



Voice and Frames in the Soviet Nenets' Auto/Biographies¹

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the narrative and metalinguistic devices used by two Nenets writers, Nikolaj Vylka and Anton Pyrerka, in the auto/biographical novels they wrote in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Focusing on narrator roles and voices, the article argues that despite the overarching programme of socialist realism, the writers creatively used available linguistic resources to build socialist plots and frames in their novels. However, their choices differ considerably, reflecting their divergent ideas about the relationship between pre- and post-Soviet Nenets culture.

Keywords: auto/biography, narrator roles, voice, socialist realism

TIIVISTELMÄ

Artikkelissa tarkastellaan kahden nenetsikirjailijan, Nikolai Vilkan ja Anton Pyrerkan, käyttämiä kerronnan keinoja ja metalingvistisiä strategioita oma/elämäkerrallisissa romaaneissa, jotka on kirjoitettu 1930-luvulla Neuvostoliitossa. Analyysi keskittyy kertojaroolihin ja romaanien puhujien eri asemiin ja sen tuloksena tuodaan esiin, että kirjailijat käyttivät luovasti niin sosialistisen realismin kuin tundranenetsin tarjoamia kielellisiä resursseja tuottaessaan romaanien sosialistisia juonia ja kehyksiä. Kirjailijoiden toisistaan poikkeavat valinnat heijastelevat heidän omaksumiaan käsityksiä Neuvostoliittoa edeltäneen ja sitä seuranneen nenetsikulttuurin suhteista.

Avainsanat: oma/elämäkerta, kertojaroolit, ääni, sosialistinen realismi

The early Soviet decades witnessed a triumph of life writing. In the 1920s and 1930s, the new, exceptional society and the ideology behind it were told to the masses of the Soviet Union. The ideology was all-encompassing, and Soviet power wanted its revolutionary socialist narrative to be created and told through the lives of individuals: revolutionaries, students, Party activists and workers. The lives were written both publicly and privately in official and unofficial contexts, and the socialist realist novel also made the most of the auto/biographical novel, which became not only a way to narrate the Revolution and socialist development but also to write one's life into the collective project, to participate in society.

The minorities of the Soviet Union strove to write themselves into society, not only following the imperatives of the socialist realism but also enriching it with their local, cultural auto/biographical practices. Reading auto/biographical novels of the northern indigenous peoples of the Soviet Union, the texts clearly do not reiterate a given model but constantly negotiate its possibilities with local ways of narrating lives. As the socialist realist model was totalising, the local texts also make constant choices about who is narrating, in which voice and about what. These are questions about concrete linguistic choices of narrator roles and voices, but they return to problems of entitlement: who is allowed or able to narrate indigenous and socialist lives?

This article discusses two Soviet auto/biographical novels by two Nenets writers, Nikolaj Semënovič Vylka (1911–1942) and Anton Petrovič Pyrerka (1905–1941). The Nenets are an ethnolinguistic minority living in Arctic Russia and North-Western Siberia. On the eve of the October Revolution, most Nenets were nomadic reindeer herders, hunters or fishermen, sharing this lifestyle with numerous other northern indigenous peoples. The Soviet state strove for modernisation, and the North presented one of the greatest challenges of the project. In addition to numerous development programmes, the creation of literary languages and literature for the northern peoples represented an answer to the challenge, and consequently, such a literary language was developed for the Tundra Nenets in the 1930s (see Slezkine 1994; Grenoble 2003).

When the first Nenets began to write their novels, socialist realism had already been institutionalised, and one should not fail to recognise this frame in their texts. Nevertheless, the novels should also be read within the interpretative frames of the Nenets' local expressive modes; indeed, my central argument is that their novels interlink Soviet and local auto/biographical contents and strategies. I also argue that some Nenets strategies of auto/biographical framing contest the Soviet or Russian ones in ways that demand broadening our understanding of auto/biographical writing to read the novels as telling the lives of their authors. In this

article, I discuss how writers work with the interaction of different voices and narrator roles as a narrative strategy as the key point in understanding the difference between Nenets and traditional Western or Russian auto/biographical expression (Bakhtin 1981, 297–330; Bauman 2004; Coleman 2004). Consequently, the article will ask how Nikolaj Vylka and Anton Pyrerka used different narrator roles and voices as well as their connotations to build the lives of two Nenets protagonists, Tabilo and Xèdo, respectively, in their auto/biographical novels.

In writing lives, the choices made in narrator roles and voices have a profound impact on the alignments of the main protagonists to their communities and the narrated world. Again, this is a major strategy of building characters' relations to ideological positions. Thus, the narrator roles and voices are central in answering not only who is telling and for whom but also for what purpose. As the auto/biography invites us to read about lives, it is of utmost importance to ponder whose point of view and voice the writing reflects.

I proceed from presenting the writers, the Nenets and the general framework of early Soviet cultural policies towards the discussion of narrative strategies. After describing the background of the article, I analyse the divergent ways Vylka and Pyrerka frame their narration, represent voices and close their novels. The analysis opens up the ways the writers create or avoid connections with Tundra Nenets verbal repertoire and tradition and the ways this builds the lives of their main protagonists in relation to the Revolution.

SOCIALIST REALIST BIOGRAPHERS IN THE MAKING

Both Nikolaj Semënovič Vylka and Anton Petrovič Pyrerka (Pirya) were Nenets students at the Institute of the Peoples of the North, Leningrad, in the 1930s. Vylka was apparently born in Novaja Zemlja, studied in Leningrad in the 1930s and worked actively with the linguist Grigorij Davidovič Verbov (1909–1942). Returning to his home region, Vylka died during the Second World War, but it is uncertain where exactly and how (Ogryzko 1998, 161). Pyrerka was born in the tundra of the European part of Russia to a family of reindeer herders. He was orphaned and ended up studying in northern and Moscow Party schools before leaving for Leningrad, where he became interested in collecting folklore, working on primary school books and a Russian-Nenets dictionary as well as translating Russian classics and language teaching. Despite his vigorous work on folklore, language and research, Pyrerka also took an active part in politics. He died on the frontlines of the Second World War (Ščerbakova 1956, 75–76; Ogryzko 1998, 80–81; Barmič n.d.).

The fates of Vylka and Pyrerka reflect the first hectic phase of creating literature for the northern peoples of Russia in the Soviet Union. It took place in a short stretch of time, from around 1925, when the first courses to train the northern peoples began in Leningrad, until 1937–1939, when the Institute of the Peoples of the North was purged and reorganised within the Stalinist repressions (Roon and Sirina 2003; Krupnik 2008; Ljarskaja 2016). In the 1930s, the students of the Institute were actively encouraged and guided to write in both their native tongues and Russian. In addition to learning to write in general, the students were taught to write in the frames of socialist realism.

A distinctive feature of Soviet minority writers, including the northern ones, is their use of folklore motifs in their texts, although the writers of the time were generally encouraged to use their “own” folklore as the source for plots, subjects and language. This encouragement, solely but powerfully provided by Maksim Gorkij, set folklore and literature as different but also the same in a way that echoed contemporary Soviet linguistic ideologies. As past literature was conceived as bourgeois in some revolutionary circles, certain manoeuvres were required to legitimise the overt status given to literature in the Soviet Union. Literature was first made to represent the voice of the masses, consequently becoming comparable to folklore. Second, as a socialist practice, literature engaged in certain aesthetic and political programmes that any author who wanted to be published had to follow (Gorkij 1934).

The novels I analyse in the following were initially written in the Tundra Nenets and only afterward translated into Russian. Vylka’s *Ngoxona/Na ostrove* [*On the Island*] was published in 1938 as a bilingual edition and translated by Verbov (Vylka 1938). I use this edition as the basis of my analysis. Vylka’s text is a biographical novel about his uncle, Tyko Vylka, whose pseudonym in the novel is Tabilo. Born in 1886, he was a hunter in the archipelago of Novaja Zemlja and guided several scientific expeditions in the archipelago in the early twentieth century. The scientists in the novel paid attention not only to Vylka’s extremely knowledgeable engagement with the environment but also to his interest and talent in painting. They took Vylka with them to Moscow to study for a year, after which he returned via Arhangel’sk and additional education in ship technology to his home island to continue his life as a hunter. During the Soviet years, Vylka worked as the chair of the Novaja Zemlja island soviet until the archipelago was evacuated during and after the first nuclear tests. Afterwards, Vylka stayed in Arhangel’sk and spent his late years painting and writing *Novaja Zemlja* (Pereplečikov 1917; Ščerbakova 1967; Suxanovskij 2009).

Pyrerka’s novel *Wèdo’ nyudya nyu/Mladšij syn’ Vèdo* [*The Youngest Son of Vèdo*] (1960) was published only in Russian. Apparently, the initial

translation from Tundra Nenets to Russian was made by Pyrerka, but his son finished it. The translation was published only in 1960, although the novel itself was written in the 1930s. Unfortunately, I could not find the Tundra Nenets original and thus worked with the 1960 translation and the two Tundra Nenets fragments representing the beginning and the end of the novel (Tereščenko 1959; Lapcuj and Susoj 1990). Pyrerka also used a pseudonym, naming his main protagonist Xèdo.

The texts are read here as auto/biographies, a culturally and historically situated way of writing and narrating lives. Both novels are the type of coming-of-age story that does not cover the whole life span of the protagonist but his life from an impoverished childhood towards socialist consciousness (Pratt 2003; Clark 1983). Neither novel claims to be truly autobiographical, and both tend to distance the author from the protagonist. Still, both contain biographical traces that are either elements that refer to the life of a known person or poetic devices that denote the auto/biographical mode.

Consequently, the descriptive text in the publication data page of *Mladšij syn' Vèdo* indicates that the book is about 'the burdensome life of the Nenets before the October Revolution and about the arrival of the Soviet power to the tundra' and about the life of the boy Nikolaša. *Povest'*, a subtitle given to the publication, denotes the genre: the short novel. Despite the fictionality and frames that distance the author from the narrator, the book has been interpreted as the autobiography of Pyrerka (e.g. Barmič n.d.). The author of *Ngoxona*, Nikolaj Vylka, is the nephew of Tiko Vilka, whose life the contents of the novel constantly refer to. The texts do not meet the criteria for traditional Western autobiographies (Olney 1972; Bruss 1976; Lejeune 1989, 4–30) because their author claims not to be the protagonist and the novels do not insist on referentiality. This article shows, however, that we can and should nevertheless read these texts as Nenets auto/biographies.

STRATEGIES OF SOCIALIST BIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS

Right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, research on Russian life writing focused on either private texts, such as unpublished diaries and testimonial texts, or on public biographies produced, for example, for Party organisation (see Fitzpatrick 2000; Hellbeck 2002; Steinberg 2002; Petersen 2009; Halfin 2011; Herzberg 2015). However, the auto/biographical mode had already become canonical in Soviet literature, where the factual and ideological and individual and social were in constant tension (Clark 1983, 44; Holmgren 2003, xxii–xxiii, xxvii–xxix; Jones 2018). According to Polly Jones (2018, 147), the tension is based on

the ‘ideology of collective class consciousness and behaviour and supra-personal historical laws’. Although the role of the individual was problematic in this context, it was increasingly clear in the 1930s (Jones 2018, 148). Biographical texts functioned as education and propaganda, and despite the revolutionary romanticism, heroism and typicality of the protagonists, they were ideally conceived as realistic text types. In this way, the representation of the truth and its verification was in constant tension with the poetics of writing and narrating.

Following Dobrenko (2001) and Clark (1983), my point of departure for the analysis of Vylka’s and Pyrerka’s texts is understanding them as reasonable linguistic and expressive practices by their writers in the frames of the aesthetic system and literary regime of which they were a part. In the same vein, Hellbeck, who has studied Stalinist diaries, has noted that socialist biographical writing is not just about combining ideological currents with one’s life but about ‘ideologising’ one’s life, ‘to turn it into the expression of a firm, internally consistent, totalising *Weltanschauung*’ (Hellbeck 2006, 26). These points have serious consequences for the method of analysing these texts. They *are* to be read as revolutionary writings that have been written to narrate socialist lives: not just individual lives but those of whole linguistic communities.

However, reading the novels only as expressions of the totalising Soviet worldview and socialist realist narration would ignore the local Tundra Nenets worldview and linguistic repertoires, which the writers obviously used. In the research on Native American, minority and women’s auto-biographies, much attention has been paid to the need for widening the theories of Western autobiography to understand how non-Westerners (non-males) narrate their lives. Instead of juxtaposing the so-called traditional Western autobiography and indigenous auto/biographies, I suggest focusing on the inescapable manners in which the indigenous works interlace with the conventions of the dominant culture while clearly standing out from it (Wong 1992, 20–24; Goldman 1996, xix, xxiv; Rak 2004, 29–32). To become published under a dominant literary regime, one must follow its conventions—one may even *want* to follow them—so the dominant models become inherent parts of the structures and contents of the texts. Nevertheless, if indigenous auto/biographies are interpreted only through the frames of dominant literary regimes, the interpretations are incomplete: the Nenets auto/biographies are richer and fuller if we read them through both the Soviet and Nenets conventions of reading, listening, narrating and writing. In brief, the texts do not contrast with the Russian or Soviet modes, nor are they read as bare representatives of socialist realism. Instead, I see the Soviet and Nenets modes as parallel registers of narrating life histories in the Soviet context.

For instance, the Soviet and Nenets language repertoires are not opposed in these works; the writers used both to write socialist Nenets lives. The 'language repertoire' refers to all the forms that the users of a language employ in their speech or writing (see Gumperz 1964; Duranti 1997, 71–72). Although it originally referred to oral communication and its individual, social and situational variations, I use the term to denote the various linguistic resources the Nenets had at hand when writing their novels. The term allows discussing both the contents and poetics of their repertoires, and thus in writing Soviet literature, indigenous peoples used not only the motifs of their oral traditions but also the narrative strategies available in the Soviet repertoire. Focusing on the Soviet and Tundra Nenets language repertoires allows us to see how the socialist realist novel was creatively used by these writers to express not only the imperial Soviet narrative but also indigenous and individual lives.

As the 'repertoire' is a large category, I focus on discussing the strategies of the writers in constructing the voices of narrators and auto/biographical selves through reflexive linguistic resources. Consequently, my analysis focuses on the manipulation of narrator roles and voices (Bakhtin 1981; Briggs and Bauman 1992; Irvine 1996; Bauman 2004). These are the moments when writers use different narrators and actors and their voices to create worlds and temporalities within the primary temporality of the novel. The voices can be several, and each acquires its meaning from a shared understanding of certain kinds of social selves (Irvine 1990, 130; Keane 1999; Coleman 2004). Recently, Coleman discussed the metalinguistic devices that call 'to mind a whole range of social aspects of the person represented, implicitly suggesting an indexical link between these social and personal aspects and the elements of communicative style represented' as personation and voicing (Coleman 2004, 393).

When utterances also refer to oral tradition, writers are traditionalising their texts, creating intertextual links and gaps in relation to what is judged as 'traditional' in a community. According to Richard Bauman, traditionalisation is not about referring to tradition as a bounded entity or thing. Rather, it is about the 'active construction of connections that link the present with a meaningful past' and using 'tradition as a rhetorical source', not about analysing it as an inherent quality of the narration as such (Bauman 2004, 27–31). Besides traditionalisation, writers could naturally also refer to tradition as a bounded entity and, rather than making use of their knowledge and abilities in poetics, refer instead to the image of tradition, which they also have at their disposal. The writers are, in these kinds of moments, playing with the intertextual gaps (Briggs and Bauman 1992).

In the context of life writing, the differing voices and varying intertextual links or gaps are powerful means of constructing auto/biographical selves as social personae, as they create moments where diverse lives and voices intersect. The protagonists of auto/biographies can align themselves with others or be critical or doubtful of them, which constructs their selves in relation to their communities but also in relation to the readers. Moreover, the narrator's voice and its relation to the auto/biographical self revolves around issues of entitlement: who can speak and to whom about one's life (see Shuman 2005). By examining roles and voices, one can observe how firm and consistent the ideology behind life writing was and how different ideologies interacted in the novels. In the context of Soviet novels, which are based on juxtaposing pre-Soviet life and ideology and post-Soviet ones, these alignments are central in understanding whose lives the auto/biographical novels are narrating in the end.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

The novels analysed in this article differ considerably in multiple respects, but I begin with the strategy of framing the story, which both writers shared. In the novels of Pyrerka and Vylka, the outset is set in the same period, the early twentieth century, the years before and after the revolution. The narration continues mostly in the first-person singular, focused on the narrator, and proceeds mainly chronologically and linearly. Consequently, the narration is retrospective, reflected by the past tense produced by the indicative preterite and the so-called *we* evidential in Nenets.²

At the beginning of *Mladšij syn' Vèdo*, the autobiographical novel of Pyrerka, he introduces a frame:

Davno, kogda my eščë pasli olenej, dolgimi zimmimi nočami rasslazyval mne Xèdo svoju žizn'. Očen' napominali èti rasskazy moè sobstvennoe detstvo. Potomu i zadali oni mne s serdce.

Prošlo mnogo let, i ja vstretil Xèdo v bol'som gorode. On učilsja na partij-nix kursax, ne odin god byl užè na sovetsoj partijnoj rabote. Vsplyli togda v moej pamjati rasskazy druga, i zaxotelos' peredat' ix tak, kak oni mne zapomnilis'. (Pyrerka 1960, 5)

[A long time ago, when we were still herding reindeer, Xèdo told me about his life during the long winter nights. The stories reminded me of my own childhood, and that is why I remembered them so well.

After many years, I met Xèdo in the big city. He was studying in the Party school and had already worked for the Party for many years. It was then that the stories came to mind and I wanted to tell them as I remembered them.]

While Xèdo is the main protagonist of the novel, the narrator is Xèdo's friend, who has organised Xèdo's stories into a text according to the frame. As the narration after the frame continues in the first-person singular, the readers are meant to forget the initial frame in the course of the narration. Instead, they immerse themselves in the narrated time, in Xèdo's world and point of view. In the story, Xèdo and his sister are orphaned as children and left to live on their own in a Russian village. There, Xèdo begs with an older man, makes a living by making bows for other children, and eventually moves among Russian villages, stealing with other kids. After his wild childhood, Xèdo ends up studying in the village school of Telviska, where a kind teacher instils good habits and temper in him. After three years of school, Xèdo leaves to meet his older brother, who he has heard has arrived at the nearby tundra. There, the brothers hear about the revolution, meet some Reds, and decide to establish a Nenets reindeer cooperative. The tale ends with Xèdo's promise to continue studying.

The illusion of Xèdo's point of view is broken only at the end, when Xèdo's promise to continue studying is left hanging and the reader must return to the initial frame to grasp the actual resolution. Indeed, he was true to his words and went to study and became a Party activist, as the frame reveals. All in all, then, several narrators exist in the novel, and their voices are constructed through embedded frames. Xèdo's unnamed friend narrates the first frame, who transfers the voice to Xèdo as the narration moves to first-person singular. One cannot forget Pyrerka himself, of course, the author of the novel, who has been interpreted to be the main protagonist, Xèdo.

A similar pattern of framing is part of Vylka's novel, but not in as explicit a sense. Vylka's novel begins by describing the childhood of the main protagonist, Tabilo, through a series of mistakes and misunderstandings, and it continues with the flight of Tabilo's family from the Russian and Komi reindeer owners to live on their own in the archipelago of Novaja Zemlja. The life in Novaja Zemlja is described as an ideal one, but several things come to break their happiness. The Russian scientists whom the Nenets help move around the islands threaten the community's ideal life first when they suggest that Tabilo, now a talented youngster, leave with them for Moscow. Tabilo decides to leave, and the novel describes his travels and stay in the capital as well as the misery and unfriendliness of the city for the indigenous Tabilo. Returning to Novaja Zemlja, he finds other disruptions to the peaceful island life: a growing community and an increasing number of Russian merchants who cheat the Nenets, who, on the other hand, are led to live immoral lives. Staying away from the village that has evolved on the island, Tabilo hunts in nearby areas. Rumours about the revolution are also heard on the island before the Communists

arrive and a Soviet is founded. At the end of the novel, Tabilo is chosen as the chairman of the soviet.

Vylka produces the embedded nature of narration through metalinguistic devices, which is why it is not as explicit as in Pyrerka's novel. The first device is the shift between evidential moods; the second emerges from the way different genres are embedded in the novel. This chapter describes the first strategy, and the next chapter the second one. Vylka uses the so-called *we* evidential to mark the narrator, who is not taking part in the story, and contrasts these phases with narration in the indicative mood, often in first-person singular. While the *we* evidential is used especially to reflect the passage of time against the environment, the annual rhythm, the change of seasons and the ageing of community members, the indicative is used to highlight action. This strategy indicates Nenets oral poetry. The shifting modes from the *we* evidential to the indicative is one index of the narrative strategies of Nenets epic narration, where the *we* evidential indicates that the narration goes on through an external narrator. This can be personified (Lukin 2017), but often the performers of epic songs simply index the external narrator through the *we* evidential. When the narration goes on in the indicative mood, the listeners of epic poetry are immersed in the story, and the phases in the *we* evidential break the story, reminding the listeners of the narrative event. This is part of the dynamics of Nenets epic narration, alternately creating the storyworld and then taking distance from it, and Vylka clearly makes close intertextual connections with Nenets oral tradition through this strategy.

Notably, although Vylka builds a solid intertextual relation to the oral tradition using a similar metalinguistic strategy, Pyrerka also indicates the same framing strategy through his frame. He is, however, making the connection through metanarration, not using exactly the same linguistic means with the oral tradition to create the link, which is why he creates a wider intertextual gap from epic narration. However, Pyrerka's frame approaches another genre of Nenets folklore: the individual song.

The individual songs, *xinabc* or *yabye*"*ma syo*, are usually short texts that move between autobiography, commentary and rumour. In the ideal, everyone has their own personal song that they can recreate through their life. Individual songs are sung poems that build on six-syllable lines coupled with additional vowels and the repetition of lines or line groups by another person in the performance (Niemi 1998; Puškarëva 2000; Lukin 2017). Each song is owned by the person it describes, which means that they can be performed only by the owners themselves or while the owners are not present (Puškarëva 2001; Niemi and Lapsui 2004; Laptander 2017). Consequently, as the owner performs the song, they perform an

autobiography. According to the Nenets view, when another person sings someone else's individual song, the performer is recreating the autobiography of the owner of the song. This returns to Nenets linguistic ideology, where words' power transcends their referential content and the context of their expression. As the words once uttered circulate within the community, they carry forward the utterer's qualities (Vallikivi 2015, 181). This is why, in the oral performance context, the performers either explicitly identify the first performers of the texts they narrate—in the case of individual songs—or they transpose the agency of the narrator to some external narrator, as in the case of epic narration (Puškarëva 2001; Niemi and Lapsui 2004; Laptander 2017; Lukin 2017).

When Pyrerka builds a frame in which the narrator is not Xèdo but his friend, who claims to repeat the stories he has heard from Xèdo, the novel seems to build a complex frame of previous narrations built into a coherent text. As a Nenets writer, Pyrerka has, however, used the linguistic repertoires of Nenets oral tradition to build his text as friend-recreated stories. This builds a link to the tradition of individual songs but through the means of the novel, not Nenets verbal art. Hence, the intertextual gap seems wider than in Vylka's novel.

Notably, Vylka is not writing about his own life, but makes constant references to Tyko Vylka, his uncle. Some passages are intertextually linked to the autobiographical songs of Tyko Vylka, published by Natalja Tereščenko (1960, 252–253) and later more extensively by Anna Ščerbakova (1967). Presumably, Nikolaj Vylka heard these songs in his home community and used them in his novel. Consequently, Vylka stuck to the same strategy of building distance between the protagonist of the auto/biography and the narrator. Again, however, he does not make this explicitly clear in the text but leverages the strategies available in oral tradition.

The embedded nature of the narrator, the protagonist and his narrations related to the Nenets oral narration thus seem to have been used by both 1930s writers in their auto/biographies in an uneasy relationship with early twentieth-century socialist realist ideas about the auto/biographical mode and the referential meanings of language. Seeing that both Pyrerka and Vylka stuck to the Nenets model is interesting. The uneasiness of their choices revolves around the notion of the writer also being the narrator and the actor of an auto/biographical text, which was prevalent in the early twentieth-century Soviet Union (e.g. Weir 2002; Holmgren 2003; Hellbeck 2006, 42–52). However, the Nenets model places more emphasis on the power of words to carry the initial narrator with them, which refers to the problem of writing lives within the Nenets conception that, rather than referential value, are more concerned about

the power of the words of the story. While contemporary narrators are also acknowledged, they are given the roles of intermediaries. The roles of the narrator and the main protagonists not only shift and build according to the models of Nenets narration in the novels; they are also blurred to reflect the models of entitlement in Nenets narration: the owner of one's story should not perform their story publicly, but neither should one narrate another's life in their presence. Subsequently, the shifting roles of narrators and the pseudonyms of the main protagonists ensure that their lives are tellable in public as printed texts.

Western research and explorations of auto/biographical acts have questioned the voice of the narrator and its relation to the author, especially since Serge Doubrovsky's autofiction (Doubrovsky and Ireland 1993). The manoeuvre between narrator roles in the Nenets auto/biographies does not, however, problematise referentiality like the Western tradition of autofiction (see also Savolainen 2016, 214 in a different context). The appearance of different overlapping narrators is a narrative strategy that makes life writing or narration possible in the first place. This, again, is related to Nenets linguistic ideologies. Consequently, those local Nenets strategies of narration might echo autofiction but should instead be discussed as Nenets expressive traditions to be described and understood correctly.

EMBEDDING AND REPORTING SPEECH

The other way of shifting between narrator roles and voices in Vylka's novels is embedding genres. While the strategy of embedding different narrators plays especially with different contemporary voices (i.e. those of the primary narrator and the one recreating the story), embedding genres uses voices in different temporalities. This again was central to the socialist realist novel, for it aimed to present the pre-Soviet, Soviet and utopian socialist temporalities in a hierarchical plane that valued the pre-Soviet negatively but the Soviet and especially the socialist positively. Consequently, this was also central to the creation of socialist lives.

Vylka embeds different speech genres into his novel, building a truly multi-layered, multi-temporal plane. Vylka makes constant reversion to the past through other people's memories and narratives. Consequently, although the story of *Tabilo* proceeds linearly, the recollections and voices representing different genres interrupt the plot and narration. The narration is also coupled with the voice of the external narrator, whose remarks interrupt the narration altogether. Consider the phase in which *Tabilo's* father is recollecting and reflecting on their previous and contemporary lives:

– Xow! Ngawxawanana', yilyenyi' ngabcuwna yilyewacy. Ngarka Yaxanana'. Xarna' təkocyina' tanyasya'ma. Tedayexèwa yawo' syinyu tyaxa', yabto nyu taryew pyilyibt yilyelyuw'. Yiryikèr, tina' xa'maxad, Sanèr lucaxana yud po' pongga pudm nèkalpiwasy. Many ta malyenggana yu powasy. Taryem manzaranaxanana' syidya yu' podanyi xaya. Yiryikèr manzarawyita malxana yam xèwxalngasy. Xakècyayer nganyi ngobtyiki syer'—yiryikènd ngudo'mana xayasy. Təkocyayina' nganyi', wèwako xabcyanggana xacy, posa xabcyanggana. (Vylka 1938, 13–14)

[– Well, earlier we used to live in a good manner in Bol'šezemelja (an area on the mainland K.L.). We had our own reindeer. And now, I live behind the sea mists like a gosling. After our reindeer died, your grandfather seined for ten years for a Russian in Pečora River. I was ten years at the time and as I turned 20, grandpa, after working, died. And grandma, in the same way, went after grandpa. And our reindeer died of anthrax.]

The extract above is reminiscence, and it immediately takes the readers into three separate temporalities: the time the family lived on the mainland with their own reindeer, the time the family got their living working for the Russians and the time of the story. This is told by Tabilo's father, who compares the good life before with life now, as the family lives in the archipelago of Novaja Zemlja. These periods are paralleled, and they are both confronted with a period between when the family lost its reindeer and worked for the Russians.

Tabilo's father is represented as a person from the past, but his reflection transcends a simple juxtaposition between the Nenets' nomadic temporality and some new one. Again, this strategy builds an intertextual link with Nenets oral tradition, where elders' recollections build significant layers of the social identity of the main protagonist, who otherwise is ignorant about his past and thus also his identity. The link is built through the habit of recollection and the habit of respecting elders' voices, knowledge and experience, which are vital to epic heroes' success.

In this respect, Pyrerka's strategy is notably different. He consistently reports the speech of the elders but also of those who own reindeer or care for the reindeer economy, but their voice is valued negatively. For example, Pyrerka describes Xèdo's parents as good but superstitious people. They are the ones who speak inevitably of the Nenets nomadic lifestyle as a whole, about the protection of Num, the Nenets celestial god, and other details of the vernacular religion. Consequently, their voices represent the backward indigenous society. In a similar vein, the next passage represents an outgoing, backward voice: reported speech of the leader of the camp, who sees the Reds approaching.

Yer"yawa" manzy xanada: 'Xè, tyedaxawa' yan walakawa". Tyikida" nyar-yana" Tyedaxawa' syidna" nyadèlabtanggu". Ngawodyikina" martido', nyena" marta", syidna" xadyerta". Ngarka Num"ya syidna" nyirye ngèda". Ngobkar-tara" luca' wadawna nyoya laxan'. (Tereščenko 1959, 133)

[Our host said: 'How! This is our end. Those are the Reds! They are going to settle us down. They will take our property, our wives, and they will beat us. Perhaps the Great Num will protect us. No one of you should speak Russian'.]

This is the speech of a patronising leader of the camp, and Pyrerka uses multiple tokens to personate the speech as such. Talking in the first-person plural, he speaks for and to the whole camp about fears related to the revolution and the changes it might bring. He is clearly not talking about continuity, but about a purge that would turn the Nenets out of power and send them to live in settlements. He refers to Num, the Nenets deity, which obviously was not desirable in the atheist state. The leader also forbids people to communicate with the outsiders, a token of a leader who does not want to discuss social questions in public. Notably, his inclusive first-person plural is immediately confronted by Xèdo's own thoughts and perceptions, which contradict the host's cautions. The passage thus emphasises the inevitability of the change and brings out its qualitatively different implications for different classes. The host is analogical to the bourgeoisie and the herders to the working class. Their voice is narrated as outgoing, not respected, and deniable.

This juxtaposition is consistent with the programme of socialist realism, and Pyrerka builds a strong connection to that at the cost of building a wide gap from the Nenets tradition, not only its form but also its deeper ontologies. Importantly, in the context of writing indigenous lives, the strategies chosen by Pyrerka and Vylka differ considerably, which builds different selves for their main protagonists through the voices of their community members. As Pyrerka repeatedly uses Nenets reported speech to build negatively valued voices, he accordingly builds his protagonists as characters of change and gap. Vylka, again, does not consistently create Nenets voices as backward, but he uses them to build various positions in the community. Hence, his novel is polyphonic, and the revolution is not a sudden radical change but a smooth transformation.

SOCIALIST MASTER PLOT AND FRAMES

Above, I concentrated on passages that centre on the pre-Soviet narrated time and place. Still, as the novels were published after the programme

of socialist realism was defined, they should explicitly be about the revolution in society. When reading Nikolaj Vylka's *Ngoxona* and Anton Pyrerka's *Mladšij syn' Wèdo*, one cannot fail to notice the overall tendency of both writers to set their stories in the general frame of the socialist realist novel. According to Katerine Clark, the general tale of socialist realist fiction 'is of a questing hero who sets out in search of "consciousness"'. What differentiates the Soviet tale is the societal side of the hero's task ('he may, for instance, aim to supervise the construction of a dam or to raise production yields') and the inner goals of the hero, that is, resolving 'within him the tension between "spontaneity" and "consciousness." Since the public and private goals are fused, the hero's personal resolution becomes a historical allegory' (Clark 1983, 163). 'Spontaneity' and 'consciousness' refer to the basic dialectics that take place in socialist realism between sporadic, uncoordinated acts that lack political awareness and controlled, disciplined, highly aware actions (Clark 1983, 13–24). The High Stalinist novels³ depict young heroes who are often fiery and ardent but who, in the course of events and often with the help of more aware elders or teachers, become themselves more aware, peaceful and controlled. Since representing the working-class experience became a principal aim of socialist realism, the heroes often have poor origins, and the misery and violence of their living environment tend to reflect the roots of their spontaneity, whereas their development towards consciousness is also highlighted in environmental changes (Clark 1983, 164–176; see also Pratt 2003).

Reaching consciousness as a metaphor in the novels of indigenous peoples is as much about inner development as it is about the development of their linguistic communities. The indigenous novel itself proves this development because the Soviet state made literacy possible in the first place. In addition to heroes' progress towards consciousness, the novels are also about the movement towards Soviet modernity, a temporality qualitatively different and better than the one described in their beginnings.

This master plot, which is undeniably followed by both auto/biographical novels, provided their writers with yet another linguistic resource. By framing their novels as the kind of *Bildungsroman* where the main protagonists grow up in harsh physical and social environments and reach, through education and learning, socialist worldviews through which they can retrospectively evaluate not only their own but their communities' pasts, Pyrerka and Vylka are writing revolutionary or socialist lives. This frame made their narratives, the lives of Xèdo (Anton Pyrerka) and Tabilo (Tiko Vylka), worth telling in 1930s Soviet novels.

Although it is precisely the revolution and new Soviet modernity to which these novels and their protagonists are oriented—or rather the

revolution seems to be a powerful default that attracts meanings and magnetises interpretations—the revolution itself is named only at their closing. Compared to contemporary socialist realist novels, it is this that stands out. The Nenets auto/biographical novels tend to end there, where the other novels seem to take their beginning. The typical landscape of the socialist realist novel was the (civil) war or a construction project and the fervent Party and Komsomol practices within them (Clark 1983). The Nenets novels of the 1930s never arrive there but depict the promise of the Revolution.

The final passages discussing the Revolution explore the possibility of Soviet modernity among the Nenets and in the lives of Xèdo and Tabilo. At the end of his novel, Pyrerka depicts how the new ideas come to the tundra, clearly a heightened point of the narration after which a new kind of determination can be sensed in the voice of Xèdo. To describe the new momentum, the narrator has to broaden the Nenets' lexicon with notions such as 'October Revolution' (*Oktyabrskoyi revolyuciya*), 'Nenets kulaks' (*nyeneciye" kulak*"), 'capitalists' (*kapitalist*"), 'peasants' (*krestyan*") and the 'Reds' and 'Whites' (*Nyaryana* and *Serako*), of which only the latter are created using Tundra Nenets vocabulary; the rest are loans from Russian. It appears that, in Pyrerka's novel, the socialist life cannot be narrated using only Nenets linguistic repertoires, though the Nenets are entitled to tell it.

Vylka's novel ends with the arrival of the communists and the founding of a soviet on the island. However, Vylka also explores the possibility of not only socialism but the official Russian urban among the Nenets before closing his novel, when Tabilo comes home from Moscow to Novaja Zemlja. Here, the emphasis is on his appearance, but again, an important moment in the story is highlighted by generic embedding. The father of Tabilo sings a *yabye*"*ma syo*, an individual song (Vylka 1938, 29):

Yewanzadakow yerwo'ponlixina	[My dear son in the midst of leaders
Nyiwèw xamada.	I could not recognise.
Nyarawa longgako syidya ya wikana	He has two lines of copper buttons
Todanakoraxa', pyisndyakoraxa'	like fire, as if smiling the two lines are
Wèra yanèdyow, tyi Noxo wèsakond	Vera, my friend, the Old Noho
Nyuda xirkaraxa.	has this kind of son.
Yerw ngésy, yerw!	A leader, isn't he a leader!]

And the father-in-law answers:

Tabyilo nyuw tyeda'yaxawa	[Tabilo, my son-in-law
Yedèyi Yaxananda xarta parèngoda,	the own tsar of Novaja Zemlja

Parèngoda ngénggu!	will be the tsar!
Nyarawa longgèyi' syidya ya wikana	Copper buttons in two lines
Pyisndyakuraxa'.	are as if smiling.]

In this passage, the songs represent a short stretch and dialogue of Tabilo's father and his father-in-law. The songs are images of Nenets singing and, as such, they index close family or camp relations and trust. Moreover, these songs represent the individual songs discussed above. The language of the *yabye*"*ma syos* follows a particular register with terms of endearment (*yewanzadakow* [my dear one], *yanèdyow* [my friend] and *nyuw tyeda'yaxawa* [son-in-law]), parallelism and repetition. The register seems to repel Russian, and Soviet terminology is probably not fit for it. Quite the opposite, the Nenets terms for leaders, *yerw* [leader, host] and *parèngoda* [tsar], belong to the vocabulary of the register. Of these, *parèngoda* in particular is part of the pre-revolutionary temporality. Nevertheless, in this extract, Tabilo is named as becoming a tsar, a local leader, analogous to the Russian Tsar. The naming refers to imperial Russia's past, but in the context of the novel it balances between the old and the new, as Tabilo is indeed named the leader of the newly founded soviet island. Tyko Vylka, to whose life the novel refers, was also known among the Nenets as the *president* of Novaja Zemlja. All the same, Nikolaj Vylka uses the special register of personal songs and elderly man to achieve this balance: an exchange between the two temporalities.

Compared to Pyrerka's use of loan words to describe the arrival of Soviet life and emphasise the incompatibility of the previous and becoming temporalities, this extract creates a picture of continuation—but not straightforwardly. Tabilo receives his signs and legitimisation for the leadership—the copper buttons, Russian clothes and the visit to Moscow—before the revolution. When the news of the revolution comes to the island afterwards, they are bringing the news from the same hierarchically central Russian plane that Tabilo had visited, only now, the news indexes another change, which is again clearly reflected in Vylka's language. Consequently, the final passage of the novel is written in a referential language that differs significantly from the novel's poetic language and creates a wide gap from the Nenets oral tradition. Vylka turns to the same writing mode as Pyrerka, which reflects individual and collective change at the level of language in a similar manner as the use of loan-words. Both, then, voice the revolution in their auto/biographical novels through a metalinguistic shift: Pyrerka throughout his novel and Vylka at the end.

I propose that Vylka's shift in language works in his novel as a coda—in other words, yet another frame that guides the readers in the work of

interpretation. Codas work to make meaning, to bring the audience back to the time of narration and its significance (Labov 1972; see also Young 1987, 45; Shuman 2005, 105–111). Notably, Vylka does not refer to the Revolution or Socialism earlier in his novel but comes to it only at the end in a formulaic manner, emphasising the shift in voice. This strategy can be interpreted either to emphasise socialism in a way that should guide the interpretation of the whole novel or as a voice so different that it confronts the whole project of socialism as such. In principle, these kinds of contested voices were not allowed in socialist realism, and the 1930s interpretation undoubtedly followed socialism rather than contested it.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the article, I compared two auto/biographical novels, and to make the point, I first summarise the narrative strategies of Pyrerka and Vylka and then reflect on what kinds of lives they wrote for Xèdo and Tabilo. I first analysed all the narrator roles through the frames and voices the writers used in their novels and, second, through the lexical and generic choices or references they made. The narrator roles point generally to the question of entitlement, to the rights and possibilities of narrating lives not only in the context of the socialist realist novel but also within Nenets practices. The lexical and generic choices align with the choices the writers made regarding entitlement. Overall, these choices reflect the tendencies of traditionalisation and alignment with Nenets verbal repertoire, which again build two differing positions.

Anton Pyrerka built a complex frame narrative for his autobiographical novel, where the narrator and compiler role is given to an unnamed friend of the main protagonist, Xèdo. The narration also proceeds in the first-person singular, which is why this friend's role is blurred. The frame is, first of all, built through explicit metanarration at the beginning of the novel. Second, the frame itself is directed to the time of writing to the end of the novel. This transparently reveals the path Xèdo took: becoming a Party official and active member of the Soviet state. Consequently, the novel is open about its retrospective gaze and socialist ideology. A similar kind of explicitness is reflected in the voices of the Nenets community that Pyrerka presents to the readers. The elders and the reindeer owners are personated as backward, outgoing and patronising, and Xèdo's own voice tends to confront them. Thus, the main protagonist is repeatedly described in contrast to his own local community, especially its pre-Soviet leading figures or role models. This juxtaposition also emerges in Pyrerka's lexical choices when he describes the arrival of socialism.

He builds the incompatibility of the old and new through recurring loan words from the Russian and Soviet repertoire, insisting on the incapability of the Nenets vocabulary to grasp the profound societal change.

This is a strategy of emphasising the change and gap. In contrast, Nikolaj Vylka relies on continuities, compatibilities and the Tundra Nenets verbal repertoire in his novel. Although Vylka's novel also plays with multiple embedded frames and the transformations from third-person singular to first-person singular, he does this with the help of metalinguistic devices. His strategy reflects the positions of different narrators, speakers and their relationships rather than building dichotomies between them. The voices in the novel are several, and the same characters may represent different voices: the father of Tabilo is, for example, personated as an elder whose recollections are to be cherished and as a father who rejoices in the education and modernisation of his son. Moreover, the represented voices are evaluated positively: they are reflexive and stand between the past and the present, not contrasting them but intersecting. Still, the news of the revolution and the prediction of the better life to come are written by Vylka as a coda clearly separable from the rest of his novel, which surprisingly builds a gap, not traditionalisation, as otherwise. However, as a whole, his multi-levelled traditionalisation does not contrast tradition and modernisation, Nenets nomadic and Soviet temporality, but has them interact.

In contrast to Vylka, Pyrerka does not use these Nenets resources. In this sense, Pyrerka's style is more innovative than verbal repertoire. In the frames of intertextual gaps, Pyrerka clearly widens the gap from the Nenets oral tradition and wants to create a new kind of register for writing Tundra Nenets. His style could be described as 'referential', as mentioned above. Moreover, it builds upon frames that are Russian or Soviet.

The shared quality of the embedded narrations refers to Nenets narrative strategies in general and, more importantly, to temporal frames that are not basically linear and contradictory but interlace through multiple voices and sets of temporalities. This comes to Nenets linguistic ideologies and the entitlements of narrating lives. To read the novels as auto/biographies, one must understand that Nenets local autobiographical practices did not emphasise truth values or the similarity of the narrator or author and the protagonist. Rather, Nenets narration is based on the idea that the voice of the first narrator is included in the concurrent narrations, although the actual performer might be different. The autobiographical value is not diminished if the performer changes; rather, one is concerned that the first narrator never hears their story told by anyone else. The complex narrator roles index this in literature and enable publishing life narratives in written form.

Nevertheless, the entitlement is not only about who is able to tell and for whom but also with whose voice(s). What kinds of voices do auto/biographies carry with them? With what voices do they align? Both novels follow the general plot of the socialist realist novel in the sense that the main protagonists reach consciousness over the course of the story, which is clearly a societal task and an allegory for the path of the Nenets community at large. The general frame also focuses on the contrast and confrontation of tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. Within these frames, Vylka and Pyrerka ideologise the lives of their protagonists. As the texts are novels that were published, they clearly built father figures for the Soviet Nenets, the first Nenets revolutionaries, the leaders and the models. Through these choices, the leaders are different, not in their biographical path—from spontaneity to consciousness—but in their alignment with Nenets verbal repertoire and its ontology: the radical view of Pyrerka is clearly different from the ambiguous, reflexive sight. Pyrerka tends to give the Nenets tradition the voice of spontaneity that should be overcome through socialism. For Vylka, the tradition also offers resources for conscious voices.

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NOTES

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- 2 The *we* evidential is common but not pervasive in Nenets narratives. The evidential name varies according to the researcher. 'Narrative mood' is a term used by Salminen (1997). Nikolaeva (2014: 93–96) names the mood 'inferential', whereas Jalava (2017: 138–140) highlights the different meanings related to the resultative aspect and narrative mood accomplished by the *we* evidential. Whatever the term, the *we* evidential 'conveys a large variety of evidential meanings. It often denotes the events which cannot [or could not, I should add] be witnessed directly' (Nikolaeva 2014: 93; see also Jalava 2014: 210–218).
- 3 'High Stalinist' refers roughly to the years 1932–1941, when Stalin had established his power and many branches of culture were canonized and standard procedures in several strands of society established (see e.g. Clark and Dobrenko 2007: 139–149).