

## Who is speaking?

*On the concept of 'I' in Finnish spells*

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Hundreds of spells, in numerous different variants, have been recorded from the area around Finnish Karelia and the majority of these have been published in the collection *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* (Old Poetry of the Finnish People).<sup>1</sup> The material collected therein is principally the work of 19<sup>th</sup> century singers, both men and women. Many spells have also been recorded in the minutes of various trials during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when they were used as proof of the accused's witchcraft.

Spells can be seen as an act of communication, whereby it is assumed that the speaker's message has a (supranormal) recipient. They can thus be seen as speech (parole) containing a given message (cf. Weiner 1984, pp. 702-3). Formally, a spell is a monologue incanted against another force. It is also a psychic process, which penetrates its opponent's will, breaks free from its own territory into another person's space. The need thus arises to protect oneself, a need for the reassurance of one's own impenetrable autonomy. In everyday life, people's deeds are defined by many physical factors such as a limited field of vision, a space and an environment within one's control, one's own physical strength and the constraints of time. In the magical psychological reality of spells, there are no such limitations, indeed conquering them is a prerequisite for the success of the spell reciter. On a verbal level, spells can also be seen as depicting the relationship between the participants in a rite (Siikala 1984, p. 193). As such, it is a ritualistic tool, which is used to achieve a given objective.

Spells are incanted to rid people of everyday problems, in connection with healing rites and the magic associated with supporting people's livelihood - fishing, rearing cattle, working the land - as well as ensuring their sexual capacity. It is thus that medical steps and other such symbolic acts are often carried out alongside the chanting of a spell.

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<sup>1</sup> All examples in this article are taken from volume VII/4 of that collection and are identified by the numbers given in that volume.

Finnish-Karelian spells consist of a wide variety of verbal material. There are often both narrative and descriptive passages along with a direct discourse in the texts. The latter can take the form of questions, prayers, threats or invocations. At least part of the text is always tied up with the given aim of the spell, even though spells used for different purposes may contain some of the same stanzas; indeed, these can often be seen even in the poetic tradition. As such, the body of spell texts takes many different forms, whilst structurally they represent a logic, which deviates considerably from the norm. What is ostensibly incoherent and somewhat varying repetition can perhaps be seen as depicting the periodical strengthening of psychic powers.

The use of spells also varies considerably. Some texts would have been used by almost any layman; these texts are thought to have been chanted mechanically, merely by reading them aloud. However, in dealing with serious problems - such as the outbreak of a virulent disease, the loss of herds of cattle or being the victim of an evil form of witchcraft - the help of a seer, a specialist in the rite tradition, was enlisted. This person was required to have a knowledge of the topology of the underworld and of supernatural beings, as well as the ability to adapt this mythical knowledge in order to solve the particular acute problem (Siikala 1989, p. 67). What are known as the words of the seer are often associated with this; these words are known by many different names, for example words of protection, words of invocation or words acting as vehicle. It is particularly in these spell texts that we find a wealth of material involving a first person narrative, an 'I'. If the text of a spell is read without any personal involvement, merely as a mechanical means of achieving a given end, the 'I' is left with a purely grammatical function as the subject of the sentence. If, however, the monologue is taken to be an agent in the spell's overall effect, thus the aim of that effect rises beyond the semantic content of the sentence. Is the speaker in the spell, the text's 'I', therefore a role assumed by the seer - thus using the text in the same manner as other instruments involved in the rite? Does the word refer to the self of the seer, for whom the text of the spell is a projection of their internalised actions? For one reading recorded archive material, the body of text reveals only a verbal 'I' - is it also concealing a self?

### Hidden knowledge in spells

Naturally, it is impossible to offer generalised answers to questions pertaining to the self of the spell reciter. Even narrowing the focus of this paper to exclusively Finnish archive material does not help simplify matters. One particular problem is

the temporal stratification we encounter in the textual elements of spells. In practice, this means that the same text can sometimes contain elements to do with the spell's world view from different eras, anything from archaic shamanistic material to Christian ideas.

Despite the somewhat linguistic uniformity of some texts, it would seem that spells held different meanings for different experts. The level of intensity between the one invoking the spell and its textual semantics also varies a great deal. Recorders of this tradition have collected texts both from those who themselves had used the magic of the words and from those who had coincidentally heard the texts from someone else. The ability to comprehend the text is often dependent on their 'proficiency' as spell users. One person may have heard another recite the spell, whilst another may have been told that someone else uses a particular text as a spell. In such cases, it is unlikely that the person performing the spell will have had any notion of the 'I' in the text. An indifferent reciter may well have used the spell without paying attention to the significance of this notion. It is in such cases that the spell would have been used as a mechanical means of achieving a given end. Indeed, the relationship of the reciter to the text concerned is often not mentioned in collectors' notes. What is sometimes noted down is some information about the person, from whom someone initially learnt the spell - this is generally a person whose supernatural powers were widely recognised within the community. Conversely, those performing the spell have often remained silent about their own such powers. There are just few recorded instances, from which we can conclusively demonstrate how the reciter him/ herself perceived the 'I' of the verses.

Although in practice it is impossible to verify to what extent recorded information is purely subjective, we can nonetheless examine two alternative assumptions. On the one hand, there is the question of the text's relation to tradition. A prerequisite of collective interpretation is a formal loyalty towards the communally accepted form of the text. However, individual interpretation may lead to freer textual variation. For the purposes of the present examination, I find the latter a most interesting alternative. By narrowing this examination to the words of the seer, we can take as a starting point the spell's function as a rite text, which strives to influence events on the basis of an individual interpretation. If we assume this, the speaker is then no longer the one who merely imparts the text to others, rather he or she also fulfils a ritualistic function as an implicit vehicle in this process towards a given objective. The 'I' of the text thus enters into an as yet undefined relationship with the speaker's self.

## Characteristic features of the 'I' in spell texts

In the words of the seer, the 'I' often comes to the fore through, for instance, the speaker's description of him/ herself, placing particular emphasis on their magical abilities. The powers of the 'I' form a kind of magical inheritance. A blacksmith has traditionally been seen not only as an everyday vocation, but also has mythical associations with the forger, as the world was created. On the other hand, eating is often considered in spells to be a metaphor for the mythical wielding of power (Ilomäki 1995). The metallic attributes of the opponents depicted in spells represent to a certain extent their supernatural capacity. The distinctions *pohjalainen*, *tyriläinen* and *lappalainen* refer to a local identity laden with unknown mythical significance.

Mie oun noian nuorin poika,  
vaskiseppiä valama.

Mie syön noiat nuolinensa  
velhot veitsirautionensa,  
katehet kuraksinensa

...

Mie oun poika pohjalainen,  
tyriläisen tuuvittama,  
lappalaisen liekuttama  
rautasessa kätkeyssä,  
hihnoissa hopehisissa (1742)

I am the witch's youngest son,  
forged by the brass smiths.

I eat witches with all their arrows  
sorcerers with their knives of iron,  
the envious ones with their daggers

I am a boy from the far north,  
rocked by the Tyri,  
rocked by the Lapp  
in a cradle of iron,  
in straps of silver

According to the text, the magical capacity of the 'I' can affect both human constructions and elements of nature. The 'I' is described with images, which in everyday life would have awoken fear and displeasure.

Mie kun liikun, linnat liikkuu.

Mie kun järkyn, järvi järkkyy. (1746)

Missä kyiset hintahani,  
maan matokset vantuheni,  
joilla kynnän kyisen pellon,  
kärmeiset käännättelen? (1745)

Mull on kourat kondiolta,  
veren juojalta vekarat,  
linnulta lihan pitimet,

As I move, so towns move.

As I tremble, so lakes tremble.

Where are my adder gloves,  
my earth worm gloves,  
with which I plough the field of adders,  
and banish the snakes?

I have the hands of a bear,  
the grip of one who drinks blood,  
the bird's meat claws,

havukalta haarottimet  
jolla konnan kouristelen,  
jolla ilkiän asetan (1716)

the eagle's talons,  
with which I clamp the scoundrel,  
and grip all evil.

Here, the speaker describes him/ herself with attributes, which threaten power in order to show that the person approaching the opponent is not simply anyone, and that the persona of the 'I' is powerful.<sup>2</sup> Instead of the reciter him/ herself, the speaker could be their ruler or some greater power may be speaking through their mediation.

Nostan luontoni lovesta,  
haon alta haltijani,  
puhumaan puolestani,  
virkkamaan vierestäni (1721)

My soul arises from the beyond,  
my spirit from under a spruce branch,  
to speak on my behalf,  
and to talk with me.

en puhu omalla suulla,  
puhun suulla puhtahalla,  
Herran henkellä hyvällä (1747)

I do not speak with my own mouth,  
I speak with a pure mouth,  
with the Lord's good spirit.

This contemplation of the self in the spell's monologue threatens the supernatural 'listener':

Ruvennenko, ryhtylenkö,  
tätä hiittä hiomahan,  
paholaista painamahan?  
Hampahat sären huuhmarissa,  
pään panen pahan patahan,  
kielen pieksän petkelellä,  
ikenet kivellä survon (1660)

Shall I start, shall I begin  
to frighten this gnome,  
to weigh down the devil?  
I shatter the teeth of mortals,  
its head I shall place in the cauldron of evil,  
its tongue I shall whip with a stamper,  
its gums I shall grind with stones.

The speaker may also appear to be humbly aware of their own powerlessness:

Kuin ei liene minussa miestä  
tämän jakson jaksajoa,  
saakoon Jumala joku,

When there is not enough man in me  
to endure this enduring,  
may God find someone,

<sup>2</sup> According to Finnish folk beliefs, the dynamistic component to the entities in the world, *väki* is defined by Jouko Hautala as a kind of impersonal force or power belonging to all beings and phenomena. "This force is concealed when these go unnoticed, but becomes active and makes these beings and phenomena dynamic when they become of current interest and the more powerful, important, unusual, conspicuous and emotional the being or phenomenon is in itself, the more effective is the force. (Hautala 1960, p. 13; English translation in Stark-Arola 1998).

tulkoon vanha Väinämöinen  
 kaikki päästöt päästämään,  
 kaikki jaksot jaksimaan,  
 ahinkot avaamaan,  
 reisiä repäsemään (1758)

come, old Väinämöinen  
 to release all that shall be released,  
 to endure all that shall be endured,  
 to open up closed spaces,  
 to tear at thighs.

Alternatively, the speaker may invoke “a thousand devils” (1762) or “males from a closed lake, one hundred men with swords, one thousand males of iron” (1960). According to the lyrics, as the speaker gathers power from different sources, their magic psychic potential grows and the characteristics of their everyday personality seem to disappear. As such, does this give rise to a momentarily transfigured self or does the reciter construct the ‘I’ from latent elements of his / her personality? Of what does the magic potential of the ‘I’ consist? As a background to this we must first examine the facts behind the recitation of spells.

### The ritualistic monologue

Although the monologue is essentially that of the reciter, the words give the impression of an address to an assumed listener. Communication is an act involving two people, therefore the monologue is assumed to have a listener - despite the fact that monologues are generally read in private, indeed actively avoiding other people. The ‘I’ of spells assumes there to be a ‘you’. However, although there may have been a number of listeners present during the reading of a spell, these people were not actually intended as the recipient of the spell’s message. It was thought that a supernatural opponent would fill this role - a bringer of disease, a spirit protecting game or some other kind of antagonist, whose intention, it was assumed, was to hurt the reciter and those he / she was helping. Often, it was supposed that this opponent was some evil person, who was thought to have brought about disease or the loss of cattle by magic means. In some instances, it was thought that the opponent had supernatural helpers or that the people being helped by the reciter were plagued by the dead. It is particularly common of healing spells that they have a way of identifying the opponent. By addressing the birth of the being which has caused the problem, the reciter can in a way take hold of the being and crush it (Honko 1959, pp. 19-20). Although there are parallels between the concepts holy power and orenda, these have in fact to be addressed in a more narrow and concrete way: “the dynamic force may be located in the forest, the earth or the ground, the sauna steam, fire, etc.” (Stark-Arola 1998, pp. 120-121). As such,

people often thought that disease or other problems were caused by places or beings associated with negative power.

Mistä pulmat puutununna  
Ihohon ihmisen lapsen?  
Onko kiistynyt kiroista,  
Vai lienet, vienonen, vesistä,  
vai lienet vesi hiis, ves kalma,  
vai lienet tuska tuulilta tullut,  
vai lienet kalma kalmoista (1759)

kivistäkö, kannoistako,  
vaanko vanhoista akoista,  
vaanko siitä seipähästä,  
jossa on korppi saanut kohulliseksi,  
munivaksi musta lintu? (1760)

Vai on tuuli tuuvittavanna  
Vai on kalma kammiosta,  
Perkele pyhästä maasta,  
Kirkon kirjavan sivulta,  
Satalauan lappiasta,  
Tuhatlauan tutkaimesta,  
Jossa lukkarit lukevat,  
sekä papit pauhovaapi,  
messumiehet mellehtivät (1762)

Where do problems fasten  
To the skin of a child?  
Are they transmitted by curses,  
or, gentle one, are you of the water,  
or are you the water gnome, death,  
or are you suffering come on the winds,  
or are you the death of all deaths?

of stone, of stumps,  
or of old hags,  
or of that staff,  
where the raven became fertile,  
the black bird began to spawn?

Is it the wind that rocks us  
Or is it death from the tomb,  
The Devil from the sacred land,  
From the side of the colourful church,  
From the ceiling of a hundred planks,  
From the corner of a thousand planks,  
Where the parish clerks read,  
and the priests roar,  
and give sermons.

Some spell texts immediately name their particular ailment and its birth: "Sie oot, horkka,/ tuulen tuoma,/ tuulen tuoma,/ veen vetämä" (1955) [Plague, you are/ brought by the wind,/ brought by the wind,/ carried by the water]. Thus the 'you' is verbalised. This list of questions presented to the listener does not merely describe the kinds of places the evil could have come from; it is also indicative of the reciter's own potential: the list outlines a space, which the reciter controls, thus forcing the opponent (the assumed listener) to submit to the reciter's will. Although the 'I' does not appear as a verbal element in the text, it is clear that the person performing these questions is indeed the semantic first person agent of the spell. This is the person who asks the 'tooth worm' the question: "Is it here you have set your bean,/ Is it here you have placed your pea?" (1939).

In any case, the capacity of the 'I' in the spell is exceptional in its ability to control the landscape imbued with magic described in the text. Who could have had such a psychic structure and such spiritual resources? Is the performer an 'I' implicitly hidden in the text or a seer involved in the healing act itself?

### Meanings underlying the body of texts

In preparing to fulfil his/her ritual task, the reciter must begin from his/her own everyday 'I'; here, the point of departure is the person with all the qualities seen in their everyday life. In order to overcome the limits of everyday reality, the reciter must possess exceptional psychic powers. To achieve this - and to protect oneself from harmful people or supernatural beings - the 'I' of the seer would first gather supernatural power verbally, as described above. It may also mean that the reciter would invoke his/her spirit, that is, would call for help from the nature of the other side; a spirit companion. These spells would normally begin with an invocation of the spirit.

Haltiuttani havatan, velhouttani verestän (1565)

[I awake my spirit, I call upon my sorcery]

The invocation of nature by an ecstatic healer has strong associations with the archaic shamanistic tradition, even though they sound banal out of the context of the original worldview (Siikala 1985, p. 161). Alongside such age-old elements in the text, these spells are abundant with material relating to cultural strata from a far later period. However, there are no grounds for us to assume that elements from different origins would have held radically different meanings for later users of the spell or that they would have been in conflict with each other or even that they would have differed in value. Forms of expression belonging to different mental contexts would presumably have been interpreted according to the meaning contemporary with the time of recital and, as such, conflicts have not been recorded. Even in texts from different backgrounds, the interpretation of the 'I' is strikingly similar.

According to the oldest written sources, in performing the ritual, the seer would fall into a motoric trance; in other words, he/she was in ecstasy, or possessed by the spirit in achieving a transfigured form of the self. Martti Haavio has used the French word *possédé* to describe this kind of psychic state (Haavio 1967, p. 316). According to Christfried Ganander, who in the 18<sup>th</sup> century recorded much information about the use of spells, "No one would dare to disturb these zealots,



for they would fly into a rage, grind their teeth together, jump into the air in a frenzy, mutter, kick their legs and behave like one in the grip of fury” (Ganander 1789, p. 21). Around two hundred years later, Samuli Paulaharju described a seer he had met in Russian Karelia preparing for a spell, protecting himself with fire and iron. By concentrating he achieved a frenzied state, “the rise of the spirit could be seen in that his hair stood on end” (Paulaharju 1929).

A gifted reciter could bring him/ herself to a sense of his / her own powers, to a state of over-excited, transfigured consciousness. Thus aware of his / her own powers, the seer would experience sensations like having “jaws of steel, teeth of iron” (1565) with which to bite. In this state, his / her potential was far greater and he/ she could carry out unusual feats: he/ she could paralyse his / her opponents or banish them to places imbued with magical powers - to the mythical waters of Lapland or deep within the earth. The seer may also have been able to return the problem or its cause and all the pain it brought with it back whence it came.

Mie laulan Lappalaisen,  
salasyöjäni sanelen,  
laulan halki hartioni,  
puhki leukani puhelen (1628)

I sing the Lapp,  
I address the evil one,  
I sing through my shoulders,  
and through my jaws I speak.

Tuonne mie sinun manoan:  
koskehe kovah,  
Lapin muah lainehesse (1751)

Thither shall I banish you:  
into that hard torrent,  
to the far Lappish wilderness.

Tuonne ma sinun manaan  
vuoreen teräksineen,  
rautaseen kallioon,  
josta ei kuulu kuuna pääänä,  
selviä sinä ikänä (1616)

Thither shall I banish you  
into that steel mountain,  
into that rock of iron,  
from whence you will never be heard,  
and never shall you survive.

Reikä keskellä kiviä,  
tuohon mä kipuja tungen,  
tuohon vaivoja vähennän. (1807)

A hole in a stone,  
thither shall I shove these pains  
and diminish these afflictions.

Mäne sinne, jonne käsken,  
mäne luokse laittajasi,  
tekijäsi tienohille,  
panijasi parmaille (1670)

Go where I command  
go to that which sent you,  
to meet your maker,  
to the shoulders of your creator.

In calling upon the help of other powers, it is not a matter of understating the self, but rather of a threat and of the inverted image of the reciter's powers. Thus, as well as their own powers, the reciter also gathered the strength of the supernatural beings mentioned, the act of saying the words aloud meant that their powers would accumulate in the reciter themselves. The central objective of these texts is to strengthen the 'I', to depict its power as being greater than the powers of its opponent. Here, a supernatural capacity is in use, it is a concentration of powers charged by the words.

Still the question remains. Is the 'I' of a ritual text a separate entity with no connection to the reciter's everyday self or does the reciter him/ herself transform, as their spirit consists of many different elements? Some renowned seers were known to undergo a powerful personality change - at least outwardly - at the beginning of the spell. Miina Huovinen, in his private life an obliging, happy and hospitable man, was known to clasp a weapon during rites. Similarly, Poahkomie Omenairi, who was friendly, open-minded and unprejudiced, behaved like a raging dog whilst in a trance (Pankmo 1996, p. 13). According to some sources, the abilities of seers were often seen as a heavy psychic and repellent burden, which was already discernible as different from the rest of the community at a young age (Kopponen 1973, pp. 76-79).

The 'I' of the reciter thus differs from the everyday, functioning individual within society. On a textual level, does the spell guide its user beyond the limits of their everyday 'I' and to assume the verbalised ego and the ritualistic self? Is the reciter able - even for a brief moment - to experience this transfigured self as a true personal self? This is an attractive assumption, but two separate identities are however not in question here. The ability to have magical influence over events is not a normal quality, rather it is the result of 'training' and specific psychic preparation. In preparing for this task, the seer must assume elements of personality, which do not appear under normal circumstances. Therefore, reciting the spell brings latent personality elements to the fore. Nonetheless, we can still ask the question as to whether the 'I' of the reciter is a conscious manifestation of his / her self.

### Questions to the 'I'

As a concept, 'self' is no more unambiguous and clearly defined an entity than 'I'. In many ethnic cultures it is by no means considered a central concept (Shulman & Stroumsa 2002, p. 3) and yet in literate cultures it has been assessed from philosophical, psychological and linguistic perspectives. In a text published

in 1938, which was originally given as a lecture, Marcel Mauss outlined the historical development of the 'I' (moi) from its opposite role (personnage) to the idea of a person with full legal rights (personne), until an awareness of one's 'inner life' brought about the concept of the individual (personnalité) (Mauss 1985). The analysis made by George Herbert Mead has become just as much a seminal text: here, he adds to the socio-psychological perspective a bio-social level as he describes "how the human mind and self arise in the process of conduct" (Morris 1934, xv). According to this analysis, one cannot identify the self with the person as a physiological organism, rather it is the result of experiences gained through interaction with another individual. Constructing this requires an awareness of those experiences, which are associated with the self - therefore, both how these experiences can be acquired and produced. One result of this is that the self is at once conventional ('me') and yet consists of something far more subjective. "I which is aware of the social me, the I reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others" (Mead 1962, p. 171). Looking purely mechanically at the spell, the 'I' of the text represents the 'me' side of the self, which in turn reveals a creative and working first person subject. Fundamental life experiences which arise from one's relations to other people are, according to Senni Timonen, catalysts in the dynamics of songs by both Ingrian and Mansi women. The relationship of the 'I' to the 'you' is at the foundation of these songs (Timonen 1990, pp. 200-1).

The distinction made by Grace Gredys Harris is based on a variety of different material, yet she nonetheless ends up at the central problems of the same concepts. According to this, the word 'individual' refers to a person as a part of the universe and a member of humankind. The distinctive criterion of this self-awareness is a mastery of the communal language. Conversely, the self is seen as the existential 'I', a product of social experience. Identity is bound up with this concept of the self, as is an awareness of the capabilities of the 'I' and its limits in relation to other people. The third category, 'person', forms "an agent, the author of action purposely directed towards a goal" (Harris 1989, pp. 600-602). This questions the dimensions of the 'I' as it is consciously directed by both the self and others. This social process produces a communally competent 'I', just as the awareness of this creates an undamaged self. Associated with the self built into people's social communication are other factors, a person's habitat, elements of their work and their relationship within the community. We can therefore assume that the reciter's 'I' may be found on this level. George Mead has defined, in abstract terms, a person as

a personality who belongs to a group and assumes the model of behaviour within that society. "The process out of which the self arises is a social process, which implies interaction of individuals in the group, implies the pre-existence of the group" (Mead 1962, p. 158). Even the reciter has undergone a learning process and it is during this that the features of the self have changed. He / she is nonetheless more independent of conventions during the recitation of a spell.

On the whole, assessments of cultural anthropological concepts of the 'I' and the self are holistic and generalising. Concerning the self, it may be necessary to look more closely at this distinction, as suggested by Michelle Z. Ronaldo, and to separate the individual sense of self from the socio-cultural category the 'concept of self'. One's psychic and physical awareness of bodily and individual existence is a fundamental cognitive assumption, thus a conscious concept of the self can only arise gradually. "There would always be a gap between the personality and its culture". However, it cannot be denied that "thought is always culturally patterned and inspired with feelings which themselves reflect a culturally ordered past" (1984, pp. 137-141). Naturally, this is true, even in the light of the reasoning of an outside examiner (an anthropologist). One must however remember to question the requirements for putting oneself in the 'skin' of another cultural representative, especially as in anthropological study these cultures are generally primitive (Geerts 1984, p. 125).

Grace G. Harris has put forward a three-way division of the 'I' in spells and perhaps the most interesting parts of this are how some of these features differ from the norm. She suggests that the definition of the concept 'individual' disrupts some of the concepts of folk belief (e.g. the European werewolf, the Ojibwa cannibal monster and African shape-changing magicians). Contrastingly, the concept 'self' obscures some of the descriptions of spirit possession referring to ideas of there being some gaps in the availability of the self as an object. On the level of the persona, Harris recognises a temporal dimension, which gives some space to the definition of a crystallised identity (Harris 1989, pp. 605-607). The reciter's social 'I' is of course one point of departure, however, it is a ritual 'I' which is portrayed in spells. These two concepts must be kept clearly distinct from one another.

Cultural anthropologists have debated whether it is right to define "the Western conception of the self" as the opposite of that in other cultures (cf. e.g. Spiro 1993). In an examination of the 'I' in spell texts, such juxtapositioning of cultures or even generalisations referring to individual ethnic groups is not particularly helpful. Although as far as their content is concerned, a spell is a cultur-

ally bound text, within its own culture it is also exceptional speech. This is why examining it against an abstract cultural background is largely irrelevant. Any examination must move closer to the text itself.

How does the 'I' in spells compare to that in other oral tradition? It is best to limit an examination of this kind to genres, in which there is the same kind of subjectivity as that found in spells; therefore, in which the 'I' could be interpreted as the speaker him/ herself. Alongside laments (cf. Nenola 2002, pp. 63, 74), lyric poetry could also be called into question. In much the same manner as with lyric poetry, spells consist of strictly traditional elements and, despite some variation individual to each performance, the same images recur in spell repertoire. Senni Timonen has crystallised the idea of self in Finno-Ugric lyric poetry thus:

Who is this ego: singer, poet, audience, or all these together? In these songs, in which the ego is conditioned by an accumulation of collective values and experiences, the scope for individual self-expression is less prominent. Rooted in a collective mind – and at the same time actively shaping the scale of feelings and values of that mind – the 'I' of the songs and the feelings communicated by it combine to produce the collective 'self' of lyric poetry: a self in constant dialogue with the self of the singers, poets and audiences. Repeatedly this self coincides with them, it lives and breathes through them, is transmitted and transformed by them. Yet the actual experience of sameness is fleeting; this collective sense is transient, to be identified only momentarily with any one individual. (Timonen 1993, 339).

Although the material available to a reciter forms a socially controlled paradigm and the form of expression is also uniform, the text of the seer's words is nonetheless not socially shared to the same extent as lyric poetry. A lyric poem interprets personal emotions, with which many listeners or a person reciting the song can identify. Conversely, spells are texts specific to given rites, to which the reciter must be entirely committed and for which not everyone has either the right or the bravery to use. Unlike lyric poems, which can apply to changing situations, a spell is a vehicle for momentary yet intense influence, which draws each reciter into that influential power.

### The 'I' and the message of the text

Communication cannot transmit experience, but its significance to the self can however be described and it is in this way that it is communicated to others (Ricoeur 1976, p. 16). This can be seen readily in lyric poetry but spells are less transparent. The speaker's true relation to the experience is not revealed on a ver-

bal level. The image of a frenzied reciter armed with iron and fire is very individual. It cannot be used to describe a singer who has accepted the collective tradition, but rather a self-aware rite specialist; perhaps this is because it is not meant for members of the community but for another reality. The line "I have the hands of a bear" relates to role assumed by the seer, but this role's precise relationship to the real 'I' seems to remain a mystery. Once the rite has been carried out, the reciter returns to his/ her own everyday 'I' - are these two entities completely separate?

Should we approach spells as real communication or should we stress the nature of the monologues within them?<sup>3</sup> In that case, should we assume that, whilst in a trance, the reciter is completely unaware of and is not interpreting his / her words as a form of address? Can the reciter experience this trance as merely a vessel for the rite speech and not as one with personal influence? As such, these verses would be drawn from the collective paradigm and would be adapted intuitively for use in acute situations. Even in such cases, the concept of the 'I' in the text would no longer be an empty one, as in the background there would be an assumption based on a ritual context.

In any given language, most words are polysemic, but the context generally limits the possibility of misunderstanding. "To mean is what the speaker does. But it is also what the sentence does. The utterance meaning – in the sense of the propositional content – is the 'objective' side of this meaning. The utterer's meaning – in the threefold sense of the self-reference of the sentence, the illocutionary dimension of the speech act, and the intention of recognition by the hearer – is the 'subjective' side of the meaning" (Ricoeur 1976, 11-19). Those who use spells would, in addition to the skills of a seer or a healer, have also had other characteristics and facilities related to social life. These would have been, amongst other things, features of their character, their family membership, professional skills and roles associated with age or social status. Moreover, they have defined the side of the reciter's everyday 'I', which other people see. The self has the characteristic

<sup>3</sup> Only a few letters distinguish two variations of *Voiteen luku* (The Chapter of Ointment) from one another: one of them was recorded in Suistamo in 1884 and the other in Soanlahti some thirty years later. The latter is a speech to the Virgin Mary: "Voia alta, voia päältä, kerta keskeltä sipase, keskeltä kivuttomaksi, alta aivan terveheksi, päältä tuntumattomaksi!" (1785) [Put ointment underneath, ointment on the head, gently touch the middle, the middle will become painless, underneath completely healthy, the head unconscious]. The version recoded in Suistamo is in the first person: "Voian alta, voian päältä..." (1782) [I put ointment underneath, I put ointment on (my) head...]. The former resembles a prayer, in which the role of the reciter remains in the background. In the latter, the reciter is a decisive healer.

that it is an object to itself and that characteristic distinguishes it from other objects and from the body. Although the self is the object of experience, as Ricoeur points out, as a word it is reflexive and as such refers both to the subject and the object. The significance of the 'I' in spells must therefore be found in the wider areas at the edge of communication.

Communication makes itself visible and places itself alongside or opposite another person. Thus, it is possible for the self to become aware of itself as 'another', with whom it can also communicate. The self is placed outside; in Mead's words this is 'social intelligence'. The character can only be an object to itself on the level of linguistic behaviour; in a sense, communication creates the self. However, a person can also behave in such a way that the self-aware 'I' retreats to the background. For instance, an instinctive reaction can instigate the act of running, which the self cannot regulate (Mead 1962, pp. 136-7). Perhaps at this point, it is necessary to outline the extent to which the 'I' of the text and the reciter's self are the same yet different. Are we to believe that the concentration required in the task takes over the mind so much that the reciter's own self remains outside the actual rite? If this is the case, the 'I' of the text (which invokes, threatens, demands, bites and so on) is merely a verbal element learnt for a specific text and is spoken as part of a text, supposedly read 'correctly'. Charles Malamoud has noticed this kind of duality in his examination of the self in a selection of Veda texts. He concludes with the assumption that through the text there is the construction of "a sublimated replica, a sacrificial body made of words and rhythms that is at the same time a thing of beauty and their true self" (Malamoud 2002). This option does not however support the assumption about communication. The reciter is still seen to gather influential powers by addressing their assumed opponent or other supernatural beings. As long as we think of spells as speech, so the speaker must necessarily be 'present'. The 'you' being addressed requires there to be a speaking, self-aware 'I'.

Even ritual texts are language per se, they consist of elements of verbal expression. In considering the origins of the meanings of spoken language, Paul Ricoeur uses the pronoun 'I' to illustrate the difference between linguistic code and discourse. On a linguistic level, the word 'I' is very simple, just like any personal pronoun. However, it is not a concept which can be exchanged with the definition 'the one who is now speaking'. The word has different meanings depending on the context in which it is used and each time it refers to a particular individual person. In speaking, 'I' refers to itself as the logical subject (In Finnish,

the word *minä* (I) is generally included in the verb form of the first person singular. Theoretically speaking, this is the same thing.) Although linguistic codes are given a precise expression in the act of speaking, they only refer to the subject of that act without interpreting it.

## Conclusion

The mystery of the self in spell texts cannot be solved from a socio-anthropological basis, nor from that of an individual writer. Although they are 'traditional', spells are always texts belonging to exceptional personalities within a society. Above is outlined why the words of the seer are exceptional even amongst other spell texts. Using them requires - at least in theory - personal commitment and conviction in the act, in order for the verbal achievement to have the desired effect. This is also why, even in its most mechanical use, the 'I' of spell texts cannot simply be explained semantically as a hollow expression. Even anthropologists who have attempted to define the social 'I' accept this exception to the rule: in a ritualistic context, very specific roles are being realised and at such times the individual subject breaks loose from its absorption within its social group (Morris 1994, p. 4). The behaviour of the reciter can be seen as the opposite of the norm. In general, thinking implies a symbol, which causes the same response in another that it calls out in the thinker (Mead 1962, p. 147). Communication which moulds the self produces an array of interactive experiences, for which a common model of explanation is required to interpret them correctly. The person sending out a message cannot, however, experience that message in the same way as the person receiving it. Aggressive behaviour and frenzied speech may frighten the person listening, but they do not bring about the same feelings within the speaker. As the 'I' of the spell threatens the opponent, it is assumed that this opponent becomes frightened and backs away. However, the 'I' of a spell text - and for that matter the actual speaker - does not share these sentiments. The self of an ordinary person may have reason to fear supernatural beings, but the 'I' of a seer blessed with magic powers is safe. As such, the self of the spell is more abstract than an ordinary person and semantically more concrete than the empty word 'I'; it is the 'I' constructed by the seer for an acute situation. At such times, a person's everyday 'I' subsides - on a textual level and employing latent features of his/ her personality - to a ritually constructed 'I', independent from experiences gained within social interaction and communication.

*Translated by David Hackston*



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