Methodological challenges of semantic fieldwork in Mari El

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OVERVIEW

1. Introduction: the purpose of my thesis and aim of the fieldwork
2. The fieldwork: general data
3. Data collection and methodological challenges
4. On field: personal and social aspects
5. Conclusion and further prospects

1.1 THE PURPOSE OF MY THESIS

Analysis of how the domain of modality is expressed in Meadow Mari (ISO: mhr)

Dynamic, deontic, epistemic possibility and necessity, as well as volition

With special attention to epistemic / inferential modality

Possible coding strategies: affixes, auxiliary constructions, VPs (mental st ate predicates) as well as lexemes

1.1 THE PURPOSE OF MY THESIS

Types of modality (cf. Nuyts 2016)

- dynamic modality
  - (1) *I can swim.*
- deontic modality
  - (2) *John may come in now.*
- **epistemic modality**
  - (3) *They may have run out of fuel.*
- (volitional/boulomaic modality)
  - (4) *(I want to be a poet.)*

root/situational modality (Nuyts 2016; van der Auwera & Ammann 2013)

1.1 THE PURPOSE OF MY THESIS

Types of modality (cf. Nuyts 2016)

	Possibility	Necessity
Dynamic	*John **can** swim.*	*For smoke there **must** be fire.*
Deontic	*You **can** come in now.*	*You **must** not smoke.*
Epistemic	*She **can't** be home at this time.*	*He **must** be a good swimmer.*
(Volitive)	*I **want** to be a poet.*	

…how are these encoded in Meadow Mari?

1.2 THE AIM OF MY FIELDWORK

- to gather data for my dissertation
- to test various data collection methods
- to establish connections for further research

2.1 THE FIELDWORK: GENERAL

between 24.05.2019. and 21.06.2019 (~4 weeks)

solo trip

10 days in urban, 8 days in rural environment (7 days „holiday” in Udmurtia and 4 days in Moscow)

funded by the NKFI-K-125282 research grant for the Typological Database of the Volga area Finno-Ugric Languages (research project at my home university)

Total result:

- 240 minutes of audio
- 47 questionnaires

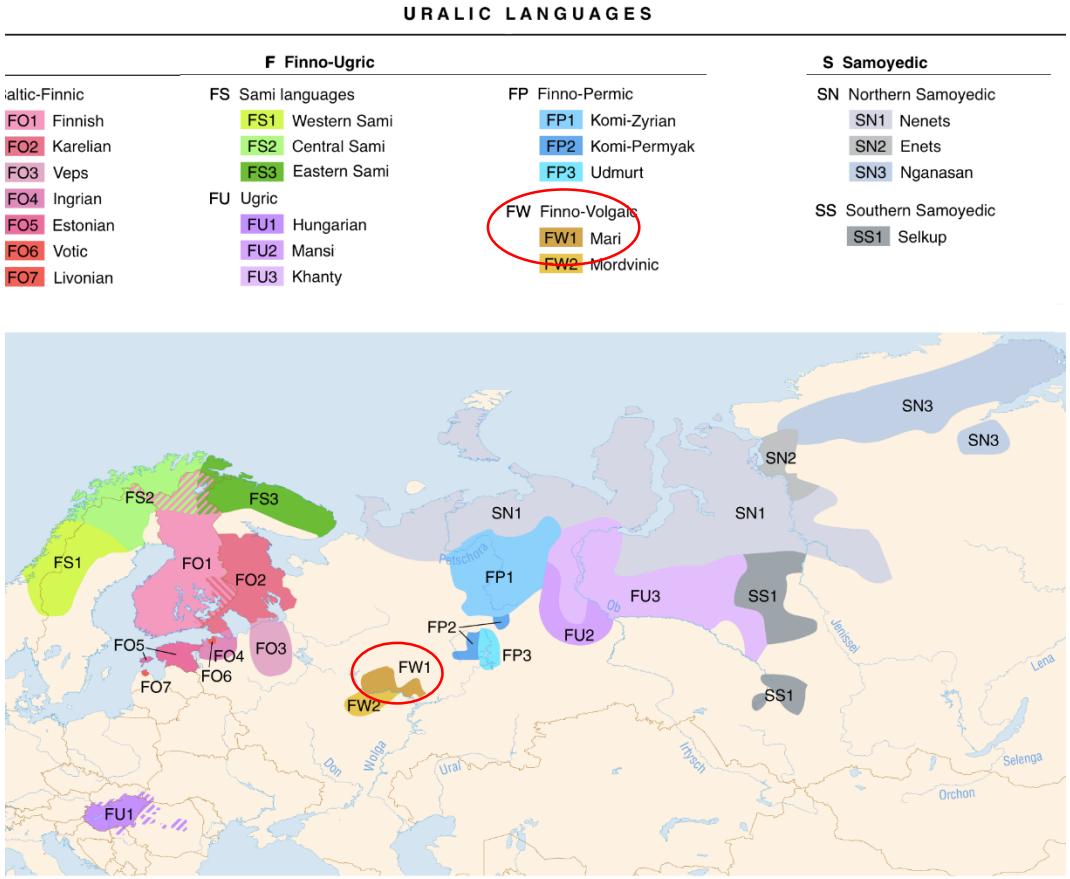
2.2 THE MARI LANGUAGE

a Finno-Ugric language, Volgaic branch

Population: 547 000 (2010)

Two literary standards:

- **Meadow Mari** ~365 000 speakers
- **Hill Mari** ~23 000 speakers

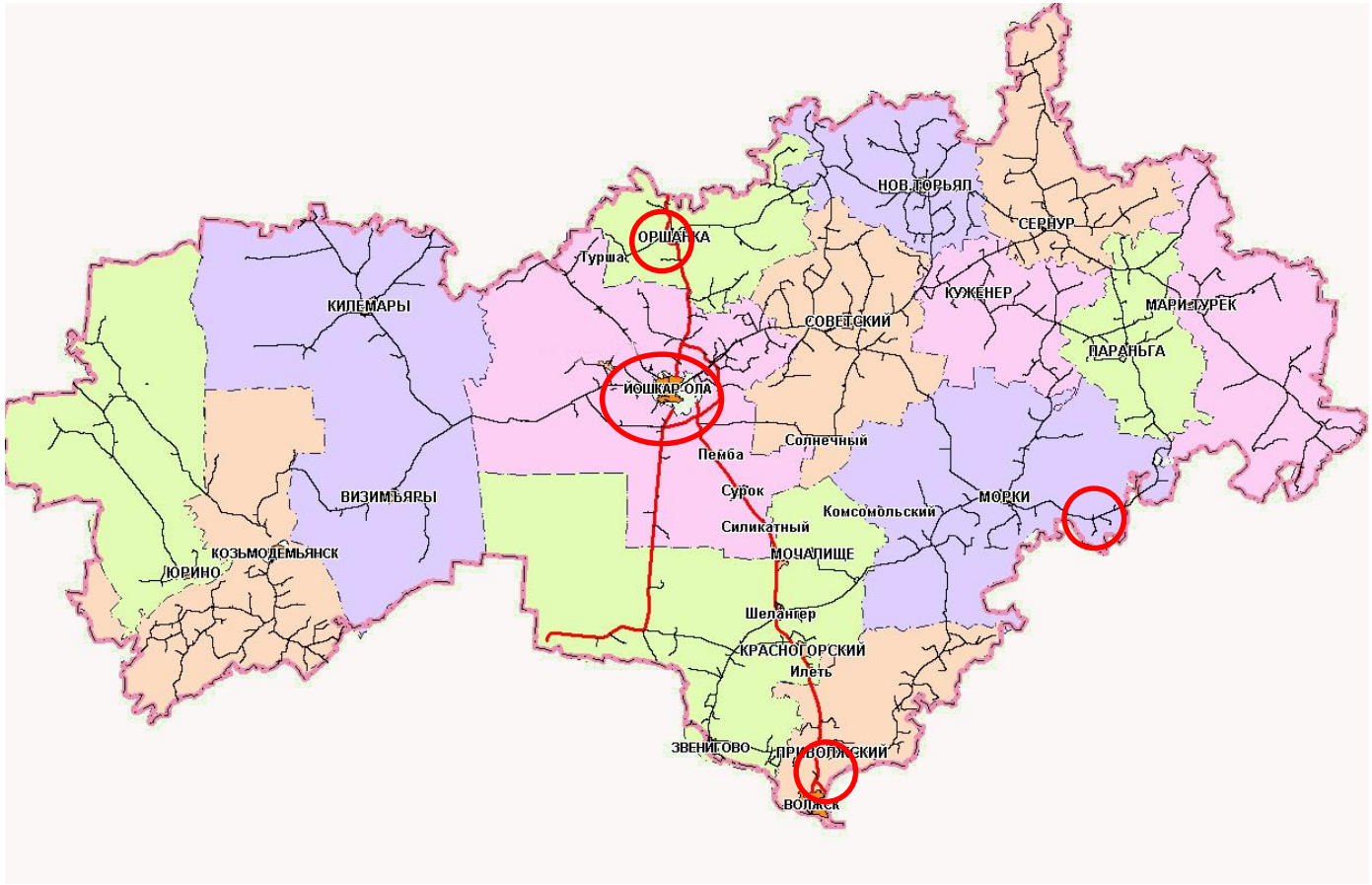


2.2 THE MARI LANGUAGE

Some typological features (Meadow Mari)

- agglutinative type
- SOV word order, heavily head-final
- heavy Turkic influence (Chuvash, Tatar, Bashkir)
- Russian influence mainly on vocabulary and compound sentences (subordination)

2.3 DATA COLLECTION SITES



2.4 TECHNICAL DATA

Audio recording: Zoom H4N Field Recorder (saved in .WAV, stored in my OneDrive cloud), sometimes Huawei P Smart (my phone)

Video recording (for the Picture Task): GoPro Hero 5 (stopped working mid-session)

Transciption: ELAN 4.9.4

3.1 HOW TO ELICITATE MODALS?

- Written corpus — does not provide context

→ questionnaires (3.2)

→ spontaneous speech recordings (3.3)

→ task solving (3.4)

3.2 QUESTIONNAIRE

based on Vander Klok's modal questionnaire for cross-linguistic use (2013)

Task: finish the sentences (30 questions)

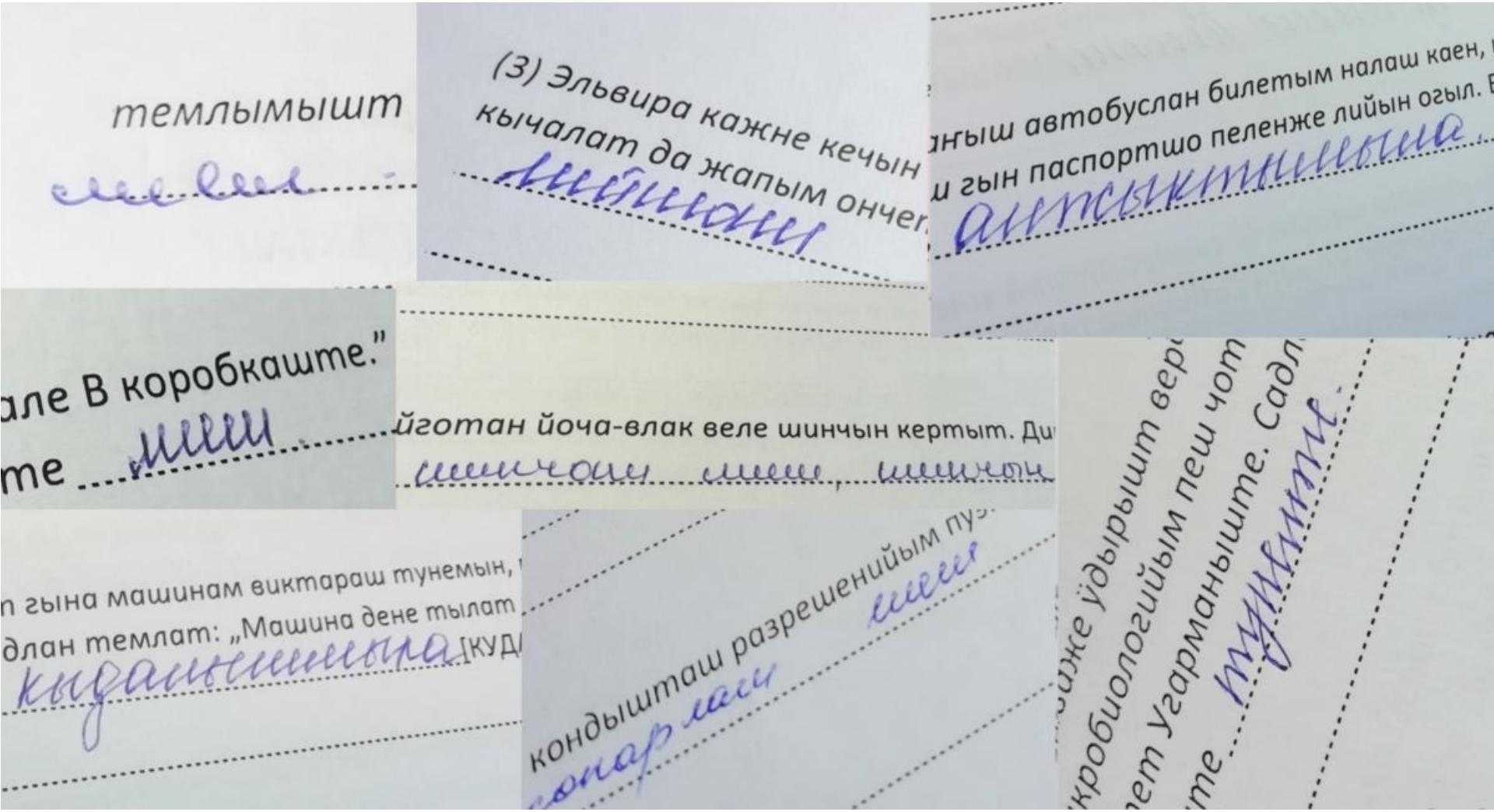
> *In order to ride a motorcycle, you [MUST] wear a helmet.*
>
> *If you know Olga is in her garden every day from 7 to 10 and now it's 9:00, she [MUST] be in her garden.*

handed out at classes and events

Problems:

- misunderstanding of the task
- without follow-up elicitation, you don't get to know all possible answers

3.2 QUESTIONNAIRE



3.3 SPONTANEOUS SPEECH

a total of 193 minutes of spontaneous speech was recorded

Problems:

- spontaneous?
- superfluous: modals are rare

3.4 TASK SOLVING

Family Problems Picture Task based on the stimulus kit by San Roque et al. (2012)

Task 1: picture description

Task 2: story construction

Task 3: narration

Total time: 47’51”

39 occurrences of epistemic/inferential modality!

4.1 FIELDWORK PREPARATION

Well in advance:

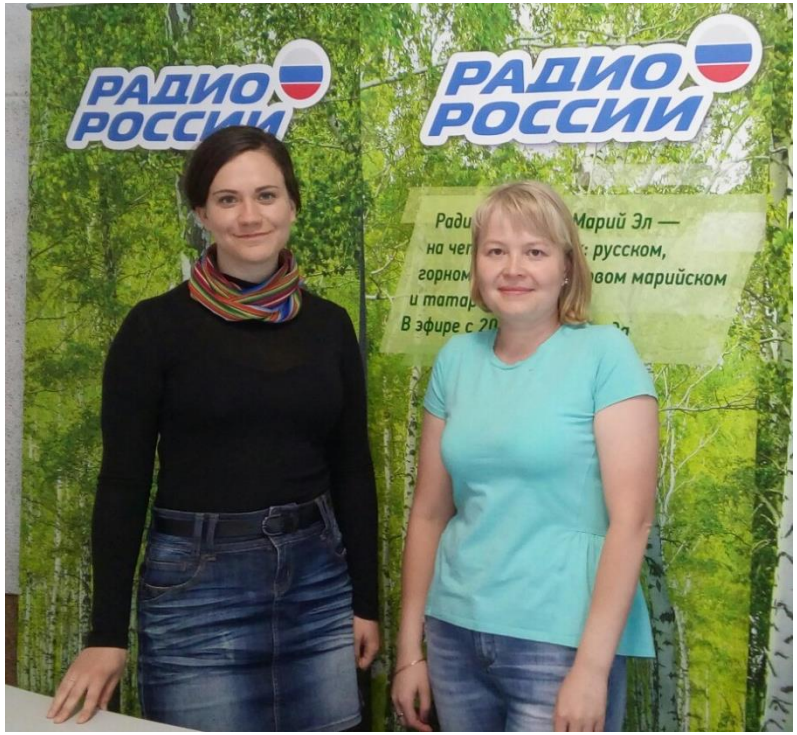
- learning Mari
- acquiring specific (agriculture-related) vocabulary
- establishing connections within the community
- studying social norms

A few weeks before fieldwork:

- acquiring visa
- purchasing suitable gifts
- announcing my visit on all social media platforms (Instagram, Vkontakte)

4.2 THE RIGHT INFORMANTS

- respected within the community
- literate and sharp-minded
- not „too educated”



4.3 THE SOCIAL CODE

- standard means of politeness
- the Mari religion

4.4 WHAT TO GIVE IN EXCHANGE

4.4 WHAT TO GIVE IN EXCHANGE

5. CONCLUSION

What I did right:

- I had prior knowledge and experience about the area. I was well introduced in the community, and had valuable connections.
- I did thorough preparation for dialects and rural vocabulary
- I had funding for my trip arranged well in advance.
- I had proper equipment.
- I had no need of intermediary language.
- I prepared presents for my informants, and gave back in abundance to the community.

5. CONCLUSION

What I did wrong:

- The scope of my research was far too broad.
- 30 questions are too much for a questionnaire, especially if all of them depict a different situation.
- I should also have communicated more clearly what I wanted from my stay, and ask for help accordingly.
- Wrong visa got me in trouble with the police.
- Crippling shyness and inconfidence in my research.
- The sheer weight of my completed questionnaires. On my way home, my suitcase was 8 kilograms overweight.

Thank you very much!

Тау пеш кугу!

Questions and suggestions are welcome!