

## **From the *Árran* to the Internet: Sami Storytelling in Digital Environments**

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This essay investigates the use of storytelling in the process of cultural and linguistic revitalization through specific contemporary examples drawn from the Internet. By examining instances of adaptation of Sami tales and legends to digital environments, I discuss new premises and challenges for the emergence of such narratives. In particular, within a contemporary context characterized by an increasing variety of media and channels, as well as by an improvement in minority politics, it is important to examine how expressive culture and traditional modes of expression are transposed and negotiated. The rich Sami storytelling tradition is a central form of cultural expression. Its role in the articulation of norms, values, and discourses within the community has been emphasized in previous research (Balto 1997; Cocq 2008; Fjellström 1986); it is a means for learning and communicating valuable knowledge—a shared understanding. Legends and tales convey information, educate, socialize, and entertain. Their role within contemporary inreach and outreach initiatives is explored in this essay from the perspective of adaptation and revitalization. As I emphasize, the explicit goals in minority politics are factors that have an effect on the selection and adaptation of Sami expressive culture. From this perspective, the Internet is approached as a place of creation and negotiation for traditional storytelling through a case study that I hope will offer a relevant contribution to other indigenous communities. Additionally, this study illustrates how the potential of the Internet has to be nuanced and interpreted in relation to offline practices regarding such materials and traditions.

### **Stigmatized Cultures, Endangered Languages, and Revitalization**

The Sami population lives in the Sápmi area that encompasses northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. According to the Swedish Sami parliament, the Sami population is about 80,000-95,000, but the lack of a census based on ethnicity makes this estimate imprecise. In the definition applied by the Sami parliaments, language and self-asciption are the criteria that characterize who is Sami. The prerequisites for the Sami minorities in the four countries have varied and affected different Sami groups to various extents, but policies of cultural assimilation were a common denominator until the Second World War (Elenius 2006:149-249; Lundmark 2008:141-84). As a result, the Sami identity and symbols associated with it were stigmatized, and the Sami languages are today endangered. Since the

1970s revitalization movements have taken place. A first wave characterized by a strong political awareness resulted in the establishment of Sami parliaments in Norway, Sweden, and Finland (Bjørklund 2000:20-48).

In the context of the early twenty-first century, many minorities and indigenous peoples benefit from a more favorable ideological and political climate. Injustices, infringements, and violations of rights—as well as loss of languages—are most often problems that governments are striving to solve—by giving minority groups an increased degree of participation in decision-making and representation, for instance. A positive change in attitudes has even been concretized at the international level by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and at the European level by the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. At national levels, the recognition of official minority languages alongside additional language legislation has occurred in Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

As Scheller and Vinka (forthcoming) point out, “benevolent legislation is often a prerequisite [to language revitalization], but matters of implementation are as vital.” Further, revitalization requires changing community attitudes (Grenoble and Whaley 2006:13). It is in this context that Sami initiatives for the revitalization of language and culture take place and come to expression in many domains (Pietikäinen 2008; Scheller 2011). Revitalization is a “conscious effort . . . to construct a more satisfying culture” (Wallace 1956:265), “a group-level attempt to recapture an idealized past in order to reintegrate it with an uncertain future” (Balzer 1999:75).

Bearing in mind the close relationship between identity and language in Sami identity management (cf. Seurujärvi-Kari 2012), revitalization should be understood here as a process that includes both cultural and linguistic aspects. The requirement of a change in attitudes (cf. Grenoble and Whaley 2006), conscious efforts (cf. Wallace 1956), and future-oriented attempts (cf. Balzer 1999) applies to efforts towards strengthening a language and language acquisition as well as towards increasing the visibility of a specific culture and assessing its value.

### **Contextualizing Contemporary Storytelling**

The process of globalization and the development of various additional media for communication imply that new forms of storytelling take place in many societies, whereas traditional social activities and gatherings—former arenas for storytelling—have often decreased. Technological changes of the twenty-first century and the practices they have brought about have motivated new discourses in the epistemological and cognitive consequences for the relationship between media technology and cognition (cf. Appadurai 1996; Foley 2002, 2010a; Sauerberg 2011), and as underscored in recent publications (Blank 2009; Page and Thomas 2011), new media platforms involve new narrative practices—in both the production and the consumption of narratives.

The production of knowledge related to minorities in Sweden has undergone a process similar to what can be observed elsewhere in the world regarding accessibility, diffusion, and globalization. The variety of conduits of information technology has allowed for a growing number of information technology (IT) projects by and for indigenous people, aiming at the

development of networks, the preservation of traditional cultures, and the maintenance of languages and education (Dyson et al. 2007; Landzelius 2006). In this context, I wish to investigate the continuity of the communicative function of contemporary narratives in digital environments as an effect of the relocation of storytelling events from the *árran*—the fireplace at the center of the Sami tent and a place for gathering—to the web, today a daily meeting place for many. Linguistic and cultural revitalization is expressed through an increasing number of cultural events and initiatives that promote Sami languages and culture; indeed it is a process that takes place in many different arenas, including the Internet. The possibilities and challenges of online revitalization through media technology therefore deserve closer examination.

The adaptive capacity of legends has been observed in previous research that has emphasized the broad range of possible applications for narratives in different contexts (Dégh 1994:33; Ingwersen 1995:89). The continuity of Sami storytelling traditions is unmistakable; for instance, children are well acquainted with the mean ogre Stállu, who is present not only in traditional narration contexts, but also on television shows for children, in children's literature, and even at museum exhibitions.<sup>1</sup> The persistence of Sami traditional narratives through time has included modification and adaptation; today they occur in different shapes, influenced in their form and content by a new medium and by a specific audience. Such persistence and adaptation can be better understood through studying selected Sami-produced websites that make use of elements of storytelling in order to promote language acquisition and to convey knowledge about the minority in Sweden. In Sami-produced websites and digital environments, recurrent references to the oral traditions, characters, and properties of storytelling stress the significance and continuity of the narrative tradition. Taking as a point of departure the fact that innovation does not exclude preservation (Dégh 1994:12; Selberg 1993:202), the following analysis of digital examples highlights how Sami narratives have been preserved and modified.

Theories of adaptation provide an angle of approach that enables us to reflect on the many facets of transcoding (Hutcheon 2006) inherent in transforming a piece of work to another media. The complex processes and consequences of the adaptation of oral narratives to digital media involve issues highly significant for this present essay, and since these issues must always be kept in mind as they continually operate in the background, discussions raised by the Theory of the Gutenberg Parenthesis (TGP) must be taken into consideration. This provocative concept, coined by Lars Ole Sauerberg (2010) and based on Marshall McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) as well as on Walter Ong's (1982) notion of secondary orality, underscores the similarities between oral traditions before the Gutenberg revolution and digital productions after the internet revolution. The concept of a parenthesis emphasizes the parallels between the two periods and the resumption of a somewhat interrupted continuum that takes place in the twenty-first century. The TGP research forum investigates the consequences of this phenomenon on our modes of perception and cognition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A Stállu exhibition can be seen at the Ájtte (Swedish Mountain and Sami) Museum at Jokkmokk. The *Várjjat Sámi Musea* in Varanger (Norway) has a Stállu playroom, the *Stálllobiedju*.

<sup>2</sup> This forum is located at [http://www.sdu.dk/en/om\\_sdu/institutter\\_centre/ikv/forskning/forskningsprojekter/gutenberg\\_projekt/](http://www.sdu.dk/en/om_sdu/institutter_centre/ikv/forskning/forskningsprojekter/gutenberg_projekt/).

Further nuance for these ideas can be found in the work of John Miles Foley (2002, 2010a, 2010b) through his investigations of how cyber-editions might represent oral performances and how oral traditions and the Internet correspond to each other as technologies that “mime the way we think” through their prioritizing of the pathways and processes “in contrast to the fixed spatial organization of the page and book.”<sup>3</sup> Foley’s medium-based model for oral traditions (2002, 2010b:19-20) and his categorization of verbal marketplaces, or “agoras,” provides a model for a better understanding of both oral tradition and internet technology. Similarities and contrasts between the oral, textual, and electronic agoras underscore how the various technologies influence each other and their continuum.

The analysis that follows examines Sami websites that utilize storytelling and is complemented by empirical data collected through a survey and interviews in order to include the users’ perspectives. The survey, spread electronically among users of Sami-produced websites, asked about expectations and experiences in relation to explicit goals expressed in minority politics such as visibility, identity, representation, and transmission of traditions. Survey results were further supplemented by interviews with producers of digital material for Sami websites.<sup>4</sup> The examples presented below are all sites for language acquisition and are the Sami initiatives referred to within the survey.

### Digitally Mediated Narratives

Our first example, *Cugu*, is an internet-based, digital-born multimedia narrative (located at <http://www.ur.se/cugu/>). The story of two Sami children looking for their puppy (called Cugu) gives users the opportunity to travel not only through the Sami landscape, but also through a world inhabited by mythological beings from the Sami storytelling tradition. The site is produced by *Driva produktion* and the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR), and it presents the story as a fairy tale. The narrative follows a linear structure through different chapters, and the role of the storyteller is filled by various participants: the Sami writer and filmmaker John Erling Utsi; a producer, Birgitta Lindström; and an illustrator, Maria Beskow. *Cugu* includes interactive features that the user can choose to follow or



Fig. 1. Screenshot of *Cugu* homepage <http://www.ur.se/cugu>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://pathwaysproject.org/pathways/show/HomePage>

<sup>4</sup> The survey was conducted in February and March of 2011; for a synthesis of the results (in Swedish), see <http://challengingtraditions.wordpress.com/surveyenkatt/sammanstallning-av-enkatsvaren/>. Eight interviews were conducted to include the perspectives of producers and cultural workers.

leave out of the experience. It is in North Sami<sup>5</sup> and provides a Swedish translation through a PDF file. This digital story thus contains both narrative elements and game-like exercises about aspects of language, and it thereby illustrates the “interactive, option-driven experiences” (Foley 2010b:22) of the electronic agora; the oral and the textual are embedded in the electronic.

One narrative motif, for instance, involves underground beings known as the *háldit* as part of an interactive exercise where the user must identify items that should not be accepted unless one wishes to remain in the world of the *háldit*. This narrative detail is, of course, a reference to Sami legends and traditional knowledge about how one should behave in a situation when encountering such beings. For instance, Johan Turi wrote in 1910 how people seeking shelter beneath some rocks sometimes come upon a beautiful home and are invited to eat. “And if one eats,” he wrote, “then one can never leave. But if one refuses to eat, then [the underground beings] cannot keep one there” (Turi 2011 [1910]:154). The interactive exercise in *Cugu* makes allusion to these beings, warning of the risk of accepting food from the *háldit*.

*Gulahalan* (“I make myself understood”) is a site (<http://www.ur.se/gulahalan/>; see Fig. 2) for language acquisition in the form of a textbook, produced by UR and the Sami Education



Fig. 2. Screenshot of *Gulahalan* homepage (<http://www.ur.se/gulahalan/>).

Center in Jokkmokk. The web design makes use of patterns of design from Sami handicraft. Similarly, the colors in the design—red, blue, green, and yellow—correspond to the ones that are used traditionally in Sami costumes and that appear on the Sami national flag.

The site is divided into different sequential chapters, with a glossary and grammar exercises. It includes audio features, texts, and interactive exercises about vocabulary, numerals, and the like. The site also includes ten recorded narratives that can be used for practicing listening comprehension. Some of them are short interviews about a variety of topics such as Sami folk beliefs or sport. Others are called “traditional Sami stories” (*traditionella samiska berättelser*); three of these are based on a collection of North Sami legends from the end of the nineteenth century (Qvigstad 1927:327, 405), and two are readings from *Sámi Deavsttat* (“Sami Texts”) (Turi and Turi 1918:129-31), one of the books by the storyteller and writer Johan Turi. The web user thus becomes acquainted with traditional legends including, for instance, a tale that gives us an explanation for the different types of reindeer. This story about the origin of the wild reindeer published in Qvigstad’s work (1927:327) revolves around two sisters, Háhčēšeadni and Njávešeadni, and their reindeer. One day the reindeer of the first sister, unsatisfied with its treatment, decides to leave and thus becomes a wild reindeer; Njávešeadni’s reindeer, on the other hand, chooses to stay and becomes domesticated. This tale is embedded in *Gulahalan* and is quite faithful to the text published in 1927. Such stories on the website are mediated following the pattern of a radio program and are not instances of digital narratives to the same extent as

<sup>5</sup> The site has recently been translated into Lule Sami: <http://www.ur.se/tjutju/>.

*Cugu*; instead, their multimediality consists of the sum of the different features of the website and the way storytelling is included within the frame of the textbook.

*Noaidegiisá* (“The Magic Coffin,” found at <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/default.aspx?programid=3124>) is a series of legends and tales for children that are broadcast on the Internet and the radio. The programs are available on a website that provides pictures and some complementary information for each episode, with *Noaidegiisá* being the North Sami part of a larger series of narratives broadcast by the Swedish radio in the five official minority languages, with tales and legends specific to each community.<sup>6</sup> We find, for instance, the story of Stállu marrying a tree stump. In this legend, the mean ogre is lured by the Sami, who make him believe he is marrying a “pretty girl” that is in fact just a tree stump arranged with a girl’s clothes. The story narrates how the silly giant talks to his wife and does not notice he has been fooled until later when he wishes to go to bed with her. He then becomes furious, runs out naked, and eventually freezes to death (Turi 2011 [1910]:148).

Although the narratives on the *Noaidegiisá* website are specific to each language group, the website’s design follows the same layout for each of the five different versions in the minority languages and therefore uses few symbols or features referring specifically to Sami principles of form as did the previous examples of *Cugu* and *Gulahalan*. However, the few illustrations that are present tend to be more particularized as they depict specialized landscapes and animals, as well as protagonists wearing the Sami *gákti*, the traditional costume (with its characteristically big red pompom on the cap) associated most closely with the north Sami area of Karesuando. The site’s audio settings include *yoik* (a traditional form of Sami singing and storytelling) and drums, and an introductory text in Swedish describes Sami myths and stories as “at home and almost everywhere in the Sami society”<sup>7</sup> and also emphasizes a close relationship between Sami culture and nature. The stories were written for the series, but versions of the narratives and similar narrative elements can be found in most collections of Sami legends.<sup>8</sup>

*Cujaju* is a website (<http://www.cujaju.no/>) where short YouTube films are embedded. The website is about *yoik* and is—as is made clear on the site’s information page—an effort to make this traditional form of singing and storytelling accessible and understandable for young children. It is directed by Rachel Andersen, produced by Sonar Film and the Senter for Nordlige Folk (“Center for Northern Peoples”) in Norway, and financed by the Sami parliament. On the site’s main page, an outdoor scene with a hare, mosquito, and bear functions as an index to other *yoiks* on YouTube by allowing users to click

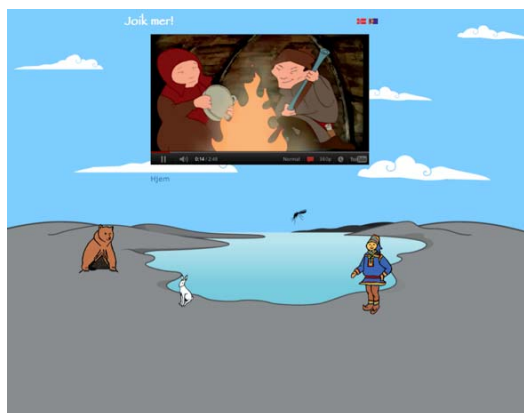


Fig. 3. Screenshot of *Cujaju* homepage (<http://www.cujaju.no>).

<sup>6</sup> Since 2000, the five official national minority languages of Sweden are Finnish, Yiddish, Romani, Meänkieli, and Sami.

<sup>7</sup> <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=3129&artikel=4326826> (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Qvigstad 1927.

on the pictures of animals. The story of *Cujaju* is also provided as a short text that can be accessed via a link. The site is available in Norwegian and North Sami.

Although the Sami *yoik* is often referred to as a form of singing and discussed in terms of its musical qualities (Graff 2007; Jones-Bamman 1993), it is also a form of storytelling (Stoor 2007). The website *Cujaju* highlights musical and narrative qualities. The core story is a traditional tale about the hunter Garral and his meeting with *draugfolket*, beings from Sami tales. The animated film of 2½ minutes begins in a Sami tent where we first see the seal hunter preparing for the journey that he then undertakes to the shore. The Sami tent is the only building; an outdoor landscape with its bird song, audible wind, and resounding sea is the setting for the rest of the story. The webpage frames the narrative with aural and visual elements; paratextual features as well as text-based descriptions are present.

These selected sites are mentioned by many of the users that responded to the survey. *Cujaju*, *Cugu*, *Noaidegiisá*, and *Gulahalan* refer directly to vernacular Sami storytelling traditions, including characters, topics, settings (landscape), and musical background (*yoik* and drums). These examples are also all in line with the goals of minority politics, that is, the promotion of the Sami languages and the strengthening of Sami identity (Regeringskansliet 2008/2009:158, 2009:724). Issues related to language and traditions are also a main concern among visitors to Sami websites, as the survey shows, and learning Sami and finding information about the situation of the Sami are primary aims for visitors to these websites. In addition, language acquisition and the transmission of culture and traditions are especially highly positioned in the expectations for children's interaction with these sites.

The websites illustrate the wide variation, overlap, and interplay between the different “verbal marketplaces.” Foley's medium-based model of oral traditions enables us to approach multimediality in the recent Sami-produced webspaces in relation to a strong oral tradition that is stressed as a point of reference in the selected examples discussed above. The oral is central with regard to both the features used for conveying the legends (recordings) and the references made to the origin of the stories. But the written word is still the main means for introducing and framing these stories. The electronic format combines audio-visual and interactive features with the oral and the written. The study of the sites and how they interplay with the storytelling tradition exemplifies the multiple uses of a variety of registers and channels of communication that Foley describes as “a matter of code-switching” (2010b:20).

### **The Continuity of Oral Storytelling**

The attractive features of traditional storytelling—along with a wish to educate and inform the general public about minorities and indigenous peoples—have triggered adaptations of legends and tales for the digital medium in many instances.<sup>9</sup> The Internet can be a strong pedagogical tool that enables teachers or producers to successfully combine entertainment and information in a manner that triggers motivation and learning. The Internet is also a suitable medium for storytelling thanks to the multimedia possibilities it offers through the combination

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Leavy 2007 and also the Conne River Project (<http://www.storiesofconneriver.ca/>).

of several forms of already-existing media (Punday 2011:20-21). Sami storytelling on the Internet is expressed in many different forms, with various degrees of multimediality and diverse targeted audiences. The websites selected above exemplify this variation and, at the same time, illustrate recurrent narrative features. In the case of *Cugu*, the writer John Erling Utsi describes the tale as a synthesis of elements of traditional Sami storytelling (Sameradion 2010), and entities such as underground beings and Stállu are indeed drawn from the Sami storytelling repertoire. The narratives on *Gulahalan* also refer to legends and tales from previous publications (cf. Turi 2011 [1910]; Qvigstad 1927).

The strong intertextuality between the digital examples presented here and their text-based sources might seem to imply that the contemporary examples have remained confined to the pattern of written text, without freeing themselves totally from a “textual taxidermy” (Foley 2005:233). In the cases of *Gulahalan* and *Noaidegiisá*, for instance, the Internet is only a mode of diffusion and access, and the narratives in *Gulahalan* are simply versions transposed from the printed source into another medium without any greater modifications. But *Cugu* and *Cujaju* were created to use internet applications: *Cugu* illustrates the potential of digital-born narratives with interactive features and the possibilities for flexibility and variation; as for *Cujaju*, the site explores the possibilities of film and platforms such as YouTube for a visual representation of *yoik*. The use of graphics and animation is yet another mode of negotiation between sources and intertexts (cf. Hayles 2003). In *Cugu* and *Cujaju*, words are no longer prominent: even though the sites are in North Sami, even non-Sami speakers can navigate the digital environment. In the case of *Gulahalan* and *Noaidegiisá*, on the other hand, words are central, a reality reflected both in the content and in the limited use of multimedia features.

Interactivity enables interplay and interaction between storyteller, audience, and story to a greater extent than a written and printed text. The examples chosen in this essay do not make use of all the layers of interactivity explored by Ryan (2011:35-62) since they do not involve internal participation or collaborative interaction. Nevertheless, the degree of interactivity is higher in a digital environment or on a website where the participant can make choices and create his or her own relationship with the narratives than it is with a written text.

The chosen websites also point toward the continuity of storytelling as a social practice and as a natural part of life—even though mediated in various ways—and the adaptation of traditional Sami narratives is simply part of the larger cultural production that now takes place in digital environments. The computer and the Internet as media, in comparison with the book as a medium, provide a wider range of tools to create and transmit knowledge. Storytelling in the “postparentetical period,” as Sauerberg (2010:232-34) would call it, presents similarities with “preparentetical” storytelling and primary orality (Ong 1982:6). The continuum and similarities between oral traditions and internet technologies stressed by Foley are here demonstrated by the mix of tradition and individual, a distributed authorship, the intended audience, and process-oriented storytelling events. A story is no longer contained within a book and reduced to a text (Foley 2005:233); it is now a dynamic process that the reader becomes part of through interaction. The readers and the audience are viewed not as passive recipients, but rather as active participants (cf. Page and Thomas 2011:8). These contemporary instances not only highlight the continuity of the storytelling tradition, but they also expose new prerequisites,



assumptions, and intentions. A narrative event can, thanks to multimediality, resemble an oral performance to a greater extent than a printed text or even an audio file.

Although the parallels between oral and digital storytelling are many and there is an undoubted continuity from oral to written to digital forms, any interpretation of digital narratives must also include—in addition to intertextual and contextual aspects—their hypertextual and paratextual features. A story of course emerges out of a context and makes reference to previous legends and tales; the examples focused upon in this study are based on sources documented from another historical context, but they are in dialogical relation to contemporary master narratives such as Sami identity discourse in a context of revitalization. But in the case of digitally mediated narratives, the position of a story on a website and embedded links there also place a specific account in a hypertextual context that needs to be taken into consideration. The chosen sites are produced, linked, and placed on websites with specific intentions; their connection to the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company, for example, underscores the educational purposes of *Gulahalan* and *Cugu*. As for paratextual features, the study of the intermediality and multimediality of stories emphasizes how visual and aural elements also contribute to establishing a relationship with other narratives. For instance, the use of traditional Sami designs, the employment of colors from the traditional Sami costume, and the inclusion of *yoik* and drums all work to create associations with Sami identity.

Even though an adaptation is “likely to be greeted as minor and subsidiary and certainly never as good as the ‘original’” (Hutcheon 2006:6), the intertextual and dialogical relationship between digital narratives and previous publications of Sami folklore collections makes it difficult to approach new productions as autonomous items. Accordingly, this relationship should be studied as horizontal rather than hierarchic. The recent online productions of *Cujaju*, *Cugu*, and *Noaidegiisá* combine diverse aspects of the storytelling tradition in such a way that new multimedia stories emerge. Interestingly, instances that contain a high degree of intertextuality (Tarkka 1993:175) make less use of the multimedia opportunities and interactivity. Narratives based on printed versions of stories recorded some 100 years ago seem less flexible in their adaptation to the Internet, as is well illustrated by *Gulahalan* and *Noaidegiisá*. Respect for authorship and issues related to authenticity and ownership might partially explain this phenomenon (cf. Welch 2009); as Page and Thomas point out (2011:10), “conventions of authenticity online still prevail.”

The possibilities that digital environments offer for creation are not fully exploited in all of the websites examined in this study, and—as mentioned above—their employment varies greatly. There is a rather high degree of multimediality in *Cugu*, and the *Gulahalan* site makes use of different media side by side, with the storytelling using mainly audio. As for *Noaidegiisá*, the Internet is used as a means for diffusion and access, not as a tool for creation. *Cujaju* provides another instance of multimediality where the main source, a *yoik*, is turned into an animated film. While *Gulahalan* and *Noaidegiisá* are closer to textual technology, combining original printed texts and recordings with a web platform, *Cujaju* illustrates a broader technological range, and *Cugu* best illustrates how internet technology can represent oral traditions successfully in relation to navigational paths and process-oriented performances.

### Premises and Challenges

A story as a performance is partly shaped by its audience (see, for instance, Bauman 1986:11-12), independent of the medium. Although the readers of a digitally mediated narrative cannot necessarily be explicitly identified, there is an implicitly targeted audience. In order to successfully approach the narratives as storytelling events it is important to include this assumed audience in the analysis of our selected sites. The contemporary adaptations are based on traditional legends and tales; written versions were published at the turn of the twentieth century, and these versions thus represent an early adaptation from an oral source to the book format. The narratives collected 100 years ago were part of the Sami tradition that addressed members of the community, including both adults and children. But minority language politics have a predominant didactic goal in contemporary forms of storytelling, and there has therefore been a necessary adjustment in the intended audience and the role of media in the transmission of these tales. On the sites I have examined, content and composition are now designed primarily for promoting language acquisition, and in this context storytelling is assigned a specific meaning.

The main difference between older texts and contemporary instances of Sami storytelling—such as those found in our selected websites or in recent publications (for example, Birkeland 1988; Utsi 2011)—is their intended audience. Cruel and salacious details in older narratives indicate that some stories were not aimed especially at children, but at a broader audience. All generations used to be involved in such narrative events. But in their newer digital media forms, the Sami legends and tales are intended especially for children. Traditional narratives have been adjusted to employ a more accessible register, and Sami storytelling has been somewhat redefined as a genre with a shift in focus. Side effects of the shift that can be observed today include the disappearances of details and a narrowing of variations in order to adjust legends and tales to young readers.

This adaptation of traditional stories entails the greater elaboration of visual representations. Adaptation to the audience can be observed in the pictures of the characters that visual media deliver. Portrayals of the mean, foolish ogre Stállu, for instance, differ greatly between older representations and recent illustrations. In more recent publications such as children's books (for example, Birkeland 1988; Utsi 2011), digital stories (as available on the *Cugu* website), or short films on television (Fig. 4), the visual representations do not typically render the cruelty found in the descriptions of older narratives. The transformation of the Stállu figure in mass media adaptations are motivated by assumptions and values proper to a contemporary and global context. The expected audience—in this case, children—induces the choice of a certain genre



Fig. 4. Stállu in the short film *Stállu ja garjá*.

and the components associated with it.

The contemporary contexts for the development and emergence of storytelling and media consumption provide another explanation for the discrepancies between the narration as documented 100 years ago and the ones we find today on the Internet. Differences between oral, written, audiovisual, and multimedia variants of storytelling are related not only to the transmission medium used—be it the Internet or a book—but also to the context in which they are consumed. Narration today does not occur under traditional conditions: children may sit alone in front of the computer or read on their own, whereas storytelling would traditionally occur only when a group is gathered. Cruel details narrated within a safe environment might now be inappropriate for children hearing stories on their own; in the case of the Stállu lore, for instance, the more terrible parts of narratives have been censored in order to adapt them for children, and in general recent storytelling events often offer “cuddly” versions of the legends. In books for children, the murders, death, and cruelty have been replaced by an ambiguous ending. For example, the traditional story mentioned earlier of Stállu marrying a tree stump has more recently been narrated in a children’s book (Birkeland 1988) and in *Noaidegiisá*, whose graphic ending is less explicit. The reader does not get to know exactly what happens to Stállu—we are told only that he “disappears”—whereas his death by freezing is detailed in Turi’s 1910 version.

Online creations therefore provide examples for how the oral, visual, written, and digital interplay and influence each other, resulting in narrative practices that strengthen the continuity of Sami storytelling but also contribute to its novelty. Additionally, such online productions are in interplay with offline conditions and prerequisites such as minority politics, an intended audience, and consumption patterns. A richer understanding of the performance of the digital stories would therefore include a deeper receptionalist approach for gaining a better awareness of who the users are or how the websites are used differently by adults and children. Such an investigation would require more extensive user data and would require a separate article of its own.

### **Internet Technologies, Oral Traditions, and Revitalization**

This essay has examined contemporary storytelling in Sami webspaces through selected examples. But we should also investigate further the role that such digital environments can play in ongoing processes of revitalization in relation to minority politics, user expectations, and the community. As we shall see, these sites work well to exemplify the reciprocity of contextual factors, that is, how revitalization objectives and minority politics shape contemporary Sami storytelling.

One effect of the growth of online Sami productions is that the visibility of the Sami minority has increased. Long an invisible minority in their own countries, today, thanks to new forms of literature and storytelling in mass media, information about Sami traditions, culture, and history is accessible to a broader audience. For the marginalized Sami minority, the actualization of languages and traditions in mass media appears essential, and it has also been a significant point of legislation (Regeringskansliet 2009).

A consequence of the spreading of knowledge—and one of the objectives of Sami media producers as well—is the affirmation and consolidation of a Sami identity. A recent report about the situation of the Sami people in the Sápmi region (Anaya 2011) underscores the importance of promoting minority languages, and the close relationship between language and identity. The study of Sami-produced websites using traditional storytelling indicates how central certain aspects are in the articulation of a Sami identity: as we have seen, there are the obvious aesthetic factors involved in the visual associations of *duodji* (handicraft) and the *gákti* (traditional clothing), but within many sites there is also an emphasis on features relating to the land and the landscape, thus materializing the Sápmi region itself.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, references to tradition and traditional knowledge are many, even as these traditions and knowledge are being redefined in a contemporary context.

Anaya (2011) has identified the decrease in the variety of the Sami languages as an area of concern but mentions mass media as a tool for revival; such media have a central role in the promotion of languages, and their effect on the dissemination of words and pedagogical communication is well established. Digital media are also significant in the preservation and vitality of these languages: they constitute a site of creativity and renewal. Terminology related to contemporary topics or technology can easily be shaped and spread through the Internet. But in terms of standardization and modernization of language, the use of new media for storytelling deserves further investigation, with several Sami languages and identity revitalization processes needing to be taken into account.

A majority of the survey participants expressed the view that there is not enough Sami available on the web, and especially not enough of the less-spoken Sami languages (South Sami, Lule Sami, and Ume Sami) in particular.<sup>11</sup> Looking specifically at the explicit aims of the Sami media, a majority of those who completed the survey expressed that the websites (both Sami sites in general and sites for children specifically) do not succeed fully in the task of supporting language acquisition.<sup>12</sup> Even though productions in Lule Sami and South Sami have increased over the last five years, they are outnumbered by North Sami productions, and often North Sami is used synonymously for Sami, with other minor Sami languages remaining disregarded. Moreover, the dialectal variations of the North Sami language, spoken in three different countries, run the risk of being overlooked because of the implicit standardization of language caused by the centralization of Sami media production.

The process of revitalization cannot be studied solely online. It is a process initiated and put into practice offline; it is triggered by people and relates to many arenas of life. The Internet is a single part of it as a place for creation and a meeting place. There is, nevertheless, a strong connection between what happens online and offline. In the survey, 79.5% answered “agree” or “agree to some extent” to the statement “there is a manifest connection between the websites and reality.” The Internet gives indications about ongoing processes and phenomena that should be

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<sup>10</sup> For some of the implications of this process, see Cocq 2013.

<sup>11</sup> It emerges from the survey results that 75% believe the Sami languages are not well represented on the Internet (“inclined to disagree” or “disagree”).

<sup>12</sup> 67.5% respond “to some extent” or “to a lesser degree” to the question “Do the Sami websites meet the goal of supporting language acquisition?”

studied in relation to offline activity. But as discussed above, there is also skepticism among users about the potential of digital media in the ongoing processes of linguistic revitalization in the Sami communities.

As for the adaptation of narratives, Sami storytelling is currently at a crossroads of different influences: a strong tradition is being challenged by an explicit effort toward adaptation with respect to new media, a new audience, and a new context for the revitalization, promotion, and development of threatened languages. Survey results indicate that the main expectations of users are not fully met by what is offered online today, and even though there is a strong belief in the Internet and its potential for language teaching, doubts remain among users with regard to the possibility of developing the narrative tradition through digital media. The narrowing definition of the targeted audience in recent adaptations of storytelling risks the loss of variation in a strong storytelling tradition. The communicative dimension of storytelling appears secondary in contemporary examples, whereas the entertainment dimension—traditionally a rhetorical means rather than an explicit goal—is primary today. Prior to this shift, storytelling was a central social practice in the transmission of social norms and codes of the community. Narratives did not function simply to entertain, but also to educate and socialize. The transcoding that takes place when involving a new audience, new technologies, and new consumption patterns affects the form and content of narratives in many ways. Offline narrative practices remain the strongest bearer of language revitalization, and it is their extensive use and unquestioned bond to tradition that motivates online productions dedicated to the same aims.

The examples focused upon in this study illustrate the possibilities and challenges of the Internet for narrative practices and endangered languages. The richness of storytelling and the Internet's potential for the adaptation, creation, and diffusion of narratives provide a promising foundation for the continuity and development of the strong Sami storytelling tradition. The digital technologies and practices themselves are in a phase of exploration and development, as can be observed in their use by many other minority communities as well. Indigenous peoples around the world make use of digital media, and the example of the Sami can contribute to the search for new insights into the Internet as a locus for storytelling and oral traditions more generally. Internet technologies do not simply provide a wide range of tools better suited than the written text for representing oral traditions; despite their shortcomings, digital media also offer empowering strategies, paths to revitalization, and the ability to represent more fully the true diversity and heterogeneity of the cultures and languages that surround and enable them.

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