

Taimyr Pidgin Russian and Native Russian: How Close Are They?

Dieter Stern (Universiteit Ghent, Ghent)

Povzetek

Pogosto prevladuje mnenje, da med pidžinskimi jeziki in njihovimi dominantnimi jeziki ni medjezikovne razumljivosti, kar bi lahko pomenilo, da kakršen koli poenostavljen jezikovni repertoar, ki je še vedno nekako razumljiv za večino maternih govorcev dominantnega jezika, ne velja več za pravi pidžin. Prispevek raziskuje težave medjezikovne razumljivosti med ruščino in ruskim dominantnim jezikom pidžina tajmirske ruščine ter se pri tem opira na rezultate preprostega raziskovalnega testa razumevanja, pri katerem so materni govorce ruščine poslušali posnetke tajmirske pidžinske ruščine. Na podlagi tega specifičnega ruskega primera bomo kritično ocenili uporabnost in verodostojnost pomanjkanja medsebojne razumljivosti kot ključne lastnosti pidžinskih jezikov na splošno. Hkrati bo treba obravnavati bolj specifična vprašanja o statusu tajmirske pidžinske ruščine, predvsem že dalj časa porajajoče se vprašanje o tem, koliko značilnosti pidžina ji še preostane in ali je sploh kdaj predstavljala tipični pidžin, da bomo lahko ustrezno ocenili celotno možnost posploševanja naših izsledkov.

Ključne besede: tajmirska pidžinska ruščina, razumljivost pidžina za govorce osnovnega jezika, ruski jeziki v stiku.

Abstract

It is often maintained that pidgins and their lexifiers are not mutually intelligible, implying that any simplified linguistic repertoire which is still somehow intelligible to most native speakers of the lexifier would not qualify as a true pidgin. This paper sets out to explore issues of intercomprehensibility between Russian and the Russian-lexifier pidgin Taimyr Pidgin Russian making use of the results of a simple exploratory comprehension test in which native Russian speakers were exposed to field recordings of Taimyr Pidgin Russian. On the basis of this specific Russian case a critical assessment will be made of the usefulness and the validity of the lack of intercomprehensibility as a defining feature of pidgins in general. At the same time, more specific issues of the status of Taimyr Pidgin Russian, primarily the pending question of how far it is already depidginized and whether it ever represented a typical pidgin, will have to be addressed in order to correctly assess the overall generalizability of our findings.

Key words: Taimyr Pidgin Russian, intelligibility of pidgins for speakers of lexifier, Russian contact languages

1 Introduction

For most intercomprehension will imply mutuality, such that if a Pole can be shown to understand a Czech, it follows that a Czech will also understand a Pole. This assumption appears intuitively reasonable in the case of two languages like Czech and Polish whose very relationship is based on a common linguistic ancestry, which in itself encapsulates the very idea of mutuality. The relationship which holds between Polish and Czech is strictly symmetrical, and still the mutuality of comprehension, which is implied by this relationship may prove empirically unfounded after all, as cases of non-reciprocal intelligibility (Wolff 1959: 35-36) show. As it comes to the relation between pidgins and their lexifiers, not even the principal symmetry of genetically related languages will hold. Though pidgins will depend on their lexifiers for their lexical outfit, the relationship between pidgin and lexifier cannot be reduced to a simple matter of genetic affiliation and linguistic distance. Among others, their relationship is crucially defined by an essential asymmetry with respect to the kind of language game each of them is based on, – a difference that significantly bears on the issue of comprehension. Speaking the lexifier means sticking to the beaten tracks of conventional rules and conversational routines, whereas speaking pidgin resembles an open game of situational improvisation. Intelligibility tests involving pidgins would then appear to measure the capability to deal with an overall indeterminateness of improvised linguistic expression rather than the capability to deal with fixed and regular linguistic distance. Of course, in listening to an unknown but genetically close parent language the test person will likewise miss crucial grammatical clues for a proper decoding and his interpretation of what is being said will largely hinge on lexical anchors (*ancrages lexicaux*; Kostomaroff 2012: 4), preferably nouns, so that his mode of operation is not so far removed from that in pidgin communication. But then pidgins are still different in that they will rely on free linguistic improvisation under conditions of a restricted and impoverished referential capacity. Depending on the degree of the stability of the pidgin on the whole and the routine and dexterity of its individual speakers, narrative episodes may be framed very differently from what we are used to in ordinary native speech. Speakers who have throughout their lives been exclusively involved in a monolingual native environment with a limited range of individual expression within a neatly defined “area of acceptable variation” (Karam 2000: 122-124), may be supposed to be able to deal only with familiar patterns and structures. A good pidgin speaker, however, is also defined by his capability to tackle and interpret forms of expression, not previously known to him. This is basically a difference of training, but also of attitudes towards acceptability extreme forms of variation beyond the conventionalized area of acceptability.

Without going into the details of the other asymmetries which characterize the relationship between pidgins and their lexifiers, it should be clear that, if speakers of the pidgin can be shown to be able to understand its lexifier without prior knowledge of it, it does not follow that the same is true of speakers of the lexifier with respect to the pidgin. Though both directions of comprehension are certainly somehow interrelated, it might prove useful to treat them separately. In our research we will, accordingly, focus on just one such direction, viz. the comprehension of a Russian pidgin, i.e. Taimyr Pidgin Russian (henceforward TPR) by native speakers of its lexifier, i.e. Russian. For one, we are forced to do so, because at the time of writing this paper no speaker of the pidgin is still alive on whom to test his comprehension of Standard Russian. But even if there were still one or other speaker around, the task would prove pointless, because the last speakers of Taimyr Pidgin Russian had been heavily exposed to Standard Russian in the last decades of their lives, so that a passive knowledge resulting in a fairly good comprehension of Standard Russian may be assumed for them on the basis of their linguistic biographies. But there is another reason for focusing on the comprehension of the pidgin by speakers of its lexifier, for it is basically this direction of comprehension which pidginists will time and again point to in their attempts to define the relationship between pidgins and their lexifiers.

2 Intercomprehensibility among pidgins and their lexifiers

It is often maintained that pidgins are unintelligible to the speakers of their lexifier, implying that any contact-induced linguistic repertoire, which shows all internal and external symptoms of being a pidgin, but which is still somehow intelligible to most native speakers of the lexifier would rather not qualify as a true pidgin. The claim of unintelligibility appears on first sight to run counter to sound intuition. For one, are not pidgins meant to enable communication and comprehension in situations where people are confronted with a serious communicative gap, which their native and other linguistic knowledge will not be able to bridge, at least not immediately? So general comprehensibility should be the hallmark of pidgins. In addition, do not pidgins involve attempts at learning the lexifier as a target language? Though efforts to acquire knowledge of a perceived target language may play a role at least with some speakers who get involved in a process of pidginisation, the very target is as a rule not sharply laid out before them (e.g., by means of a language text book), and for most persons involved in pidginisation it may be doubted whether targeted language acquisition governs their linguistic behaviour and decisions which ultimately lead to the emergence of a pidgin (Bakker 1995: 26; Mühlhäusler ²1997: 6). The direction a process of

pidginization takes may in fact rather constitute a move away from the lexifier than a move towards it, contributing thus to an increase of unintelligibility.

Though lack of intelligibility for speakers of their lexifiers is not explicitly referred to in most pidgin definitions, which any handbook of pidgin and creole studies will provide for, it appears that it is tacitly understood as common knowledge and that it is taken for granted by virtually all of them. Though most creolists seem to consider lack of mutual intelligibility a virtual fact about pidgins, they will usually not put too much emphasis on it by making it an indispensable defining feature of pidginness. Clear and unrestricted statements to this effect are to be found only occasionally, as in Gillian Sankoff (1980: 140):

I will reserve the term “pidgin” only for those contact vernaculars that display (a) some degree of conventionalization, and (b) a sharp enough break with all “parent” languages as to be not mutually intelligible with any of them.

Of the impressive number of handbooks and introductions to pidgin and creole studies, which have amassed in the course of the past decennia, only Mark Sebba unequivocally makes lack of intelligibility a prerequisite for a language to qualify as a pidgin: “They [scil. pidgins — DS] are not mutually intelligible with their source languages” (Sebba 1997: 15). Others, like Peter Bakker, will mention this feature with some reservation, stating that pidgins “are *usually* [highlighting is mine – DS] unintelligible for speakers of the language from which the lexicon derives” (1995: 25).¹ Bakker’s reserve is probably owing to Thomason & Kaufman’s (1988: 168–169) critique of Sankoff’s elevation of the lack of intelligibility to the rank of a major defining feature for pidgins. Thomason & Kaufman identify three exceptions to the assumption. First, they point out that unintelligibility may not be expected to apply to early stages of pidginisation, which, by the way, is already implied in Sankoff’s criterion (a), which ought to be read as an input condition for criterion (b).² Accordingly, Mühlhäusler (²1997: 162) makes a point

1 With similar reserves Loreto Todd (1974: 7). Lack of mutual intelligibility can be concluded conversely from Romaine’s characterisation of koinés as opposed to pidgins (1988: 26).

2 A causal link between evolving norms and increase of unintelligibility for speakers of the lexifier is also implied in Parkvall & Bakker (2013: 23). They conclude also that the fact that pidgins have to be learned by speakers of the lexifier is an indication of the incomprehensibility of pidgins to speakers of the lexifier (2013: 24). It may be objected that the need to learn the pidgin may have more to do with a pressure from the pidgin-using group on native lexifier speakers on entering the community and may therefore be also socially motivated apart from being driven by incomprehensibility. Another point is that incomprehensibility need not be mutual. Thus, father Suslov in dealing with Nganasan neophytes in the 1880s stressed that outsiders had to learn TPR, because the Nganasans would insist on speaking it, considering it to be proper Russian, and would also not be capable of comprehending native Russian (Stern 2012: 52). This does, however, not necessarily imply that father Suslov was, vice versa, incapable of understanding TPR when he first came across it.

of expressly stating that pidgins only become unintelligible to speakers of their lexifier language “subsequent to their stabilization,” the idea behind this, apparently, being that prepidgins or jargons are basically conceived of as initial stages of tackling a serious communication problem by means of free verbal and also non-verbal improvisation. The rationale of prepidgins is to make oneself understood to anyone at any costs, whereas stabilized pidgins have already socially condensed into a group of insiders, constituted by regular interaction, which will place ease of routine communication within the group above the obligation to unconditionally provide for intelligibility to anyone joining the group from the outside. Total transparency and immediate accessibility of linguistic strategies to invariably anyone, not only to speakers of the lexifier, is the indispensable prerequisite for prepidgins to work at all. Universal intelligibility may be expected to lie at the very core of prepidgins.³

The second qualification of Thomason & Kaufman is that the predominant use of a linguistic repertoire for interethnic communication should range above lack of mutual intelligibility in defining a pidgin, allowing at least for a certain extent of intercomprehensibility between pidgin and lexifier in some cases. Thirdly, intercomprehensibility may be expected to be maintained in cases of pidgins deriving from contact between typologically and genetically close languages. Ultimately, the specifications suggested by Thomason & Kaufman amount to an affirmation of the lack of intercomprehensibility, though not as a defining feature, but at least as a typical feature of the relationship which holds between pidgins and their lexifiers.

But what exactly is the basis of the often repeated statement that pidgins are unintelligible to speakers of their lexifiers? To date no study ever has explored the issue empirically, e.g., by subjecting respondents from the lexifier speech community to comprehension tests, confronting them with pidgin (or creole)

3 But then, universal intelligibility is counteracted by another general property of prepidgins, and also of stabilized pidgins, but not of pidgincreoles and creoles. Linguistic repertoires which aim to bridge a communication gap and must therefore rely on impromptu strategies in combination with a rudimentary incipient set of recreated grammatical categories and a reconventionalized basic lexicon, will by necessity have to put a higher responsibility on the listener for successful communication than is the case in ordinary linguistic communication, which can rely on highly elaborated sets of conventionalized signifiers that will usually cover all essential grammatical relations. Thus, e.g., the loss of tense, case and embedding in most if not all pidgins has to be made up by the listener’s ingenuity at interpretation (Romaine 1988: 26; Bakker 2008: 138). In early pidgin stages, ease of communication by means of simplification appears to be basically gained for the speaker at the cost of the listener (Hymes 1971: 72; Romaine 1988: 31-32). Interpreting and understanding utterances in pidgin communication clearly requires a heightened level of versatility and effort from the listener. Pidgins are therefore generally encumbered with a higher threshold for listener comprehension, which holds accordingly also for mutual intelligibility between pidgin and lexifier.

material.⁴ It appears that lack of mutual intelligibility is basically deduced from theoretical assumptions, first and foremost from the assumption that pidginisation presupposes a radical break of transmission with concomitant discontinuities of speech community, intelligibility and geographic boundedness (Mühlhäusler 1997: 225-226). Whereas languages are usually transmitted without any serious disruptions, with linguistic changes going for the most part unnoticed, pidgins are said to be the product of events which cause major discontinuities in consequence of a complete breakdown of routine verbal communication. Pidgins are supposed to require a complete relaunch of communication practices, which only a small set of the vocabulary will survive, while all the rest has to be recreated from scratch, i.e. without having recourse to the original source language. The only tie between pidgin and lexifier consists accordingly merely in a modest set of lexical items, which more often than not will even have undergone significant changes to their semantic patterns in the course of the relaunch and later events. It stands to reason that in view of this intercomprehensibility between lexifier and pidgin should rather not be considered a possibility.

Thus, lack of intercomprehensibility appears a product of theorizing rather than an observational fact about pidgins. As such it may and did acquire an axiomatic role in the elaboration of further theory-building. Keith Whinnom took recourse to the unintelligibility assumption to underpin his contact linguistic model which opposes secondary to tertiary hybridization. For Whinnom (1971: 103) unintelligibility in the case of pidgins on the one hand and mutual intelligibility in the case of bilingual contact situations, such as Italian immigrants' Spanish in Argentina known as *cocoliche*, on the other hand, makes all the difference between tertiary hybridization typical of pidgins and secondary hybridization typical of other forms of language contact. Severely restricted access to the lexifier will cause the radical break of transmission which will then bring about unintelligibility between the pidgin and its lexical source.

But then, it would not be fair to maintain that it is all a matter of theorizing and keeping up theoretical elaborations. Whinnom himself supports his unintelligibility claim by pointing to foreigner-talk strategies employed by speakers of Chinese Pidgin English when addressing new arrivals from England to China:

Chinese Pidgin is also quite unintelligible to the newcomer from England. To make themselves understood pidgin-speakers adopt precisely the same measures as in the alleged behaviour of master to slave, i.e. they speak slowly and distinctly, repeat carefully phrases and sentences obviously not understood, seek periphrases, resort to gestures. (Whinnom 1971: 103)

4 One study at least, i.e. Prescod (2013) addresses mutual intelligibility between various English-based creoles.

Though there might be no thorough empirical foundation to the claim, at least there appears to be an experiential basis deriving from colonial practices.⁵ This is further corroborated by the earliest versions of this claim as applied to individual pidgins, as in Robert Hall jr. (1955: 17):

If we, as native speakers of English, listen to [Melanesian — DS] Pidgin, its first effect on us is decidedly confusing. We can make out single words here and there, and often (if the conversation goes slowly enough) complete sentences; but the meaning is likely to escape us, or we are likely to make bad errors of interpretation.

Hall jr. (1955: 18) then goes on to lend his argument further support by referring to Captain John J. Murphy, a colonial officer, who felt the need to compile a *Book of Pidgin English* for his colleagues in order to avoid frictions with the local population, which in his view were basically due to the officers' not understanding (Melanesian) Pidgin. This clearly shows that the linguistic assumption ultimately derives from lay observations within the context of first-hand colonial experiences. A sound and broad experiential base is certainly not the worst thing to go by, but its drawbacks are also quite apparent, such as unintelligibility caused by formal linguistic distance getting easily mixed up with prejudices and stereotypes about native ways of speaking. Apart from that, Melanesian Pidgin or just Neomelanesian, and possibly also Chinese Pidgin English, as established communal languages, which would qualify as pidgincreoles in Bakker's (2002: 5) terminology, had already gone a long way to arrive at the stage of unintelligibility, which gave rise to the observations cited here. Would the same in fact hold for pidgins which only recently became stabilized, as is claimed by Mühlhäusler (1997: 162)?

We will not be able to pursue this issue any further here, but it must be pointed out that an answer to this and similar questions would bear on the interpretation of the results of our small intercomprehension test. If it can be shown that TPR, which will be the object language in our test design, is quite intelligible to Russian native speakers without prior exposure to that same language, what conclusions will this finding allow for? Will it prove the general claim about pidgins being unintelligible to speakers of their lexifier to be untrue? Or will it rather contribute to a refinement of this same statement to the effect that certain stages and kinds of pidgins form an exception to this claim? Or will it even force us to reconsider the very status of TPR, which hitherto has been considered a pidgin, though a somewhat strange one?

5 A similar reference to colonial experience is made by Hall jr. (1966: 128) with respect to Neomelanesian.

In the end, our study may turn out to be not so much about intelligibility between pidgins and lexifiers, but about the status of TPR, and possibly not even about the status of TPR proper, but rather the status of the available text material which is being used for intercomprehension testing. Elena Perechval'skaja (Перехвальская 2007) argued that TPR being recorded only in the last quarter of the 20th century, is in fact a post-pidgin showing clear structural influences of the lexifier due to renewed, and this time intense contact with it. A. Urmančieva (Урманчиева 2010) proposes a similar interpretation, addressing TPR as a mixed language combining component parts of the original pidgin with certain subsystems of the lexifier (especially the verbal inflexions for person, number and tense), also due to renewed contact. Apart from the unlikelihood of the latter proposal, for which no plausible sociolinguistic motivation can be conceived of, there is evidence that the features in question were already present in the pidgin prior to renewed contact with Standard Russian in the Soviet period (Stern 2009). Notwithstanding this controversy, which specifically focusses on the retention of verbal morphology from the lexifier in TPR, it cannot be denied that renewed contact contributed to convergence at other levels, especially the lexicon and idiomatic usage, which is likely to have an effect on intelligibility.

Only few creolists will go beyond the simple statement of the unintelligibility assumption and probe into the linguistic features which in their view might stand in the way of intelligibility despite a common lexical core. It is again Sebba who comes forward with a quite explicit hypothesis what will cause this unintelligibility. Speaking about pidgin Englishes, he remarks:

Of course, because many of its words are of English origin, learning the vocabulary may be a relatively easy task for an English speaker. Learning the grammar may present more challenges – a fact not always realised by Europeans trying to speak pidgin. (Sebba 1997: 15)

Though this statement is about learning a pidgin rather than understanding it without prior instruction, pointing to the grammar as the greater challenge in the acquisition process seems for Sebba to imply that unintelligibility is largely owing to the grammatical features of pidgins rather than their lexicon. Again, there is no empirical support to this claim for the time being, and beyond that there is an opposite claim, put forward by Eugene Nida, that “differences in grammar seem to constitute less acute problems [for intelligibility — DS] than distinctions in words and idioms, since people can often guess satisfactorily at relations, provided they understand the words” (1988: 245). Nida’s claim is corroborated by the observation that respondents to intelligibility tests will resort to common lexical items as anchors for interpretation (Kostomaroff 2012: 4). Sebba’s assumption

seems to derive from the similarity of the lexical core of both pidgin and lexifier on the one hand in contrast to the maximal dissimilarity of the grammar of both. In our view, however, the common lexical core is likely to be easily overrated. It does hardly ever comprise more than a few dozen entries, as a consequence of which strategies like semantic extension, compounding and others have to be employed in order to extend the functional range of the pidgin, as time goes by and new needs arise (Holm 1988 I: 72-73). The application of these strategies of extension, however, would in effect rather contribute to confusion, leading speakers of the lexifier every so often completely astray by letting them misleadingly assume lexical meanings they are familiar with from their own language. So, on the lexical level, too, there is very likely little to go by for native speakers of the lexifier to properly understand pidgin utterances on the spot. In addition, the effects of phonetic adaptations must not be underestimated.

3 Measuring intercomprehensibility between pidgins and their lexifiers

Hans Wolff (1959) was the first to identify the impact of inter-ethnic attitudes on intelligibility, claiming that intelligibility testing does tell us more about social and political interrelations than about actual linguistic distance (see also Nida 1988: 244). This is certainly a factor which ought to be taken into account when dealing with linguistically related languages which share the same sociogeographical area, especially if cross-linguistic communication is common and widespread within the area in question, so that a pecking order of preferred against dispreferred languages of wider communication is likely to have evolved. In order to eliminate the effects of intergroup attitudes one should ideally focus on linguistically related languages whose speakers have no prior knowledge of the other language and the group which speaks it. This, of course, is almost impossible to be had anywhere. Even on the scale of national languages, where state borders and other administrative measures effectively contain any kind of daily communicative and other exchanges between national speech communities, knowledge of neighbouring nations including prejudices and attitudes, which are likely to have an impact on intelligibility, may be assumed to be common, as, e.g., among the speakers of the Scandinavian languages (Haugen 1966). Since our focus will be on testing the intelligibility of TPR to native Russian speakers, our research design appears to meet the ideal requirements on first consideration. Very few native Russian speakers are likely to have ever heard of TPR and only those few who happened to have come into contact with one of its last speakers on the Taimyr peninsula, – one of the remotest places of all Russia – will have

had the opportunity of being directly exposed to this language. But it might turn out that it is just this remoteness and marginality which will feed into a generalized perception of TPR speakers among the global category of deviant outsiders, who are even incapable of speaking proper Russian. Negative attitudes of speakers of the lexifier towards pidgins are well-attested (Reinecke 1938: 108; Hall 1966: 129-130; Bakker 1995: 27), and native Russian speakers form no exception to this (Stern 2006: 163-166). From my personal experience I can confirm that prejudices against ethnic minorities, which tend to be spoken of derogatively as *nacionaly*, are quite strong throughout Siberia. In our test design an effort has been made to control this variable, or make it at least visible, by asking the test respondents about the impression the pidgin speaker and his language has made on them. Though the question was framed as considerate as possible, avoiding any hint that this is about ethnic stereotypes, absolutely none of the respondents cared to provide an answer to it. Absolute silence is, of course, notoriously difficult to interpret, but its unanimity in our case might be indicative of our question touching upon a sensitive issue.

The measurement of intercomprehension between pidgins and their lexifiers is encumbered with additional problems, which will not turn up with languages defined by a fixed native speaker community. Pidgins tend to be highly variable and volatile on different levels. For one, pidgins evolve within a relatively short time span, moving through diverse stages, known as the pidgin-creole life-cycle, with each stage being marked by quite distinct properties, which may be expected to bear on mutual intelligibility with the lexifier. Knowing the developmental stage of a pidgin is therefore crucial, but determining this stage for any pidgin at a certain point in time is not always a straightforward task. This is particularly true for TPR. TPR as it has been recorded and described in recent times is obviously not an incipient or prepidgin. It has evolved innovative grammatical features and strategies, which are used by all speakers in approximately the same way and pattern. This testifies to norms having already emerged, so that there may rest little doubt that TPR is at least a stabilized pidgin.⁶ But has it ever reached the stage of pidgincreole, as it is defined in social terms by Peter Bakker (2008: 139)? Did it ever acquire a community of its own, without yet having native speakers? In view of the scarcity of the historical evidence at our disposal this is hard to judge. Stern

6 Sankoff (1980: 145) treats the fact that speakers of the lexifier come to see the necessity of actively learning features which deviate from their own usage as a fairly good indicator for stabilization in pidgins. For TPR father Suslov noted already in 1880 that in order to book success as a missionary among the Nganasan natives one had to switch to the kind of Russian they are used to (Stern 2012: 68-69). In 1926 Koreškov thought it useful to write down in his diary a rule for the proper use of the word *mesto* when talking Russian to the natives of Taimyr (Stern 2012: 360).

(2009; 2012) argues that, though TPR might never have evolved into some kind of ingroup code, it seems to have been closely linked to forms of Russian settlers' native Russian, probably forming a proficiency continuum with it. This means that TPR, though it served basically intergroup communication, had sufficient feedback from dialectal forms of native Russian not to move too far away from Russian, anyway. It may even be doubted whether the concept of a real radical break of transmission is fully applicable to TPR.

4 Making sense of a story being told in a weird version of one's language

4.1 Russians listening to TPR: the test design

If the aim of our research were limited to empirically testing the pidginist hypothesis of unintelligibility, it might appear sufficient to design a test which would provide a simple yes/no answer to the question "Do native Russian speakers understand TPR?" and count and calculate the results. We shall, however, not stop at this, but will go on to look in more detail into matters concerning the (un)intelligibility of TPR for two obvious reasons. Firstly, since any comprehension test relies on respondents' evaluations of what intelligibility means to them, we have to cross-check whether their conception of intelligibility is in line with the aim of our test design. Secondly, it goes without saying that the opportunity must not be lost to try and identify the sources of unintelligibility and judge its extent in order to arrive at a dependable assessment of the (un)intelligibility of TPR to native Russian speakers.

Since the pidginist hypothesis, which derives basically from anecdotal evidence on first-hand pidgin experiences undergone by native speakers, obviously refers to unintelligibility in real life situations with all its multi-levelled facets which might influence understanding on the discourse level, the natural choice for our research design appears to be a discourse-based test design. In the present test design, test persons are asked to listen to an audiofile once and provide an answer as to whether they understood what they heard or not. In case they claim to have understood, they are asked to give a summary or translation of what they heard. Translation is, of course, a skill unrelated to understanding, so that an inappropriate translation provided by an informant does not necessarily prove incomprehension (Wolff 1959: 34). An ideal test design should, therefore, include intelligibility tests based on performance tasks rather than on direct verbal responses in order to eliminate the translation fallacy. Unfortunately, the specific nature of the

material at our disposal does not allow for a similar research design. There are no more speakers of TPR around who might be asked to help record commands for performance tasks specifically designed for the intelligibility test. We also believe our general awareness of the translation fallacy to be sufficient to allow for a proper interpretation of the data obtained.

In addition to the summary/translation, test persons were also asked to write up comments on their experience with the texts they were exposed to and to identify what they perceived as basic obstacles to a proper understanding as well as jotting down words they recognized in case they did not understand the whole text. The latter is meant to help determine the relationship between word/utterance recognition and the appropriate interpretation of utterances, i.e. their locutionary and illocutionary force, according to Smith's (1988: 266) division of intercomprehension into (1) intelligibility, i.e. word/utterance recognition, (2) comprehensibility, i.e. word/utterance meaning and (3) interpretability, i.e. identifying the intended overall meaning behind the conventional meanings of the words/utterances (illocution).

Perlocution, here understood as the wider implications for and effects on the reader/listener, is generally not taken into consideration in analyzing the levels of (inter)comprehension, though, as will be shown below, keeping illocution and perlocution apart is key to a proper interpretation of test results. We consider attainments such as properly identifying the genre of the text by the respondents as narrative prose and distinguishing the general theme as well as the contextual framework of the narration, especially its relation to the narrator, as perlocutionary in nature. Asking informants about their understanding is conducive to introducing ambiguity into the test results on principled grounds, because 'understanding' in folk linguistic terms appears to cover both pragmatic forces. Some respondents, who provided only short statements identifying the aboutness of the text, considered this rather perlocutive interpretation as sufficient proof to themselves that they in fact 'understood' the text, although they apparently did not understand much else besides. Though, in theory perlocution may be expected to presuppose proper identification of all locutionary and illocutionary details of an utterance, proper perlocutionary interpretation, being also based on non-linguistic contextual clues, is not strictly dependent on the other levels. Thus, being able to identify our sample text as a narrative on hunting and fishing and framing the text accordingly as either fictitious, instructive or just a personal anecdote, does not require the respondent to have grasped the full locutionary and illocutionary force of all utterances that make up the text.

Usually, the sample for tests on mutual intelligibility based on free discourse will not exceed the limit of 20 test persons (Kostomaroff 2012: 4), which should be sufficient where not much individual variation in terms of personal parameters

is to be expected. Classical sociological variables like gender, sex and age may not be expected to bear on the issue at hand. We have also tried to see to it that only persons whose life is firmly settled within a primarily monolingual Russian environment with variation being restricted to Karam's acceptable area will take part in the experiment, so that the sample will consist of a group of native speakers with little to no experience in cross-linguistic communication. The search for respondents was accordingly limited to Russian urbanites of the centre, i.e. to people who are deeply embedded in monolingual Russian standard culture and thus form the greatest possible contrast to the cultural environment of TPR. It is true that this homogenized group must fall short of being representative of the wide variety of individual Russian linguistic biographies,⁷ but then the pidginists' hypothesis, which we have set out to test, is implicitly based on an idealized native speaker, who would be as far removed as possible from the pidgin in question and its specific cultural framework. We are also aware that, though the group may be homogenized, individual variation with respect to the test results may still turn out to be very pronounced. Especially the innate individual capability to creatively and flexibly deal with highly divergent and variable, and to some extent also deficient linguistic input, may be expected to yield highly divergent individual results. Individual differences in working memory should also be taken into account (Just & Carpenter 1992).

The base text consists of an original sound recording of a simple narrative text of 5 minutes length, told by Djalante Jarockij, who is making a conscious effort in speaking as basilectal as possible in telling this particular story.⁸ The text was chosen to be short enough to make sure that incomprehension might not be due to overstrained memory capacities. Furthermore, neither is comprehension impeded by complexifying features such as a high level of abstraction, narrative inconsistencies, insertion of comments, mismatches of discourse and event structures, such as flashbacks and flashforwards. The text is narratively simple according to the principles of integration, consistency and isomorphism as applied by Ohtsuka & Brewer (2009). There are only mildly raised costs for construal, as delineated by Zwaan (2003: 50) caused by two changes of the time frame, reported though in consecutive order (twice 'the next day'), and a change of perspective between

7 As, e.g., traditional minority and regional bilingualism in Russia itself, but even more so the growing number of Russians going abroad or coming regularly into contact with foreigners visiting Russia.

8 The story has been published in Stern (2012: 584) and will be reproduced and provided with a translation in the appendix to this article. The test is accessible online via <http://survey.flw.ugent.be/index.php/258798>. Respondents were recruited via facebook and through personal networks of friends and acquaintances of the author in Russia (among whom I would particularly like to express my gratitude to Kapitolina Fedorova and Dennis Ioffe). About two months after being launched in November 2017 the test site was accessed for the last time.

older and younger brother. The respondents were asked to give a written summary, to indicate passages that they found particularly troubling, and point out lexical items that were unknown to them. Those who indicated that they did not understand the text as a whole, were asked to listen once again to it, this time, however, on a sentence-by-sentence basis, asking them after each sentence to write down what they had heard and to give an interpretation of it.

4.2 Russians having listened to TPR: the test results

Unlike physical elements, humans have to comply with the conditions set out by the test design, which means that apart from the test results proper there may always be some unexpected side effects. We already mentioned that none of the respondents provided an intuitive evaluation of the language and the background of the speaker. There was also a very high number of respondents who did not complete the test. Of the 78 persons who entered the test site, only 30 went through the whole test. 31 entered the start page and left immediately. This page consists of a personal statement, where I present myself and the background of my test design. It is, of course, impossible to determine the reasons for leaving the site at this early point, but my guess would be that the would-be respondents were deterred by the length of the introductory text, which required about 2 minutes reading time. Another three dropped out at the next page, where they were asked to identify themselves. Two went on to read the short test instruction, but did not listen to the sound file. Possibly, they experienced technical difficulties in trying to play the sound file on their personal computer. 11 persons listened to the sound file but did not answer the question whether they understood the text or not. This latter large group deserves some closer attention, because the correct interpretation of their decision to stop with the test at this point may have an impact on the overall results. Of course, there is no way of knowing what motivated their silent decision to stop, but there is a possibility that they did so because they did not understand the text and were reluctant to admit it by hitting the NO-button. Though I emphasized – perhaps unwisely so – in the introductory statement that the test is not about individual capabilities, many may have thought it shameful nonetheless to admit of being unable to perform the task. In the light of the overall results of those who completed the test, this appears not an unlikely interpretation. Of the 30 respondents who completed the test, only two checked the NO-box, though it became obvious on closer scrutiny that some of those who maintained to have understood the text, did apparently not understand very much of it. Thus, we are dealing with a sizable margin of uncertainty with respect to the overall test results. If the interpretation suggested here is correct and true for all 11 respondents in question, there would be 41 instead of 30 relevant reactions to the test. Instead

of a result which would testify to the general and almost unquestionable intelligibility of TPR to native Russian speakers, we would get a somewhat less straightforward picture of the whole issue. In view of this, a close scrutiny and thorough interpretation of the 30 completed test files will be the more imperative. We will start our analysis with the 28 respondents who indicated that they understood the text. In order to judge the extent of comprehension for each respondent, a list of topics and elements which together form the narrative was set up as a standard against which to evaluate the summaries given by the respondents. The table below indicates for each topic how many respondents identified it:

Feature type	theme/aboutness			narrative setting and structure				narrative and plot details			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
identified by n respondents	28	26	10	13	11	7	4	10	8	7	4

1 fishing – **2** hunting – **3** reindeer hunting – **4** older and younger brothers as actors on the scene – **5** older brother giving directions to younger brother – **6** happy ending: shortage of food supplies solved – **7** dialogic structure of the narrative – **8** There is a lake which abounds particularly in edible fish – **9** the older brother left two reindeer behind and asks his younger brother to go and pick them up – **10** older brother is married, but without children – **11** the younger brother loses his bearings on his way back to the camp

The use of this table as a basis to judge the extent of comprehension for each respondent rests on the assumption that every respondent tried to give as exhaustive and detailed a summary as possible instead of just indicating the general theme or aboutness of the text. Though being able to indicate the general theme would testify to at least a rudimentary form of comprehension, it is certainly a far cry from (almost) full comprehension, which alone may count as a valid indicator of (mutual) intelligibility. Thus, the fact of asking for a summary by itself should already imply quite clearly that in order to prove real comprehension, the respondent ought to provide more than just an indication of the overall theme. Notwithstanding the explicit requirement to this effect in the test instructions, some answers are pretty short and do in fact indicate nothing more than the general theme. For these short answers it cannot be excluded that the respondents misunderstood the instructions (by mistaking illocutionary for perlocutionary understanding, as suggested above) and limited their answer consciously to a short statement of the

aboutness of the text, thinking this sufficient proof of their true text comprehension. Since, however, most respondents went out of their way to provide fairly detailed summaries in order to provide full evidence of their having understood the text, it is not unlikely that short answers were given by those who did not wish to give away how little they in fact understood.

The main themes of fishing and hunting are unanimously identified by nearly all respondents. Being able to identify the theme(s) and supply a generic title to the story appears to have been considered the basic requirement to check the YES-box for comprehension. As a matter of fact, one respondent who checked the YES-box openly admitted that she did not comprehend anything beyond the general theme of the text. It may be safely assumed that with narratives the threshold for claiming comprehension is significantly lower than with directives and instructions, which would require the respondents to take action on the basis of what they actually understood. No one would claim to have understood any directions given to him, if the only thing he actually understood was that he was being given directions. Claiming comprehension of the narrative on the basis of just being able to indicate the general theme may in fact be a strategic move to avoid straightforwardly admitting incomprehension. This is somewhat obliquely confirmed by a number of respondents, who specified that they did not comprehend that much after all and that they completely missed parts of the narrative. Giving details on the overall narrative setting and structure as well as identifying specific details of the plot, however, are very clear indications that comprehension went clearly beyond a basic understanding of what was being talked about. The significantly lower scores for more specific bits of information give an idea that not everyone of the 28 respondents in fact understood the story in a way as to be able to reproduce it in a coherent manner. The table given below gives the number of respondents by increasing number of features being identified:

	identification of theme			partial comprehension			almost full to full comprehension				
number of features identified	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
number of respondents	0	9	5	1	5	1	3	2	2	0	0
total	14			7			7				

It goes without saying that the features identified by those scoring only two to three features included the basic themes fishing and hunting. For all higher scores details of narrative structure or specific plot details were identified to varying degrees. Evidence of full comprehension was provided only for seven respondents, the lower scores for partial comprehension may, however, in part be owing to mnemonic difficulties of reproducing in writing all they had understood while listening. Mnemonic problems were in fact claimed by three respondents, among whom was, however, one respondent who scored particularly high (8 features). Allowing for mnemonic limitations, which can explain the cases of partial comprehension, but rather not those of mere identification of the aboutness of the story, we arrive at a roughly equal distribution of comprehension vs. incomprehension.

If our interpretation of the above table is correct, a mismatch between the respondents' self-assessment and the presumed actual state of affairs has to be dealt with. Part of the problem is that the structure of the test required respondents to give a yes-or-no answer to the question of having understood the text, where some might have appreciated the possibility of giving a graded response. This is evidenced by one respondent, who, though she checked yes, declared that she understood but 30-40% of the text. Another one, mentioned above, admitted that she was only able to figure out the theme of the text. Unfortunately, these were the only respondents who used the commentary box to give an estimate of the extent of their comprehension. Since trust in the self-assessment of the respondents is a basic precondition for any intercomprehension test, doubts about the accuracy and reliability of the responses require additional evidence to go by. Having the respondents give estimates of the extent of comprehension, in addition, appears useful on first consideration, though it will ultimately yield results which are still more difficult to interpret due to the high degree of spontaneous intuition involved in them. We consider misapprehensions of parts of the text, as they emerge from some of the respondents' summaries, a better guidance in assessing actual text comprehension:

Misapprehension of text genre

1. misidentification of the narrator as the one who goes fishing and hunting and by the same token misapprehension of the text, which is a fictitious anecdote, as some sort of personal account (respondents [1] and [28]).
2. misidentification of the narrator as father [16], [20] or another brother [23] of the two brothers of the narrative, with the same consequences with respect to genre-assignment as in (1).
3. story misconceived of as a piece of teaching or general instruction on the topic of fishing and hunting [16].

Misapprehension of structural properties of subparts of the narrative

4. giving directions, which covers a large part of the narrative, is being mistaken for an exchange of general fishing and hunting experiences [1],[3] and advice on preparing food [3].
5. giving directions is being mistaken for an account of a fishing tour of several lakes, where in fact only one lake is singled out as a fishing site [8].
6. [3] does not realize that the major bulk of the narrative is in dialogue.

Misapprehensions concerning the story-line

7. both brothers are misidentified as partners going on a joint fishing trip by [8] and [25], where in fact one is sending the other and giving him directions.
8. the activities of both brothers are being framed as a kind of enterprise to conquer new lands by [8].
9. [3] does not realize that there is more than one person involved.
10. [5] thinks that the younger brother is additionally sent to catch a stallion on the banks of a river. This is due to lexical misapprehension. The respondent obviously mistook *xrebet* ‘mountain ridge’ (pronounced as *xiribét* with an aptzyctic vowel inserted into the word initial cluster) for *žerebéc* ‘stallion’.⁹

The misapprehensions listed above call to mind Hall’s “bad errors of interpretation” (see above, ch. 2 for the full quote), which any native speaker of the lexifier will make despite his seemingly being able to understand so many words and even whole phrases. Almost all misconceptions listed apply to deep levels of text organisation. This is not just about the odd detail being misunderstood in the context of an otherwise correct framing of the text. Except for the minor misunderstanding (10), for which a lexical source can be identified, in all other cases it is hard to pinpoint with any degree of certainty what triggered the misconceptions. The incorrect assignment of the text genre appears to be largely due (at least in (1)-(2)) to attempts to determine the relationship between the narrator and the narrative, which, as a matter of fact, is not made explicit by the narrator himself. This is obviously about filling in missing contextual, i.e. extra-textual information, and therefore should not qualify as evidence of text comprehension, on first consideration. But then, orally delivered personal accounts should be easily distinguishable from fictitious anecdotes on the basis of formal clues within the text, such as the use of first person pronouns as narrator form. There are, in

9 This lexical misapprehension also demonstrates the actual use of nouns as anchors and base for the reconstruction of narrated events by listeners under conditions of deviant linguistic input.

fact, five occurrences of forms indicating first person (pronominal *ja* and *menja* (twice), *pojdu* ‘I’ll go’, *nachožu* ‘I find’), which may have been understood by the respondents in question to refer to the narrator himself, though they actually occur in direct speech and refer to the speaker, accordingly, instead of the narrator. Misinterpreting these forms as referring to the narrator – if they were perceived at all – may have been induced by not realising the basically dialogic organisation of the narrative. Missing the overall dialogic pattern is put into evidence by (6) and appears also to lie at the bottom of (3)-(5). In much the same line, key aspects of the story-line are misrepresented in (7)-(9), testifying to a general failure of constructing the text as a cohesive whole from all its constitutive building blocks. In the end, it looks like at least some respondents did not build up their interpretation of the text from a linear sentence-by-sentence progression through the text, but rather by picking up fragments in an uncoordinated manner and piecing them together into a hypothetical story-line. This may be taken as an indication that the text was not processed in the same way as might be expected in ordinary native language text processing, but rather in a reconstructive approach filling in the gaps of the deviant and therefore deficient input.¹⁰ This specific mode may be assumed to operate on the basis of salient lexical content words only. It cannot, of course, be excluded that the odd sentence may have been understood in full, too. By and large, the source for all misapprehensions ought to be looked for within patterns of text organisation, such as the use of grammatical and pragmatic markers, clearly deviating from native Russian usage. As a matter of fact, it is this area where TPR and native Russian differ most expressly. Though TPR appears to be comprehensible to native Russian speakers to some extent, understanding TPR utterances and texts for them is certainly a far cry from ordinary understanding of discourse in their familiar native Russian.

Contrary to our preliminary interpretation of misapprehensions deriving from a lack of formal grammatical and pragmatic clues to help the respondents’ construal of the text, respondents identified unknown or unidentified lexical content words [2], especially nouns [17], as the one major obstacle to proper comprehension. This is further confirmed by the two respondents who answered the question whether they understood the text in the negative [9,14]. Some respondents were more specific and identified individual lexical items they stumbled upon: *lajda* ‘swampy depression in the ground’ [6,12,18,28]¹¹, *kusta netu* [6], i.e. misheard *kusat-ta netu*

10 For the role of grammatical markers as guiding signifiers to direct attention, indicate spatiotemporal relations, etc., during the construal of narrated events, see Zwaan (2003: 45 and 51). It should be quite obvious how the construal of a story-line is impeded where these guiding devices are missing or are not properly perceived.

11 In the translation task the two respondents having given a negative answer had to go through, this very lexical item was the only one which was left blank.

‘there is nothing to eat’, and *chiribét* [18], i.e. misheard *chrebét* ‘mountain ridge’. The first one, *lajda* – a term for a very specific geographical condition, exclusively found in the tundra of the Far North – is in fact the only obstacle which is truly lexical. The other two items identified as lexically problematic are in fact due to phonetic differences between TPR and native Russian. In one more case, a lexical item was misinterpreted: *sig* ‘a salmon-like fish (*coregonus nasutus*)’ was misheard as *š’uk* ‘pike’ (which ought to be *š’uka*) by [12]. None of the items either identified as problematic or actually misheard caused in fact any major misconstruals. Actually, none of the misconstruals listed under (1)-(9) can be causally linked to the ignorance or misapprehension of lexical content words. There is an obvious mismatch between what is perceived as causing and what actually caused incomprehension, which may simply reflect the fact that (content) words rank highest in folk linguistic perception (Collins 1998; Stern 2015: 201-203).

This brings us to the two only respondents who claimed to have not understood the text on hearing it in full. Both identified unknown words as the reason for not being able to understand the text. One added that she found the pronunciation also troublesome. Respondents giving a negative answer were asked to listen once again to the first part of the text, this time divided up into five short chunks (cf. appendix, text units 01-05). After listening to each unit they were asked once again whether they understood what they heard. In case they answered in the positive, they were asked to provide a native Russian translation of the unit. This time both respondents checked the YES-box for all five units and gave translations which clearly indicated that they understood all units entirely, with the only exception of the lexical item *lajda* for which both respondents left blanks. This result seems once more to confirm Hall’s description of the strange native speaker experience of understanding the words but not the meaning of pidgin utterances. But contrary to our preliminary assumption that deviant structural properties as, e.g., the use of the generalized form of the 2nd person pronoun *tebja* in subject position in units 02 and 03, might cause incomprehension, neither respondent was misled by the deviant morphosyntax of the short utterances into giving an incorrect translation. The single-sentence translations both respondents provided leave the impression that the difference between them and those who claimed to have understood is not that big after all. It appears that TPR is fairly well comprehensible to native Russian speakers, as long as it is presented in short isolated chunks, but that it requires particular attention to arrive at a proper understanding of TPR utterances due to its many deviations from ordinary native Russian usage on all levels (pragmatic, morphosyntactic, phonetic, lexical). Identifying *tebja* as a somewhat unusual subject form is an easy task in isolation, but if similar deviations amass as one proceeds through a text, the effort to deal with these manifold small variations on familiar usage appears to be too

much, ultimately, to be able to keep track of the narrative at the same time. This is somewhat reminiscent of the experience of being exposed to a closely related language, such as my personal experience of a speaker of German being exposed to Dutch on moving to Flanders. This implies that there may be no principal difference between intercomprehension between genetically related languages and intercomprehension between pidgin and lexifier after all, as was suggested at the beginning of this paper. In both cases, listeners have to deal with deviantly patterned usage of familiar linguistic items, which subtracts from their overall attention capacity that would otherwise be fully bestowed upon making sense of the complex utterances they are exposed to. The answer to the question whether TPR is intelligible to native Russian speakers is therefore that it is so in a restricted sense. If we apply Kintsch & van Dijk's (1978) model of text comprehension, which opposes the macrostructure of discourse to the microstructure of individual propositions, it appears that unintelligibility emerges at the level of single propositions. It became apparent that all respondents experienced to different degrees difficulties in keeping track of or even identifying the plot line, which in an obvious manner derives from the logical sequence of individual propositions. Disturbances, however, at the microlevel in all cases but two did not impede constructing a topic of discourse, which Kintsch & van Dijk identify as the global semantic macrostructure of a discourse (1978: 365-6). This raises the interesting question, which we will not pursue here, how the topic or theme is arrived at, if the propositional text base, from which it is supposed to derive, is largely deficient or deviant (at least in terms of grammatical and pragmatical clues)?¹²

5 Conclusion

The research this paper presents was inspired by the general claim that pidgins and their lexifiers are mutually unintelligible. At the end of our way we are in a position to say that at least one pidgin, i.e. TPR, is, though in a restricted manner, intelligible to native speakers of its lexifier. If the general claim were an absolute and strict one, requiring full mutual unintelligibility for all pidgins and their respective lexifiers, our findings would be sufficient to disprove the claim or else raise doubts about TPR being a true pidgin. But most pidginists treat the claim in a supple manner, and, what is more, TPR becomes fully intelligible only under the quite artificial condition of being presented in bite-sized chunks. In real-life interaction quite a sizable proportion of Russian native speakers would probably experience TPR discourse as something requiring customization and perhaps

12 It could be assumed that topic identification and assignment is in these cases possibly no more than a good guess based on a very small base of fragmentary evidence indeed (like, e.g., recurrent key-words). It still remains a striking fact how good people in general are at guessing the right thing.

even training. Claiming intelligibility for TPR in real-life use would be stretching it too far, apparently.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to use TPR as a test case for the unintelligibility hypothesis only with some caution. It has been repeatedly argued that TPR, as it was documented for the first time only at the end of the 20th and the turn of the 21st century, is in fact a post-pidgin (Хелимский 2000; Урманчиева 2010). This argument was basically founded on the use of verbal inflexions of the lexifier in TPR. Stern (2009) argued against this position, producing historical evidence from as far back as the 1880s to show that the alleged post-pidgin features were already present way before renewed contact with the lexifier could gain momentum in the 1930s. This does, of course, not mean that the speech of the last TPR speakers was not somehow affected by Standard Russian. But this is not what makes TPR special. Though TPR clearly fulfills the basic criteria for being a pidgin, Stern (2012: 537-9) argues that it is a pidgin with a very special history, which probably lacked a radical break of transmission. This would account for the retention of Russian verbal inflexions, but it may also account for a greater closeness to native Russian in general. It may be pointed out here that TPR neatly reflects Russian colloquial lexical usage, not making much use of techniques to extend a strongly reduced lexical base, as is typical of most other pidgins. It should be quite obvious how this affects mutual intelligibility with its lexifier in a way that makes it incommensurable with other pidgins. However, being a pidgin nevertheless – though with a special history – it must not be excluded from consideration in discussing the intelligibility hypothesis for pidgins in general. The special case of TPR may serve as a warning not to treat mutual intelligibility as a core defining feature of pidginess and thereby denying pidgins with a non-prototypical sociohistorical trajectory their place in pidgin studies. Besides, there are other reasons not to take mutual unintelligibility too seriously. One of these reasons should have become clear from our comprehension test. Intelligibility can be tested for sure, but testing it does not yield the clear-cut, undebatable results desirable for exclusive either-or-type defining criteria.

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APPENDIX

Djalamte Jarockij I-1 (Stern 2012, 584)¹³

00 Dəvá bəráť

два брат
two brother01 “Uuu,” stáršai gəvərít, “tam ərəpnəi ósira iēs.
старший говорит там рыбный озеро есть
AUTH older speak-3SG.PRS here fishy lake EXIST.AUTH

02 Ćibiá ni sna-l eta miesta?”

Тебя не знал это место
2 NEG know-PST DEM place03 “Uuu, ni sna-l.” “Nu, Ćibiá vót pr’áama tak pajd’ó-ś,
не зна-л ну тебя вот прямо так пойдешь
AUTH NEG know-PST now 2 DEIC straight ahead so go-2SG.PRS
a najd’óś málinki lájda.
a найдешь маленький лайда
CONJ find-2SG.PRS small depression

04 Tut lájda kəraj najd’óś irécka.

тут лайда край найдешь речка
DEM depression end find-2SG.PRS riverIrécka dále najd’óś ísó ósira.
речка далее найдешь еще озеро
river beyond find-SG.PRS yet lake

05 Tut ósira nańís kəraj tam sópəčka ivida-t, malinki sópəčka.

Тут озеро наниз край там сопочка вида-ть маленький сопочка
DEM lake East end there hill see-INF small hill

13 The tags used for glossing the text are: ADV adverb — AUTH authoritative (expressed either by utterance initial long drawn ooo-sound or by shift of the word accent of the last word of a sentence to the last syllable in combination with a long high falling intonation) — AUX auxiliary — CONJ conjunction — CV converb — DAT dative — DEIC deictic pointer — DEM demonstrative pronoun — ELAT elative-superlative (expressed by extra lengthening of the stressed syllable) — INDEF indefinite — EXIST existential — FOC focus — FUT future — GEN genitive — IMV imperative — INF infinitive — NEG negation — NEU neuter — PL plural — PRP preposition — PRS present tense — PST past tense — PTCP participle — SG singular

- 06** Tut sóпка n'ésú tam ósira ies.
 тут сопка низу там озеро есть
 DEM *hill below there lake* EXIST
 Tut ósira miestə sétku éən-ēi, əgəbáçit bud'ís tam.
 тут озеро место сетку тян-и рыбачить будешь ам
 DEM *lake place net stretch-IMV.AUTH fish-INF FUT.AUX-2SG.PRS there*
 Kúsə-t-tə n'étu u nas."
 куша-ть-то нету у нас
 eat-INF-FOC NEG.EXIST PRP 1PL
- 07** Nu, tut-ta ušó-l i sétu pastávi-l, patóm pirišól:
 Ну тут-то уше-л и сети постави-л потом пришел
 now DEM-FOC *leave-PST and net place-PST then come-PST*
 “Nu bəráť, umin'á našól étə gəvər-én ósira-tōu.”
 ну брат у меня наше-л это говор-ен озеро-то
 now *brother 1SG find-PST DEM say-PTCP lake-FOC-AUTH*
- 08** Šéçi pastávi-l, dəvá arípka rajmá-l: ad'in čir i ad'in šik.
 сети постави-л два рыбака пойма-л один чир и один сиг
 net *place-PST two fish catch-PST one whitefish and one maraene*
- 09** O, sasém xarašó stá-l-i an'í.
 совсем хорошо ста-л-и они
 very good *become-PST-PL 3PL*
- 10** Na durugói d'én: “Nu, rajd-ú d'iki iska-č, alén.”
 на другой день ну пойд-у дикий иска-ть олень
 PRP *other day now go-1SG.PRS wild seek-INF reindeer*
- 11** Axóci-lsa, tirí alén ubí-l, d'iki-x alinéi.
 Охоти-лся три олень уби-л дики-х оленей
 hunt-PST *three reindeer kill-PST wild-GEN.PL reindeer-GEN.PL*
 Dəva astávi-l. Éťə stársəi axóti-t.
 Два остави-л. Это старший охоти-т
 two *leave behind-PST DEM older hunt-3SG.PRS*
- 12** Na durugói d'én bəraçísk-u gəvərít:
 на другой день братишк-у говорит
 PRP *other day little-brother-DAT.SG say-3SG.PRS*
 “Tam dəva oléni astaviíl. Éť-i pərinis-í.
 Там два олени оставил эт-и принес-и
 there two *reindeer leave behind-PST DEM-PL bring-IMV*

- 13 Nu, pajd'ós tudá, síribiét málinki najd'óós.
 ну пойдешь туда хребет маленький найдешь
now go-2SG.PRS thither ridge small find-2SG.PRS
- 14 Tut síribiét n'ésú bolsóóói lájdácku naid'ós, dilíínə.
 тут хребет низу большой лайдочку найдешь длинный
 DEM *ridge below huge.ELAT depression find-2SG.PRS long-ELAT*
- 15 Éta lájda kan'és miésta hiribiét jes,
 это лайда конец место хребет есть
 DEM *depression end place ridge EXIST*
 liés-ta málinki, ni sílna gustói.
 лес-то маленький не сильно густой
wood-FOC small NEG strongly dense
- 16 Tut hiribiét ərəsá-lda n'ésú lájda jes.
 тут хребет реза-лда низу лайда есть
 DEM *ridge cut-CV below depression EXIST*
 Tut lájda miéstə naid'ó-ś éc-i ubí-tə alén.”
 тут лайда место найде-шь эт-и уби-тый олень
 DEM *depression place find-2SG.PRS DEM-PL kill-PTCP reindeer*
- 17 Paśó-l málinki-tə, móláci-tə. Uuu, id'ó-t id'ó-t párin-tə:
 пошел маленький-то младший-то иде-т иде-т парень-то
go-PST small-FOC younger-FOCAUTH go-3SG.PRS go-3SG.PRS lad-FOC
 “D'é ón gəvəri-l takí-tə simlú. Paćimú-tə ni naħaž-ú.”
 где он говори-л такие-то землю почему-то не нахожу
where 3SG say-PST DEM-FOC land why-INDEF NEG find-1SG.PRS
- 18 Kaħədə-ta hiribiét naśó-l: “Étət navirnəu.”
 Когда-то хребет наше-л этот наверно
when-INDEF ridge find-PST DEM probably.AUTH
- 19 Hiribiét kráj daxód'i-t. Nu právilna tut láidáckə.
 хребет край доходи-т ну правильно тут лайдочка
ridge end reach-3SG.PRS now correctly here depression
- 20 Lájda kráj tut id'ó-t. O, isó lájda málinki.
 лайда край тут иде-т еще лайда маленький
depression end 3 go-3SG.PRS yet depression small
- 21 O, tut uot lájda miéstə dəvá ubí-tə alén našó-l.
 тут вот лайда место два уби-тый олень наше-л
 DEM DEIC *depression place two kill-PTCP reindeer find-PST*

- 22 ét-i sánki méstə gurudi-lda taharia pośól damój.
 эти санки место груди-лда пошел домой
 DEM-PL *sleigh place stow-CV now go-PST home*
- 23 Bəráť méstə gəvəri-t: “O, ja ix naśó-l.”
 брат место говори-т я их наше-л
brother place say-3SG.PRS 1SG 3PL find-PST
- 24 “Pastój ćibiá dalikó sn’étus? Ćemno stála.”
 почто тебя далеко нету темн-о ста-л-о
why 2 far NEG.EXIST dark-ADV become-PST-NEU
- 25 “O, nimnókə kuruža-l umin’á.”
 немножко кружа-л у меня
a little bit turn around-PST 1
- 26 “Simlá-tə ni snat.
 земля-то не знает
land-FOC NEG know-3SG.PRS
 Ee, bólsa ćibiá dalikó ni búdu puskāu-ć.
 больше тебя далеко не буду пуска-ть
more 2 far NEG FUT.AUX-1SG let go-INF
- 27 Búi-ś ćá ókəla ćúm méstə kurućí-t.
 буде-шь тебя около чум место крути-ть
FUT.AUX-2SG 2 close to tent place move about-INF
- 28 Tut dažə śéci miéstə ćibiá puská-t ni búđ-u.
 тут даже сети место тебя пуска-ть не буд-у
 DEM *even net place 2 let go-INF NEG FUT.AUX-1SG*
- 29 Xudói đéh astánit, potiriáit.”
 худой день останет потеряет
bad day become-3SG.PRS lose-3SG.PRS
- 30 Nu, stársə pośó-l śéci motiré-ć.
 ну старший поше-л сети смотре-ть
now older go-PST net look-INF
 Motiré-l, ou, munógə əgə’bu rajmá-l.
 смотре-л много рыбу пойма-л
look-PST many fish catch-PST
- 31 Məláci-tə n’étu, étə biž žinə’.
 младший-то нету, это без жены
younger-FOC NEG-EXIST DEM without wife-GEN.SG

	Stársə	žəná,	dʲéc-i	nʲétu.						
	Старший	жена	дет-и	нету						
	<i>Older</i>	<i>wife</i>	<i>child-PL</i>	NEG.EXIST						
32	“U,”	ćipérə	bába	miéstə	gəvərít,	“əṛə’ba-tə	sé	jedá-tə	palnó	stál.”
		теперь	баба	место	говорит	рыба-то	се	еда-то	полно	стал
	AUTH <i>now</i>	<i>wife</i>	<i>place</i>	<i>say-3SG.PRS</i>	<i>fish-FOC</i>	<i>all food-FOC</i>	<i>enough</i>	<i>become-PST</i>		
33	Sasém	narmálnə-tə	xəṛəsó	náci-l-ī.						
	совсем	нормально-то	хорошо	нача-л-и						
	<i>very</i>	<i>regular-FOC</i>	<i>good</i>	<i>begin-PST-PL.AUTH</i>						
34	Əṛə’b-i	žít	náci-l-i	xəṛəsó.						
	рыб-ы	жить	нача-л-и	хорошо						
	<i>fish-PL</i>	<i>live-INF</i>	<i>begin-PST-PL</i>	<i>good</i>						
35	Tətí	bəḷta.	[in Nganasan]							
	(əto vəcĕ)									
	DEM <i>all</i>									

Two Brothers

01 The older (brother) said: “There is a lake there which abounds in fish. **02** You didn’t know that place?” **03** — “I didn’t know it.” — “Now, you go straight ahead, and you’ll find a small depression. **04** At the end of that depression you’ll find a river. Beyond that river you’ll find yet another lake. **05** — At the East bank of that lake a hill will become visible, a small hill. **06** Below that hill there is a lake. Place your net at that lake, it is there that you’ll be fishing. We don’t have anything to eat any more.” **07** — Now, that one left and placed the net, and then he came back: “Now, brother, I found that lake you were talking about. **08** I placed the net and caught two fish: one whitefish and one maraene.” **09** — Oh, they were very well off then. **10** On the next day: “Now, I’ll go to seek some wild reindeer.” **11** He went hunting and killed three reindeer. He left two behind. It was the older one that went hunting. **12** The next day he said to his little brother: “I left two reindeer behind. Bring them here. **13** Now, you’ll take this direction and you’ll find a small ridge. **14** Below that ridge you’ll find a tremendous depression, a very long one. **15** At the end of this depression is a ridge, a small wood, not very dense. **16** When you cross that ridge, there will be a depression. At that depression you will find the killed reindeer.” **17** The small one, the younger brother went. He goes and goes, that lad: “Where did he say, is this land? I cannot find it for some

reason.” **18** Sometime later he found a ridge: “Probably it is this one.” **19** He reached the end of the ridge. Here is a depression, indeed. **20** He went to the end of that depression: oh, there is yet another depression. **21** At this very depression he finally found the two killed reindeer. **22** He stowed them away on the sleigh now and went home. **23** He says to his brother: “Oh, I found them.” **24** — “Why have you been so long away? Night has fallen.” **25** — “Oh, I got lost a little bit.” **26** — “He does not know the land! Eh, I won’t let you go anywhere far away anymore. **27** You will only move about close to the camp site. **28** I won’t even let you go to the fishing ground. **29** If it’s going to be an unlucky day, he’ll get lost.” **30** Now, the older (brother) went to check the net. He checked, and, oh, he caught a lot of fish. **31** As for the younger brother, he had no wife. The older brother had a wife, but no children. **32** Now he said to his wife: “With all that fish there is enough food now.” **33** They began to have a very good, regular life now. **34** They began to live well off this fish. **35** That’s all.