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"Куэссь не получается сāмас, рӯшас полегче" – codeswitching on the Kola Peninsula

In this article I will take a closer look at some examples of codeswitching (CS) between Kildin Saami and Russian on the Kola Peninsula, and try to explain their possible discourse-related meanings in the light of existing theories on CS. In addition, I will say a few words about the relationship between CS and loanwords.

1.   The area and its languages

Both Kildin Saami and Komi are nowadays minority languages on the Kola Peninsula; the Komi people migrated to Kola at the end of the 19th century from their ancestral areas east of the White Sea. Although Russian settlement of Kola began as early as the 13th-14th century, it was mostly confined to the town of Kola and the so-called Ter Coast on the White Sea. The Russian settlers encountered a largely unfamiliar environment, and much of the knowledge — and the accompanying terminology — that they needed in order to survive was borrowed from their new neighbours, the Saami and Karelians. Thus, the Saami language gained a certain influence on the vocabulary of the local Russian dialect.

From the beginning of the 20th century, the Kola Peninsula became of increasing strategic importance: as the only (non-Baltic) ice-free port in the European part of Russia, Romanov-na-Murmane (founded in 1916, name changed to Murmansk in 1917) was of great importance to the war effort in World War I. In the 1920s and 1930s, large quantities of valuable minerals were discovered in the Khibiny Mountains, and large-scale mining started. Today, the western part of the Peninsula is dominated by the military (submarine bases), fishing (a trawler port in Murmansk) and mining industry (Nikel', Mončegorsk, Poljarnye Zori, Revda), a development that contributed to the large population growth and massive immigration from other parts of the Soviet Union.

The Kildin Saami and Komi languages both belong to the Finno-Ugric language family. Kildin Saami is one of the Saami languages

spoken on the Kola Peninsula; the other ones are Skolt Saami (called "нотозерский говор" in the Russian tradition), Ter Saami ("иокангский говор") and the probably extinct Akkala Saami ("бабинский говор"). These Saami languages in Russia have approximately 500 speakers.[1]

2. Gathering the recordings

The recordings on which this article is based were gathered during fieldwork trips to the Kola Peninsula in Spring and Autumn of 2007 and in Spring 2008. During the first two trips we visited the village of Lovozero (in Kildin Saami *Lujavv'r*), which is the "capital city" of the Russian Saami. The Saami are but a small minority in Lovozero: the large majority of the population consists of Russians and Ižma-Komi, the latter the descendants of the immigrant reindeer owners who settled on the Peninsula in the late 19th century.

During our third trip we also visited the village of Krasnoščel'e, which is situated about 180 km further inland in the tundra and cannot be reached by road. Even though part of the population is of Saami descent, the village is dominated by the Ižma-Komi, who founded it in the 1920s. Only one Saami speaker was found there.

The first trip to Lovozero was primarily used to become acquainted with possible informants. During the following trips, a number of recordings were made with these informants. Two problems emerged: our limited Kildin Saami proficiency and our attempts to minimise the effects of the well-known "Observer's Paradox", in which the observer influences the behaviour he wants to observe without influencing it. An attempt was made to resolve both problems simultaneously by trying to organise more or less "spontaneous" conversations. This was achieved by inviting people to our home and starting a conversation with the generous help of our Kildin-speaking neighbour. This strategy seemed to work reasonably well, and several longer recordings were made this way. Another benefit of this method was that we ourselves could participate in the conversation without turning it into an official "interview". Most previous recordings consist of interviews in which an attempt was made

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[1] Rantala 2005.

to ask questions in Kildin Saami, and a conversation that takes the form of a "quasi-monologue" by the informant, who needed very little encouragement to speak freely.

3.   Codeswitching and borrowing

One of the recurrent issues in CS literature is where to draw the boundary between CS and borrowing. This mostly concerns the cases where a single word from language A "ends up" in a fragment consisting of words of language B. Can we claim that this single word has been borrowed into language B, i.e. become a part of language B's vocabulary, or does the speaker make a short switch from language B to language A and back again?

Myers-Scotton (1993) distinguishes between these two categories by using phonological adaptation as a criterion: if a word originally came from language A, but has been phonologically adapted to language B, one can regard it as a borrowing, rather than a switch. In the case of Kildin Saami, this would mean that words like *карндашш* and *калпас*, coming from Russian *карандаш* and *колбаса* respectively, and which have been adapted to Kildin Saami phonology by shifting the stress to the first syllable, are borrowings. Words like *буран* (snowmobile) and *детский садик* (kindergarten), however, have — at least in the pronunciation of our informants, kept their initial voiced plosives, a sound which is not in accordance with Kildin phonology (cf. *тēҋҋк* from Russian *деньги*, *пукс* from Scandinavian *bukser*). The word *буран* has, in addition, maintained its stress on a non-first syllable.

Appel & Muysken (1987) additionally mention *morphological* adaptation as a possible criterion for distinguishing borrowings from CS. Both *буран* and *детский садик* were used by our informants in a morphologically adapted form, i.e. they were used with Kildin Saami case endings:

> Рōбхушше [...] детский садикэсьт.
> *Work-PRET1SG [...] kindergarten-INESS.*
> *I worked in a kindergarten.* (L26_H7)[2]

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[2] The code following the translation refers to the sound file.

>А тāлльва бурáнэйгуэйм пуэдтлэв
>*And in-winter snowmobile-COMITPL come-PRES3PL.*
>*And in winter they come by snowmobile.* (L21_V8)

The latter informant interestingly also used the same word once with first syllable stress (*бýран*), followed by the neither phonologically nor morphologically adapted *на буране*. Another informant, who as a matter of fact does not use Saami on a daily basis, used several morphologically adapted forms of Russian words: *бурáнэсьт* (with inessive ending) (L08_V8), *бурáнэнҍ* (with comitative ending) (L08_V8), *бригáдэсьт* (with inessive ending; notice the initial consonant cluster *бр-*, which is not permitted in Saami). There appears to be a degree of variation in the adaptation of words to the recipient language phonology and morphology, even in the speech of one and the same informant. This makes it difficult to distinguish between established loans and CS, using only the criteria of phonological and/or morphological adaptation.

Furthermore, phonological adaptation becomes less important as contact between the two languages increases and majority language A becomes ever more a "second mother tongue" to the speakers of minority language B. They learn to master the phonology of language A, and this phonology is absorbed into language A together with borrowings. The frequent use of words like *бригада* in Kildin Saami contexts might make the pronunciation of initial consonant clusters gradually more acceptable to the speakers, and it might become increasingly less necessary to adapt such words to their own phonological rules. This can be compared with the way word-final stress has become acceptable in most Norwegian dialects (*revolusjón, bensín, levére*), even though it conflicts with Norwegian stress rules.

It is, therefore, difficult not to agree with Appel & Muysken when they remark that there is a gradual transitional area between CS and borrowing, and that individual members of a speech community adapt words in different degrees; as we saw in the above examples, there can be variety even in the usage of one and the same informant.

Another aspect of the CS vs. borrowing problem is the use of numerals. Kildin Saami disposes of a full system of numbers, with indigenous words up to and including thousand, and — like in Russian — borrowings for the higher numbers (миллион etc.). In principle it should

be possible to count using the Saami numeral system; this includes dates. In practice, the latter is not expressed in Saami. In recounting their lives, our informants used many dates (of birth, marriage etc.), but these were never in Saami, even when the conversation otherwise was mostly in Saami. [3] Even in counting objects or people, Saami numerals higher than four were seldom used, even though the informants apparently knew the numerals up till at least ten.[4] Here are some examples (Russian words with Russian morphology are <u>underlined</u>):

> Мыннэ <u>шестнадцать</u> эллей.
> *I-ILL <u>sixteen</u> not-was.*
> *I was not yet sixteen.* (L26_H7)

> Сыйй сыййта пудтэнъ <u>в сороковом году</u>.
> *They village-ILL come-PRET3PL <u>in fortieth year-LOK</u>.*
> *They came to the village in 1940.* (L26_H7)

> <u>По четыреста литров объём да</u> пыйепь (L26_H7)
> *<u>Each four-hundred litre-GENPL volume PRT</u> put-PRES1PL.*
> *We filled them with 400 litres each.*

Cf. the following example with the numerals *four* and *five* in Saami:

> <u>Мне</u> нелль ыга <u>наверно</u> ляйй, лянч выдт. (ibid.)
> *PRON1DAT four year <u>probably</u> be-PRET3SG, be-FUT3SG five.*
> *I was probably four, maybe five years old.*

These numerals, which have neither phonologically nor morphologically been adapted to Kildin Saami, have largely displaced the Saami numerals. Can they be considered to be CS? Does this mean that Kildin Saami speakers switch to Russian every time they use a numeral? Or have they borrowed all numerals except 1-4, with optional parallel forms in the range 5-6, without adapting words that are phonologically hard to

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[3] This phenomenon can be witnessed in Northern Saami as well, where Scandinavian dates are used. Often, a Saami inessive ending *-is* is used: *nittenhundreogsytten-is*. In Kildin Saami one uses the Russian construction *в ... году*.

[4] When asked about their use of Russian numerals, one of our informants answered: "Saami numerals are so cumbersome".

swallow (from a Kildin point of view) like *сто, десять, шестнадцать* to their own speech? The same can be said of many conjunctions, interjections and adverbs of Russian origin, frequently used in Kildin Saami without having been adapted to its phonology. Examples include the conjunctions *что* and *чтобы* and the adverb *просто*, all of which have initial consonant clusters. The frequent expression *хочется* falls in the same category: very few Saami words have an initial *x*-, and one of our informants even had trouble pronouncing this dorsal fricative in Russian words, turning *хозяин* into *козяин*.

Our informants usually had learned Russian in school. Since public life in Lovozero is conducted almost exclusively in Russian, this language has become a "second mother tongue" to many of them. Many set expressions are freely borrowed (or switched) from Russian into Saami, fitted into Saami syntax and sometimes translated into Saami. Several informants have their own "pet phrases" that regularly emerge in conversation: L26 has *полный караул, полный дебилизм, с характером лев* ("they have character"; here connected to the Saami verb *to be* in the 3Pl form), L21 has *ничего себе*. An example of a literal translation to Saami is *ёллей труп ляйй*, "he was a living corpse", which our informant explicitly mentioned as a Saami expression, even though the word *труп* is an unadapted borrowing, and this expression occurs not only in Saami and Russian, but in many other languages as well. It appears that the line between Russian and Saami is not always clear — or meaningful — to speakers.

The high frequency of CS or borrowing in some parts of the conversations is exemplified by the following fragment (Russian words with Russian endings are underlined):

> Ну понимаю, **ну**, тэль, нимэнн не хочется лыххкэ, никēн уйнэ, даже сāррнэ эгк выж. Тэнн мунн не отрицаю.
>
> *OK, so I understand, well, like, you don't like to do anything, to see anybody, you don't even want to talk. That I do not deny.* (L26_H7)

4.   Some theories on codeswitching

Codeswitching research comes in at least two types. On the one hand

there is research on the syntax of CS, focussing on the constraints on switching within a sentence or word group. An important theory in this research area is Myers-Scotton's *Matrix Language Model*, which assumes the presence in every sentence of a matrix language that determines syntax and most morphology, with "islands" of embedded language stranded in this matrix (see e.g. Myers-Scotton 2006; for a critical appraisal of this theory, see Muysken 2000).

On the other hand we have research dedicated to the discourse-related meaning of CS. Why do speakers CS at all? Are there certain settings or themes for conversation that trigger CS? Is CS used in a creative way by the speakers to express their attitude towards the conversation theme or situation? Does CS express identity?

Before the 1950s, CS was generally looked upon as a symptom of poor language skills. The speaker was not able to express himself in any of the languages at his disposal, and thus resorted to mixing languages to get the message across. Later on, it became clear that CS actually demands great virtuosity on the part of speakers, switching language *and* syntax in mid-sentence.

One of the first studies that took CS seriously as a discourse phenomenon and tried to explain it from a sociolinguistic point of view was Blom and Gumperz' article on language use in Hemnesberget in the Rana district of Norway (Blom & Gumperz 1972), which took a closer look at the switching between standard (*bokmål*) language and the Rana dialect. The authors distinguished between two forms of CS:

1. *Situational CS*: "where alternation between varieties redefines a situation". Here, the use of a certain language is connected to certain situations: with certain participants, in certain places, in certain social situations a speaker uses one language, in others — another language. To name an example: a person uses a different form of speech to address his friends in a café than to converse with other members of his parish in church on Sunday;

2. *Metaphorical CS*: "where alternation enriches a situation, allowing for allusion to more than one social relationship within the situation". Here, the conversation situation does not change, but the participants, by using different languages, allude to different

possible roles they can assume within the conversation. Also, the theme of the conversation can play a role in language choice: it might for example allude to common experiences, or be triggered by certain associations. Blom & Gumperz mention an example where a group of students from Hemnesberget switch from dialect to *bokmål* when the conversation turns to their common experiences in the big city student life.

In their 1987 work, Appel and Muysken discuss sociolinguistic research on CS and present a typology of different types of switching, based on research by, among others, Gumperz, Hernández-Chavez and Poplack:

1. *Referential CS*: this type of CS is what the speakers themselves most often see as "typical CS". The speaker switches from language A to language B because he does not know one or more words in language A, or because he feels it is easier to speak about a certain theme (politics, car mechanics) in language B. When confronted with their own CS behaviour, some of our informants remarked that they were so used to speaking Russian that they mixed the languages at random; according to them, there were only a few persons who *could* speak pure Saami;

2. *Directive CS*: CS is used as a means to either include people in the conversation, or to exclude them from it. An example would be parents switching to a language their children do not understand in order to discuss something secret;

3. *Expressive CS*: CS is used to underline a common identity. Examples of this use have been documented among members of Hispanic communities in New York, who use Spanish words and tags to express a Hispanic identity;

4. *Phatic CS*: switching emphasises a statement or comments it. This category includes the use of dialect or ethnolect in the punch line of a joke to allude to stereotypes;

5. *Metalinguistic CS*: the change from one language to another is used to comment on the language use itself, or to show off one's

linguistic repertoire. It is possible that the use of the words *cāмac* and *pȳuac* in the title of this article (a phrase used by one of our informants) belongs to this category;

6. *Poetic CS*: language switching is used for its poetic or humorous effect, for instance in bilingual puns.

In her 1993 book, Myers-Scotton presented a new model to account for CS, the *Markedness Model*. The model tries to generalise away from the models mentioned earlier, which, according to Myers-Scotton, were too much "lists" of possible instances of CS, and which made no attempt to explain what these categories had in common and to situate them in a larger theoretical framework. In her new model she accepts the claim that humans have an innate cognitive ability to distinguish *marked* and *un-marked* phenomena, for instance in language. What is marked and un-marked, of course, is culturally conditioned, and has to be learned gradu-ally in the context of the particular culture, but the ability itself is univer-sal. In each instance of human communication, the situation surrounding the communication creates certain expectations concerning the relations between the participants. These relations can vary according to e.g. the participants' status, the conversation topic, and where the conversation takes place. This expected relation is expressed in a so-called *Rights-and-Obligations Set* (RO-set). Every RO-set has a matching unmarked speech form, the speech form to be expected in this particular situation. Myers-Scotton defines it as follows in the *Unmarked Choice Maxim*:

> "Choose code to agree with the set of Rights-and-Obligations which you wish to be in force between speaker and addressee for the current exchange."

However, if the speaker wishes to change the RO-set between the participants, e.g. when he wishes to stress a different relationship between the participants than that implied in the present RO-set, or a different topic, or wishes to give meta-comment on the conversation, he can do it by shifting to a code which is marked in the present RO-set, but signals that he wants to change to an RO-set where this code is unmarked. Alternatively, it might only allude to such an RO-set.

An important premise for Myers-Scotton's theory is that speakers actively, if not necessarily consciously, use CS to influence the course of conversation. The choice of a particular code can be explained from the speaker's motivations: he can either make an unmarked choice relative to the RO-set, a marked choice, meaning he wishes to renegotiate a new RO-set, or an "exploratory choice", meaning he is unsure about the unmarked choice in an unknown or unclear situation.

CS can itself be an "exploratory choice": by shifting between different codes and registering the reactions of fellow participants, one can renegotiate a code that fits the conversation situation. But in some language communities, CS itself can be the unmarked choice. This can be the case in communities where the minority language, as spoken by many speakers, already has been thoroughly influenced by the majority language, and "pure", loanword-free speech can sound stylistically marked, official or pedantic. Our recordings give the impression that the more relaxed conversations between informants contained more CS than the rather more formal "interview-style" conversations. This could point to "pure" Kildin Saami being regarded as marked in everyday conversations. This is also suggested by a remark by one of the informants when her CS was commented upon: she claimed to speak bad Saami, and mentioned some community members who, according to her, spoke "pure" Saami, with the right words and the right pronunciation. The persons she mentioned as "pure" speakers were language teachers or activists, who consciously avoid using borrowings from Russian.

5.   Some examples of markedness

As suggested in the previous paragraph, a mixed code of Saami with short switches to Russian appears to be an unmarked choice in relatively "relaxed" conversations, in which, even if one or several linguists are present, most of the conversation takes place between participants who know each other intimately and speak about everyday topics that do not demand much Russian terminology. On the other hand, some of the recorded conversations did contain code choices that might be interpreted as marking it as not being a relaxed conversation, but rather an interview, where the linguist was expected to be told about the traditional Kildin Saami way of life in "pure" Saami. An example of this is the following

interview, in which a married couple showed and commented on photos of their life in the tundra. The husband (A) tells about a flock of reindeer, then his wife (B) comments on his use of Russian numerals, something which otherwise is quite common and, as mentioned earlier, could be considered "unmarked" among Kildin speakers:

A: Чуэз <u>да по пять-по шесть тысяч</u> […] чӯдзэ …
B: Выдт-кудт тоафант.
A: Выдт-кудт тоафант.
B: Сӣмас сӣрн!
A: *A Flock <u>of five-six thousand</u> [...] head.*
B: *Five-six thousand.*
A: *Five-six thousand.*
B: *Speak Saami!*

This correction (which, by the way, was followed by laughter from all concerned, including B) is somewhat strange, considering that numerals in Kildin Saami conversation are usually Russian. Also the reprimand "speak Saami!" is probably quite uncommon in everyday conversation. In my opinion, what is marked by this insistence on purism is actually the *artificial* character of the interview situation. The informant expresses the view that "these linguists are not here to hear you use Russian words, but Saami ones!"

Such an interview situation demands a certain artificial framework and this is expressed not only by purism, i.e. "marked absence of borrowings", but also by switching to a different language. This happened several times after an interview had been carried on in Saami, but ended with a conclusion in Russian, putting the previous conversation in an "interview perspective". A usual word was "всё", "that's it", signaling that the informant had said everything there was to say about this theme and was ready for the next question. Another informant had been speaking for more than an hour, mostly in Saami, but with some switches to Russian. The conversation — or rather monologue — appeared to be quite casual. Then, suddenly, the informant switched to Russian and said:

Ну что ещё, задавайте какие ещё вопросы. То я трещу трещу.
Well, what else, just ask some more questions. Otherwise I will just babble and babble.

The spontaneous conversation in Saami was suddenly interrupted by a Russian metatextual "frame" that reminded us of the fact that this was also an interview, in which formal and concrete questions are expected.

Another sign of "artificiality" — although not connected to CS — was that some of the informants started singing during the recordings. Even though this does not necessarily suggest an artificial situation, it is difficult to interpret it otherwise when the informant explicitly introduces a *лыввьт* (joik) by saying:

> Сӣмас быдт лӣввлэ? Лӣвлса!
> *Do I have to sing in Saami? I will sing then!*

Another informant saw the mike lying on the table, turned towards it and started singing a *joik*.

In addition to marking the artificial character of a recording session, CS to Russian can in some cases also be linked to *authority*. This term is not meant to suggest an authoritarian behaviour. Language use here emphasises the source of knowledge that the speaker has gathered from Russian-language media like TV, books, magazines etc. This knowledge, of course, is not traditional Saami lore (about life in the tundra, hunting and fishing), but rather knowledge that is transmitted through the Russian majority society. The fact that much of the terminology in these fields of knowledge is Russian certainly facilitates such a switch, but one could argue that this is not the only reason: otherwise, we could expect a basically Saami sentence structure with many loanwords to fill the gaps in Saami vocabulary. This is, however, not the case in the following examples. Note the slightly pompous style of the Russian used, with many expressions that seem to come right out of an article, and the use of rhetorical questions (Saami text is <u>underlined</u>):

> <u>Мӣй</u> то скрывать? Потому что э … так все коренные народности севера, малые национальности, они очень быстро спиваются. Потому что у нас в организме нет такого фермента, который расщепляет алкоголь и выводит с организма.
> <u>*Why*</u> *hide it? Because err... well all native peoples of the North, small nations, they become alcoholics very quickly. Because we*

lack the ferment in our organism that breaks down alcohol and leads it out of the organism.

Просто, вот … вот по-русски сказать: кодировка, что … кодировка что дает? Помогает человеку остановиться пить.
It' just, like ... well, to say it in Russian: therapy, what ... what does the therapy give you? It helps a person to stop drinking.

A final category of markedness apparently present in the recordings was the use of CS to mark a *change of attitude*. In the following fragment, B suddenly shifts to Russian after a long dialogue in Saami. The conversation is about some houses that were torn down by Russians to build something new on the lot. B becomes very emotional:

A: <u>Оарр</u> хороший <u>саррь</u> [?] <u>тэль, лыгкэсьт ōллмэ</u>.
B: А вот это не надо было им и трогать, они … вот это, не надо было им эти дома трогать даже совсем!
A: *There is some nice <u>blueberry</u> [?] <u>like, people were moved</u> [?].*
B: *Well, they shouldn't have touched them, they ... well, they had no business touching these houses at all!*

My interpretation of this sudden language shift is that informant B went out of the "framework" of the present conversation. B's emotional reaction is not as much directed at the other participants in the conversation, but more in general against the "insolence" of these Russians. By switching to Russian, B could signal that this was not part of the otherwise pleasant conversation.

Nevertheless, one could interpret this switch in a different way. I discussed this example with my colleague Elisabeth Scheller, who participates in the Kola Saami Documentation Project, and who knows the informant well. According to her opinion, the informant, who does not use Saami on a daily basis, has too weak a fluency in Saami to allow her to use the language in an emotional outburst, and therefore had to resort to Russian when she got emotional. This goes to show how careful one should be in interpreting such switches in isolation.

6. Conclusion

Codeswitching is no longer viewed by researchers as resulting from a lack of competence in one or more languages, but as a meaningful factor in discourse. While earlier research has regarded switching as a passive reaction to the conversation situation or topic, one can also view it as a means the speaker, albeit unconsciously, uses to direct the conversation, change the relationship between its participants, or accentuate certain aspects of what is being said ("artificiality", "authority").

At the same time, one should realise that this is no exact science. We cannot peek into the heads of our informants, and instances of code-switching can often be interpreted in different ways. The last example might serve as a warning and encourage us to be cautious in interpreting individual instances of codeswitching.

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