

## **Modeling visual stimuli for descriptive fieldwork among the Upper Lozva Mansi: metalanguage vs. target language**

It is widely known that elicitation may be an imperfect tool for extracting certain types of linguistic data. Because of this, we encounter numerous problems during our fieldwork among the Upper Lozva Mansi (<Finno-Ugric <Uralic, Russia). In our case, the target language (Mansi) and the metalanguage (Russian) belong to different language families, furthermore, the lifestyle of the native speakers of Mansi differs drastically from that of Russians. Most elicitation tasks prove to be difficult for the speakers and extraction of texts is hindered as Mansi adopt a laconic manner of expression. In this situation, elicitation is obviously limited and provides us with incomplete or even misleading results. The search for close correspondences during translation tasks causes syntactic and prosodic priming ([Chelliah, de Reuse 2011]), which strongly biases the resulting data. Moreover, during elicitation sessions, the speakers easily shift to Russian (which is apparently more prestigious, see [Bíró, Sipőcz 2009]), while a reverse shift is difficult to achieve.

An alternate method of gathering linguistic can be borrowed from psycholinguistics and pragmatic studies ([Gibbs 2004], [Skopeteas et al. 2006], [Tanenhaus, Brown-Schmidt 2008]), namely, employing visual stimuli. During our fieldwork, we used three types of pictures for sentence generation, which we afterwards compared in terms of their efficiency: pictures with Russian words, pictures with Mansi words and pictures with no textual information. Apart from these types of stimuli, we have used series of pictures to gather texts. These comics can also be divided into three groups: Mansi folk tales, Russian folk tales and abstract stories, which can be freely interpreted by the speakers.

Both stimuli with Russian text and Russian folk tales cause the speakers to generate structures which are not normally encountered in Mansi (for example, inverted word order, calqued case marking, Russian position of stress and means of its prosodic marking). Other types of visual stimuli let us extract natural Mansi texts and sentences containing grammatical and phonetic phenomena not found in stories based on Russian-oriented stimuli.

Thus, we argue that investigating the macrostructure of spoken language (unlike some types of grammatical fieldwork) should be diverted from the metalanguage. Furthermore, the graphic means should be created regarding the special living conditions and cognitive traits of the target community.

### **References**

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