

# Tracing Metrical Skills in North Samoyedic Sung Expression<sup>1</sup>

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## Interests in structure and form

This concise article presents examples of some fundamental discoveries and problems of *structure* and *form* in North Samoyedic traditional sung expression. These examples are associated with appearances of word forms in the flow of time of the sung performance. The presented phenomena are seen here as reflecting the skills of the performers of the local culture and communities and perhaps also as indicators of the vitality of the local oral cultures in general.

With this article, I would like to contribute to sketching a common ground for understanding the relationship of structure and meaning, pursued both in linguistics and in the ethnomusicologically flavored analysis of a sound performance presented here. This approach has been informed much by the achievements in recent Samoyedology, without which this article would probably have looked quite different. Speaking strictly about advances in linguistic studies, Janhunen (1986) paved way for, among other things, the modern perspectives of associating sound phenomena with phonology and diachronic interpretations, not only in northern Samoyedic languages, but also in a more encompassing Ural-Altaic perspective. Salminen (1997, 2007) has constructed a detailed phonological and morphological (inflectional) understanding of both Tundra and Forest Nenets language forms. Especially in Forest Nenets studies, Salminen's work has been pioneering.

As regards to the theme of this article, and speaking particularly about the understanding of metrical forms of Nenets sung expression, Helimski's study (1989) was the first comprehensive presentation of the phenomena of the (Tundra) Nenets language in metrical forms. The list of Helimski's discoveries is even more impressive when we remember that the majority of the source materials at his disposal then were *written* sources (e.g., Kupriyanova 1960; Lehtisalo 1947), where the metrical texts on the printed pages were frozen as typographic representations, presenting only the line-level segmentation of the texts, and leaving the rest for the analyst to infer. Helimski is, of course, explicit about this limitation of the text materials he used, but he nevertheless arrives at detailed and consistent conclusions about the fundamental characteristics of

<sup>1</sup> Cordial thanks to the reviewers of this text for the many suggestions that made the presentation of the content much clearer and more effective. All the remaining inconsistencies and discrepancies are mine.

Nenets metrical expression, revealed both in traditional, originally sung materials and in Nenets written poetry. This fundamental work also utilized Janhunen's (1986, 109–128) views, particularly about the phonological segmentation of Nenets at the level of subtle vowel phenomena, leaving traces in certain contexts of language performance and being indistinguishable in others.

Having been exposed to this linguistic discussion at the end of the 1980s, it was an exciting moment for me at the turn of the decade to have a chance to get acquainted with the Nenets performers and the sound recordings of the Nenets song materials. The first experience for me was participation with the Finno-Ugrists of the University of Helsinki in 1988 on a short trip to the (then) Faculty of the Peoples of the Far North of the Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad, USSR (for the history of the institute, see, e.g., Taksami 1976). During that trip it also became possible for me to engage with the teachers and the students of the institute, which was to result in many field trips in the future. In Finland, the first turning point was the beginning of the long and fruitful cooperation with the former journalist, and later film director, Anastasia Lapsui when she moved to our country. Our first joint work was developed in Finland (Niemi 1995; Niemi & Lapsui 1995ab), and it was an aural exploration of the phonograms of Nenets songs made by Toivo Lehtisalo in 1911–1912. This work was an attempt to study the historical sound recordings, but was not without problems due to the technical quality of the recordings. Thus far, a more comprehensive joint project was our publication of Lapsui's mother's repertoire of Nenets songs (Niemi & Lapsui 2004), where the technical quality of the available sound recordings provided more stable ground for transcriptions, and therefore also for the structural analysis of the song materials.

The first years of the 1990s were a time of turmoil and instability in Russia, but the northern regions also became gradually accessible to foreigners. This meant unique possibilities for carrying out fieldwork in the Nenets regions. I had the opportunity to visit the singers, for example, in the Salekhard area of the Yamal Nenets Autonomous District in 1991 (together with Tapani Salminen and Jöns Carlson), in the Naryan-Mar area of the Nenets Autonomous District in 1994, in the Tarko-Sale area of the Pur region (together with Tapani Salminen) in 1998, and in the Kanin Peninsula of the Nenets Autonomous District in 2002. These field trips resulted in exciting recorded and archived materials, including both song performances and discussions with performers about the cultural context of performances, of which only a part has been published so far (see, e.g., Niemi 1998; 2001; 2006; 2009). They have also resulted in new contacts and many years of prolonged cooperation, for example, as possibilities to invite the local experts and connoisseurs of language and culture to Finland.

### **Performance, textuality and materiality as perspectives for the Nenets song studies**

As mentioned, the perspective for the examination of the cultural materials in this article is woven together from various trajectories of a more general level in cultural studies as well as in linguistics. These emphases stem from theoretically contextualized viewpoints of *performance*, *text*, and *materiality*, which are discussed here as a background orientation in assessing the possibilities of talking about forms of cultural expression in general.

With the concept of (cultural) *performance*, I would like to emphasize the perceptual, multisensory context of the performance—particularly as this involves both performers and audience. In view of perspectives often presented in cultural studies, broadly defined (e.g., Foley 1995; Kress & van Leeuwen 1996; Schechner 2006; Seye 2014), this emphasis refers to performance as a culturally defined arena not only in space, but also in the production and reproduction of meaning, with and through performance. There is no need, or rather, space, to delve further into the discussion about meaning, whether from a linguistic or cultural perspective. Nevertheless, it still warrants noting in this connection that defining a performance situation in this way also provides a complex, multimodal production of meaning, as performance typically involves not only linguistic expressions, but also expressions embedded in sound, vision, tactility, body, space, and scents, that is, stimuli for the entire human organism.

The concept of (cultural) *text* is, on one hand, used here much in the same manner as it is in linguistics, due to the obvious fact that we are talking about language forms in a context of sung performance. Perhaps some of the fundamental definitions of cultural text carry with them flavors of the ontologies that were once the larger contexts of paradigms of scientific thought. From that vantage point, I associate myself here, seemingly, more or less with the structuralist paradigm, if we consider cultural texts as flows of meanings in culture petrified with some kind of a symbolic representation (see, e.g., Pekkilä 1988, 67–68; Fornäs 1998, 182–183). Notwithstanding the varying degree of adherence to structuralist orientations, I believe that it is possible to model new, more culture-sensitive understandings about cultural texts when we consider that the cultural materials of the indigenous communities and local cultures representing the distribution of the Samoyedic group of languages still comprise a fascinating, new whole for cultural studies. Although there is a comprehensive continuum of scientific work concerning Samoyedic languages, ethnography, culture, and history, and furthermore, already a firm tradition of indigenous scholars researching their own culture (see, e.g., Laptander 2021), such local cultures still remain arenas of inductive learning, particularly for the foreign researchers.

Language and song, as argued here, are excellent examples of foreign attempts at learning culture, especially with, for example, Forest Nenets local cultures, because they still represent cultural areas left outside of many (foreign) considerations, understandings, and textualizations. Learning at least some levels or areas of a culture has usually meant ethnographic enterprises and projects, providing descriptions of a culture that are perhaps initially coarse, inaccurate, and erroneous, but, hopefully improving and sharpening over time. “Learning a culture” is, in my opinion, best understood as a goal of culture-sensitive research for understanding (some of) the elements of a culture and, perhaps, suggesting ways for describing them and their idiosyncrasies in their cultural context. As the work of the Finnish Samoyedologists has suggested, for example, the processes of standardizing new phonological symbolics, not to mention new orthographies, can be long and eventful, both from the perspectives of the local communities and those of the scholarly audience. In any case, understanding a language requires, at a structural level, a full account of its elements, structures, and ways of use in a culture. Furthermore, at a sociolinguistic level, an understanding of a social language environment also requires further knowledge, for example, about local struggles for connoisseur statuses and hierarchies, together with attempts at canonizations within the culture.

The song performance also creates other textualities, as the song is performed with voice, pitch structures (more stable than in speech intonation), and the physiological elements of performance. Of course, it is also performed with various narrative levels, concerning the actual linguistic content of the song, and, for example, performers' manners of speaking about the cultural context of song performance—including also narratives about performers' positions as connoisseurs of their culture. It is understandable that we cannot examine all these textualities in this article, but I hope that the following examination of a narrower textual level of sung forms of language can, at least, make visible these more encompassing textual horizons for later discussions.

Thus, the areas of local cultures of Samoyedic language speakers serve as good examples of cultures that we still have much to learn from. Speaking about song cultures, the local cultures in the Samoyedic areas have been predominantly oral well into the new millennium. Furthermore, we can only guess about the “age” of, for example, Nenets metrical forms. As I have suggested elsewhere (Niemi 2021), we may date the roots of the Nenets song meter to the times before the dispersal of the Tundra and Forest Nenets languages, since both of the groups have retained the common meter.

Oral cultures, such as the Nenets local cultures, have predominantly been based on doing and practice instead of verbal conceptualization. Therefore, there are no explanations or training for learning to sing (for the fundamentals of the Nenets song culture, see Niemi 1998; Niemi & Lapsui 2004). Instead, there are performances to watch, hear and learn. Thus, the (sole) evidence and trace of a culture resides in its performance. This being the case, we either have to be there at the time of the performance or grasp at least some elements of it from a recording. Sensed live or via recording, we can suggest that the performance offers us a window through which we may catch at least some *material* traces of a culture. Materialistic orientations have attracted interest in recent years in cultural studies (see, e.g., Lehtonen 2014), as well as in linguistics (see, e.g., Keane & Silverstein 2017). As, for example, Lehtonen (2014, 14) points out, materiality, actions, and symbols are deeply interwoven; they are best understood as coexisting dimensions of the culture. Further, following Fornäs (1998, 181), materiality concerns not only concrete artefacts, but also other cultural acts, which leave detectible traces that refer to cultural skills, learning, or distributing the culture, which all represent the concept of culture as structures of social continua that reach beyond the individual. Cultural artefacts, in this broad definition, are thus bound to be *public*, which is also an indispensable and natural dimension for a phenomenon of cultural continuity.

Furthermore, the British anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000, 153) understands materiality through the metaphor of *dwelling* (stemming from Heidegger's existential philosophy), which, in short, comprises the idea of an individual (as a member of culture) as someone who has “grown” with his/her culture to the surrounding physical environment—together with the *skills* (Ingold 2000, 289) provided by the culture. This existential idea of the “being and moving in the world” of an individual as a member of a culture is, in short, the core of the *cultural ecology* in Ingold's thought. Transferred as a conceptual background for cultural analysis, we may keep this thought in mind when trying to catch, describe, and interpret material traces of cultural texts in Nenets song performance.

### Traces of skill in performances of the North Samoyedic song

As already mentioned, when the recorded sound materials of Nenets song performances began to become available at the end of the 1990s in greater number and in greater local representativity, it was possible to suggest ways of describing and interpreting them, as well as to aim at more comprehensive views of the Nenets song styles in various dialectal areas, ranging from the White Sea coast in European Russia to Taimyr Peninsula in Russian Siberia (see Niemi 1998; 2021).

In the following, I would like to present short fragments of northern Samoyedic song examples as linguistic text, set out in a way that shows some fundamental elements of the performed meter. All the examples are taken, transcribed, and analyzed from sound recordings of sung performances. Obviously, the nature of sound recording makes it possible to reexamine the materials. Accordingly, as some of the examples analyzed here have been examined several times over the years, new suggestions have sometimes emerged and the old have been cast aside. The sound recordings also allow the analyst to take a more detailed look at the material, for example by reducing the playing speed of the recording.

The northern Samoyedic song traditions have, roughly speaking, one feature in common: they all seem to have an underlying isometric principle in the organization of their song texts into line forms. This was already transparent from Helimski's (1989) analysis, albeit primarily, in his formulation of an "isosyllabic" principle, since his goal was to examine printed texts and not the sound performance. When this kind of analysis of versification can be also done with the evidence of the recorded sound performances, we may have the possibility to trace other metrical regularities and prominences besides the syllables. Thus, the *isometric* principle means that the songs in these traditions basically have a fixed number of syllables in each line of a song. The songs examined here consist of six-syllable lines of linguistic text. This principle of hexasyllabicity concerns the basic lexical, semantic text of the line. In addition to this, every performed song has an individual metrical architecture in its line structure that embeds this basic text into the sounding line of the performance, together with the organized flow of musical time and the undulating waves of the pitch levels of the melody. Furthermore, the hexasyllabic basic line usually contains (also in an individual manner) a specific organization of additional syllables, which may be called "song syllables" (e.g., *ngey*). These syllables are present primarily for the purposes of the well-formedness of the line, yet they are complementary to the hexasyllabic textual line, which means that the "hexasyllabic" textual line may contain more than six syllables in performance. Thus, if we would like to translate this principle of isosyllabic or hexasyllabic basic text into a concept reflecting the union of language, sound, and performance, it would be more suitable to talk about *isometricity*—or in the present case of Nenets and Nganasan songs, about *trimetric* verse form, although it blends with the endless variations of the individual musical meters of these songs.

I have suggested some methodological considerations already on several occasions, and presented the paradigmatic method of the analysis, which proved quite suitable for isometric structures (Niemi 1998; 2021; Niemi & Lapsui 2004, 40–41), so it is probably unnecessary to repeat them here in detail. On this occasion, the point is to suggest a somewhat new angle to the visual representation of a sound analysis (see also Niemi 2020). To make it more effective, I omit altogether sound and pitch

variation from the presentation, in other words, the “musical” representation. What is left is only the linguistic text, but the text is presented here as organized in columns, the succession of which represents the basic grouping of the musical meter of the performance. Thus, each column corresponds to a duration of time in the performance. Because of the basic isometric structure of the song, each line conforms to the recurring isometric pattern of musical time of the song, and therefore the lines can be presented one under another as actualizations of the recurring isometric basic structure of the song. For the purposes of the present analysis, we do not need to consider what the actual time values of the columns are. For example, in some songs, the durational combination of the musical time in a line (in a six-column presentation like this) can be, for example, short-long-short-long-short-long (as in Ex. 1). In addition, also in these song forms there seems to be an almost universal tendency to group smaller metrical elements in a line into blocks of “two” (referred, especially in the literary study of versification, as “feet,” regardless of the systems of accentuation), so that this six-part organization also tends to be grouped into three pairs.

This isometric principle seems to be an elementary form of metrical organization in the local traditions of the speakers of North Samoyedic languages. The basic organization is steady and simple, but it also has its peculiarities in actual performance, which adds the elements of musical pitch undulation, musical time, and also additional “song syllables.” Examining this, we return to the question of the “skill” of the performer. As typical in oral traditions, these forms of culture (whether labeled as “folklore” or not) can be understood as regular in form, although they simultaneously seem to contain elements of variation. Thus, a Nenets song can have a fixed textual basis in its line-form song text, but the singer still seems to produce the text anew in each performance. The text is stable or varying, depending on the performer’s mood and memory. These elements of skill or competence of the performer also relate to the various orientations and statuses the performer may have in his/her local community (a dimension well-studied in folkloristics; see, e.g., Siikala 1984; Harvilahti 1992).

Performing the song means to perform (and sometimes to produce) also the song text. As was mentioned before, each song has its own metrical architecture, a basic metrical scheme where it is apparently easier for the performer to place the song words rendered “as is,” varied, or improvised during the performance. In any case, the performer has to be ready and skilled to produce language, that is, words to be placed in the metrical organization of the song performed. This inevitably means that the performer must be ready to “throw in” whatever words are required by the content or narration in the song. Now, Nenets, as well as Nganasan and other languages of the world, have words with different numbers of syllables, but, for some reason, the overwhelming majority of the northern Samoyedic metrical schemes tend to group themselves into *paired* blocks (as mentioned already, conceptualized as verse “feet” in older literature). Against this background, performers’ skills seem to be put to the test every time they have to produce lines with words that have an *odd* number of syllables. I have called these paired and unpaired *word border types*. In brief, a line of a paired word border type typically consists of three two-syllable words (“2+2+2”) and a line of an unpaired word border type typically consists of two three-syllable words (“3+3”) (see also: Niemi 1998, 29–41). Comparable kinds of contrasting line types have been described and analyzed in detail in the common Finnic tetrameter (see e.g., Sadeniemi

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1951; Leino 1974). In Nenets verse form, something similar seems to happen, although obviously resulting from an altogether different cultural history (see Niemi 1998; Niemi & Jouste 2002) that has produced the verse form discussed here. For the purposes of the further discussions about the possible prehistories of the Finnic and Samoyedic verse forms (cf. Helinski 1989), recently opened up again by Frog (2019), it is worth mentioning that there is another verse form in North Samoyedic oral traditions: the “shamanistic” or “ritual” *octosyllabic (tetrametric)* verse. I would like to discuss this verse form on another occasion because of the particular complexities of its study, as the traditions of performance skill had gone into oblivion by the end of the 20th century, and the surviving sound materials of recorded performances are extremely scarce. Here it suffices to mention that on the basis of the existing Nenets sound recordings, the peculiar *encrypted* verse form (see also the discussion about the Nganasan (hexasyllabic) *keyngeyrsya* in this article; see also Niemi 2021, 101) seems to be more characteristic of the Nenets octosyllabic/tetrametric forms than the mere syllabic count of the verse (see Niemi 1998, 72–77; Niemi & Lapsui 2004; 27–28).

There is much for us yet to understand concerning the realization of performers’ skills during the performance. However, examination of the ways a performer places these occasions of words with an unpaired number of syllables in a metrical scheme of the song can be easily detected in the performed song text (i.e., linguistic + musical text), and understanding it can help us with further considerations about the general tendencies of organization of North Samoyedic versification, as well as the competence of the performers.

Let us take a short look at the appearance of the occasions of these “word border types” in a Nenets song.

**Example 1.**

Yadko Yadarta yabye’ sho, perf. by L. P. Nenyang.

Rec. by L. P. Nenyang in Dudinka, mid-1990s.

(Excerpt of the sung text (lines 5–13) from the middle of the song (of 21 lines) (see Niemi 1998, 36)).<sup>2</sup>

Sung text with translation:

|     |                            |  |
|-----|----------------------------|--|
| 5.  | Khu” ngaramchangey,        | From the beginning,                    |
| 6.  | nyunyey” wadawinyey”,      | our children we raised up,             |
| 7.  | xary(i)nyey wadawinyey”    | we raised them up to adults,           |
| 8.  | nyunyey”, ngarka nyunyey”. | our (now) grown-up children.           |
| 9.  | Ngopoyey nyuyamyey,        | Only one of them,                      |
| 10. | Chiwchow nyuyamyey,        | Chiwcha-son,                           |
| 11. | Chiwchyey nyuyamyey...     | he, Chiwcha-son...                     |
| 12. | Yincha ngum’ ngarkanyow,   | He has a great wit (he is not a fool), |
| 13. | taremngow ngarkanyow.      | so great.                              |

<sup>2</sup> The Tundra and Forest Nenets song texts (Ex. 1 and Ex. 2) are written here only with an approximate Latinization of the original (also approximate) forms reflecting the orthographical practices of writing Nenets.

Sung text columnized as representing the basic rhythmical paradigms of the performance:

|     |            |       |        |       |         |        |
|-----|------------|-------|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| 5.  | Khu”       |       | nga -  | ram - | cha -   | ngey,  |
| 6.  | nyu -      | nyey” | wa -   | da -  | wi -    | nyey”, |
| 7.  | khary(i) - | nyey  | wa -   | da -  | wi -    | nyey”, |
| 8.  | nyu -      | nyey” | ngar - | ka    | nyu -   | nyey”, |
| 9.  | ngo - po - | yey   | nyu -  | ya -  | myey,   |        |
| 10. | Chyiw -    | chow  | nyu -  | ya -  | myey,   |        |
| 11. | Chyiw -    | chyey | nyu -  | ya -  | myey... |        |
| 12. | Yin - cha  | ngum’ | ngar - | ka -  | nyow,   |        |
| 13. | ta - rem - | ngow  | ngar - | ka -  | nyow.   |        |

In this example of a Taimyr (Yenisey) Nenets individual song, a closer look is taken at two lines. Line 8 represents a *paired word border type* as a line exemplified here with three two-syllable words. On the grounds of the existing quantitative analysis (Niemi 1998), this type of Nenets line is very well presented in various corpora, and it may be considered accordingly as a kind of “basic” verse type. It also represents an “ideal” verse form regarding the regular Nenets lexical main stress occurring on the first syllable. However, line 9 illustrates a line of the *unpaired word border type*, which is comprised here of two three-syllable words. According to the mentioned analysis, this line type is considerably less represented in the analyzed song corpora. The columnization of the six syllables of the line represents the rhythmical manifestation of the metrical scheme (in this case, short-long-short-long-short-long) that characterizes this particular song.

These lines (8 and 9) were chosen as typical representatives of their word border types, as regards to their standard syllabic form, which results in their standard rhythmical manifestation in this particular song. It is, however, noteworthy that these kinds of basic word border types are to be discerned only with an analysis of larger song corpora. The selected excerpt of the song also provides an indication of other types of lines, which are statistically more exceptional, but which do exist in songs. For example, lines 5, 10, and 11 have only five syllables, but their rhythmical organization nevertheless provides a possibility to suggest with which word border type they could be identified. Furthermore, the initial syllables of lines 7 and 10 (*khary(i)-nyey*, *Chyiw-chow*) are good examples of syllabic variation caused by pronunciation of the syllable-final reduced vowel sounds which sometimes manifest themselves explicitly in a sung performance, also resulting in discernible rhythmical variation (e.g., *kha-ry(i)-nyey*, *Chyi-w(a)-chow*), but which sometimes remain unpronounced. It is arguable that the ability to utilize this syllabic variation can represent a singer’s mastery of language, but also his/her skill in producing verse forms during performance.

The difference between the line types may not appear dramatic if written as simple text. However, laying out the syllables in columns of the performed rhythm reveals that the line types are fundamentally distinct from the perspective of the verse form and, arguably, also from that of the performer.

In this song, the metrical organization of the verse seems to fully reflect the positioning of the syllables of the line of the *paired word border type* (here three two-



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syllable words of line 8). However, the metrical organization seems to reject the positioning of the syllables in the manner of the paired word border type in cases of *unpaired word border types*. Instead, the meter seems to require metrical synchronization of the initial stresses of the syllables, instead of positioning all the syllables of all the word border types in the same way according to the basic metrical scheme of the song. Consequently, in this song, the first three-syllable word in line 9 is performed at two positions of the performed rhythm and the six-syllable line is thus completed at the fifth rhythmic position.

It can be suggested that the performer must know how the line with the *unpaired word border type* can be fitted into the metrical scheme of the song. In other words, it is arguable that analyzing the ways a performer can fit exceptional verses into the performed rhythm can tell us something about the style and performance skills of the individuals, and potentially also about cultural change, for example, when such solutions like that in line 9 do not appear to be used.

**Example 2.**

Mal'tung kinaws. Perf. by Sh. W. Pankhi Pyak,  
Rec. by P. G. Turutina in Tarko-Sale, mid-1990s.

The following is the basic text of the song, without its appearance in the sung form (with simplified transcription of Forest Nenets on the basis of a more detailed one by Tapani Salminen):

- |     |                         |  |
|-----|-------------------------|--|
| 1.  | Mal'tung dyu" kolhadyi- | Maltu's ten reindeer bull-castrates—       |
| 2.  | kut tyiwumäy,           | who invented them,                         |
| 3.  | kapt" ngäp"nantung,     | from where did they appear,                |
| 4.  | nyemyasyata" kapt",     | motherless bulls (wild ones),              |
| 5.  | dyongkutung syemolhma", | (with) circumferences of their throats,    |
| 6.  | käywyitun dyatalhma"?   | (with their) smooth flanks?                |
| 7.  | Mal'tung dyu" kolhadyi, | Maltu's ten reindeer bull-castrates,       |
| 8.  | pyinlhyung malhsyakhana | during the mosquito time                   |
| 9.  | dyät"makhanantung,      | when they jumped around,                   |
| 10. | Päydyä"ayng wingkna,    | on the Stony tundra,                       |
| 11. | khelhyanglhi" wi"lami", | digging the ground till the frozen chunks, |
| 12. | dyät"makhanantung,      | when they jumped around,                   |
| 13. | khelhyanglhi" wi"lami", | digging the ground till the frozen chunks, |
| 14. | Mal'tung dyu" kolhadyi, | Maltu's ten reindeer bull-castrates,       |
| 15. | dyät"makhanantung.      | when they jumped around.                   |

In this example, a closer look is also taken at two lines of this individual Forest Nenets song, but this time, only these two lines are shown as columnized representation of the performance rhythm. This is because, compared to the first example, there is a very complex metrical scheme in this song: besides sung lines, there are also lines recited without the full melodic extent. The columnization of the syllables refers here to more elaborated (but paradigmatically recurring) melodic motifs and their durations of musical time, but also here, only the examples of manifestation of lines with *paired* and

*unpaired word border types* are presented (for more encompassing analysis of this song, see Niemi 2020; 2021).

Once again, lines of the *unpaired word border type* also require their special positioning in the metrical scheme of the song. Here, line 9 represents the *paired word border type*, and line 1 represents the *unpaired word border type*. Also here, the placement of the syllables into the metrical scheme reveals the norm, added with the peculiarity of placement of the additional song syllable (*ngey*) after the fourth syllable (in the paired type), or after the fifth syllable (of the unpaired type), even if it fell in the middle of a word (as it is here in line 9, which consists of one six-syllable word). After the word, there is still an obligatory line-final song syllable (*ngey*) at the end of the line. In line 1, the placing of three syllables over two rhythmic positions results in a shorter performed line, so that it requires an additional song syllable (*ngey*) at the end of the line (in addition to one song syllable already at the fifth rhythmic position):

1. Mal' - tung ju" ko - lhow - (ngey) ji (ngey ngey),  
 9. ja - t " - ma - khow - (ngey) nan - towng (ngey),

Obviously, these two examples only illustrate a few among the variety of possibilities for coping with the metrical placement of the lines of paired and unpaired word border types in a traditional Nenets song (see more considerations and examples of these in Niemi 1998). In some cases, as in some Western Nenets songs with durationally long and melismatic lines, the adaptation of lines of the unpaired word border type can be achieved with minimal rhythmical changes.

### **An Epilogue: Considerations of Nganasan song materials**

After reading Dobzhanskaya's (2014) recent publication on Nganasan singers and their song repertoires, it occurred to me that I have actually never considered the ways the phenomenon of the word border types may appear in Nganasan songs. In her publications, Dobzhanskaya has examined the legendary Nganasan song performance recordings from the 1980s, recorded from such famous performers as Tubyaku Kostërkin (1921–1989). These materials have been reprinted a couple of times (Dobzhanskaya 1988; Dobzhanskaya & Kostërkina 1995), and Dobzhanskaya wrote an analytical description of the peculiarities of these songs in her first article (1988).

The Nganasan materials represent a different style of singing, and also a somewhat different mapping of song forms. Some basic genres correspond across Nganasan and Nenets musical cultures, such as individual, narrative, and shamanistic songs, but in the Nganasan song culture there is, in addition, a fascinating song genre of allegoric songs (*keyngeyrsya*), also of the individual type. The best known Nganasan performers of this song genre mastered a peculiar structural skill in composing and improvising the song in performance. The traditional performance of the *keyngeyrsya* genre requires that the performer not only improvise the song text, but also create a complex "encryption" of the text lines by changing systematically the order of the syllables in the text lines. Nevertheless, the verse form of the *keyngeyrsya* is based on the hexasyllabic basic text. (see a more detailed example in Niemi 2021).

The question here is: does the division of the Nenets lines into the paired and unpaired word border types have any correspondences in Nganasan materials? The

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published song materials (Dobzhanskaya 1988; 2014; Dobzhanskaya & Kostërkin 1995) are not identical reprints, but they have all retained Tubyaku Kostërkin's performances (of the 1980s), which, obviously, represent the best recorded mastery also of the *keyngeyrsya* song genre.

**Example 3.**

Tumtadyuo "Kadyaka" Chunanchar's keyngeyrsya.

Perf. by T. D. Kostërkin. Rec. by Yu. I. Sheykin in Dudinka, 1986.

The following is the basic text of the song, without its appearance in the sung form (the Latinization and translation of the text is made after Helimski (1988, 69–70)). This example also indicates the complexity of the allegoric language typical of the *keyngeyrsya*.

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. ka aga" a muntu | Kadyaka says:                                     |
| 2. ð b ykuna gu    | —The old man shaman's (= T.D. Kostërkin's father) |
| 3. aly m rsybtið   | day-symbol shoulder decoration (= daughter)       |
| 4. aly iid mbaty   | (with) sun-wise movement (= good intention)       |
| 5. alty anty i m   | I wanted to touch (= pursue).                     |
| 6. a aði" lamban   | (With) horns (= reindeer) meant for the Dolgans,  |
| 7. kirbarti" aðikü | as a share for an earmark (= the bride price),    |
| 8. urak ði" lamba  | (with) horns (= reindeer) meant for the Nenetses, |
| 9. kirbarti" aðikü | as a share for an earmark (= the bride price).    |

Of these lines, 5 and 8 represent the paired word border type, whereas lines 6 and 7 represent the unpaired word border type. In the song performance, the recurring placement of these text lines into the musical time is represented with the following syllabic paradigms:

|                              |                    |               |       |       |       |
|------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| 5. al- ty- (ge- je)-         | an-ty-             | (ge- je- je)- | i-    | ( - ) | m,    |
| 6. a - a - (g - w ) -        | ði" lam - (g - w ) | ba -          | n -   | ( m), |       |
| 7. kir - ba - (g - w )r( ) - | ti" a - (g - w ð ) | -ði -         | kü (  | m),   |       |
| 8. u - ra - (g - w ) -       | k - ði' (ej)       | (ge - je le)  | lam-- | ba -  | ( m), |

These four lines of a Nganasan *keyngeyrsya* may reveal, after all, traces of the "requirements" of the verse form of adapting a line of an unpaired word border type to the "norm" of a line suggested by a paired word border type. These traces are, however, easily drowned in the overall complexity of the Nganasan *keyngeyrsya* form with its encrypted syllabic order of the lines, as well as in variations of numerous song syllable additions. In this song, the traces are small, but present. In lines 6 and 7 of the unpaired word border type, the placement of the initial syllable (in bold) of the second three-syllable word (*lamban* and *aðikü*, respectively) falls to an empty (or additional) place in comparison to the placement of the syllable of the paired type.

However, analyzing the placement of the paired and unpaired word border types in the Nganasan *keyngeyrsya* requires more time and space due to the structural complexity of the genre. Preliminary analysis of other performances of Tubyaku Kostërkin in these materials reveals, first, that there seems to be a strong tendency to *avoid* lines

of the unpaired word border type altogether, and second, that when these line types occur, there seem to be, surprisingly, traces of a confusion in the performance.

These short examples reveal that there are still many exciting features of these traditions to be explored and discovered in the recorded cultural performances not only of the Nenetses, but also of other peoples and local cultures. The initial problem usually seems to be to find and formulate fruitful questions and perspectives. Performed culture may contain rich clues for furthering our understanding of it. The more remote the examined culture is to the researcher, the more that multidisciplinary cooperation and transcultural communication is needed. Further, here the discussions with the local connoisseurs of culture, as well as the advances of linguistic research, have made this kind of analysis possible, both in theory and in practice.

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