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Kola Sámi literature (Kildin Sámi, Ter Sámi, Akkala Sámi)

Michael Rießler

Introduction

This short chapter presents a general overview of oral and written Kola Sámi literary genres as well as other artistic or poetic uses of the language and describes the most important writers and other performers. The focus is on contemporary Kildin Sámi, which is the most vital among the Sámi languages of Russia and the only one in which literary texts are produced in the country today. Since the single chapters of this report are divided according to the contemporary Sámi written languages, Skolt Sámi, which is predominantly spoken in Finland today, is overviewed in a separate chapter. However, the Kola Sámi communities in and outside Russia do not only share linguistic traits but also, for instance, Orthodox Christianity, the national costume as well as genres and topics in traditional oral literature. See also Sergejeva (2000), who subsumes the Skolt Sámi and Kola Sámi cultures and languages under "Eastern Sámi". Therefore, the two separate chapters partly overlap and allow for useful comparison.

Kola Sámi literature has been a permanent topic in the scientific and popular scientific discourse on the Sámi people of Russia. However, there are no truly reflective and comprehensive overviews available yet, but for comparison one can see, for example, the popular scientific collection of literary text samples and secondary materials about Kola Sámi literature in Большакова and Бакула 2012 and Большакова 2005 or the overviews in Бакула 2011 and Огрызко 2010. The present overview is also very general as it summarises knowledge from these and other sources as well as from my own observations during more than ten years of field research on the Kola Sámi languages. Earlier studies by myself are Rießler 2015, on literature as a part of the Kola Sámi media landscape, and Siegl and Rießler 2015, on the history of Kola Sámi written standards.

The Kola Sámi languages and the first publications

Kola Sámi is the common denominator for the four Sámi groups of northwestern Russia (mostly including but sometimes also excluding the Skolt Sámi in Norway and Finland). The four Kola Sámi languages are Ter Sámi, Kildin Sámi, Akkala Sámi, and Skolt Sámi. Kildin Sámi is spoken by around 500 native speakers, most of whom live in the municipality of Lovozero, where the majority of them were forced to resettle during the 1950s and 1960s. The total number of Skolt Sámi speakers is

roughly similar to that for Kildin Sámi, but basically all Skolt Sámi live in Finland today. The few very last Ter Sámi speakers live scattered in various places on the Kola Peninsula or elsewhere. The fourth Kola Sámi language, Akkala Sámi, is linguistically and culturally closest to Skolt Sámi. It could therefore also be considered a dialect of Skolt Sámi, rather than of Kildin Sámi. It has been regarded as a moribund language, or perhaps already extinct (Rantala and Sergina 2009; Scheller 2011).

The first written record of a Sámi language actually comes from the Kola Peninsula and consists of a short wordlist collected with native Sámi informants by the English sailor Stephen Burrough in 1557. The origin of these words is in a dialect of either Ter Sámi or Kildin Sámi (cf. Abercromby 1895; Genetz 1895). The next known samples of Kola Sámi languages were transcribed and translated folkloristic text samples from speakers of Kildin and Ter Sámi, collected already in the 18th century by the Finnish linguist Daniel Europaeus but published more than 50 years later (Itkonen 1931). The first book written in Kildin Sámi (and partly in Akkala Sámi) was a translation of the Gospel of Matthew published in a Cyrillic script by the Finnish linguist Arvid Genetz (Matthew 1878), who translated the text from Russian with the help of Kildin Sámi informants in the town of Kola. The next period of Kildin Sámi writing started in the early days of the Soviet Union, when textbooks for children and adult education as well as communist propaganda texts were written or translated. Again, the main authors and translators were not of Sámi origin, namely the two linguists Alexander Endiukovskii (Александр Г. Эндюковский, 1901–1938) and Zakharii Cherniakov (Захарий Е. Черняков, 1900–1997), who created the texts with the help of their native speaker Sámi students in Leningrad.

Native Kola Sámi literary writing was documented for the first time in the 1980s, when the current standard for Kildin Sámi was developed by a working group of Sámi teachers and language activists led by the non-Sámi educationalist and linguist Rimma Kuruch (Римма Д. Куруч, b. 1938). The first Kola Sámi writer, and member of this group, was Alexandra Antonova (see below), who included a few small literary texts and poems in her Kildin Sámi primer (Антонова 1982). But it is only since Oktiabrina Voronova (see below) made her debut with the book 'Snow water' in 1986 (Воронова 1986) that Kola Sámi literature seems to have become officially "canonised" (cf. "The first Kola Sami writer" by Sergejeva 1995).

Writers (and other performers)

In the following section, a few important Kildin and Ter Sámi writers and their role are briefly introduced. No literary texts have been published in Akkala Sámi. If literary texts are written in Sámi, most of the mentioned authors write in contemporary Standard Kildin Sámi (including Iraidá Vinogradova, who was a native speaker of Ter Sámi). The only exception is the Ter Sámi writer Oktiabrína Voronova, who published her Sámi texts in a Kildin Sámi orthographic variant in order to include special Ter Sámi pronunciation features. Writings in Akkala Sámi or contemporary Skolt Sámi texts have not been published in Russia (see the separate chapter on Skolt Sámi; also note that Askold Bazhanov, who was a very prominent Sámi writer from Russia, is included in the chapter on Skolt Sámi).

Alexandra Antonova, 1932–2014 (Александра А. Антонова, Сăндрэ Антонова, Sandra Antonova) was a native speaker of Kildin Sámi who published her first works in 1982 (Антонова 1982). Her first texts in Sámi were poems for children, later she also wrote poetry and fiction for adults as well as literary translations into Kildin Sámi. She was the most productive writer in Kildin Sámi up until present time, but she wrote also in Russian. Several of her texts were translated into North Sámi. Antonova played also an important role in the production of Kildin Sámi literature as a text editor and corrector for several other authors. She was awarded the Gollegiella Prize (together with Nina Afanasyeva) in 2012.

Oktiabrína Voronova, 1934–1990 (Октябрѳна В. Воронова), published her first book in 1986 (Воронова 1986). She was a native speaker of Ter Sámi and the sister of Iraidá Vinogradova. She wrote predominantly poems and mostly in Russian, except for one booklet published in Sámi. Parts of her production have also been translated into other languages, e.g. Komi-Zyrian and Tundra Nenets. Voronova was a member of the Union of Soviet Writers.

Nina Afanasyeva, b. 1939 (Нѳна Е. Афанасьева, Ельцэ Нѳна Афанасьева), published a book in her native language Kildin Sámi in 2008 (Яковлев 2008). She has also played an important role in the production of Kildin Sámi literature as a mediator and fundraiser, translator and text editor for various published books. Afanasyeva is also active as a Russian Sámi politician. She was awarded the Gollegiella Prize (together with Alexandra Antonova) in 2012.

Iraidá Vinogradova, 1937–2004 (Ираѳда В. Вѳноградѳва, Вѳришшѳк Вѳноградѳва), published her first book in Kildin Sámi in 1991 (И. В. Вѳноградѳва 1991). She was a native speaker of Ter Sámi and the sister of Oktiabrína Voronova. She predominantly wrote poems for children, mostly in Kildin Sámi. Several of Vinogradova's texts were also translated into North Sámi.

Sofia Yakimovich, 1940–2006 (Соѳья Е. Якимѳвич, Еѳемь Соѳья, Еѳѳм Sofia) published her first work (to my knowledge) in a journal in 2003 (Якимѳвич 2003). She was a native speaker of Kildin Sámi, who wrote mostly poems and folk literature in her na-

tive language as well as in Russian. A few of her texts were also translated into North Sámi.

Ekaterina Korkina, b. 1943 (Екатерѳна Н. Коркина), published her first small booklet with poems for children in 1994 (Коркина 1994). She is a native speaker of Kildin Sámi, who also plays an important role in the production of Kildin Sámi literature as a translator and text editor (see especially Коркина and Галкина 2005; Коркина and Перепелица 2002).

Gennadii Lukin, b. 1949 (Геннадѳй П. Лукин, Оцѳ Лукин, Л. Пѳйвин), published his first small text (under a pseudonym) in 2005 (Пѳйвин 2005), and more recently a double audio CD with fiction (Лукин 2016) (the accompanying book is in the works). Lukin has written exclusively in his native language, Kildin Sámi.

Nadezhda Bolshakova, b. 1957 (Надежда П. Большакова, Надешк Большакова), published her first two books, anthologies of texts for children, in 1996 (Большакова 1996a, 1996b). Later she also wrote poems and novels for adults and a few translations of poems by other writers from Sámi into Russian. She herself writes exclusively in Russian, but several of her texts have been translated into Kildin Sámi. Bolshakova is a member of the Union of Russian Writers and she has founded a private museum for Kola Sámi literature in the town of Revda.

Mikhail Filippov, 1960–2007 (Мѳхаѳл Н. Филиппѳв), is the author of a book with poems in Russian, which was published (posthumously) in 2015 (Филиппѳв 2015). His parents were Izhva-Komi and Sámi. In addition to being a writer, Filippov was also a locally well-known artist.

Ivan Matrekhin, b. 1958 (Иван Я. Матрѳхин), is a popular singer-songwriter of Ter Sámi ethnic background who released a music CD with his own songs (in Russian) in 2005 (Матрѳхин 2005). His lyrics were later also translated into Kildin Sámi (Матрѳхин 2007). In addition to being a singer-songwriter, Matrekhin is active as a Russian Sámi politician.

Elvira Galkina, b. 1965 (Эльѳѳира А. Галкина, Эля Галкина), published her first book in 1991 (Галкина 1991). It contains short texts for children. She is a native speaker of Kildin Sámi who writes poems and (less so) fiction in her native language and Russian. Several of her books have been translated into North Sámi. Galkina is also a locally well-known pop singer (and she won the Sámi Grand Prix in 2002).

Genres, major topics and quantity

In addition to writing, Kola Sámi literary texts have also been performed orally, especially by the mentioned (and other) singers as well as by the numerous native speaker informants working for anthropologists, linguists, musicologists, and other scientists (cf. e.g. the collections by Itkonen 1931; Genetz 1891; Szabó 1967, 1968; Керт 1961; Травѳна 1987; Керт and Зайков 1988). In addition to these orally performed and transcribed

texts and traditional songs in scientific publications, scientists have also published edited Russian versions of Kola Sámi fairy tales (e.g. Пация 1980, 1990). These texts and their topics can be characterised as folkloristic oral literature, although the actual performers are only mentioned as “metadata” to these texts (if at all), rather than as literary authors. But even in the truly authored literary production the main topics are overwhelmingly connected to cultural and personal memory.

Most Kola Sámi writers are women and educated teachers. Written literary texts are predominantly targeted at children and consist either of poems or fairy tales (or other folk literature genres). There are only very few poems, fiction texts and novels written for adults. An interesting lyric text to mention is Pushkin’s *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*, translated into Ter Sámi by Oktiabrina Voronova together with her mother (?) Klavdija Matrëhina and sister Tamara Matrëhina (К. Г. Матрëхина, Воронова, and Т. В. Матрëхина 1971). The translation was not however written in orthography but in phonemic transcription, and it was published as a linguistic text sample in a scientific publication.

Lyric and fiction texts for adults are predominantly written in Russian or translated from Russian into Kildin Sámi. The only novels for adults are written in Russian by Nadezhda Bolshakova (Большакова 2003, 2016). The most substantial literary texts written in Kildin Sámi are all translations from Russian by Alexandra Antonova: a novella by the Skolt Sámi author Askold Bazhanov (Бажанов 1996; see also the chapter on Skolt Sámi), a collection of poems by the Russian poet Esenin (together with Sofia Yakimovich) (Есенин 2008), and Astrind Lindgren’s *Pippi Longstocking* (not translated from the original but from Russian) (Линдгрэн 2013). Perhaps about 30–40 books, magazines or booklets have been published since the 1980s, with no notable decline in the last two decades. However, most of the publications are not very extensive in regard to text quantity.

Promoters and other actors

The two most important publishing houses are the Sámi publisher Davvi Girji from Norway (publishing several books with parallel text in Kildin Sámi and North Sámi) and the renowned local publisher Murmansk Book Publishing House (Мурманское книжное издательство) (publishing predominantly in Russian). However, the bulk of the books published in Kildin Sámi in Russia have not gone through professional editing and copy-editing but have been produced in printing companies or even as private publishing ventures. The latter is also true for the few irregularly appearing magazines, which in-

clude literary texts (e.g. Коркина and Перепелица 2002; Коркина and Галкина 2005; Антонова, Г. А. Виноградова, Данилова, Медведева, and Шаршина 2009).

The most important national promoter and funder for the production and distribution of literature is the Murmansk Center of the Indigenous People of the North under the Murmansk Oblast (ГБУ “Мурманский центр коренных малочисленных народов Севера”). Other significant funding comes from international Sámi and Nordic sources (e.g. the Sámi Council) as well as from other international organisations and scientific projects. Some interested individuals have also provided funding or other resources.

Distribution

In my own observation, most of the produced literary texts are not sold to readers but distributed free of charge. This is true, for example, for all books produced directly by the Murmansk Center of the Indigenous People of the North, because their editions are not allowed to be sold for legal reasons. Even the books from Davvi Girji, which are sold in Norway, have been distributed free of charge in considerable numbers in Russia. In addition, there are several gray publications, produced by public organisations or private persons in Russia or abroad, which are also typically distributed for free. At the same time, the quality of the printed matter produced in Russia for a Kola Sámi readership is rather low when it comes to the paper, design, and copy-editing.

Many texts and multimedia materials are available online, both through official platforms (e.g. the electronic library portal of the Scientific Library of the Murmansk Oblast⁶⁶, and private websites⁶⁷). It is unclear how copyright issues are handled in the latter case.

Local reception and role in culture and language revitalisation

Curiously, although Kola Sámi literary production has been highlighted as an important resource for revitalisation (e.g. by Scheller 2004, 2013), its actual reception has never been investigated. Based on my own observations, this literature is indeed used as a resource for ethnic identity as it is making Kola Sámi culture, language and identity visible. However, the impact on language revitalisation (especially through teaching or stimulating new readers and writers) is unclear. My personal view (based on impressionistic observation) is that this impact has so far been only very marginal, mostly because Kildin Sámi has not been effectively or sustainably taught anywhere on the Kola Peninsula in at least 15 years.

66 The electronic library portal of the Scientific Library of the Murmansk Oblast: <http://www.kolanord.ru/>

67 Private websites, especially: <http://saami.su/>

One should also note that in the local discourse, Kola Sámi writing is often seen merely as one kind of a “cultural expression” among other expressions of traditional Sámi culture, rather than appreciating the value of reading and literature in itself (like Kola Sámi readers would in fact do with regard to, for instance, Russian or world literature). The reasons for this are unclear to me but they may have to do with the obvious differences compared to Russian or other majority-language literature, especially the special ways of distribution, pricing, and the quality of print and design. In respect to distribution and perception, it is also interesting to mention that there are basically no literary critiques, reviews or other public discussion concerned with Kola Sámi literature, with the few exceptions of “canonised” writers like Oktiabrina Voronova.

Further relevant issues

There are logical reasons for the differences in the quality and quantity of Kola Sámi literary production, compared to the literatures of the majority cultures and even to several other minority literatures. One obvious reason is the small number of ethnic Kola Sámi people (i.e. potential writers and performers) and their marginalised role inside the Russian majority. On the other hand, the rapid establishment of different genres and topics since the 1980s and the ever-growing number of published literary texts is noteworthy. Nevertheless, the role of Russian language texts is rather strong, compared to original or translated Kildin Sámi texts. For comparison see, for example, the chapter on Skolt Sámi, describing a case of literature which is almost exclusively produced in the Skolt Sámi language. One reason for this perhaps is the much better developed and institutionalised system of Sámi language training in Finland, including significant state support. Skolt Sámi writers also make much more extensive use of available texts in other Sámi languages (mostly North Sámi). Translating in between Sámi languages can be an effective means of text production, for instance for teaching materials, because the linguistic distance is rather small and the typical themes are also often related in cultural terms.

Although Kola Sámi literature has frequently been the subject of scientific investigations during the last decades, both in literary studies and in studies about the Kola Sámi culture, languages and society, the investigations have mostly been limited to superficial inventories of texts and biographies of writers. Several very interesting phenomena – differentiating Kola Sámi literature from other literatures – have so far been completely ignored in research.

In this brief overview I could only touch upon some of the key issues. But hopefully, future research will produce more systematic analyses to gain more insight to Sámi and other minority literatures in general, and to support culture and language revitalisation through literature.

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