

9

Tjutju

Coppélie Cocq

New technologies and digital practices for language acquisition are in a constant state of exploration and development, and these developments are particularly noticeable in many minority and Indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples around the world make use of digital media, and Sámi initiatives make a contribution to the search for new understandings of the internet as a locus for storytelling. Internet technologies do not only provide a wide range of tools for representing oral traditions, but also offer possible empowering strategies and triggers for revitalisation.

This case study focuses on *Tjutju* (Utbildningsradion 2011a), a born-digital multimedial narrative in Lule Sámi. This example illustrates how traditional storytelling emerges in new formats and in contemporary settings. The story of two children looking for their puppy (called *Tjutju*) provides one with the opportunity to travel in a world inhabited by mythological beings from the Sámi storytelling tradition. The website is produced by Driva Produktion and the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (Utbildningsradion) and presents the story as a fairy tale. A version in North Sámi, *Cugu*, was first produced in 2010 (Utbildningsradion 2010), and later translated into Lule Sámi to create this version. A South Sámi version, *Tjågkoe*, was published shortly thereafter (Utbildningsradion 2011b).

The story follows a linear structure through different chapters. The role of the storyteller is represented through writer and filmmaker John Erling Utsi, producer Birgitta Lindström and illustrator Maria Beskow. *Tjutju* includes interactive features that the user can choose to follow or skip over. Thus, it contains both narrative elements and interactive exercises that allow one to practise and memorise vocabulary, for instance about recipes for *gáhko* (bread), things to have in your rucksack, about animals, or about the weather. A Swedish translation is provided in a PDF file that can be accessed while navigating through the chapters.

Oral tradition is stressed as a point of reference (Sameradion 2010) in a similar manner as other instances of legends and tales on the internet (Cocq 2013). One narrative motif, for instance, concerns the invisible beings *gadniha*, and the website provides an interactive exercise where the user has to identify items that one should not accept from these beings if one does not want to become trapped in their world. This narrative detail makes a reference to the Sámi legends and traditional knowledge about how one should behave in a situation when encountering these beings.

Cultural knowledge is embedded in storytelling not only by its reference to traditions, but also through a grammar of symbols. Paratextual features, such as visual and aural elements, contribute to establishing a relationship to other narratives. For instance, the use of principles of form from traditional Sámi design, the colours of the traditional costumes and the music (inspired by the *yoik*) create associations with Sámi identity.

Tjutju illustrates how the oral and the textual are embedded in the digital, but the written word is still the main means for introducing and framing these stories. The digital format is an additional means that combines audio-visual and interactive features with spoken and written words. Interactivity between the story, the storyteller and the audience is possible to a greater extent than a written and printed text. The participant can make choices and create their own relationship to the narratives. The readers and the audience are not viewed as passive recipients, but rather as participants.

Tjutju is one example of Sámi online productions, and one of the few in Lule Sámi. The Sámi have long been invisible minorities in their own countries, and new forms of literature and storytelling in digital media contribute to an increased circulation of information about Sámi traditions, culture and languages that become accessible to a broader audience.

A consequence of the spreading of knowledge, and one of the objectives of the producers of Sámi media, is the affirmation and consolidation of a Sámi identity. A recent report about the situation of the Sámi people underscores the importance of promoting minority languages and of the close relationship between language and identity (Anaya 2011). Different media have a central role in the promotion of languages, and their impact on and significance for the dissemination of words and pedagogical communication is acknowledged. Media are also significant in the preservation and vitality of these languages because they constitute arenas for creativity and renewal. For instance, terminology related to contemporary topics or technology can be shaped and spread through the internet. But in terms of standardisation and modernisation of language, the use of new media for storytelling deserves critical investigation. There are several Sámi languages, and the processes of revitalisation in relation to the redefinition of the Sámi identities need to be taken into account. Even though productions in the Lule Sámi and South Sámi languages have increased to some extent over the past decade, they are still greatly outnumbered by productions in North Sámi. As for the diversity of Sámi languages, North Sámi has become a synonym for Sámi, and other minor Sámi languages remain disregarded. Moreover, the dialectal variations within a specific Sámi language run the risk of being overlooked due to the implicit standardisation of language caused by the centralisation of media production.

Adaptations of storytelling also imply a risk of losing the variety that exists within a strong storytelling tradition. The communicative dimension of storytelling appears secondary in contemporary examples, and it is the entertainment dimension—which has traditionally been only a rhetorical means—that is now the primary focus. In former times, storytelling as a social practice was central in the transmission of social norms and codes within the community. Narratives did not function only to entertain, they also played important roles in education and socialisation. The transcoding that takes place when taking into account a new audience, new technologies, and new premises for consumption patterns affects the form and contents of narratives in many ways.

Although the internet serves as a place for creation and as a meeting place, processes of revitalisation cannot be studied solely online. They are initiated and put into practice offline, and they are triggered by people and are related to many arenas of life. There is a strong connection between what happens online and offline. The internet and digital practices give

indications about efforts that should be studied in relation to offline activity in order to further evaluate the effects of digital media on the ongoing processes of cultural and linguistic revitalisation.

References

- Anaya, James. 2011. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Addendum. The Situation of the Sami people in the Sápmi region of Norway, Sweden and Finland*, 18th session, UN Doc A/HRC/18/35/Add.2. (6 June 2011). Online: www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/SR/A-HRC-18-35-Add2_en.pdf (accessed 11 July 2018).
- Cocq, Coppélie. 2013. 'From the *Árran* to the internet: Sami storytelling in digital environments'. *Oral Tradition* 28(1): 125–42. Online: journal.oraltradition.org/issues/28i/cocq (accessed 16 June 2018).
- Sameradion. 2010. 'Cugu, ny barnradio' [Cugu – a new children's radio program]. *Sameradion & SVT Sápmi*, 12 January. Online: sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2327&artikel=3365060 (accessed 7 December 2014).
- Utbildningsradion. 2010. *Cugu*. Online: www.gulldalit.se/cugu (accessed 9 July 2018).
- Utbildningsradion. 2011a. *Tjutju*. Online: www.gulldalit.se/tjutju (accessed 9 July 2018).
- Utbildningsradion. 2011b. *Tjågkoe*. Online: www.gulldalit.se/tjakoe (accessed 9 July 2018).

This text is taken from *Indigenous Efflorescence: Beyond Revitalisation in Sapmi and Ainu Mosir*, edited by Gerald Roche, Hiroshi Maruyama and Åsa Viridi Kroik, published 2018 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/IE.2018.09