

DIPLOMATIC LETTERS CONCERNING THE ENGLISH ASIENTO CONTRACT

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THE ENGLISH ASIENTO CONTRACT

The English Asiento Contract refers to a treaty between Phillip V and Queen Anne (later George I and George II), that is, between Spain and England. It was ratified in the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), which was signed after the Spanish War of Succession (1702-1713). It consisted of giving to the English party the slave trade from Africa to the West Indies for 30 years. It involved the delivery of 144,000 *piezas de India* (4,800 per year), for which the English party had to pay 33 ^{1/3} pesos.

The British *Asiento* followed the French *Asiento* Contract model, but with the supplementary addition of the annual ship. One of the objectives of the British through the Peace of Utrecht was to acquire the Asiento Contract, removing the French, in order to enter into the Spanish America through a back door.

The Contract was signed on 26 March 1713, but, because some aspects were not clear, an amended treaty was needed. Thus, in June 1716 the “Convention for explaining the Articles of the Assiento” was signed. The Contract¹ consisted of 42 clauses, which were written by the English party

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¹ ARCHIVO GENERAL DE INDIAS (AGI), Indiferente General, 2769

and accepted by the King of Spain, despite the objection of *El Consejo de Indias*. The Contract had an extra clause, referring to the Annual Ship, a privilege conceded “in compensation for expected losses in the slave trade.”² The Annual Ship consisted of the permission of sending 500 tons of merchandise tax-free (which, after 1716, consisted of 650 tons because no ship had been dispatched between 1713 and 1716) every year at the time of the fair (in the Convention Treaty it was agreed to hold a fair annually in America) and once the Spanish fleet had arrived in America (the 1716 treaty allowed the merchandise to be sold after four months from arrival if the Spanish ships had not arrived).³

English and Spanish diplomatic letters: structure and examples

The letter is the text type chosen because it was the most prolific document: correspondence was the fastest way of communicating and letters frequently enclosed other text types. When sending a missive, accounts, memorandums, instructions, passports, etc. could be found in the same envelope. Letters between the two nations were written using the language of diplomacy.

Some of the letters studied were kept by Thomas Gerladino (1682-1755), originally named Thomas Fitzgerald, who watched over the interests of Spain, firstly in the London based Court of Directors of the South Sea Company and secondly as Ambassador in London.

A) SPANISH LETTERS

OPENING

- Excelentísimo Señor,
- Muy Señor Mío,

² V.G., SORSBY, *British Trade with Spanish America under the Asiento 1713-1740*. Thesis presented to the University of London. Department of History, University College, London, p. 1, 1975

³ V.G., SORSBY, op. cit. R., DONOSO ANES, “Accounting and Slavery: The English Company of the South Sea Accounts: first period 1713-1722”. En VIII World Congress of Accounting Historians, Madrid, 2000. R., DONOSO ANES, “Accounting and Slavery: The English Company of the South Sea Accounts, 1713-1722”, *The European Accounting Review* 11:2, pp. 441-452, 2002. R., DONOSO ANES, “El barco anual de permiso del Asiento de Esclavos con Inglaterra: el caso del viaje a la Veracruz del navío La Real Carolina en 1732”, *Revista de Historia Naval* 93, pp. 67-100, 2006. R., DONOSO ANES, “Un análisis sucinto del Asiento de esclavos con Inglaterra (1713-1750)”, *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 64:2, pp. 105-144, 2007. R. DONOSO ANES, “Los navíos anuales de permiso del Asiento de Esclavos con Inglaterra hasta la feria de Portobello de 1731”. *Revista de Historia Naval*, 2008, p.100. R. DONOSO ANES, “La Compañía del Asiento y la Guerra de la Oreja de Jenkins: sus causas económicas y algunos aspectos contables relacionados”. *Revista de Contabilidad*, 2008, 11:1, pp. 9-40.

BODY

- Dirijo con ésta a manos de Vucencia [...]
- Con fecha de [...] tengo escrito a Vucencia a que me refiero
- En carta de [...] di cuenta de [...]
- En carta de [...] da cuenta Vucencia de [...]
- En carta de [...] cuyo recibo acusé [...]
- En carta del presente se sirve Vucencia [...]
- Por carta fecha en [...]
- Por carta de [...] me previene Vucencia quedar enterado
- Logrando la ocasión del presente [...]
- En respuesta de la con que Vucencia me honra de ayer [...]
- [...] en respuesta a [...]
- [...] he tenido por mi obligación escribirle [...]
- [...] a la que me dieron respuesta en [...]
- [...] quedo instruido de que enterado el Rey [...]
- Y hallándome informado [...]
- Y en la misma conformidad [...]
- Con esta noticia en [...]
- Habiendo yo instado a la Dirección de la Compañía [...]
- [...] se ajustó con la Compañía Real de Inglaterra [...]
- [...] los derechos de esclavos y utilidades del Real Navío [...]
- [...] de haberse visto en la Asamblea de Directores de la Compañía del Asiento [...]
- El Rey se sirvió conceder [...]
- [...] conforme(s) a lo estipulado por el Tratado de Asiento
- [...] lo que le servirá a Vucencia poner en la Real noticia [...]
- [...] para que Vucencia lo ponga en la Real noticia [...]
- [...] por lo que pueda importar al Real Servicio de Su Majestad se halle con las noticias que contienen
- [...] de lo que se servirá Vucencia dar cuenta a Su Majestad y instruirme de su Real ánimo
- [...] avisan los factores de la Compañía del Asiento a la Dirección [...]
- [...] haber sido de la Real aprobación [...]
- [...] haber salido de aquel puerto [...]

- [...] no tenía otra cosa que noticiarles que [...]
- [...] en vista de [...]
- [...] remitiendo la traducción de [...]
- [...] de la traducción que acompaña a ésta [...]
- Asimismo, me veo obligado a [...]
- [...] servirán darme su respuesta [...]
- [...] Por cuanto [...]
- [...] me previene Vucencia quedar el Rey enterado [...]
- [...] cuya traducción [...]
- [...] a razón de [...]
- [...] en virtud de lo acordado [...]
- [...] y en orden a [...]
- [...] cuya gracia [...]
- [...] por la falta de inteligencia en [...]
- Lo que he tenido por digno de la noticia de Vucencia
- Lo que he dirigido en su ausencia [...]

CLOSING

- Dios guarde a Vucencia los muchos años que le quedad y es menester
- [Excelentísimo Señor.] Bendigo las manos de Vucencia su más rendido servido

B) ENGLISH LETTERS

OPENING

- Sir,
- My Lord,
- May it please Your Grace,
- Gentlemen,

BODY

- By Your Grace's letter of [...]
- In obedience to your order dated [...]
- In obedience to His Majesty's commands signified in Your Grace's letter [...]

- We beg leave to acquaint Your Grace that [...]
- Together with your letter of [...]
- I herewith transmit to Your Grace [...]
- [...] and beg Your Grace's favour [...]
- As to said ships being seized by virtue of [...]
- The Court of the Royal Asiento Company have certain advice that [...]
- We have now delivered to you [...]
- You are pleased to impart to me [...]
- That with regard to what is alleged [...]
- [...] I cannot avoid applying to Your Grace [...]
- [...] for the confidence reposed in him [...]
- [...] they had declared that [...]
- [...] they could accept such assignments [...]
- His Britanic majesty had been pleased to order an enquiry [...]
- [...] for making the payments in New Spain relating to [...]
- [...] and the said Company [...]
- [...] upon the representation which the Company had made [...]
- I should have been hartily glad of [...]
- The Court of Directors therefore command me to acquaint you [...]
- Thus, Sir, you perceive that [...]
- These Royal Intentions [...]
- [...] and be dispatched here with all convenient speed [...]
- [...] answers to all objections which may arise [...]
- [...] that you will be pleased to [...]
- [...] this has rendered [...]
- I may soon have that honour [...]
- [...] having measured all the Annual Ships [...]
- [...] which I had the honour some time since [...]
- [...] as well as to common Justice and Equity [...]
- [...] you gentlemen may easily inform them [...]
- If these irregularities are not sufficient inducements [...]
- I can venture to say it would be more agreeable [...]
- [...] there is great reason to suspect that many of the debts [...]

- [...] the good understanding that happily subsists between the two nations [...]
- [...] instead of profit the company have sustain considerable losses [...]
- [...] that by the [...] article of the Asiento Treaty it appears [...]
- [...] where the reciprocal advantages that both nations might probably receive thereby [...]

CLOSING

- I am with very great Respect Sir Your most humble & most obedient Servant
- By Order of the Court of Directors of the Royal Assiento Company
- My Lord, Your Grace's most obedient and most humble Servant

Language and terminology

Diplomatic language⁴ is ceremonial and formal and this is reflected in special patterns that are always repeated. It is hidden baggage where there are several messages being given at once and correctness softens the impact of negative messages. Historical and political contexts also play a fundamental role when deciphering the meaning of a diplomatic text.

A) SPANISH LANGUAGE

In 1713 the *Real Academia Española* was founded by a group of intellectuals under the command of Juan Manuel Fernández Pacheco, in order to establish the Spanish language grammar and orthography rules, thereby determining principles that would preserve the language, and avoid its fragmentation into other languages (see Carreter, 1985 [1949] and Lapesa, 1983). The Academia published the *Diccionario de Autoridades* (1726-1739), *Orthographía* (1741 and 1763), *Gramática* (1771). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that in 1743, Benito Martínez Gómez Gayoso published the first Grammar of the Spanish language.

In the documents of the *Asiento* Contract features that characterized the un-ruled Spanish language⁵ can be seen:

⁴ J. KURBALIJA and H. SLAVIK, (ed.), *Language and Diplomacy*. Malta: Universidad de Malta. Diplo Projects, 2001.

⁵ R., LAPESA, *Historia de la lengua española*. Madrid, Gredos, pp. 418-434, 1983

Differences in spelling	“b” and “v” are indistinctly use
Differences in circumflex accents	Use of “ss” and “s
Shortened words	“x” for /ks/, /gs/ and /x/
the upper case letter are used at the beginning of nouns	“cz” instead of “cc”
“de el” instead of “del”	“ff” instead of “f”
“u” and “v” are indistinctly vowel and consonant	“tt” instead of “t”
“i” and “y” can be used either as vowel or consonant	“cc” instead of “c”
There is confusion about when to use “h” or not	“j” instead of “g”
The following pairs of consonants are to be seen: “ph”, “th”, “ch”	“z” instead of “c”
Introduction of “q” as influence from Latin	Sometimes “e” instead of “i”
	“c” instead of “s”
	Phrases and words with a different meaning to the present-day meaning

Leísmo was already to be found:

Por tanto habiendo visto, y examinado el referido Tratado, he venido en aprobarle, y ratificarle [...] ⁶

B) ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Correctness, regulation, standardization, stability, rules and respect for authority are the features that characterized the desires of the 18th-century intellectuals concerned about the future of the English language. Johnson’s dictionary (1775) and the failed attempts to establish an Academy of the English language are clear examples.

In the Documents of the *Asiento* Contract the following characteristics of the English language are to be seen:

⁶ THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES. PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE KEW. London, SP 108/153

Differences in spelling	apostrophe in place of <i>l</i> , which was not normally pronounced” (Strang, B.M.H., 1970 [1991]: 109)
Shortened words	
French words were adapted according to Latin	Apostrophes were used marking real and imaginary omissions
Introduction of an unhistorical “c” and “p”	A lower case “s” in an elongated form was to be seen at the beginning of a word, in the middle of it or when written twice, it could be mistaken for an “f”
Y ^e instead of “you”	Use of “&” for “and”
Introduction of the Greek “rhy-”	Phrases and words with a different meaning to the present-day meaning
The native word “coud” was altered to could on the model of “should” and “would”. “In consequence, any of them might be written with an	

C) TERMINOLOGY

The following would be an example of the terminology used:

Table 1
Terminology of “Asiento de Negros”⁷

Spanish	English	Meaning
Agente	Agent	El que tiene por oficio gestionar negocios ajenos (DRAE); en este caso, de la <i>South Sea Company</i> o de la Corona española. A person or company that represents another person or company (Longman dictionary); in this case agents are those representing the South Sea Company or the Crown of Spain.
Apreso	Seizure	The act of suddenly taking control or possession of something (Longman dictionary). It was a common practice by the Spanish party in order to fight against contraband.

⁷ DICCIONARIO NÁUTICO TRILINGÜE: <<http://www.diccionario-nautico.com.ar/trilingue.php>>.

DICCIONARIO (2003): *Espasa términos jurídicos. Español-Inglés. English-Spanish*. Madrid.

DICCIONARIO DE LA REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA: <http://dle.rae.es/>

Arenza	Harangue	<p>Discurso por lo general solemne y elevado de tono (DRAE); ante la Asamblea de Directores se pronunciaban muchas arengas.</p> <p>A loud long angry speech that criticizes or blames people, or tries to persuade them (Longman dictionary); a lot of harangues were pronounced at the Assembly of Directors; the Kings pronounce also harengues in the Parliament</p>
Arquear	Gauge	<p>Medir la cabida de una embarcación (DRAE); en este caso la del navío anual.</p> <p>To calculate something by using a particular instrument or method (Longman dictionary); Thomas Geraldino was ordered to gauge the Annual Ship.</p>
Asamblea de Directores Asamblea General	Assembly of Directors General Assembly	<p>The reunion of the shareholders of the South Sea Company, where decisions were taken.</p>
Asentista	Contractor Supplier	<p>El que hace asiento o contrata con el gobierno o con el público, para la provisión o suministro de víveres u otros efectos [...] (DRAE).</p> <p>En este caso la Corona de Gran Bretaña, por medio de la South Sea Company, contrata con la corona española el monopolio del tráfico de negros de África a las Indias.</p> <p>A person or company that makes an agreement to do work or provide goods in large amounts for another company (Longman dictionary).</p> <p>In a general sense any party who engages by contract, but particularly and usually a person, frequently called an independent contractor, who contracts to do work and perform services for another but in so doing remains independent, does not become a servant or employee of the person for whom he does the work, and is not subject to detailed control and direction in how he does the work required (The Oxford Companion to Law).</p> <p>In this particular case the Crown of Great Britain draws up a contract with the Crown of Spain through the South Sea Company the supply of negroes from Africa to the West Indies.</p>

Asiento de Negros	Asiento Contract	The <i>Asiento</i> Contract (1713-1750) refers to the agreement of the Crowns of England (Queen Anne, George I and George II) and Spain (King Felipe V) after the Spanish Succession War (1702-1713). The Contract had significant economic and political consequences. It meant the South Sea Company's monopoly of the Slave trade (144.000 <i>piezas de India</i>) from Africa to the West Indies.
Compañía [Real] del Asiento de Negros [de Inglaterra]	[Royal] Company South Sea Company (Ssc)	Joint stock venture created by act of Parliament in may 1711. Speculation in the company's stock led to a great economic crisis known as the South Sea Bubble in 1720.
Compañía Del Mar Del Sur Compañía Inglesa		
Cuentas	Accounts	<p>Pliego o papel en que está escrita alguna razón compuesta por una o varias partidas, que al fin se suman o se restan (DRAE).</p> <p>Las cuentas anuales [en este caso, quinquenales] comprenden el balance, la cuenta de pérdidas y ganancias y la memoria (art. 34 C. de C.) (Espasa jurídico).</p> <p>An exact record of the money that a company has received and the money it has spent (Longman dictionary).</p> <p>According to the 29th article of the <i>Asiento</i> Contract, every five years the British party had to present the accounts to the Spanish party, as they were stipulated in the Treaty.</p>
Derecho de Visita	Derecho de Visita	<p>Derecho que permitía interceptar los navíos británicos para verificar su carga por parte de los guardacostas y los navíos reales.</p> <p>Guardacostas and royal ships had the right to intercept British ships in order to verify their cargo.</p>

Derechos de esclavos	Duties to be paid for negros	<p>That for each Negro [...] the Asientists shall pay thirty ubsis of Eight (Escudos) and one third of a peice of Eight (second article of the Asiento Contract).</p> <p>That the Duties upon the Negroes imported, are to be due from the Day of their Landing in any of the Ports of the Indies [...] (article 24 of the Asiento Contract).</p> <p>[...] que habiendo tenido con Don Benjamin Keene diferentes conferencias sobre el ajuste del valor de los pesos que la Compañía del Asiento debe pagar al Rey por los derechos de esclavos [...].¹</p>
Director	Director	<p>The directors are agents of the company and bind it by all acts done by them within the scope of their authority (The Oxford Companion to Law).</p> <p>In this context, it refers to those who took decisions in the South Sea Company and to the agents in charge of watching the interests of the Spanish Crown, according to article 28 of the Asiento Contract.</p> <p>[...] y ha de nombrar su Majestad Católica dos Directores o Factores, los cuales han de redidr en Londres, otros dos en Indias y uno en Cádiz para que de su parte intervengan con los de su Majestad Británica (condición número 28 del Contrato del Asiento de negros).</p>
Feria	Fair	<p>Mercado de mayor importancia que el común, en paraje público y días señalados (DRAE).</p> <p>Outdoor market of great importance taking place on certain occasions.</p> <p>The annual ship merchandise was to be sold at the time of the fair, once Spanish galleóns had arrived in the West Indies.</p>
Navío de Permisi3n Navío de Permiso	Annual Ship	<p>Consistía en la licencia de introducir anualmente y en el marco de la legalidad, mercancía en las colonias españolas, en tiempos de feria y, por tanto, una vez que la flota y los galEónes españoles hubiesen llegado a puerto (650 toneladas). Condición anexa al Contrato del Asiento de Negros.</p> <p>According to the terms of the asiento, the South Sea Company was allowed to introduce legally 650 tons of merchandise into Spanish colonies in America on annual ships.</p>

Navíos Autorizados	Licensed Ships	<p>En los momentos de negociación hacia la paz, Felipe V tuvo a bien autorizar, y como extra a los navíos anuales de permiso, el envío de dos barcos de casi 1000 toneladas de mercancías de primera calidad con destino a Veracruz y Cartagena o Portobello.</p> <p>During the first trading period the South Sea Company sent to the Spanish colonies in America two licensed merchant ships with cargoes that by agreement could not be less than 500 tons nor more than 600. The privilege had been granted to Queen Anne by Phillip V in 1713 and then assigned by Anne to the Company².</p>
Pieza de India	Pieza de India	<p>[...] referred to a prime male slave in good physical condition between 14 and 30 years of age and about 4'8'' tall³.</p> <p>[...] regular standard of seaven quartos, not being old, or defective, according to what has been practiced & established hitherto, in the Indies [...] (second article of the Asiento Treaty).</p>

Compiled by author

Translations and translators of diplomatic letters

Translation played a fundamental role in the relations between Spain and Great Britain during the *Asiento* contract. Thus, the character of the translator is of great importance. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that the majority of translations produced were not signed and hence it is not an easy task to bring to light who were the persons in charge of this activity. However, it can be deduced from original documents from the *Asiento* Contract (mainly letters) and secondary sources about the subject that those who acted as translators were not only translators: at the same time they could perform other activities, translation being the secondary activity or *vice versa*.

From the papers consulted, it becomes obvious that the competences required were to have a command of the languages involved and also to be loyal to the Crown in the case of diplomats. But, taking into consideration the humanistic background that employees of the *Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas*⁸ should have, being well versed in this area of knowledge was also a highly demanded competence. Diplomats and their officers could also act as translators, and they were supposed to speak not just their native

⁸ I. CÁCERES WÜRSIG, "Breve historia de la Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas" En Meta: Translators' Journal. Vol. 49. N° 3, 2004, pp. 609-628.

language and have political and cultural knowledge related to both nations, these requisites could also be framed within the translators' competence.

A) TRANSLATORS FOR THE SPANISH PARTY

There was not just one institution or one person in charge of translating Spanish, English, Latin and French documents into English, Spanish, Latin and for the Spanish party. Diplomats and their officers, employees of the *Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas*, external translators hired by the *Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas* and translators working for specific government departments formed, in my opinion, the corps of translators of documents on the *Asiento* Contract.

The Spanish agent in the Court of London and the Spanish ambassador in this city were the most important diplomats living there who had to deal with *Asiento* Contract issues. A considerable number of the documents they sent which required to be translated had already been translated, so the employees for the *Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas* could not have translated them. It can be assumed that diplomats and their offices did it.

B) DIPLOMATS AND THEIR OFFICERS

As explained earlier, diplomats had to be loyal to the Spanish Crown in all their activities. In field of translation this was to be reflected in being loyal to the author and faithful to the words of the ST. Yet not all Spanish Agents were faithful to the Crown: some of them accepted bribes and it is indeed possible that some of the translations of documents which spoke about the subject could be mistranslated, if those originally asked to translate them were also bribed in order not to let the King and his most loyal servants know about it. No proof has been found, but it is very difficult because translations are not normally saved with their original texts.

Apparently the most successful method of paving the way for the introduction of illicit wares into the Spanish colonies was through a well-calculated and widespread system of bribery, extending from some of the highest officials in Spain to the common soldiers⁹

Guillermo Eón (1717-1732) substituted Arthur Moore (1714-1717) as agent in the Court of Directors in London, representing the interests of the Spanish Crown, but, as Sorsby¹⁰ points out that he had no knowledge of English. Thus, in this case, any translations to be done by the Spanish related

⁹ G.H., NELSON, "Contraband Trade under The Asiento 1730-1739", *The American Historical Review*, 51:1, p.58, 1945

¹⁰ V.G., SORSBY, op. cit., p. 45.

to the issues he was involved in, could have been his officers' duty. Because of his lack of English, it is assumed that he needed an interpreter when interacting with the British and a personal translator who could have translated his notes, letters and speeches so that he was able to communicate with the South Sea Company Agents.

Nevertheless, I have found a letter Eón sent to the Spanish King in which he declared he had translated an English document he enclosed, but it was clearly limited. According to this letter, the aim of this rudimentary translation was to serve as a guide to what was said in the ST, so that the King could be aware of its content while waiting for an accurate translation.

Eón's tasks are to be seen in the *Instrucción secreta* the king sent to him. The topics of the documents to be translated should have been in cohesion with these duties:

Instrucción secreta que von Don Guillermo Don Caballero del Orden de Alcántara, habéis de tener reservada observar en el encargo que os he hecho de Director en la Corte de Inglaterra para asistir en mi Real Nombre en la Asamblea adjunta de la Compañía Real del Assiento de Negros, en los casos en que se hubiere de tratar de las dependencias concernientes a él. Luego que habéis llegado a la Corte de Londres presentaréis el Despacho de Director a los Directores de la Compañía para que a consecuencia de lo estipulado por el artículo 28 del tratado del asiento se os admita en las conferencias en las cuales se hubiere de tratar del despacho de navíos para el rescate de negros en África, de examinar las cuantas de [...] en Indias, de los productos que se trajeren, y finalmente de todos y cualesquiera casos y cosas dependientes del tráfico de negros en el interés que tengo [...] como la cuarta parte y si os parece [...] posiciones discurridas no sean convenientes al mayor beneficio y utilidad general, debéis proponer las razones [...] en contrario para persuadirlos a lo mejor y de informarme por medio del Despacho de mi real hacienda de lo que juzgaréis digno de ser expuesto en mi real noticia¹¹

Eón was suspected of bribery and therefore the translations that came from his people could have been mistranslated.

One of the Spanish representatives, the Chevalier d'Eón, had been bribed to connive at the mismeasurement of the two permission ships, allowed to sail to the Indies at the beginning of the Asiento under article 12 of the Asiento treaty as a special favour to Queen Anne, but this irregularity had not had the approval of the whole board of directors¹².

¹¹ ARCHIVO GENERAL DE SIMANCAS (AGS), Valladolid, Estado, 6840.

¹² J. McLACHLAN, *Trade and peace with the Old Spain 1667-1750. A study of influence of commerce on Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy in the first half of the eighteenth century.* Cambridge at the University Press, 1940, p.79.

Thomas Geraldino was named in 1732 to occupy Eón's position until 1736 (although Joseph Blanco substituted him a few months in 1724). Geraldino was versed in Spanish, English and French. He was in very high demand because of the linguistic knowledge of his assistants and it can be guessed that he supervised their translations, when they were supposed to act as translators. Donoso claims that Geraldino was the translator of several documents of the Asiento Contract. For instance, he assumes that he translated the accounts of the Royal Company and of The Bedford (a licensed ship) sent on the 21st October 1733 to Patiño (2010: 189, 207). It cannot be guaranteed that Geraldino was the translator of all the translated documents he had to be sent to Spain, but he most certainly did some of them.

The documents to be translated were related to his duties, which are well mapped out by Sorsby (1975) and are a summary of the *Instrucción Secreta* the King sent to him in 1732 (AGS, Estado, 7007):

Geraldino presented his credentials to the Company on 2 June 1732. In Keene's opinion the Spanish could not have selected "a more fair or Honest man". [...] Geraldino was well-briefed on the South Sea Company, and his instructions were more severe than had been anticipated by the directors. He was to monitor closely the asiento trade; attend all directors' meetings; keep his government informed about new factory regulations, the schedule of Company ships, the appointment of officials and the number of slaves introduced; and to give special attention to the prevention of contraband on the annual ships. In addition he was responsible for keeping the newly appointed Spanish agents to Company factories appraised of the situation in England as it pertained to the asiento trade¹³.

He was a very watchful and honest man and this explains why he was so trusted to fight against the bribery that has been previously referred to.

[...] the Spanish government had secure positive proof of this contraband trading from Dr. Burnet and Mathew Powles. [...] In order to prevent such violations, Philip V sent the ever watchful Sir Thomas Geraldino as his representative to sit on the board of Directors of the South Sea Company¹⁴.

Hence, translations provided by him (done by his officers and supervised by him or written by him directly) were to be trusted.

After him, Pedro Terry, recommended by both Geraldino and Montijo (AGS, Estado, 6902), became Spanish Agent in the Court of Directors of the

¹³ V.G., SORSBY, op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁴ G.H., NELSON, op. cit., p. 56.

South Sea Company. He mastered English and had a vast command of the politics and culture of both nations. So, like Geraldino, Terry probably supervised the translations sent to the Spanish party and it is likely that depending on the amount of work he had to do and the length of the document to be translated, he participated in the translations of some of them.

Regarding the translations that came from the Spanish Embassy, it can also be assumed that the officers and assistants working for the Spanish ambassador were ordered to translate. Yet the ambassador probably supervised and also translated. Ibáñez, Montijo and Geraldino held this post. Bribery and thus temptation to mistranslate could also be seen.

Also, Montijo, president of the Council of the Indies, was spoken of as having aided the cause in a way that was very satisfying for both parties¹⁵.

C) THE *SECRETARÍA DE INTEPRETACIÓN DE LENGUAS*

The *Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas* was probably created in 1527 in order to help the *Consejo de Estado* to establish communication among the territories belonging to Spain and the other countries where Spanish was not spoken. The secretaries in charge of this institution between 1729 and 1755 were Francisco Gracián y de Pereda (1714-1734), Miguel José de Aoiz y de la Torre (1734-1744) and Domingo Marcoleta (1744-1756).

It can be proved that translators working for the *Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas* were also involved in the translation of documents of the *Asiento Contract* because the signature of the Secretary is to be seen on some of the translations.

Traducido de franzes por mí Dⁿ. Fran^{co}. Gracián del Consejo de su Mag^d. y su secretario dela Ynterperazió de Lenguas, y lo firmo en Madrid, ã quatro de Marzo de millsezs y veintey cinco¹⁶.

D) TRANSLATORS FOR SPANISH GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

The *traductores del Estado*, as Cáceres Würsig¹⁷ refers to the translators working for some Spanish Government departments. I have no proof of it, but I would dare to claim that translators working for the *Consejo de Indias* and *Consejo de Hacienda* were in charge of some translations regarding the *Asiento Contract*, due to they dealt with issues related to it. José Joaquín Montealegre, Juan Amador and Juan de Iriarte are the most remarkable

¹⁵ G.H., NELSON, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁶ AGI, Indiferente General, 2803.

¹⁷ I. CÁCERES WÜRSIG, op. cit.

officers during 1729 and 1755 and therefore could have produced some of these translations.

E) TRANSLATORS FOR THE ENGLISH PARTY

It is more difficult to guess who the translators for the English side were because information to that respect is rarely provided. I have seen in some documents translated into Spanish kept in the AGS “traducción de oficio del Tribunal de Directores de la Compañía del Asiento de negros”. This suggests that probably there were translators working for the Court of Directors or employed officers whose one of their activities could have consisted in translating or writing documents in other languages.

Establishing a parallelism with the Spanish party, the South Sea Company representatives and their officials would have probably translated documents into English. Thus, Francis Stanford and Benjamin Keene and his officers could have worked as translators.

Brief conclusions

Historical diplomatic letters, which are written in the first person, but always using polite expressions and taking into account the importance of the issue being discussed, are more direct and less formal than other official communication. They offer an interesting insight into the nature of diplomatic and political relations and, at the same time, an opportunity to study the first-person experience of the historical moments being analyzed.

Getting to know who was in charge of translating texts in the *Asiento* Contract is not an easy task. Translations were not normally signed. A careful reading of the documents produced in and during the *Asiento* Contract, helped me to conclude that many translations came from diplomats and their officers watching over the interests of the Spanish Crown in London and that translators working for the *Secretaría de Interpretación de Lenguas* and for the *Consejo de Indias* and the *Consejo de Hacienda* were definitely in charge of some of them. Geraldino played a very significant role as direct or indirect translator, which means he could not have been the real translator of all the translated documents he sent to Spain, but the supervisor of them. His mother tongues were English and Spanish and it is known that he was well versed in French.