgins were a telltale sign of colonialism. Linguists classify these contact languages, which have no native speakers, into major groups named after the dominant base, such as English-, Portuguese-, Spanish-, Dutch-, French-, or Russian-, as well as African-, Asian-, and Austronesian-based.[1]

There were few Russian-based pidgins, and some which might have existed in Kamchatka, Alaska, and Moscow (the so-called Muscovite Pidgin English) left no records.[2] Among those known, Russenorsk was unique in its non-colonial origin. Its speakers were Norwegian fishermen and Russian merchants who used it during the annual seasonal trade along the coast of northern Norway from the end of the eighteenth century until the 1917 Revolution in Russia. Its vocabulary came from Russian and Norwegian in almost equal proportions, with some words of Lappish, Finnish, Swedish, French, Dutch, English, and Low German origin, and it could equally be classified as Scandinavian-based.[3]

Two more Russian-based formations, one in the border city of Kiakhta and another in East Siberia and the Russian Far East, are generally referred to as Chinese Pidgin Russian.[4] As the name indicates, their limited vocabularies were based on the Russian language. The former functioned in the cities of Kiakhta on the Russian side of the border and Maimaicheng on the Chinese side from the early eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century, when the Chinese government limited the Chinese trade in this area to Russian-speaking Chinese merchants who then had to learn some Russian. Sources which describe its emergence and development recently have been reexamined; if one is to rely on them, the speakers of Chinese Pidgin Russian in Kiakhta used syllabified Russian words with a few Chinese, Mongolian, and Manchu words thrown in and predominantly

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Chinese syntax.[5] Another Chinese Pidgin Russian, different from the one spoken in Kiakhta, evolved in East Siberia and the Russian Far East towards the end of the nineteenth century among Russians and Siberian native peoples, such as the Nanai (also known as Gol'd; Chinese Hezhe), Orochen, and Udege. Its vocabulary was almost entirely Russian with a radically simplified morphology.[6]

The present article is a study of yet another pidgin, Harbin Sino-Russian Pidgin (Harbin SRP), here so named because it was spoken primarily in the city of Harbin and in small railway settlements along the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER). This pidgin is characterised by an almost equal blend of words of Russian and Chinese origin. In this equality it was similar to Russenorsk and different from the Chinese Pidgin Russian of Kiakhta and of the Russian Far East to such an extent that it cannot neatly be included in the Russian-based group of pidgins.

Harbin SRP was spoken for some six decades, from 1898 to the late 1950s, by Chinese, Manchus, Koreans, Russians, and Russian-speaking Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Tatars, Georgians, Armenians, Germans, Latvians, Lithuanians, Czechs, Yugoslavs, and members of other ethnic groups in Harbin. This pidgin has often been mentioned and quoted in various writings, but it has not yet been recorded to any significant extent or studied in much depth. All we have is a pioneering study by Alina Jabłońska (1917, Harbin–mid-2000s, Prague; her married name was Zakhova, though she wrote under the name Jabłońska), a former Harbin Pole, who knew Polish, Russian, and some Chinese and based her analysis largely on her personal knowledge: as she writes, "working in [a] Chinese, Russian, and Polish milieu in Manchuria, I had an opportunity to become directly acquainted with this pidgin and observe its specific features."[7]

When Alina Jabłońska gave me her article in Prague in 1995, it inspired me to continue my work on a Harbin SRP dictionary, which I have been compiling on and off for many years as a first step towards capturing and studying this now extinct pidgin. The major weakness of the dictionary is that my sources are predominantly Russian, due to the scarcity of Chinese references, though these were used whenever possible.

The main source was Russian newspapers, journals, travel accounts, and literary works published in Harbin in 1900-45 and in some pre-revolutionary newspapers, journals, and books published in Russia. These texts quote words or sentences in Harbin SRP in dilettantish transliterations, largely to add authenticity, colour, or a touch of humour or ridicule, and the quotes are sometimes extended with Russian words or explanations to clarify the meaning. A few short articles on Harbin SRP occasionally appeared in Harbin Russian newspapers.

Other sources for the dictionary are memoirs, recollections, and literary works written after the dispersal of Russian-speaking Harbin residents up to the early 1960s. Most were published in the United States, Europe, and Australia, where many of these residents settled, and some accounts followed shortly thereafter in post-Soviet Russia. I have also found SRP words quoted in a number of contemporary Chinese books and articles in a variety of transliterations into Chinese.

Yet another source was my interviews with former Harbin residents, mostly Russian and a few Chinese, who had spoken SRP. And, finally, there are my own recollections, for I, like Jabłońska, spoke and heard SRP in Harbin until I learned some Chinese; this factor gives my study a certain personal dimension. The important

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point is that all of the above sources display a large degree of uniformity, which ensures reliability of the data against purely anecdotal inventions.

Since the Harbin SRP dictionary has not yet been published, I offer the following brief description. The working language is English. Each entry gives a word in Russian and in Chinese (the latter whenever known), its spelling variations in both languages, translation into English, etymology, morphology, examples, comments in English, and sources. If known, the nationality and profession of the quoted speaker are indicated in the examples, as well as his or her status as a user or an outsider. Of course, a dictionary of an oral pidgin, such as Harbin SRP, has limited capacity to convey the richness and variety of pronunciations, deviations, intonations, and gestures. As Jabłońska pointed out, Harbin SRP developed "two ways of pronunciation, namely, pidgin as spoken by a European and as spoken by a Chinese, because each speaker pronounces the same words differently in accordance with habitual articulation of their languages."[8] As supplements, the dictionary includes texts in SRP (some of which are attempts at faithful recording, others concocted imitations) from Harbin periodicals and lists of SRP remnants in the language of Harbin Russians and in the Chinese language used in Harbin.

History

Many complex historical, political, and social factors contributed to the appearance, development, and stabilisation of this particular SRP in Harbin. Its rudiments emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century along the Sino-Russian border, mainly in Blagoveshchensk, Vladivostok, settlements along the Ussuri and Amur Rivers, and on the construction sites of the Trans-Siberian and Ussuri Railway; that is, in places with considerable numbers of Russian- and Chinese-speaking merchants, soldiers, residents, small traders, contractors, workers, smugglers, etc.

Some aspects of this development were recorded in accounts by Russian officials, travellers, and journalists. One Russian official, for example, went to Jilin at the time of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 and needed to hire an interpreter in Vladivostok; several Chinese offered their services, but what they claimed to be Russian turned out to be a developing form of SRP. As one said to him, "*Taka, moia mala-mala shaltai-boltai liuski*" (That's so, I can garble-chat a little in Russian). The same official overheard a Chinese soldier and a Russian Cossack trying to communicate. The soldier pointed at the Cossack's nose and asked "*Kaka?*" (What this?) and, on obtaining the answer, kept syllabifying Russian *nos* (nose) to *noza*. When the Cossack in turn wanted to know the Chinese for nose, his question was not understood until he asked: "*Kak familiia*?" (What's the surname?), and the soldier happily responded: *bizi* (鼻子 nose), which subsequently became *biza* in SRP.[9] This *kak familiia* later became a widespread equivalent of "How do you call this?" in Harbin SRP.

Speakers of this precursor of Harbin SRP were not only Chinese and Russians, but also Orochens, Nanai, and other Siberian natives in the area. One ethnographer even called it a "Russian-Chinese-Orochen Language," though his examples and quotes had Chinese and Russian words, but none derived from Orochen; as he pointed out, some Orochens spoke a little Russian and sent their children to Russian schools.[10]

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It was the construction of the CER in Northeast China that caused the spread and rapid development of this rudimental SRP. The railway employed many Chinese workers and contractors from other provinces, primarily Shandong and Hebei. And, once the railway was built, many Chinese and Russians stayed in Harbin to work in railway administration, maintenance, mechanical workshops, factories, and enterprises, or to trade and provide various services to the growing number of settlers of many nationalities. In the years to come, many more people came to Harbin to find work and settle. Before the 1917 Revolution, Russia considered the CER corridor with its settlements to be a virtual extension of Siberia, a *de facto* Russian colony, where Russian-speaking residents had an upper hand in most spheres of life and Russian was the dominant language.

During and after the Russian Civil War of 1918-22, an influx of émigrés swelled the Russian-speaking population in Harbin of 40,000 to more than 165,000, and the prerevolutionary settlers became émigrés by default. They were but a small part of some two million people who left Russia after the 1917 Revolution. In Europe and the United States, many émigré adults had great difficulty learning foreign languages, but their children went to local schools and grew up bilingual or started losing their Russian, while grandchildren became fully assimilated in their new homelands. In China the situation was different. The Russian-speaking Harbin residents felt themselves to be not so much in China, as in a well-established former Russian semi-colony. They sent their children to an expanded system of Russian schools and Russian post-secondary institutions, published periodicals and books in Russian, engaged in Russian cultural and artistic activities, and tenaciously retained the Russian lifestyle.

Three to four generations of these Russian speakers lived in Harbin from 1898 to the late 1950s. Over the course of these years, China regained its sovereignty in the Northeast, lost it to the Japanese occupation of 1931-45, and won it again in the Anti-Japanese War. But Harbin remained a virtual Russian enclave, a sizeable community of people who were displaced geographically, but maintained a powerful spiritual, cultural, and linguistic bond with their homeland. Language was a crucial factor in this bond, and they strove to maintain it. Until the late 1930s, "Harbin spoke Russian; the CER spoke Russian; schools, gymnasiums, universities taught in Russian. Newspapers, journals, books were published in Russian. Streets had Russian names; shops had Russian signs. Even the Chinese, with whom we *had to deal* [italics are mine], started to speak Russian, saving us from the necessity to learn Chinese."[11]

Russian-speaking residents knew Chinese to varying degrees. There were a number of scholars who had mastered Chinese in the Oriental Faculties of St. Petersburg and Vladivostok, and the Harbin Law Faculty and the Institute of Oriental Studies taught Chinese to produce translators and interpreters for the CER and its economic enterprises, though enrolment was low and the dropout rate high. There were brief and inadequate attempts to teach Chinese in Russian schools and at sporadic evening courses for CER employees. There was a Society of Russian Orientalists, although many members did not know Chinese, and a Society for the Study of the Manchurian Region, where some researchers focused on studying local flora, fauna, and archaeological finds, i.e. on fields that required no knowledge of Chinese.

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The vast majority of stateless and dispossessed émigrés continued the occupational, social, and recreational segregation towards the Chinese of the former semi-colonial years. No longer colonisers, they harboured "the complex of racial superiority of the colonizers, which would not let them speak with the natives in their language."[12] One former Harbin Russian, when told that he surely must have spoken fluent Chinese in his years in China, responded: "No, all Chinese in Harbin spoke Russian," and defensively added: "This is a fact. Under our influence many Chinese became Christians, very many fully mastered Russian, graduated from Russian schools and higher institutions, and treated Russians with love and respect."[13]

Highly idealised memoirs and politically tinged accounts, written by former Harbin Russians both abroad and in post-Soviet Russia, allege that Russian-speaking residents in China "were to a significant degree devoid of national narrow-mindedness and arrogance, treating people of other nationalities openly, without prejudice and bias," and that there were "no artificial partitions between Russians and Chinese." This particular author even suggested that the Chinese were somehow responsible for the fact that Russians did not learn Chinese: "in all Chinese enterprises dealing with Russians (be it a small shop or a department store) all Chinese spoke Russian and, being good linguists, quickly mastered Russian. Such [a] state of things, of course, did not stimulate Russians to learn Chinese, let alone acquaint themselves with life and national features of the Chinese."[14]

Another Harbin Russian bemoaned the disappearance of "the 'old' China," which "was turned to us with the smiling faces of our cooks, shopkeepers, suppliers, laundry men, tailors, and shoemakers. All these Zhangs, Songs, Lis served us tea in our European-style offices; they always managed to bring promptly a lit match to a cigarette, casually taken out of an expensive cigarette-case by a well-groomed hand of the proprietor; they were never late in home deliveries of a still-warm bread, wrapped in snow-white towels, for our breakfasts; they delivered ideally ironed and lightly starched summer dresses and suits for pennies…They were the best servants in the world in their white and blue cotton gowns and noiseless soft cloth shoes."[15]

These distorting and offensive accounts aside, many Russians considered the Chinese language to be not only extremely difficult—the proverbial *kitaiskaia gramota* ("real double Dutch")—but also unnecessary, and preferred that their children learn English at the local YMCA Gymnasium. This attitude was conveyed, explicitly and implicitly, to émigré children, who were indoctrinated in being inordinately proud of being Russian. Some were permitted to play with Chinese children, but, as they grew older, the friendships were broken by Russian parents, who feared attraction between young people and the dreaded intermarriage. On their side, most Chinese did not see the need to learn the language of the foreigners living in their homeland, and those who wanted to study Russian did not always have opportunities to do so.

Such a situation was ripe for the flourishing of Harbin SRP, and flourish it did for over six decades. It started as a primitive means of communication in a colonial setting and developed into a vital language, with some words gradually fading and many new ones introduced, especially for food and other necessities strictly rationed during World War II. In the 1950s, the decade of Sino-Soviet friendship, the Russian language was taught in many Chinese schools, institutes, and universities, and young Chinese began to speak Russian with various degrees of fluency.

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The same decade saw the mass exodus of Russian-speaking Harbin residents to countries all over the world. With their departure, SRP was no longer spoken in Harbin.

Description

At present, the Harbin SRP dictionary stands at well over 200 words. Pidgin vocabularies tend to range from 100 to a few thousand words; Russenorsk, for example, had 390 words with an active core of 150-200 words, "a not unusual number of words for a pidgin of its kind."[16] The dictionary clearly demonstrates that Harbin SRP consisted of both Russian and Chinese words in more or less equal proportions, a finding that differs significantly from Jabłońska's estimate that about 80% of words came from Russian.[17] One may note here that 47% of words in Russenorsk came from Norwegian and 39% from Russian, with the rest from other languages.[18]

Harbin SRP contained almost no words from the languages of other residents of Harbin and its vicinity, such as Manchus, Mongols, Koreans, Japanese, Poles, Jews, Tatars, Armenians, Georgians, Latvians, etc. This might have been due to the fact that Russian and Chinese were dominant languages in the area and most residents of these ethnic groups spoke either Russian or Chinese in addition to their native tongues. One of the very few non-Russian, non-Chinese words was the infamous *boika* (servant), taken from the English "boy" used in British colonies, with the addition of the Russian suffix *ka*. During the thirteen years of Manchukuo, 1932-45, no Japanese words entered Harbin SRP and no Russo-Japanese or Sino-Japanese pidgin emerged; the Japanese applied an increasing amount of pressure for everyone to learn Japanese.

Harbin SRP had clearly identifiable nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, numerals, and measure words, the last of which came from Chinese. Words of Russian origin lost their declensions, number, and conjugations, and underwent syllabification, especially of consonant clusters, while words of Chinese origin often became modified, in some instances almost beyond recognition. Although Harbin SRP, like other pidgins, aimed at maximum clarity with a minimum vocabulary, there were a noticeable number of synonymous words of Russian and Chinese origins, though some acquired subtle differences. For example, a house was called *doma* from Russian *dom* and *fanza* from Chinese 房子 *fanzi*, but the former usually referred to Russian-style or solid houses, while the latter was reserved for simple or poor Chinese dwellings.

The syntax was Chinese with a general word order of subject, predicate, object, unlike in Russian, where declensions indicated subject and object. Intonation and gestures played a large role in sentence structures and their variations.

Sociolinguistic Aspects

The vocabulary of Harbin SRP shows it was used in daily contacts on the ground level where Chinese and Russians toiled and lived in close proximity, namely, on the construction and operation of the CER and in its Main Mechanical Workshops, depots, and auxiliaries; in private factories and mills; in large and small shops, markets, bazaars, flea markets, and the black market; in households which had

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servants; in interactions with street peddlers, labourers, tailors, cobblers, craftsmen, masters at repairing all possible things, gardeners, etc.; on the streets all over the city, and particularly in the outlying suburbs and in working-class and poor areas.

The examples in the dictionary also reveal that—in contrast to, for example, Russenorsk and to some extent Kiakhta pidgin, which were used predominantly by men, by "a specialized group within the larger community, e.g. a professional group"[19]—Harbin SRP was widely spoken by people of both genders, old and young. Indeed, most Harbin women spoke SRP; it was their lot to deal with daily life. Another feature of Harbin SRP was that, due to the fact that it was used in a wide range of places and situations, its general vocabulary acquired "pockets" of words limited to certain professions and fields, such as, for example, in the CER Main Mechanical Workshops and on operating the CER.

Harbin SRP indicates that, especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century, there was a strong awareness of power relations in the region. People were defined by their real or perceived status, which mattered greatly in colonial or semi-colonial settings. For example, *kapitana* from Russian *kapitan* referred not only to a captain, but to any person in a position of power; *komandira* from Russian *komandir* was used for a commander or any military officer in charge. Such words reflected the circumstances of Russian intrusion into China, especially during the Yihetuan (Boxer) Uprising and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. *Starshinka* from Russian *starshina* was used for a foreman or any person overseeing a team of workers; *poliza*, from Russian *politsiia* for the police and policeman; *karaula* from Russian *karaul* for a guard, military or private; *kupeza* from Russian *kupets* for a large-scale merchant or trader. The Chinese language contributed such words as *dzhanguida* from 掌柜的 *zhangguide* for master, boss, owner; *fudutun* from 副督统 *fudutong* for Vice Governor-General or any high-ranking local official; *dzian'dziun'* from 将军 *jiangjun* for a General or a high military official. On the other end of the social scale, there were *kuli* for a labourer,[20] *kankhodnik* from 干活的 *ganhuode* with Russian suffix *nik* for a worker, *soldata* from Russian *soldat* for a soldier, or *tamafyrshchik*, where 大麻风儿 *damafenger* (drug addict) acquired the Russian suffix *shchik*.

Women were generally defined by their marital status: *babushka*, grandmother in Russian, a term that probably was widely used because of the Chinese respect for the elderly, referred to any married woman or a woman of marriageable age. It gradually fell out of use, but *madama* of French origin via Russian and *taitai* from 太太 *taitai* (lady, Mrs.) endured throughout the decades. Young girls were called *kunia* or *kun'ka*, with Russian suffix *ka,* from Chinese 姑娘 *guniang*.

References to ethnicity as a major boundary were important in these transnational contacts. Russians tended to call all Chinese, directly or indirectly, *manza* from Chinese 满族 *manzu* (Manchu), which sometimes acquired offensive connotations, especially in its crude variant *manziuk*. The Chinese were also called *kitaitsa*, *kitaiska*, or *kitaëza,* the latter with the Chinese suffix 子 *za*,[21] from Russian *kitaets* (a Chinese), which over the years superseded *manza*. Incidentally, *manza* produced an interesting participle *obmanzevshii*, which was used by Russian speakers in a derogatory reference to those few Russians or Europeans who adopted a semi-Chinese life-style and spoke the language. A most popular word for the Chinese, however, especially in addresses, was *khodia*, which came from the Chinese 伙计 *huoji*, originally a shop-assistant, but now expanded to mean a pal, a buddy, with a

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derogatory variant *khod'ka* and a friendly one *khodiushka*.[22] The Chinese called the Russians *lamoza* 老帽子 *laomaoza*, in reference to tall fur hats worn by the CER Cossack Guards of the early days, or, more likely, 老毛子 *laomaoza*, in reference to the ample beards and moustaches of the Russians. Another word was *ruska* or *luska*, coming from Russian *russkii* (a Russian).

Nouns and adverbs often doubled as adjectives when placed before nouns as is prevalent in both Chinese and Russian word orders. *Manza-kapitan*, for example, meant a Chinese captain, *manza-madama* a Chinese woman, *ruska babushka* a Russian woman, but a reverse word order was used for *babushka-kapitan* for the wife of an officer or a military man. On the other hand, the large Russian icon of St. Nicholas of Myra at the Harbin Central Railway Station was called *vokzala stalika* from Russian *vokzal* (railway station) and *starik* (old man), following the Chinese word order of 火车站的老头儿 *huochezhande laotour*, railway station's old man.

Employment, trade, and service involved money. Here, *den'ga* from Russian *den'gi* (money) and *rubeli* from *rubl'* (rouble) were used alongside *chena* from Chinese 钱 *qian* (money). The latter gave rise to such set expressions as *doshichen* from 多少钱 *duoshaoqian* (how much?); tips were sometimes called *samochen* from 三毛钱 *sanmaoqian* (thirty cents), regardless of the amount. The numerals tended to be Chinese and were used with the basic Chinese quantifier 个 *ge*: 一个 *yige* (one), 两个 *liangge* (two), 三个 *sange* (three), etc., with the result that many Russians who did not speak Chinese could still count in Chinese. The days were counted by using *sontsa* from Russian *solntse* (sun) in the Chinese sense of 日子 *rizi* (days), an interesting instance of imposing the notion from one language onto the word in another.

As the dictionary shows, many words were related to selling and buying food and household objects, and their range expanded during the harsh conditions of the wartime. The Chinese, for example, contributed 白菜 *baicai* (Chinese cabbage), 高粱 *gaoliang* (sorghum), *tufa* from 豆腐 *doufu* (bean curd), *fyntëza* from 粉条子 *fentiaozi* (noodles), *dzëzy* from 饺子 *jiaozi* (dumplings), *manty* from 馒头 *mantou* (steamed buns), 饱子 *baozi* (steamed buns with stuffing), 冰果 *bingguo* (ice-cream on a stick), *tanhula* from 糖胡芦 *tanghulu* (caramelised hawthorn fruit on a stick), etc. The Russian language brought *ogureza* from *ogurets* (cucumber), *lieba* or *dalieba* from *khleb* (bread), *meso* from *miaso* (meat), *supa* from *sup* (soup), etc. The word for a cheap restaurant, *kharchedan*, was formed from Russian colloquial *kharchi* (grub) and Chinese 店 *dian* (hotel, inn). Local rough alcohol was known as *khanshin* or *khana*. Some sources say that the etymology of *khanshin* is not known, but one early traveller mentioned that he was offered "Chinese vodka, *khanshin* as the Russians call it, or *hodzhiu* [火酒 *huojiu*?], as the Chinese call it."[23]

Trade and service inevitably involved bargaining, disagreements, and accusations of cheating. The word for a swindle or a swindler came from Russian *moshennik*, reduced, rather confusingly for non-speakers of SRP, to *mashinka*, which sounded like a diminutive form of Russian *mashina* (machine, car, automobile). An interesting feature was that linguistic boundaries did not stop either the Russians or the Chinese from learning swear words from each other and becoming quite fluent in their use; many could not speak the language of the other, but could swear in it.

Personal pronouns were used in their Russian possessive feminine forms *moia*

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(my), *tvoia* (your, familiar) and occasionally *vasha* (your, polite and plural), *nasha* (our), and third-person possessive masculine *ego* pronounced in the Russian way as *evo* and used indiscriminately for men, women, and things. This use of possessive pronouns can be found in Russenorsk and in pidgins spoken in Kiakhta and in Siberia and the Russian Far East, perhaps because of their unambiguous two-syllable structures. Demonstrative pronouns came from the Chinese: *chega* from Chinese 这个 *zhege* (this), *nega* from Chinese 那个 *nage* (that). *Shima*, from the Chinese interrogative pronoun 甚么 *shenme*, in its colloquial pronunciation *shemma*, was used widely to mean what, why, what for: *Shima tvoia ne labotai?* (Why aren't you working?).

Verbs were limited to customary and frequent actions, such as working, selling, buying, eating, sleeping, resting, etc. Those of Russian origin were used in the imperative of the second-person singular familiar form. Apart from the fact that the singular form ended in a vowel and merged with the Chinese syllabification, the usage suggests that the nature of the early contacts was limited to Russians giving orders to subordinates and inferiors, which usually were in second-person singular imperative, not the polite second-person plural form. Moreover, members of the lower classes generally used the familiar form in their contacts with equals. Some verbs were often doubled in the Chinese manner: *beri-beri* from Russian imperative *beri* (take!), *sypi-sypi* from Russian *spi* (sleep!), *kushi-kushi* from Russian *kushai* (eat!). One verbal expression combined a noun and a verb to express a threat of a physical punishment, *piliuli davai* (literally: give pills!), which came from the Russian notion of swallowing a bitter pill.

The past tense for Russian-origin verbs was formed by adding the Chinese indicator of past tense or completion of action 了 *le*, pronounced *la* or *lo* and close in sound to the Russian past-tense endings *la* (fem.) and *lo* (neut.): thus, *taskailo* (carried) from Russian *taskai* (carry!), *pomirailo* (died) from Russian colloquial *pomirai* (die!), *pochiniailo* (repaired) from Russian *pochiniai* (repair!). One Harbin Russian newspaper entitled a news item on the death of a Pope *"Konchaila"* (Died), a verb made from *konchai* (finish!), which elicited an indignant letter to another newspaper from Catholic readers offended by the use of the SRP word for such a sensitive topic.[24] The verbs were often used in a wide variety of related meanings. For example, the past tense of the verb *lomailo* (broke) from Russian *lomai* (break!) was used to indicate a defeat, a broken limb, or an illness. During the Russo-Japanese War, a Chinese orderly in a hospital referred to a Russian doctor on an alcoholic binge as "*Shibko lomailo kapitana"* (Very sick boss).[25]

Verbs of Chinese origin were not as numerous and retained their form, such as *chifan* from 吃饭 *chifan* (to eat), which doubled as a noun for food, *kankhodi* from 干活 *ganhuo* (to work), or *sute* from Chinese 睡觉 *shuijiao* (to sleep), the latter having a Russian-origin synonym *sypi-sypi* from *spi* (sleep!). A popular verb *fangulia* from the expression 翻过来 *fanguolai* (turn) came to mean to turn over, to go over, upset, or escape; the nickname of one Russian pocket thief in Harbin was *Fanguli*.[26]

Harbin SRP was capable of great expressiveness, which was important in negotiations over offering and providing goods and services and arguing about quality, value, and cost. The amounts were often rendered by such Russian-origin adverbs as *mnogo-mnogo* (many) and *malo-malo* (few, several) with the typical Chinese

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doubling. Also very useful were *kokoida* from Chinese 快快地 *kuaikuaidi* (fast, quick) and *mamandi* from Chinese 慢慢地 *manmandi* (slowly, wait). Approval and disapproval were expressed by *kho* and *pukho* from the Chinese 好 *hao* (good) and 不好 *buhao* (bad), and by *korosho* from Russian *khorosho* (good), the latter amplified by *shibko* (very) of Russian colloquial origin, as in *shibko korosho* (very good). The most popular word for approval and admiration was *shango* for good, fine, perfect, and its negative *pushango* with the aid of the Chinese negation 不 *bu*. My informants suggested that it might have come from 山高 *shanggao* (mountain-high), 上好 *shanghao* and 挺好 *tinghao* (very good), *tinggao* 挺高 (very high), or 上不过 *shanbuguo* (unsurpassable). In 1903, one enterprising Harbin Russian named his distillery "Shango."[27]

Another way of emphasising availability and quality of goods and services or to stress the existing state of things was to use a word order in which verbs of existence and possession were placed at the end of the sentence. In such sentences, *esi* from Russian *est'* (to be, to be present, to have) was not omitted, as it is in Russian declarative sentences in the present tense, but instead placed at the end of the sentence: *Kapitana, shibko khudo esi* (Captain, things are very bad); *Moia lomailo esi* (I am injured, I am sick)*; Siankuaza esi* (I have melons); *Shango esi* (It is good). In negation, the Russian colloquial *netu* (not, not available) was used in the same emphatic sense at the end of the sentence: *Moia mashinka netu* (I am not a swindler), *Moia khunkhuza netu* (I am not a bandit). The Chinese verb 有 (to have) and its negation 没有 *meiyou* were used in the same emphatic word order: *Ego skoro kantami iu* (He will soon be executed), *Chena malo-malo iu* (I have a little money). Interrogative sentences followed the same pattern: *Lieba esi?* (Do you have bread?)*, Ershiga rubeli iu?* (Do you have twenty rubles?).

Harbin SRP had very few words to convey emotions, personal feelings, or abstract notions; one could mention, but certainly not discuss, such topics as politics, history, art, or literature. As the majority of lexical items show, it was a language of utilitarian contacts, communication, and survival, spoken predominantly by people of the lower classes, both Chinese and Russians, who lived and worked side-by-side through the harsh decades of the first half of the twentieth century.

At the time, neither the Russian nor the Chinese language had the word "pidgin," and speakers and observers struggled to find descriptive names for Harbin SRP. Russians referred to it as Special or Mixed Russo-Chinese and Sino-Russian Language (*osobyi russko-kitaiskii iazyk, smeshannyi russko-kitaiskii*) and Harbin Poles did the same (*język mieszany chińsko-rosyjski*). Other names were Russo-Chinese Jargon, Sino-Russian Jargon, and Harbin Jargon (*russko-kitaiskii zhargon*, *kitaisko-russkii zhargon*, and *kharbinskii zhargon*); Russian Harbin Dialect (*russkii kharbinskii dialekt*); Russian-Chinese Volapük and Local Volapük (*russko-kitaiskii volapiuk* and *mestnyi volapiuk*); Russian-Chinese Vernacular (*russko-kitaiskii govor*); Broken Russian language; and Harbin Broken Russian Dialect (*kharbinskoe russkoe lomanoe narechie*). Colloquially it was simply "yours-mine" (*tvoia-moia*).[28]

The Chinese speakers called it Language of the Hairy Ones (毛子话 *maozihua*) and Dialect of the Hairy Ones (毛子调 *maozidiao*), accentuating its foreignness, or simply Harbin Language (哈尔滨话 *Haerbinhua*). Chinese scholars describe it as Sino-Russian Periphery Language (中俄边缘语 *Zhong-E bianyuanyu*), or Pidgin

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Russian (洋泾浜俄语 *yangjingbang Eyu*) by analogy with Pidgin English (洋泾浜英语 *yangjingbang Yingyu*).[29]

Speakers' perceptions and attitudes towards Harbin SRP are individual and differ widely. A personal reflection, for what it's worth, is that both Russians and Chinese pragmatically appreciated its usefulness and occasionally used it with a sense of humour. Jabłońska observed, as I often did, that when the Chinese spoke SRP, they usually tried to insert as many Russian words as they happened to know, and the Russians did the same with Chinese words.[30] This demonstrated a need and a willingness to meet the other side more than half way, to show goodwill and pride in one's acquired knowledge of the language of the other, no matter how minimal. In the late 1920s, in the Harbin prison on the bank of the Sungari, Chinese and Russian prisoners sang an old Russian prison song: *Solntsa iula i meiula, / vody fanza pushango, / karaula iula-iula, / meiiu fanguli okno*; the SRP words are underlined here. The Russian original is: *Solntse vskhodit i zakhodit, / a v tiur'me moei temno, / karaul'nyi khodit, khodit, / sterezhet moe okno* (The sun rises and sets, / but it is dark in my prison, / a guard keeps walking, / guarding my window).[31]

Harbin Russian newspapers and texts quoted Harbin SRP words and expressions as spoken mostly by the Chinese and sometimes in dialogues between a Chinese and a Russian speaker. Some Russians were fond of amusing themselves by creating little texts or semi-satirical parodies of Russian poems in SRP. The Chinese did the same. One SRP word gave rise to a Chinese joke which begins with two somewhat nonsensical lines to the effect of seven plus one, 七交母加一交母 *qijiaomu jia yijiaomu*, and ends with the tag line 他就巴交母了 *ta jiu bajiaomule* (and so he up and went), with *ba* 巴 as a homonym for *ba* 八, eight. This *bajiaomule* was an SRP word *pazëmula* (let's go) formed from Russian *poidëm* (let's go!).[32]

SRP words occasionally found their way into the poems of prominent Harbin Russian poets, such as Arsenii Nesmelov, Aleksandra Parkau, Leonid Eshchin, and Nikolai Svetlov, to name a few. In Marianna Kolosova's poem, for example, a young émigré girl "*nynche s khodiami v lavchonkakh / taratorit po-kitaiski, / […] / i torguetsia svirepo: / 'Igoyan khunkhuza vasha!'*" The quote, with SRP words underlined, translates as "now with the Chinese in small shops / she chatters in Chinese /…/ and bargains fiercely: / 'You are just like a bandit!'"[33] It is noteworthy that her use of SRP is described as "chattering in Chinese."

Harbin SRP left some traces in both languages. After leaving China, in their second emigration all over the world, many former Russian-speaking residents, particularly of the older generation, continued to insert SRP words of Chinese origin in their language in nostalgic or humorous echoes of their Chinese life, such as, for example, *chifanit'* (to eat), *fanza* (house), *shango* (great), *meiiubanfa* (nothing can be done about it), *suibian* (as you like). One Harbin Russian, very supportive of my work on the dictionary, once sent me an e-mail that began: *Shima tvoia ne pishi?* (Why haven't you been writing?).

In China, the decade of the Cultural Revolution eliminated many traces of the Russian presence in Harbin, but a few remnants of Harbin SRP can be found in such widely used words as *leba* or *daleba* (bread, from Russian *khleb*), *supa* (soup, from Russian *sup*), *dibao* (depot, from Russian *depo*). The 秋林 Qiulin Department Store (former Russian I.Ia. Churin Store) sells its own brand of 格瓦斯 *gewasi*, Russian-style *kvas*, a popular fermented bread drink.[34]

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Conclusion

Harbin SRP developed before the 1917 Revolution when Russia had the upper hand in the region and was used throughout the harsh decades of the 1920s–50s when Russia and Russian-speaking residents lost their political and social dominance. As the dictionary demonstrates, its specificity lay in the lexical equality of the Russian and Chinese languages. Harbin SRP was a contact language limited primarily to work and trade and, with rare exceptions, did not lead to intermingling and socialising. On the one hand, it served well as a most resourceful and pragmatic breach in the linguistic and cultural boundaries that separated these two ethnocentric and thus linguistically and culturally isolated communities in one city. On the other, SRP reinforced these boundaries, and the vast majority of Russian-speaking and Chinese-speaking Harbin residents saw each other through its limitations.

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Notes

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1 Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, Map 1 and 2.
2 Ibid., 620-1.
3 Broch, "Russenorsk," 21-65; Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, 621.
4 Nichols, "The Bottom Line," 239-40; Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, 624-6.
5 Cherepanov, "Kiakhtinskoe kitaiskoe narechie," 370-8; Maksimov, *Na Vostoke*, 485-583; Kudinov, *V chuzhikh kraiakh*, 18-19; Neumann, "Zur chinesisch-russischen Behelfssprache," 237-51; Stern, "Myth and Facts," 63-72.
6 Arsen'ev, *V gorakh Sikhote-Alinia*; Arsen'ev, *Po Ussuriiskomu kraiu*.
7 Jabłońska, "Język mieszany chińsko-rosyjski," 157.
8 Ibid., 159.
9 Bel'kovich, "V chuzhoi strane", 164. Note that this *shaltai-boltai* was used in Kiakhta Chinese Pidgin Russian as *shelatai-baletai* in the sense of "somehow." See Cherepanov, 376.
10 Lopatin, *Leto sredi orochei*, 1-33.
11 Rachinskaia, *Pereletnye ptitsy*, 7.
12 Jabłońska, "Język mieszany chińsko-rosyjski," 158.
13 Petlin, "Iubileinyi sbornik," 198.
14 Melikhov, *Man'chzhuriia dalekaia i blizkaia*,

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293, 267-8, 277.
15 Rachinskaia, *Pereletnye ptitsy*, 93.
16 Sebba, *Contact Languages,* 51; Broch, "Russenorsk," 30; Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, 623.
17 Jabłońska, "Język mieszany chińsko-rosyjski," 162, and footnote 26 on 166.
18 Broch, "Russenorsk," 47.
19 Stern, "Social Functions of Speaking Pidgin," 162, 169.
20 I am grateful to Dr. Mark Gamsa for pointing out that Jonathan Porter in *Macau: The Imaginary City,* 205, footnote 60, contests the explanation of *kuli*, spelt in English as *coolie*, as coming from the Chinese 苦力 *kuli* and refers to OED, 1961, which gives the source of the word as Tamil. *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, 1998, gives the etymology as "perhaps from *Kulí*, an aboriginal tribe from Gujarat, India."
21 Note that the character 子 *zi* is pronounced *za* when used as a suffix of nouns indicating objects, persons, professions, etc.
22 Sergei Tret'iakov, "Den Shi-khua," 301. The main character, a Chinese studying in Moscow, allegedly tells the author that the word originally meant a buddy, but the Russians in Northeast China turned into an insult. I am grateful to Dr. Mark Gamsa for drawing my attention to this unlikely interpretation.
23 Garin-Mikhailovskii, "Po Koree, Man'chzhurii i Liaodunskomu poluostrovu," 140.
24 "Besstydnoe koshchunstvo," *Zaria,* 25.1. 1922.
25 Kozlova, "Pod voennoi grozoi," Vol. 134, 555.
26 "Khronika," *Kharbinskii vestnik*, September 14, 1911.
27 Jabłońska, "Język mieszany chińsko-rosyjski," 162; Valerii Pereleshin. "Russko-kitaiskii volapiuk"; Advertisement, "Pervyi v Man'chzhurii vinokurno-vodochnyi zavod A.I. Chaikovskii i Ko., khutor 'Shango' bliz Kharbina," *Kharbinskii vestnik*, July 6, 1903. One observer of a Chinese Pidgin Russian spoken along the Amur recorded *shangavde* / *pushangavde* meaning good and bad; see Maksimov, 342.
28 S. Runich, "V Man'chzhurii," 619, 622; Jabłońska, "Język mieszany chińsko-rosyjski," 158; W., "Iz zhizni na Dal'nem Vostoke," 5, 24; Levitskii, "Kitaiskii teatr," 98; I.S., "Russko-kitaiskie zhargony"; Tutaev, *U istokov,* 74; *Skazochnaia byl'*, 193; Serebrennikov, *Moi vospominaniia*, 45; Sladkovskii, *Znakomstvo s Kitaem*, 112; Krasnov, *Po Azii,* 199; Salatko-Petrishche, "Russko-kitaiskii volapiuk"; Rudakopov, "Khunhkuzy," 928, 931; Kozlova, "Pod voennoi grozoi," 555; Pavlovskii, "Russo-kitaiskii govor"; and my informants.
29 Zhao Luchen, "Haerbin Zhong-E bianyuanyu xiaowang tanyin," 123.
30 Jabłońska, "Język mieszany chińsko-rosyjski," 166.
31 A personal recollection. A variant is quoted in B. Zalesskii, *Man'chzhurskie zapiski,* 42.
32 A Cheng, *Harbinren*, 031, quotes the joke as given above; another variant recorded by the author, perhaps wrongly, has 家 *jia* instead of 交 *jiao*.
33 Kolosova, "Pis'mo is Afriki."
34 Advertisement in Harbin newspaper *Xinwanbao*, September 21, 2010.

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