

Linguistic fieldwork and revitalization: the case of Upper Lozva Mansi

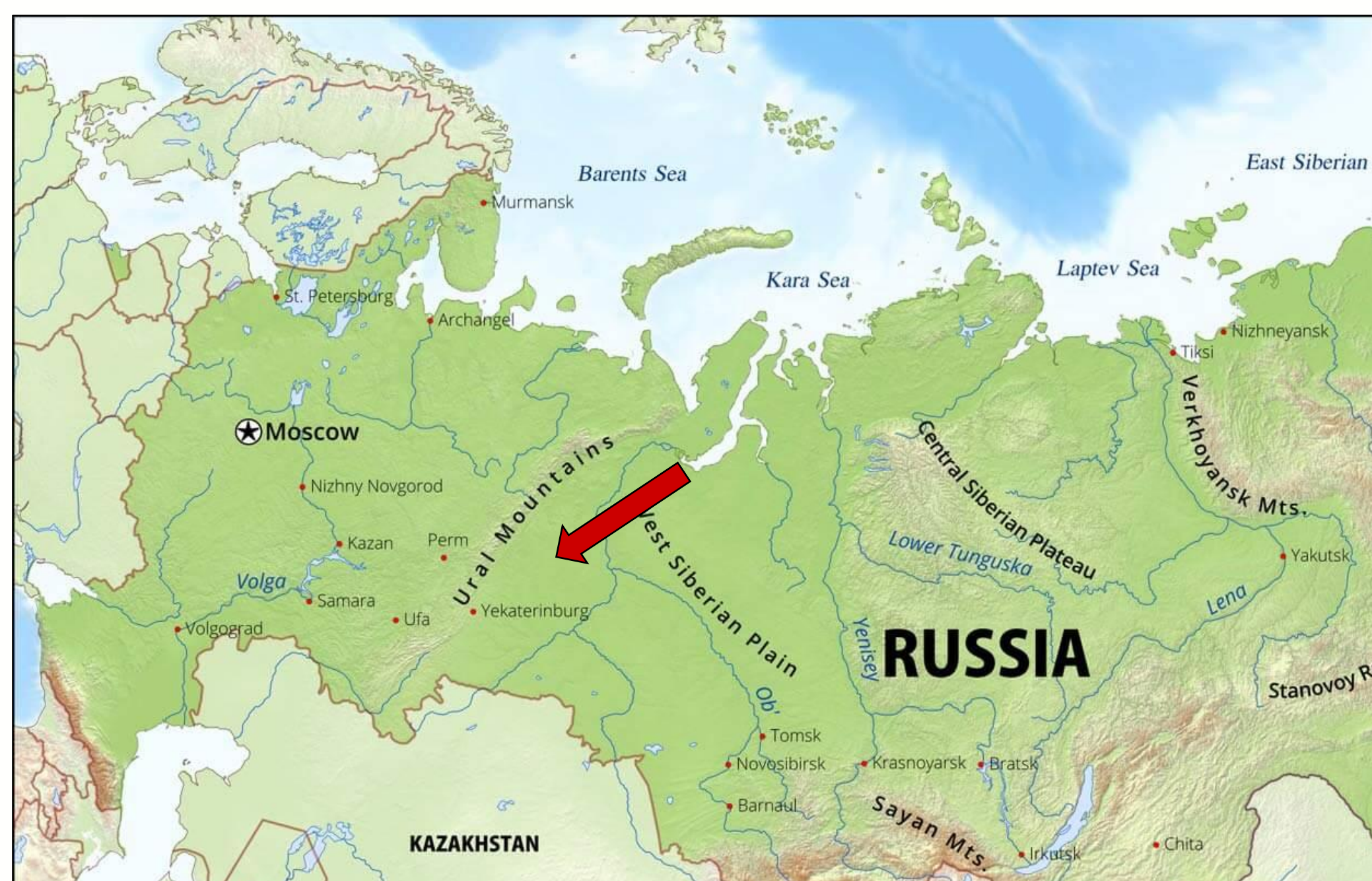
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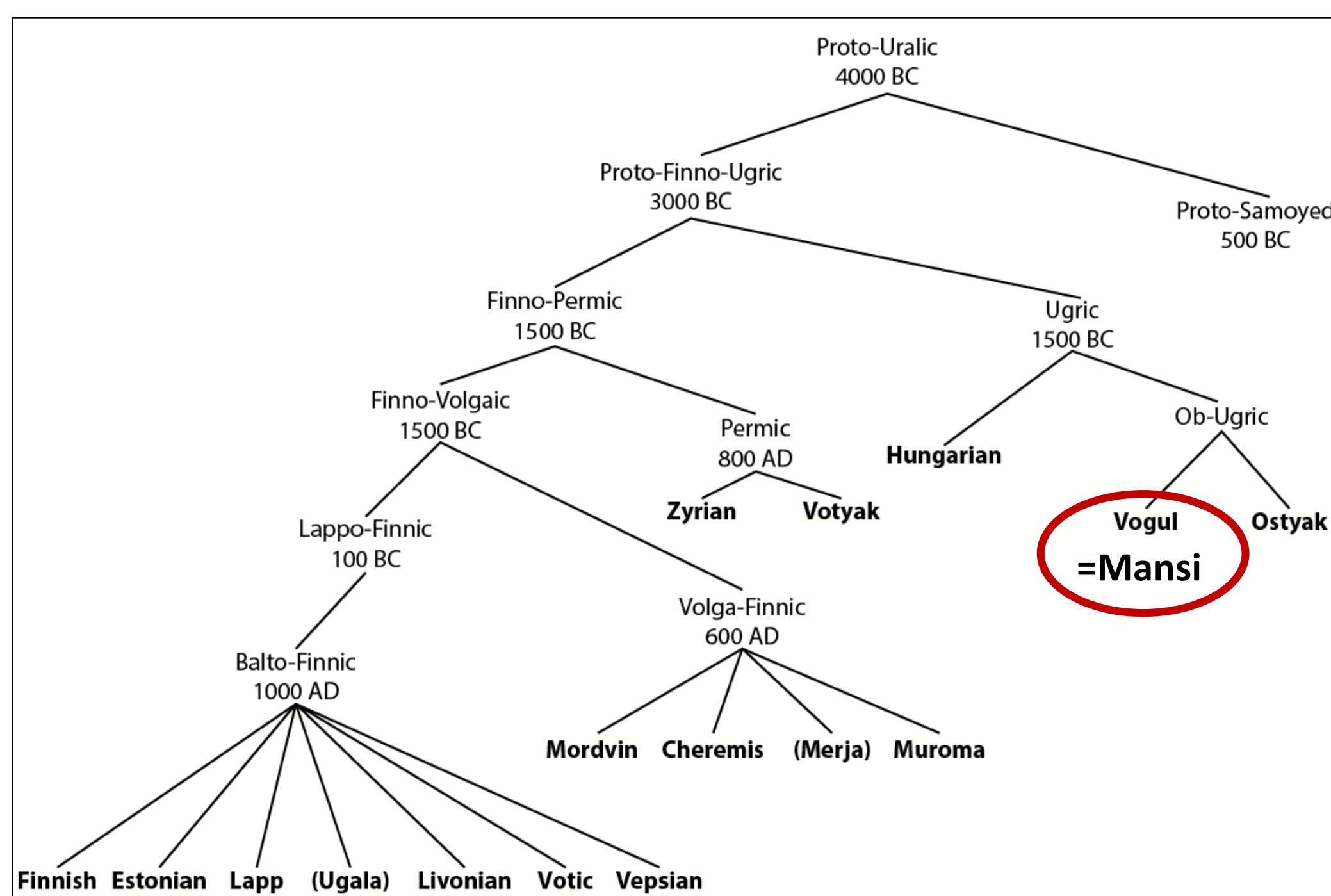


Introduction



Upper Lozva Mansi: the villages Ushma (Ушма) and Treskolje (Тресколъе) located in the Ivdel region of the Sverdlovsk oblast

The main part of the Mansi community resides in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug-Yugra (KhMAO)



Earlier: 4 Mansi dialect branches

Today: only the Northern branch survives with 938 speakers (2010 census)

Upper Lozva speakers: ~100 speakers, descendants from two closely related families

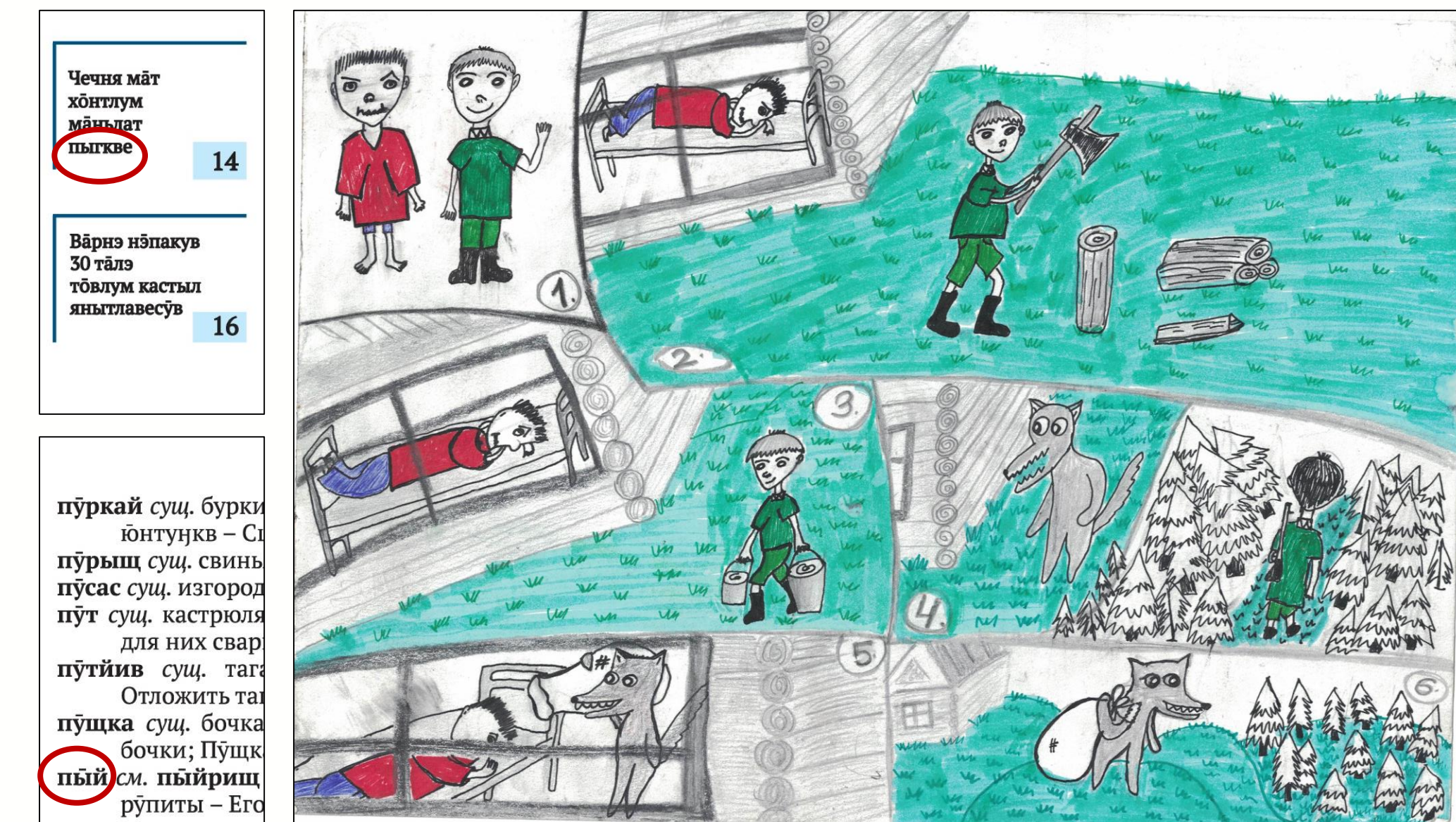
UL Mansi are both geographically and administratively isolated from other Mansi speakers → the UL dialect differs significantly from standard Mansi

We want to discuss special traits of UL Mansi and propose revitalization strategies based on these traits.

Important issues

- The living conditions of UL Mansi are characterized by the following traits, which contribute to the endangerment of their dialect.
- We believe that linguistic fieldwork can successfully solve such problems.
- Some problems and their possible solutions:
 - Isolation from the main part of the Mansi community → Materials in standard Mansi are unsuitable for UL speakers → Development of suitable grammar books and orthographic systems by the fieldworkers. Existing grammars such as [Rombandeeva 1973], [Riese 2001] differ significantly from UL empirical data → Accessible education materials, existence of the dialect in written form, rise of prestige
 - Social and historical factors → Low prestige and fear of using the language due to disrespectful attitude & distrust of the Russian community → Linguistic expeditions demonstrate a different attitude to the Mansi language and culture (a small group of fieldworkers may visibly influence the community because of its small size) → Increase in motivation of Mansi speakers towards keeping their language and culture, trust towards members of the Russian community
 - Remote location, absence of communications and electricity, traditional lifestyle → Unsuitability of modern means of linguistic revitalization → Use of questionnaires and experimental material based on ideas common for the speakers → Speakers are interested in experimental tasks, passive vocabulary is activated, new vocabulary applicable to new situations is developed as well
 - Socioantropological factors → Mansi speakers are usually shy due to their special mentality, which causes them to hide their linguistic and cultural traits and even to forget them in Russian surroundings → During lengthy fieldtrips Mansi speakers find themselves in the company of Russians on “their” territory for a long time → Speakers get used to speaking their language and acting naturally even among “outsiders”, so linguists have an opportunity to observe and record the language in its pure form

Let's talk about boys



- Orthographic problems lead even to disruption in phonology: e.g. due to different spelling of *ныл* and *ныл* [Bakhtiyarova, Dinislamova 2016], the Mansi word for ‘boy’ pronounced as [pə:ɣ] / [pə:j] is sometimes transformed into [pə:k] in Russian reduction manner → this problem can be solved by introducing a new grapheme for [ɣ], see [Zhornik, Pokrovskaya 2017]
- As Mansi live far from “civilization”, modern means normally used for revitalization are bound to fail and are not even taken seriously by the speakers: due to absence of electricity and connections, digital programs (such as those mentioned in [Horvath et al. 2017]). E.g. our story about 2 boys is more common for the native speakers and is better for text extraction. In the process of storytelling, speakers produce language innovations which then settle in the language.

Conclusion

Language is the core component of the culture and self-identification of any ethnic group. Thus, linguistic fieldwork should be an indispensable part of any revitalization strategy, targeting not only aspects of communication, but also indirectly influencing all kinds of life spheres.



References

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Our project

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Studies of the Upper Lozva dialect:

- 3 field trips in 2017-2018
- ✓ elicitation of grammar
- ✓ phonetic questionnaires
- ✓ gathering lexical data
- ✓ text recordings
- ✓ experiments on information structure and prosody
- ✓ language games

Corpus of written and spoken Mansi:

- ✓ newspaper ‘Luima Seripos’:
 - approx. 900 000 tokens
- ✓ Upper Lozva field recordings:
 - 5 hours in total
 - 1 hour available with audio
- ✓ in progress:
 - old texts recorded by A. Kannisto in extinct Mansi dialects
 - Soviet and modern standard books

For more information, see our website

<http://digital-mansi.com/> (English version in progress)

We would like to express our gratitude to all our Mansi language consultants!

Пум̄әсунә!

