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Karelian Laments in 21st Century Finland:
Linguistic Patterns and Attitudes

Master's Thesis

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Author's Affirmation

I confirm that I have written this thesis independently and have correctly cited all sources. The thesis complies with the requirements of the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics and with good academic practice.

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Abstract

This study examines contemporary lamenting practices in Finland, focusing primarily on practices rooted in Karelian lamenting traditions. The thesis analyzes both metalinguistic talk about laments and their linguistic forms: it asks how language, continuity, and change are negotiated in contemporary lamenting discourse and whether contemporary laments preserve or modify the lexical and grammatical features of archived Karelian laments.

The data consists of 26 online questionnaire responses, six interviews, and seven laments written in Karelian, Finnish, and mixed forms. The analysis combines qualitative methods, including thematic analysis, discourse analysis, and textual analysis.

The findings suggest that contemporary laments simultaneously maintain and modify the form of traditional Karelian laments. Following the traditional lament register is perceived as important and motivated by the aim of authenticity or the functions of lament. The linguistic elements of the register are perceived as flexible, as the syntax of Karelian laments can also be applied to languages other than Karelian.

As tradition is perceived as highly valuable, a respectful approach to lamenting is expected. In practice, this respect is linked with safety, accurate knowledge, and acknowledgement of Karelians' position as a minority group in Finland. The analysis shows that in 21st-century Finland, lamenting is still strongly connected to Karelian identity and communication with the otherworld, but it has also developed new functions in response to contemporary needs.

Keywords: Lament, Linguistic identity, Register, Cultural appropriation, Crisis management

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GLOSSING ABBREVIATIONS

ALL allative

ABL ablative

COND conditional

DIM diminutive

FREQ frequentative

GEN genitive

ILL illative

IMP imperative

INF infinitive

INE inessive

PAR partitive

PL plural

POSS possessive suffix

PST past

PTCL particle

Q question particle

TRANSL translative

1SG first person singular

2SG second person singular

3SG third person singular

1PL first person plural

1. Introduction

A lament, combining text, melody, and weeping, is a traditional way of grieving and ritually organizing moments of transition and loss. Laments have been found across continents and cultures, and in some parts of Eastern Europe, lamenting remained practiced until the 20th century (e.g., Honko 1963; Konkka 1985; Mansikka 1924; Nenola 2002; Wilce 2009). Lamenting has often been opposed to modernity and described as a disappearing tradition; however, in many countries, lamenting is still practiced (Frog, Silvonen & Stepanova 2026; Hytönen-Ng 2023; Wilce 2009; Wilce & Fenigsen 2012).

There is no known original lament tradition in Finland (Konkka 1985; Nenola 2002; Wilce 2009). Instead, the lamenting practices carried out in present-day Finland are often rooted in closely related Finnic lament traditions, especially Karelian laments (e.g., Tenhunen 2006; Wilce 2011). Karelian laments have traditionally been part of rituals related to changes in a person's social status, and they have been understood as protecting the community's well-being and securing the boundaries between the living and the dead (Arukask 2011; Honko 1963; Mansikka 1924; Nenola 1986). In Karelian culture, the "poetry of eternal separation" was performed at funerals, weddings, and in connection with recruitment for war. Lamenting also occurred outside ritual situations, as "occasional laments" (Honko 1963; Konkka 1985; E. Stepanova 2012).

The register of Karelian lament consists of both paralinguistic and linguistic elements, and it has been described as communicating honour and endearment (E. Stepanova 2014; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015). Its language is characterized by a "special syntax," including frequentative verbs and the use of plural and diminutive forms (E. Stepanova 2012, E. Stepanova 2014). The language had a ritual function and aimed to ensure successful communication with the deceased. As laments were based on improvisation, poetic formulas and established avoidance vocabulary provided a structure that enabled the creation of laments in the moment (A. Stepanova 2012; E. Stepanova 2015b).

In Finland, scholarly engagement with Karelian laments dates to the 19th century, when collectors of oral tradition, inspired by the national-romantic movement of Karelianism, travelled to Karelia. After World War II and the evacuation of the Karelian population from border regions to Finland, a lamenting tradition continued to some extent among Karelian evacuees. In Finnish North Karelia in particular, lamenters, among other performers of oral poetry, became part of the region's cultural identity, as they performed in museums and tourist attractions. At the beginning of the 21st century, lamenting was systematically revived in

Finland by the organization *Äänellä Itkijät ry*, which operates within a framework that maintains a connection to Karelian traditions (Silvonen & Kallio 2023; Söderholm 1989; Tenhunen 2006; Wilce 2011).

As lament moved from its ritual context to stages and other contemporary settings, its cultural meanings shifted. Today, lamenting in Finland has been described as taking place mainly outside ritual contexts, including artistic performances and lamenting circles organized with healing intentions (Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023a; Silvonen 2020; Silvonen & Kallio 2023; Silvonen & Kuittinen 2022). Contemporary lamenting has also become a topic of critical discussion, particularly in relation to authority, cultural appropriation, and minority–majority power relations (Silvonen & Kallio 2023). This debate is connected to broader discussions concerning the mistreatment and injustice that Karelians have experienced in Finland (e.g., Sarhimaa 2017).

The growing visibility of contemporary lamenting in Finland has made it a relevant topic in academic research. Previous studies have examined contemporary and Finnish-language lamenting in Finland from perspectives such as revival and healing, performance art, and the relationship between lamenting and affect (Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023a, Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023b; Silvonen 2026; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015; Wilce 2011). While the linguistic forms and musical structures of archived Karelian laments have been studied (e.g., Silvonen 2020; E. Stepanova 2017; Silvonen & Stepanova 2020; Tolbert 1990), contemporary laments and their linguistic features have received little attention.

This study addresses the linguistic form of contemporary lament texts. It seeks to understand the perceived role of traditional genre features in contemporary laments and to examine how these features are used and adapted. Alongside the analysis of lament language, the study considers metalinguistic discourse concerning laments, as well as the attitudes, ideologies, and values associated with lamenting practices in 21st-century Finland. The research questions are as follows:

1. How are continuity, change, and language negotiated in contemporary lament practices?
2. What do contemporary laments look like—do they preserve, and if not, how do they modify the lexical and grammatical features of traditional Karelian laments?

The data consists of 26 responses to an online questionnaire, six interview recordings, and a corpus of seven contemporary lament texts. The interviews and online questionnaire are analyzed using the approach of reflexive thematic analysis and discourse analysis, while the lament texts are examined using textual analysis.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary lamenting practices in Finland and illustrates how traditions are understood, interpreted, maintained, and adapted in present-day contexts. As the diverse linguistic forms of contemporary laments have received little attention, this study addresses the topic and aims to investigate how the meanings and functions attached to the tradition change in new contexts.

As Haapoja (2017: 68) notes, the term ‘tradition’ is used with multiple meanings; in everyday speech, it can refer either to the process of transmission or to its content, such as customs and rituals. In this study, the approach to lamenting is aligned with Frog, Silvonen, and Stepanova, who view traditions as “continuously being varied and evolved by people in society in relation to changes in their worldviews and individual and social needs” (2026: 12). Therefore, the term ‘tradition’ is understood as a “modern product” (Anttonen 2005: 13), which is culturally constructed and constantly produced (Haapoja 2017: 68–70). Anttonen (2005: 12–14) discusses tradition as “inseparable from the idea and experience of modernity” as it is “a category constituted within discourse on the modern”, often presented as the opposite of modernity. This study does not attempt to divide laments into old and new or determine whether contemporary lamenting constitutes the same tradition as earlier forms. Rather, it focuses on contemporary interpretations of archival practices and asks how tradition is understood and reproduced (cf. Wilce & Fenigsen 2012; Frog, Silvonen & Stepanova 2026; Haapoja 2017: 67–70; Wilce 2009; Wilce 2011).

The thesis moves from an introduction of Karelia as a historical and cultural region to the theoretical background, which discusses Karelian lament language and contemporary laments. Chapter 3 introduces the data and methodology used in the study, while Chapter 4 discusses the findings. Chapter 5 functions as a conclusion, synthesizing the discussion of the earlier chapters.

1.1 Karelia as a historical and cultural region

Geographically, Karelia is a borderland region between present-day Finland and Russia, with its western part located in Finland and its eastern parts in northwest Russia. Finnish Karelia refers to the administrative regions of South Karelia and North Karelia, and Russian Karelia is associated with the Republic of Karelia and part of Leningrad Oblast. In addition, in Russia, there are Karelian-speaking language enclaves in the inner parts of Russia.

In Finnish historiography and area studies, Karelia has been seen as a borderland of East and West, with the border as a central feature in defining the area. The first division of Karelia

took place in 1323, when the Treaty of Nöteborg divided the area between Novgorod and Sweden. Due to this division, the cultures developed differently: in the east, language and culture were shaped by eastern influences and Orthodox religion, while in the west, they were shaped by western influences and Lutheranism (Fingerroos 2008: 235–236; Jetsu 2013: 390–395; Koivisto 2017: 432).

Finland became independent in 1917, and the Treaty of Tartu in 1920 confirmed its borders. Before the 1940s, Finland's territory included the Karelian Isthmus and Ladoga Karelia. Between 1940 and 1944, these areas were first annexed by the Soviet Union, then regained by Finland, and finally ceded to the Soviet Union after the Continuation War in 1944. After its defeat in the Continuation War, Finland lost about 12 percent of its territory, leading to the displacement and resettlement of over 400,000 people. Today, Finland's Karelia is located next to Finland's eastern border, and the Karelian Isthmus and Ladoga Karelia continue to exist in collective memory as “Lost Karelia” (Fingerroos 2008: 238; Fingerroos 2012: 483, 485; Koivisto 2018; Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 265–266; Torikka 2004).

Before the 1820s, Karelians were viewed in a negative light. With the rise of Romantic nationalism, these views started to change. Particularly in the second half of the 19th century, Karelianism, a national-romantic movement idealizing Karelia, inspired artists, students, and scientists to travel to White Sea Karelia and Olonets Karelia in search of “the living roots of ancient Finnishness” (Fingerroos 2012: 486). Painters, authors, scientists, and composers helped to form an image of Karelia as a “cradle of Finnish heritage” (E. Stepanova 2020: 388). Karelianism was politically motivated: at first, it was connected to the aim of securing greater autonomous rights for the Grand Duchy of Finland within the Russian Empire, and later it developed into the goal of creating a Finnic nation, Greater Finland, that would extend into the lands of Karelia (Fingerroos 2008: 238; Fingerroos 2012: 484; Pimiä 2012: 398–400; Sihvo 1973: 32–33, 353; E. Stepanova 2020: 381–383).

Among other scholars and artists, Elias Lönnrot travelled to Karelia: his first journey took place in April 1828. During his journeys, he collected Karelian, Ingrian, and Finnish folk poetry. Later, he edited, reshaped, and adapted these materials into a form more suitable for a Finnish audience, compiling them into the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*. After the *Kalevala*'s publication in 1835, it became a “demonstration of Fennoman ideology” and a crucial symbol in the development of Finnish national identity (Sihvo 1973: 92). Through national narratives, Karelians were framed as Finns, and Karelian culture was integrated into “Finnishness,” ignoring the voices and experiences of Karelian people (E. Stepanova 2020: 383; Tarkka, Stepanova & Haapoja-Mäkelä 2018). This has led to Karelia representing the past of

Finnishness in both Russian and Finnish discourses, instead of focusing on what it means to be Karelian in the present day (Tarkka, Stepanova & Haapoja-Mäkelä 2018: 38).

Karelians migrated to Finnish territory in three major waves: after the *Heimosodat* in the 1920s, then in 1944, when Finland ceded its borderlands to the Soviet Union, and finally in the 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR (Stepanova 2020: 379). Especially after the Second World War, Karelians encountered discrimination because their language and their religious and cultural habits were perceived as foreign by Finns (e.g., Kananen 2010; Sarhimaa 2017). As a result, many shifted from the Karelian language to Finnish, changed their names into Finnish forms, and hid their religion and customs. At the same time, the state implemented assimilationist policies, and the ideology that treated Karelian as a dialect or variety of Finnish further weakened the language's development and status (Sarhimaa 2017: 119–121).

Because Karelia is understood as a region without stable borders, locating it geographically is not straightforward. As Jetsu (2013: 389) notes, “there are as many representations of Karelia as there are narrators.” For the same reason, referring to “Karelian culture” in the singular can be overgeneralizing, as Karelian cultural traditions are not uniform across regions. A common distinction is based on religion and language: in Lutheran Karelia, Southeastern and Savonian dialects of Finnish were spoken, whereas in Orthodox Karelia, Karelian was spoken (Jetsu 2013: 395). However, the terms Karelia and Karelians can have various referents, which has led to some ambiguity.

Generally, Karelia refers to a historical and cultural area currently populated by Finns, Russians, Karelians, and other Finnic peoples. Finnish Karelia can refer either to the lands that belonged to Finland before 1944 or to the current areas of North Karelia and South Karelia in Eastern Finland. The term ‘Karelian’ refers to a member of the ethnic group of Karelians; however, identifying as Karelian is not directly related to speaking the Karelian language, but to self-identification based on multiple factors, such as family heritage, culture, and customs (Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 265–266; E. Stepanova 2020: 379).

In this study, Karelian identity is understood as shaped by multiple factors in addition to religion, language, and the geographical location of family roots. In the context of contemporary Finland, this study uses the term ‘Karelian’ to refer to people who construct and narrate their identity as connected to Karelian heritage.

1.2 Karelian language

Karelian is a Finnic language traditionally spoken in Finland and Russia. Although closely related and partly mutually intelligible, Karelian and Finnish are two separate languages with their own grammatical, lexical, and phonological features. Karelian is divided into two main dialects: 1) Karelian Proper, which consists of North Karelian (White Sea Karelian) and South Karelian dialects, and 2) Olonets (Livvi) Karelian. The division into these dialects is based on phonological and morphological features, as well as differences in their local case systems, reflexive verb inflections, and consonant gradation. In Finland, all three mentioned dialect varieties are spoken (Koivisto 2018; Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 264; Sarhimaa 2022: 273).

Karelian is an autochthonous language, meaning that it was spoken in the territories of present-day Finland and Russia before the formation of national borders. Alongside Karelian, other languages have been spoken in the area, such as Finnish, Ludic, Veps, Sámi languages, and Russian (Koivisto 2017: 423). Within the territory of present-day Finland, Karelian was spoken in the easternmost parts of the regions of North Karelia and South Karelia. After World War II and Finland's cession of its easternmost lands to Russia, around 50,000 Karelian speakers moved to different parts of Finland, making Karelian a nonregional minority language. As the speaker communities dispersed, the number of Karelian speakers started to decrease rapidly (Koivisto 2017: 424; Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 265, 271; Torikka 2004). Today, Karelian speakers in Finland are descendants of Border Karelian evacuees, immigrants from Russian Karelia, and so-called new speakers, meaning individuals who learned Karelian in adulthood (Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 276; Sarhimaa 2022).

Karelian differs from Finnish in its phonology, morphosyntax, and lexicon.¹ Due to closer contact with Russian, Karelian has developed differently from Finnish dialects: for example, Karelian contains borrowed phonetic features, grammatical structures, and loanwords from Russian (Palander & Riionheimo 2018: 87). Karelian has three affricates, retains strong palatalization in many consonants, and the consonants *g*, *d*, *b*, *z*, and *ž* are voiced in South Karelian and Olonets dialects. In addition, word-initial consonant clusters occur in Karelian. Whereas in Finnish all vowels may occur in both short and long forms, in Karelian only three long vowels are native to the language: *uu*, *yy*, and *ii*, although other long vowels may occur in loanwords. Furthermore, Karelian contains triphthongs that are not common in Finnish

¹ Some features here also surface in dialects of Finnish. There are also differences between different Karelian dialects, for example, in their phonology, lexicon, and case systems (see Sarhimaa 2022).

(Markianova & Pyöli 2021; Sarhimaa 1995: 212). Karelian retains /h/ in positions where it is absent in Finnish (e.g., Karelian *veneh* : *venehen*, Finnish *vene* : *veneeseen*, ‘boat’ : ‘boat.GEN’), and uses the forms to express the third-person plural that correspond to Finnish passive (e.g., Karelian *tuldih kodih*, Finnish *tulivat kotiin*, ‘they came home’) (Leskinen 1998). Both languages are agglutinative, but their case systems differ syntactically and semantically; for example, in Karelian, the adessive case has taken on functions that in Finnish are associated with the genitive and the inessive. In Karelian Proper, the adessive and allative have merged, and in Olonets Karelian, the adessive and ablative have merged, as have the inessive and elative cases (Sarhimaa 1995: 212; Sarhimaa 2022: 277).

The Karelian language is highly endangered both in Russia and Finland. However, providing exact numbers of speakers is difficult, since the speakers are mainly bilingual and the definition of a speaker varies. In 2010, there were around 25,000 self-reported speakers of Karelian in Russia, and in Finland, the estimated number of speakers is between 5,000 and 11,000 (Karjalainen et al. 2013; Sarhimaa 2017; Sarhimaa 2022: 269). Today, most speakers in Russia live in the Republic of Karelia, the Tver region, and cities such as Saint Petersburg and Moscow. In Finland, speakers are located in Eastern Finland and in various larger cities (Koivisto 2018: 57; Moshnikov 2022: 277; Sarhimaa 2017: 114–115).

There are still many misconceptions in Finland related to the Karelian language: Finns may refer to the Finnish dialects spoken in the regions of North and South Karelia in Finland as Karelian or think that the Karelian language is only spoken in Russia (Palander 2015: 37–42; Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 266–267). These misconceptions may also be related to the perceived closeness of the languages: both Eastern Finnish dialects and Karelian developed from Proto-Karelian and are positioned in the Eastern Finnic dialect/language continuum and therefore share many features (Koivisto 2017: 423; Sarhimaa 2017: 38–40).

The reasons leading to the language’s endangerment in Finland are related to many sociopolitical factors: while Finnish has developed into a language of administration and education, Karelian has been spoken within smaller speaker communities rather than at institutional levels. Protecting Karelian as a language has not been considered in language legislation (Koivisto 2017: 425). Even before World War II, speakers of Karelian encountered linguistic and cultural assimilation, and after the displacement and fragmentation of the speaker community, assimilation policies continued. In Finland, Karelians experienced discrimination, and this caused many to shift from speaking Karelian to speaking Finnish. As Orthodox-Lutheran marriages became more common, many children grew up in households where the Finnish language and Lutheranism were dominant. Generational transmission was disrupted,

and as people aged, a gradually decreasing number of people spoke Karelian (Kananen 2010; Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 272–273; Sarhimaa 2017: 116–123).

Organized revitalization efforts for the Karelian language began in Finland in the 1990s. In 2009, Karelian was recognized as a non-territorial minority language in Finland. However, Karelian has never been mentioned in the Finnish Constitution, which includes the Sámi languages, Romani, and Sign Language. Karelian has never been a language of education in public schools, and learning the language is possible only at the university level or in adult education courses, which fail to support child learners. There is a shortage of pedagogically qualified teachers and learning materials. To address these issues, the Karelian Language Revitalization Programme, published in 2025, advocates constitutional recognition and the creation of a public law body that would address issues related to the Karelian language and organize language revitalization (Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 271, 275; Sarhimaa 2017: 214–219; Tynnyrinen et al. 2025).

The last decades of language revitalization have shown signs of progress. There are families in which Karelian is spoken to children, the language is used in online spaces, its vocabulary is being developed, and texts are being translated into Karelian. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok create possibilities for language revitalization: for example, Instagram can also function as a form of activism while enabling communication with speaker communities regardless of their physical location (Moshnikov 2022: 301; Selin et al. 2023; Tynnyrinen 2025). Still, the intergenerational transmission of the language has been disrupted for two to three generations, and Karelian remains highly endangered (Riionheimo & Tynnyrinen 2024: 272; Tynnyrinen et al. 2025:18).

1.3 Lament as a global practice

Lamenting practices are found in various cultures all over the world (Honko 1963: 81; Wilce 2009). Laments are a typically improvised form of poetry used to express grief, involving crying with words and song-like intonation (Wilce 2009: 1–2). They are associated with ritual contexts and functions, especially those related to death, and “reflected communal concepts of death and the fate of the dead, as well as relations between the living and the dead” (Nenola 2002: 72). Honko (1963) calls laments “the poetry of eternal separation” and sees a lament as an extension of the natural expression of one’s sorrow:

“When death suddenly wrenches a mother, a father, or a spouse away from a human being, the pressure of grief and despair may burst forth as a shattering cry: “oh my mother,

oh my mother!” Such a wailing outcry is not yet lyric poetry, but within it one may already perceive the primal seed of the lament: an interjection of sorrow.” (1963: 81–82)

Laments have traditionally been performed by women (e.g., Honko 1974: 115; Konkka 1985: 12). Nenola (2002: 74) relates women’s role in lamenting to their position in Eastern Europe’s patriarchal kin-based societies: women gave birth to new members of society, and marriage functioned as a transfer from one kin group to another. While guided by ritual functions and formulaic language, laments have typically been based on improvisation (Nenola 1986: 205, 208; Wilce 2009: 23).

Karelian lamenting belongs to the Finno-Ugric lament tradition of Eastern Europe, and more specifically to the Finnic lament tradition, which is also found in Ingrian (Izhorian), Seto, Votic, and Vepsian cultures (Nenola 1986: 205; Stepanova 2017: 487). Many elements present in Karelian laments are shared across Finnic traditions: for example, parallelism, avoidance vocabulary, and the use of diminutive and plural forms (E. Stepanova 2015b; E. Stepanova 2017: 487).

There is no documented Finnish lament tradition. The regions where lament traditions persisted are mainly those where the Orthodox Church was dominant. In the western areas influenced by the Catholic and Lutheran Churches, the tradition has not been shown to have been historically present to the same extent. One reason for this development has been linked to Orthodox Christianity, which did not try to suppress pagan beliefs to the same extent as the Roman Catholic Church and later the Lutheran Church. Among the Balto-Finnic lament areas, Ingria is an exception: there, Ingrian Finnish *äyrämöiset* maintained a lamenting tradition to some degree despite being Lutheran. However, this tradition has been perceived as borrowed from the Orthodox Izhorian through mixed marriages (Honko 1963: 126; Konkka 1985: 14; Nenola 1986: 205; Nenola 2002: 15, 28–29; Nenola-Kallio 1973: 97; E. Stepanova 2017: 486–488).

2. Background

2.1 Karelian laments

Karelian laments can be defined as “sung poetry following conventionalized rules of traditional verbal and nonverbal expression, most often performed by women in ritual contexts and potentially also on non-ritual grievous occasions” (E. Stepanova 2017: 487). Laments were part of the rites of passage organized to transform the social status of a member of a family or a community, and the most common ritual contexts for Karelian lamenting were funerals, weddings, and departure ceremonies related to recruitment (Honko 1963; Konkka 1985: 10).

Laments were also performed outside of ritual contexts. The themes of occasional laments concerned the lamenters’ own lives: being a widow, loneliness, or reminiscing about family members lost in war. The expression of these laments would still follow the formulaic language used in rites (Honko 1974: 115; Konkka 1985: 9; E. Stepanova 2012: 258). Nenola (1986: 206) also argues that occasional lamenting functioned simultaneously as a way of practicing and maintaining the skill of lamenting.

In Karelia, lamenting was called *itkeminen* (‘crying’) or *eänel itkeminen* (‘crying with voice’). When referring to a lament, *virsi* was used in, especially in relation to laments connected to specific ritual cries. Despite the descriptions of fieldworkers in the 1800s, in Karelia, lamenting was never called singing (Konkka 1985: 10–11). In *Karjalan kielen sanakirja* (KKS), both *virži/virši* (noun: ‘hymn, psalm, chant’) and *itkie* (verb: ‘to cry’) are used when referring to the performance of laments. The term *itkuvirsi* has only been used in literature, and it is used to refer to lament traditions worldwide.

Lamenting was not found in all areas of Karelia. The lamenting tradition in Karelia was divided by different regions: Viena (White Sea Karelia), Seesjärvi (Segozero), Aunus (Olonets), and Tver. These regions also had differences in vocabulary, melodies, and formal features (A. Stepanova 1985; E. Stepanova 2017: 488). Although the tradition is not regionally uniform, the shared register features, including, for example, their communicative purpose and use of avoidance language, have led scholars to use the term ‘Karelian lament’ as an umbrella term covering the regional lament traditions found in Karelia.

The contemporary lament practices in Finland have been strongly inspired by and closely connected to the Karelian tradition (Tenhunen 2006; Wilce 2011; Wilce & Fenigsen 2012). In scholarship, these practices are often called ‘contemporary laments’. The term ‘neolament’ has been used to refer to practices that reinterpret those perceived as traditional, differing in their

meaning and purpose (Silvonen 2026: 121; Wilce 2011; Wilce & Fenigsen 2012). In this study, I use both the terms ‘lament’ and ‘Karelian lament’. The term ‘lament’ refers to the universal tradition of lamenting, whereas ‘Karelian lament’ refers to practices rooted in the Karelian lament tradition. These practices include (1) lamenting practices performed in Karelia and later in Finland by Karelian evacuees, and (2) contemporary lamenting practices that draw on this tradition.

My study focuses primarily on Karelian laments. While historically they have been closely embedded in ritual practices, communication with the dead, Orthodox Christianity, and vernacular beliefs, modern interpretations can vary (e.g., E. Stepanova 2012; Silvonen 2026; Silvonen & Kallio 2023). However, understanding the ritual dimensions of the practice and the mythological worldview is necessary for understanding the elements present in the lament texts – and *vice versa* (cf. Konkka 1985: 7; Mansikka 1924: 161). Therefore, in the following chapter, I will introduce the ritual functions and mythological worldview associated with laments, and the lament register with its distinct linguistic features. In addition, I will discuss the history of Karelian lamenting in Finland and introduce the contexts in which lamenting exists in present-day Finland.

2.1.1 Ritual Functions and Vernacular Beliefs

In everyday communication, ‘belief’ is used “to refer to the act of attributing veracity and validity to something, having a conviction, accepting a truth or expressing a firm opinion about how things are” (Valk 2012: 358). They may address the supernatural, spiritual, and magical, and can be understood as constellations of beliefs about social and physical reality (Hoppál 2000; Valk 2012: 358). The language of laments is connected to certain belief systems and can only be understood in relation to them. At the same time, understanding lament language also makes it possible to understand the beliefs, rituals, the mythological worldview, and the conceptualizations of life, death, and their boundaries (cf. Konkka 1985; Mansikka 1924; E. Stepanova 2011: 129; E. Stepanova 2012). As phrased by E. Stepanova and Frog (2015: 112), the lamenters were “orchestrators of rituals of separation”, meaning they had the task of protecting the community’s well-being and safety during the liminal periods of social transitions.

As mentioned before, one explanation for the preservation of the lament tradition in certain areas has been understood to be related to Orthodox Christianity. Religious life in Karelia is often described as a syncretism of Orthodox Christianity and ancient beliefs. Alongside Christian figures, people believed in nature spirits and the abode of the dead, where one’s

ancestors would continue their lives. Christian figures like Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and saints were not clearly distinguished from nature spirits and ancestors but rather seen as belonging to the same category of otherworldly helpers influencing human life. Thus, prayers and rituals were offered reciprocally to spirits and saints in the hope that they would grant protection for people's livelihoods (Järvinen 2004: 19, 62–65; Laitila 1998).

Laments have been seen as an old ritual genre having roots in the cult of the dead (Honko 1963: 9). Orthodox Karelian communities functioned based on kin ties, which organized individual roles and statuses. The death of a community member was a dramatic change that disturbed the functioning of communities. To strengthen the group's sense of its continuity, the dead were treated as part of the community, and communication with dead ancestors happened through different forms of ritual activities. These activities included, for example, commemorative ritual meals, where dead ancestors were invited to eat with the living, and visiting cemeteries to share meals at gravesites (Laitila 1998: 397–398; Stark 2002: 138).

Laments were part of death rituals that were “dictated by custom”: lamenting happened while washing and clothing the body, the morning after death, and during placing the body in the coffin, while approaching the grave, and staying beside the grave (Nenola 1986: 205–206). Arukask (2011: 146) sees the lamenting that happened from death until the funeral and continued across the commemoration period as having a function of protecting the “communal interest of the living”, meaning laments controlled the boundaries between the living and the dead. Keeping good relations with the deceased ancestors and performing the memorial rites strictly according to the customs was seen as necessary for the well-being of the living family (Järvinen & Timonen 1992: 55–56; Konkka 1985: 29).

In funeral laments, the lamenter expressed her own sorrow and respect for the deceased, but it was also necessary to make others cry with the lament. This enabled collective mourning (Tenhunen 2006: 51). The emotions were transmitted through textual, musical, and bodily indices. Transmitting the affect to the listeners involved, for example, a rocking body posture, holding a cloth against the face, and different auditory qualities such as voiced sniffing, crying, breathing, and a creaky voice (see Silvonen 2020; Silvonen & Stepanova 2020). *Apeutuminen*, or the emotional state of *abie/apie/apeus*, was seen as a sign of a successful and authentic lament performance (E. Stepanova 2014: 99). According to E. Stepanova (2014: 44–45), “the emotions that are present in laments are entangled in the mythical knowledge that is being transmitted through laments.”

Maintaining a proper connection with the otherworld was one of the most central aims of lamenting. According to folk beliefs, the task of the lamenter was to escort the soul of the

deceased to the otherworld. To communicate with the otherworld and the ancestors, a special language had to be used, since the dead ancestors could not understand ordinary spoken language. In laments, the rituals and the journey to the otherworld were described to the deceased (Mansikka 1924; E. Stepanova 2012: 259; E. Stepanova 2014: 48, 191; E. Stepanova 2015a: 10; Stepanova & Frog 2015: 112; Tenhunen 2006: 50).

The laments performed in weddings are based on the tradition of death laments; since marriage was a change in an individual's social status and role in the community, lamenting in weddings was a “means of handling relationships between the bride and her own family” (Nenola 1986: 206). Similarly, the separation related to the recruitment of a young man was often perceived as eternal; regardless of whether the son survived the war, the service was often long, and therefore, old mothers did not expect to see their sons again (Honko 1963: 125; E. Stepanova 2014: 155–164).

The use of circumlocutions in Karelian laments is related to beliefs concerning name taboo and the magical power of names: transitional periods associated with weddings and death were considered dangerous, and direct naming was avoided for fear of harming relatives. Similarly, the deceased were not referred to by name, as they were believed to understand the lament language and hear everything that was said. As an avoidance strategy, a specific vocabulary was developed and maintained in the lament register (Honko 1963: 127–128; Konkka 1985: 25–26; A. Stepanova 2012; E. Stepanova 2012, 2014, 2017).

The mythic world of Karelian laments consists of the world of the living (the immediate, perceivable world), the world of the deceased (the ancestors), and a third layer of divine powers or gods (E. Stepanova 2011: 139). The world of the deceased is called *tuonilmais* (‘otherworld’). In laments, the realm of the dead and divine powers are referred to with words *syndyset* and *spuassuzet*, which appear across laments regardless of their performance contexts. The term *syndyset* is a diminutive plural form derived from the word *synty* (‘origin, birth, emergence’). *Spuassuzet*, also a diminutive plural form, is derived from Russian *Spas*, *Spasitel* (*Спас*, *Спаситель*, ‘Saviour’). Diminutive and plural forms are typical of the lament register, signalling gentleness and respect toward the addressee (E. Stepanova 2012: 257; E. Stepanova 2014: 194; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015). Since there was regional variation in laments, the specific meaning of the words *syndyset* and *spuassuzet* varied according to the region (E. Stepanova 2012: 272–273). The terms were used to refer to the ancestors, the abode of the dead ancestors, and divine powers, reflecting both the beliefs related to the pre-Christian belief system and influences from Christianity, which were “synthesized into vernacular models of mythic knowledge” (E. Stepanova 2012: 270).

2.1.2 Karelian lament language and register

As described above, the language of Karelian laments developed to serve ritual functions and correspond to the belief world, while also developing in accordance with changes in that belief world (see E. Stepanova 2012). Karelian lament language has a highly developed and distinctive language system that has been described as unintelligible to a person unfamiliar with it (A. Stepanova 2012: 6). The language of Karelian laments consists not only of circumlocutions and an established avoidance lexicon but also of formulaic expression, diminutive and plural forms, interjections, and frequentative verb derivatives (see sections 2.1.2.2 and 2.1.2.3). Lament texts were not memorized; rather, the lament language, with its traditional features and lexicon, was internalized. This enabled performers to modify the words in accordance with traditional formulas and to create new expressions during improvised performances (Nenola 1986: 213; A. Stepanova 2012: 13; E. Stepanova 2014: 37, 69).

At the same time, knowledge of the language alone is not sufficient for understanding laments; background information about the performance context and the social roles of the people involved is also needed (Konkka 1982: 176; Nenola-Kallio 1972: 12). The lament language and worldview are entangled and cannot be examined separately, as described by E. Stepanova (2014: 284): “behind even a very small grammatical feature, the lament register opens up a much broader referential relationship to the entire tradition.”

It should be noted that words are only part of lament expression: the verbal elements of laments cannot be separated from their non-verbal elements in constructing the lament register (E. Stepanova 2015b: 263; Tolbert 1990: 81). In this study, when referring to ‘lament register’, I follow the definition of E. Stepanova (2014: 35–36): register is not limited to the linguistic elements of laments but rather refers to the tradition in its holistic sense, including both linguistic and non-linguistic features. These non-linguistic elements include melody and paralinguistic features, as well as the indices through which the meanings of lamenting are conveyed, such as “voice, melody, gestures, body posture, objects or clothing, as well as the poetry’s visual motifs, images, and broader semantic wholes.” (E. Stepanova 2012; E. Stepanova 2014: 283).

The register of laments has been described as an honorific register shaped by beliefs concerning the mythic world. Laments are a form of communication, and successful communication follows certain rules: for example, avoiding direct naming and using plural forms and diminutives when referring to the otherworld or one’s family. Similarly, when referring to herself, the lamenter uses the third person instead of the first, and self-reference is

accompanied by negative epithets. The honorific register combines humility with tender affect: the diminutivized circumlocutions signal affection and intimacy (E. Stepanova 2014: 89, 284; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015: 203). In addition, the Karelian lament register is a register “strengthening ritual transitions”, and it includes the positioning of the lamenter in a certain social role with certain responsibilities and tasks to perform (E. Stepanova 2014: 284).

2.1.2.1 The lexicon

Avoidance expressions are used to avoid naming family members, divine beings, and the otherworld (E. Stepanova 2015b: 269). These nominal circumlocutions are accompanied by epithets that describe a quality (such as the look of the physical character or a mood) of the referent explicitly. Epithets can be either substantives or adjectives (Nenola-Kallio 1972: 183). These epithets², combined with nouns, can be either positive or negative. Positive epithets are used for close relatives, for the abode of the dead, and for objects related to the close family. Negative epithets are used for strangers, for example, when referring to the groom’s family. The language functions as a marker of social categories: when referring to “others”, expressions lack diminutive and possessive suffixes, and sometimes positive epithets (A. Stepanova 2012; E. Stepanova 2012: 263–264; E. Stepanova 2014: 89, 284). Negative epithets are also used in concealing the lamenter’s ego: when the lamenter refers to herself, a noun is normally combined with negative epithets. These circumlocutions substitute personal pronouns, and the chosen words depend on the context of the performance and the role the lamenter takes. When referring to an older woman, different words are used than when referring to a young girl. The nouns used also show regional variation (A. Stepanova 2012: 55; E. Stepanova 2014: 87).

A distinctive feature of laments is also the appearance of semantically empty words. Konkka (1985: 15) and Tolbert (1990: 82) describe incidents from fieldwork where the lamenters themselves did not know the meaning of the words that they used. Lamenters in White Sea Karelia used lexical items such as *aijan*, *helun*, and *kiiran* with no independent lexical meaning. From these words have also developed adjective derivatives *aijalliset*, *helulliset*/*halulliset*, *kiiralliset*, which carry meanings such as “similar to” and “equivalent”: *iče helulliset heliet alliseni* (‘my bright birds equal to me’ = female friends), or function as interrogative

² ‘Epithet’ is a term used in literary analysis and has been used widely in studies concerning laments (e.g., Nenola-Kallio 1972: 12; Nenola-Kallio 1973: 113; E. Stepanova 2014; E. Stepanova 2015b; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015). A close linguistic term would be ‘adjective,’ but as epithets do not consist only of adjectives, I find using the term ‘epithet’ in my analysis appropriate.

proadjectives meaning “what kind of”: *mis aijalliset ollah aikomissa olentaiset?* (‘what kind of conditions are there in the new husband’s home, amongst the unfamiliar people?’) (A. Stepanova 2012: 97, 108).

Like the vocabulary of the Karelian language in general, the vocabulary of laments has also been influenced by Russian. Especially in the Seesjärvi region, Russian words were used to broaden the choice of circumlocutions and were built into compound words with Karelian words. Vowels were added to words to make them match the patterns of alliteration, and the words or formulaic expressions were assimilated to match the pattern of lament syntax, meaning they would be adapted to diminutive and plural forms (A. Stepanova 2012: 215; E. Stepanova 2014: 84–86).

2.1.2.2 Grammatical features

The grammatical features associated with laments are the regularized use of diminutive, plural, and possessive markings on nouns, as well as frequentative verbs. The regular use of the plural forms functions in marking the speaker's relation to the addressee and contributes to the register of honourification (E. Stepanova 2012; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015). Often plural forms are marked with diminutives, expressing both the affects of intimacy and honour (Wilce & Fenigsen 2012: 197). The Karelian language has several diminutive markers, but in laments, the most used suffix is *-inel-ni*: *ihalmoine* (‘lovely’, derived from *ihalmo*), and more rarely, *-ut/yt* is used: *kanaparvuot* (‘chicken-flock-DIM-PL’ = girls, female friends), derived from *kanaparvi* (‘chicken-flock’). It is also possible to encounter nouns marked with two diminutive suffixes, such as *seämyzet* (‘heart-DIM-DIM-PL’, derived from *seän*) (A. Stepanova 2012: 124; E. Stepanova 2014: 60; KKS). Frequentative forms are seen as one of the stylistic indexes of the genre (e.g., Honko 1963: 125). Frequentative verb forms are used to express the repetition of an event: they mark the iterative aspect of the verb. In laments, the derivatives are usually formed with *-ele* or *-ile*: *kysellä* (‘ask-FREQ’, derived from *kysyö*) and *vastailla* (‘answer-FREQ’, derived from *vassata*). Many core nouns used in circumlocutions derive from these frequentative forms of verbs: *ensimmäisistä aminavetysistä ylentelijäiseni* (‘the one who lifted me from the first amen-waters’ = godmother, derived from *yllennellä*: *ylenteä*-FREQ ‘to lift’) (A. Stepanova 2012: 41; E. Stepanova 2014: 61; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015: 187). These verb derivatives have multiple functions in laments: they are used to present the current action as still ongoing, framing it as an unbounded process. They have also been connected to “linguistic indirection,” similarly to the use of circumlocutions, and to “linguistic ornamentation,” which is used to shape and lengthen both rhythm and verbal phrases. Prolonging the duration of

expressions in laments is linked to strategies of honouring the addressee. Thus, alongside other linguistic ways of extending the duration of semantic units, frequentativization can index honour and endearment (E. Stepanova 2014: 61–62; E. Stepanova 2017: 501–502; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015: 203).

2.1.2.3 Parallelism and Alliteration

In the context of Karelian lament studies, parallelism has been defined, in its simplest form, as repetition, where “a similar idea is repeated with various wordings” (Tolbert 1990: 86). Frog and Tarkka (2017: 206) attach the phrase “quality of sameness” to parallelism and explain that, alongside vocabulary, syntax, morphology, and metrical structure, parallelism can also be seen “at the level of semantics, images, or symbols that are communicated through those signs”. Parallelism occurs in Karelian laments on multiple different levels: at the phonetic level of sounds, at the level of individual lexical items and larger formulaic expressions within a phrase; simultaneously, it occurs in larger thematic units (E. Stepanova 2017: 485, 502).

Alliteration, referring to the multiple words beginning with the same sounds, is a characteristic feature of the Finnic oral tradition, also in genres other than laments (see Frog & Stepanova 2011). E. Stepanova (2017: 504) describes alliteration as a form of “acoustic texture”, structuring and creating cohesion across poetic strings (E. Stepanova 2017: 491; Frog & Stepanova 2011: 197). Because the same semantic content can be verbalized multiple times through different word choices based on different patterns of alliteration, it has also affected the development of vocabulary in laments to meet different patterns (E. Stepanova 2017: 500).

Parallellism is also related to pleonasms – rhetorical redundancies – where more words are used than is necessary. Inside poetic strings, words with similar or synonymous meaning are paired next to each other. In laments, the pleonasms function as formulaic sequences of the lament lexicon, meaning that the pairings are not often improvised, but they are rather fixed poetic units in the register (E. Stepanova 2017: 493–494).

Laments did not have a regular meter. Instead, the organizational units of laments are so-called poetic strings. Poetic strings are “semantic units of varying length with a melodically marked cadence and are most often united with a consistent pattern of alliteration, although there may be a transition in the pattern of alliteration within a string in some cases” (E. Stepanova 2017: 489). In Karelian laments, the length of these poetic strings varied according to the region (Frog & Stepanova 2011: 197, 204; Konkka 1985: 24–25; E. Stepanova 2017: 489–490)

2.2 The three lives of Karelian lament

Contemporary lamenting in Finland can be understood as part of a larger continuum of tradition. Rather than disappearing, the Karelian lament underwent multiple transformations and developed new forms. Honko's theory of the folklore process (1990) describes how folklore moves from its "first life" to the "second life". The first life of folklore is situated in so-called traditional settings, while the second life begins through "its discovery and definition, fieldwork and archiving, analysis and theory, recycling and application" (Honko 1990: 120).

Building on Honko's theory, Tenhunen (2006) proposes that the Karelian lament has not two but three lives. The three lives are distinguished both temporally and geographically: the first life is situated in Border Karelia in the 19th and 20th centuries, the second life refers to the lament tradition maintained by Karelian evacuees resettled in Finland, and the third life concerns the twenty-first century "lament revival".

Tenhunen (2006: 14) underlines that the different lives are not fully separate. The idea that the emergence of a new life does not entail the disappearance of earlier ones is also noted by Frog, Silvonen & Stepanova (2026: 9): "– in parallel with the emergence of the third life of Karelian lament in Finland, its second life continued in the archives (Stepanova 2014; Silvonen 2022), as did its first life in Russian Karelia, where, for example, a news crew accidentally recorded a performance of a lament in 2021 (E. Stepanova 2023)."

The history of collecting Karelian laments extends over 200 years (A. Stepanova 2012: 211). Because the earlier stages of the tradition are unknown, Tenhunen's account of the first life of laments begins with Finnish researchers collecting laments in Karelia. In this first life, the lament tradition exists in contexts that Tenhunen calls the "natural environment" of the tradition, meaning Karelian kin-based communities and social networks (cf. Tenhunen 2006: 189, 199).

The second life of lament is situated in the period following World War II, when Karelian communities were dispersed across different regions of Finland, and laments were performed by evacuees. Lamenting became detached from its original ritual environments and was instead practiced in new social settings, such as Karelian societies and communal gatherings. At these events, laments were performed, and the topics often concerned experiences of displacement and loss (Tenhunen 2006: 189). During these years, laments were also performed on stages, sometimes outside Finland too (Tenhunen 2006: 192). Söderholm (1989: 184–186) sees the emergence of lamenting in the 1970s as connected to a new wave of Karelianism in eastern Finland, especially in North Karelia, where "revitalized" Karelian culture was used to build

regional identity and encourage tourism. This development and these new cultural settings were also criticized: if performers had not learned laments in their “original,” ritual context, was their embodiment of the tradition “unauthentic”, representing something else? (Söderholm 1989; Tenhunen 2006: 194; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015: 111).

During the second life of the lament, several women who knew about laments transmitted their knowledge to younger generations. For example, Klaudia Vonkkanen and Martta Kuikka, of whom the latter is described as a “famous transitional-generation lamenter” (Wilce & Fenigsen 2015: 199), shared their knowledge of laments with interested learners (Tenhunen 2006: 262, 266–267). During this time, lamenting also started appearing in contexts separate from Karelian culture (Tenhunen 2006: 199). *Itkijänaiset* (‘the crying women’), a group of women using lament as a form of political protest, was formed in 1987. In their protests, they attended different events dressed in black and cried out loud. In 1987, their protest gained attention in newspapers when they entered Parliament’s lecterns and, while crying out loud, threw handkerchiefs embroidered with messages against nuclear power and the militarization of women. Laments written and performed by the group members were also part of the organization’s activities (Tenhunen 2006: 199; Yoken & Turunen 2026). However, the detachment of laments from their original ritual contexts was not limited to the end of the 20th century, as already at the beginning of the century, lamenters performed at song festivals that functioned as “symbolic forums of nationalistic ideology” (Söderholm 1989: 186).

At the turn of the 21st century, new interpretations of lamenting emerged in two main contexts: the Folk Music Department of the Sibelius Academy and the organization *Äänellä Itkijät ry* (‘Those Who Cry With Voice [Words]’, following Wilce 2011: 567). Previous research presents these two contexts as the main frameworks through which contemporary laments emerged, and later interpretations of lamenting were shaped (Silvonen 2026: 121; Tenhunen 2006: 287). In the Sibelius Academy, laments were ingrained in the studies of folk music, and the organization *Äänellä Itkijät ry* focused on organizing lament courses that emphasized the healing dimensions of lamenting (see Tenhunen 2006: 294, 302–310; Wilce 2011).

Äänellä Itkijät ry was established in 2001. The organization aims to “safeguard, maintain, promote, and raise awareness of the traditions of voiced weeping and Karelian culture³” (*Äänellä Itkijät ry*, The rules of the association, updated 10.12.2010). Today, the association

³ Yhdistyksen tarkoituksena on vaalia, ylläpitää ja edistää ja tehdä tunnetuksi äänellä itkemisen perinteitä ja karjalaista kulttuuria. The translation is mine.

has been active for over 25 years and has conducted training sessions, workshops, and conferences. The organization calls its approach to lament *hoitava itku* ('healing lament'), emphasizing the therapeutic effects of lamenting (Kallonen & Äänellä Itkijät ry 2019). Lamenting often takes place in circles. Lamenting circles are seen as offering possibilities for a person to address losses in new communities formed around lamenting; since a person in contemporary Finnish society may lack "traditional communal structure or close family connections," lamenting circles can offer these forms of support to a person in need (Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023a: 153; see Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023b).

2.2.1 Contemporary Laments and Neolaments

Tenhunen's (2006) study focused on the early stages of lament revival and primarily on the activities of *Äänellä Itkijät ry*. Since Tenhunen's study, the organization has been examined from perspectives such as the semiotics of authenticity (Wilce & Fenigsen 2012), lament register (Wilce & Fenigsen 2015), and psychotherapeutic and healing interpretations of contemporary lamenting (Wilce 2011). However, the field of lamenting in Finland has diversified. Alongside the still active *Äänellä Itkijät ry*, the performance contexts and perceived meanings of laments vary. Laments are performed, for example, in musical performances, spiritual practices, and environmental art (Latvala-Harvilahti 2023; Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023a; Kauppila 2020; Silvonen 2026; Silvonen & Kallio 2023: 45, 49–50; Silvonen & Kuittinen 2022).

Earlier scholarship has usually described contemporary lamenting as existing primarily, if not only, outside ritual contexts (Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023a: 153–154; Silvonen 2020: 62; Silvonen & Kuittinen 2022: 8). The learning pathways for lamenting are usually described as lamenting circles or folk music contexts, suggesting that intergenerational transmission has been disrupted (Tenhunen 2006; Wilce 2011). However, some informants have described lamenting as continuing within family communities (Silvonen 2026; Silvonen & Kallio 2023: 45).

Lament revival, especially in Finnish contexts, has received criticism in recent years. The debate about the proper use of Karelian laments is connected to Finland's history of using Karelian culture to build Finnish national identity while overlooking Karelians' visibility and linguistic rights (see Fingerroos 2008: 238; Haapoja-Mäkelä 2020: 7; Sarhimaa 2017; E. Stepanova 2020: 393). People working in the field of contemporary lament have various perceptions of the meanings of lament: while to some, Karelian laments are about upholding Karelian culture, to others, they can be a means of creative and artistic expression or aim at

healing and psychotherapeutic outcomes (Silvonen 2026: 117; Silvonen & Kallio 2023; Wilce 2011). The expansion of lamenting into new forms and contexts has also led Karelian activists in Finland to challenge what they view as the misuse of their cultural heritage (Frog, Silvonen & Stepanova 2026; Silvonen 2026; Silvonen & Kallio 2023). If laments are understood as tightly connected to Karelian ritual practices related to Orthodox Christianity or vernacular religion, the use of Karelian laments in different contexts may be perceived as cultural appropriation (Silvonen & Kallio 2023: 55). Cultural appropriation, emerging in conversations about lamenting practices, refers to the disproportionate power relations related to majority groups using minority groups' traditions (see Rogers 2006).

Karelians and Finns can be understood as separate ethnic groups with their own linguistic, cultural, and religious identities. Finnish and Karelian identities can also overlap. Not all individuals who identify as Karelian speak the Karelian language, and what it means to be Karelian can vary depending on the individual (Sarhimaa 2017; Silvonen & Kallio 2023: 53). While many contemporary lamenters have Karelian roots and perceive their laments as a practice of Karelian culture (Hytönen-Ng 2023), not all interpretations of laments are related to Karelian identity. Overall, these debates have led practitioners and researchers of lament to position themselves in the field and discuss the ethical questions related to their own practice and research (Hytönen-Ng 2023; Silvonen & Kallio 2023; Silvonen & Kuittinen 2022).

3. Data and methods

The research aims to better understand the lamenting practices in Finland today, especially those rooted in or inspired by Karelian lamenting. The research questions address both linguistic attitudes and the linguistic structure of contemporary lament texts. Three types of data were used: answers to an open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and contemporary lament texts.

The questionnaire and interview data are used primarily to examine metalinguistic talk about laments, as well as language attitudes and ideologies, and were analyzed through a combination of reflexive thematic analysis and discourse analysis. The lament texts are used for the linguistic analysis of contemporary lament language, and they were analyzed through textual analysis, focusing on lexical, grammatical, and poetic features associated with the Karelian lament register. In the results, all three types of data are analyzed together: the questionnaire responses and interviews are seen as complementary. The textual analysis shows how the themes discussed in the respondents' answers are realized in actual lament texts.

This chapter presents the data and methods used in the study. In addition, the ethical considerations of the study are discussed.

3.1 Data

3.1.1 Questionnaire

To understand different stances on lamenting practices, language ideologies, and attitudes, I collected data through an online questionnaire. The questionnaire included two background questions concerning the respondents' age group and gender and twelve open-ended questions.

Using an online questionnaire made it possible for me to reach a broad group of respondents, who could answer the questions anonymously. The target audience included people from different backgrounds and age groups who have an interest in (contemporary) Karelian lamenting. Active lamenting was not required for answering: responses from individuals who do not lament were also welcome.

The questionnaire was hosted by the University of Tartu LimeSurvey platform. The respondents were able to choose which questions to answer and leave the remaining questions unanswered. The questions asked participants to share their memories of hearing laments, describe their own lamenting practices, and respond to metalinguistic questions about lament language. The questionnaire also addressed attitudes toward language choice and boundary

negotiations. At the end, respondents had the option to leave their contact information if they wished to be contacted or wanted to share their laments for textual analysis.

The questionnaire was opened at the end of December 2025 and stayed open until the end of January 2026. The link to the questionnaire was distributed through following channels: employees of the University of Eastern Finland helped to collect answers by sharing the link in channels aimed at students of the Karelian language and culture, and through a monthly mailing list. *Karjalan Sivistyseura*, an organization dedicated to promoting the Karelian language and culture, shared the link on its social media channels (Facebook and Instagram). The link was also shared in a closed Facebook group hosted by *Kalevalaisten Naisten Liitto*, an organization described on its website as being “for women who value roots and tradition.” (Kalevalaisten Naisten Liitto, n.d.) In addition, I shared the link through my own networks by contacting individuals I know who have lamented.

The questionnaire was available in both Finnish and Karelian (Karelian Proper, South Karelian dialect), and participants were able to choose their preferred language. The questionnaire received 26 responses, of which 21 were in Finnish and five in Karelian. Participants reported their age by selecting from predefined categories: 18–24 ($n = 0$), 25–34 ($n = 4$), 35–44 ($n = 7$), 45–55 ($n = 3$), 55–64 ($n = 4$), 66–74 ($n = 6$), and 75+ ($n = 2$). Among those who reported their gender, 22 identified as women and three as men.

All respondents were assigned an automatic respondent identifier number by the hosting platform, and these numbers are used when excerpts are presented in the thesis. One respondent explicitly requested to be identified by name rather than by a respondent number. This request was respected. When excerpts of answers are inserted into the results section, the responses in their original language are left visible alongside their English translation. Clear typing mistakes are corrected to improve readability, but otherwise the excerpts are not edited. The excerpts included in the text are chosen based on how representative they are of recurring patterns and how they reflect the variety of opinions and stances.

The questions asked in the questionnaire are included in the appendix, and alongside the original languages, an English translation is included.

3.1.2 Interviews

In addition, in January 2026, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with individuals who were familiar with contemporary lamenting in Finland. Participants were recruited by contacting publicly visible actors in the field (e.g., people involved in teaching, performing, or

otherwise working with lamenting). Invitations were sent directly to possible participants via email, and they were informed of the study and its aims.

The interview questions were based on the questions of the online questionnaire, but the interview structure was kept flexible. In addition, follow-up questions were asked, and the participants were free to introduce topics that they wanted to discuss. This allowed me to focus more on specific areas and enabled participants to introduce the topics they found most meaningful in relation to lamenting. When planning the interviews, I considered participants' roles within the field, and, for example, included questions on teaching practices related to writing lament texts. Interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom, and both audio and video were recorded with participants' consent. The length of the interviews varied between 20 and 80 minutes, and the transcriptions were done manually. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and transcribed in the original language. Interactional details, such as pauses or prosody, were not annotated. To protect anonymity, the transcripts were edited before analysis. Potentially identifying details, such as personal names, place names, and references to highly specific events, were removed or generalised. In the transcripts, such edits were marked with brackets: for example, references to cities were replaced with "[city]", and mentions of organisations with "[organisation]." When anonymisation was not possible without compromising identifiability, individual anecdotal details were omitted from the dataset.

The transcripts strictly followed the flow of speech, including instances where respondents began a sentence or a word without completing it. Therefore, some excerpts presented in the results section have been edited for readability. Such edits were made only when I judged that they did not affect the excerpt's meaning. When excerpts are presented in the thesis, they are translated into English, and the Finnish original is presented alongside the translation.

3.1.3 Lament texts

The lament texts were collected from publicly available online sources and through contacting people who work publicly with lamenting. The people contacted were individuals who have performed laments on stage for an audience or who have published music inspired by laments on online platforms. The final dataset consists of seven different lament texts. All texts analyzed were already in written form, except one, which I transcribed based on a video recording. The lament texts are included in the appendix.

The number of chosen texts is limited by the scope of a master's thesis: I selected a small corpus that is most relevant for the aims of the analysis and that portrays the linguistic features identified in the questionnaire data. The primary criteria for selection were that the texts were

produced in the 21st century and were publicly available online or provided with permission. I was interested in texts written in Karelian or Finnish and containing Karelian lament language features, as well as texts that the performers themselves identified as laments or that were presented as laments in their online descriptions. The analyzed texts were chosen based on three principles. First, they were selected based on language, as I wanted to include texts in Karelian, Finnish, and mixed forms. Second, I selected texts that reflect the lament language features and themes discussed by questionnaire and interview respondents. Third, I included texts that illustrate the diversity of contemporary lamenting, meaning that the presented laments differ clearly from one another in form.

My analysis of the texts is based only on the written form. The written form does not enable me to analyze prosodic and phonetic features or aspects of lamenting that rely on improvisation and bodily expression. This study focuses on how lamenting is realized in writing, since the tradition has developed textual forms in addition to its oral practices. The analysis focuses on examining how the tradition is being realized and reshaped in its textual form; it does not evaluate laments in terms of correctness, quality, or authenticity.

3.1.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were considered throughout the research process. Before conducting the research, an application was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Tartu. The research plan was approved by the Committee, and the study was conducted according to the Research Ethics Committee guidelines.

Participation in both the questionnaire and the interviews was voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents were provided with information about the study's aims and how the collected data would be used and stored. Participation required explicit agreement to the conditions of data use and storage. The questionnaire responses, interviews, and lament texts are treated as separate datasets. The study does not make claims about individual-level connections between questionnaire answers, interview data, and lament authorship. Direct connections between questionnaire respondents, interview participants, and the authors of the analyzed texts should not be drawn.

The online questionnaire was designed to ensure anonymity by default. Respondents were not required to provide identifying information such as their name or email address, and no identifying personal data was collected. Respondents were free to answer only the questions they wished to answer and to discontinue the questionnaire at any point. Respondents were

given the option to leave contact details only if they wished to be contacted later for interviews or for the collection of lament texts. Contact information was used only for these purposes.

The interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom. Consent was provided via email, and screenshots of these messages were stored in a password-secured cloud to which only I have access. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study within a specified two-week period after the interview. In this case, the interview would not be transcribed, and all recorded material would have been deleted. After these two weeks, the interviews were transcribed.

During the transcription, interview participants were pseudonymized using identifier numbers, and identifying information such as names of people, places, or specific events was removed or replaced in transcriptions. Recordings were stored securely in a password-protected cloud and deleted after the transcription process was completed.

The anonymized responses and transcripts of the interviews are archived in *Eesti murrete ja sugulaskeelte arhiiv*, hosted by Tartu University's Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics. The materials cannot be downloaded and are accessible through the online platform to registered users. Any questionnaire responses or interview excerpts that could not be anonymized are not archived.

The translations into English are provided by me, and I take full responsibility for their contents and faithfulness to the original language. The original versions are left visible alongside the English translation to support the transparency.

Since this study examines how archived forms of tradition are interpreted in the modern age, the archival materials themselves and the picture of ‘tradition’ that they produce should be approached critically. Archival materials provide a limited view of reality, which is filtered through the ideologies of those who interviewed, recorded, and pictured lamenting women (cf. Nenola 1989). As discussed before, Karelian culture and folklore have been used as symbols in building the national identity of Finland, and in the process, Karelians have been othered, and their traditions, language, and identity erased (Sihvo 1973; Stepanova 2020; see Tarkka 1989). As Bendix (2002: 112) notes, “All collectors are human and thus subjective. Their gender, ethnicity, class and political leanings will leave traces in the collection methodology and publication”; therefore, it is crucial to critically consider the gaze behind the collected folklore (cf. Frog, Silvonen & Stepanova 2026: 9; Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023a: 156).

Grammarly and ChatGPT were used to improve grammar, spelling, and style. All suggestions made by these tools were reviewed and edited by me.

3.2 Methods

3.2.1 Thematic analysis

To analyze the questionnaire responses and interviews, I used reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data (see Braun & Clarke 2006: 79). A theme is described as “a pattern of shared meaning, organized around a core concept or idea, a central organizing concept” (Braun et al. 2019: 845).

Thematic analysis starts with familiarizing oneself with the data and proceeds with coding. Codes are used to help capture relevant and interesting features of the data in relation to the research questions (Clarke & Braun 2017: 297). My analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006: 87; cf. Braun et al. 2019: 852–857) six-step approach of (1) familiarizing myself with the data, reading and re-reading it, (2) generating initial codes across the dataset; (3) mapping codes into potential themes; (4) reviewing themes reflecting the coded extracts and the full dataset; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report of analysis by selecting illustrative extracts and relating the analysis to the research questions and relevant literature.

Familiarizing myself with the data started already in the data collection process, as I transcribed the interviews after conducting them. After finishing conducting the interviews and closing the questionnaire, the interviews and responses were prepared for analysis through anonymization and segmentation.

The segmentation of the answers was done to make the analysis easier, as the answers were long and could contain different topics and/or positionings of the speaker. For example, if the respondent changed to a completely new topic in the middle of a response, the response was divided. Because many answers were long, segmenting was based on the change of topic or a change of positioning. An example of segmenting and coding can be found in Appendix 4. Since both interviews and questionnaire responses were segmented similarly, organizing and comparing the data was easier.

The final dataset was exported into an Excel sheet. Alongside each segment, the respondent identifier number, segment number, and question asked were left visible. The first round of coding focused on the questionnaire responses. One segment could receive multiple different codes. In the beginning, coding was semantic and descriptive. During this phase, I wrote down notes to help with further analysis. As I became more familiar with the data, the analysis progressed to latent codes, which aimed to focus on the segments’ implicit and conceptual levels of meaning (Braun et al. 2019: 853). The final coding included both latent and semantic codes.

After the first round of coding questionnaire responses, I started coding the segments of the interviews. During this phase, the interview coding led to redefining and editing the earlier codes: overlapping codes were reconsidered or merged into one, and the naming was standardized. Through the process, the meanings of each code were redefined and documented.

From here, the codes were clustered into themes. The themes of the data were formed through a coding approach with elements of both inductive “bottom-up” and deductive “top-down” approaches. No codes were decided beforehand, but as the structure of the questionnaire and planned questions for the interviews may have encouraged the formation of certain themes, the approach should not be called purely inductive (see Braun et al. 2019: 853; Terry et al. 2017). Naturally, the questionnaire and interview questions were designed based on the research questions, which may have encouraged, for example, the discussion of language choice. Before the final themes, there were prototypes that were tested in relation to the dataset and research questions (see Braun et al. 2019: 854). During this phase, the codes were used as “building blocks” for themes, and two codes were moved from the level of codes into themes, as they captured central patterns across the dataset (Braun et al. 2019: 855). The final higher-level thematic groupings that structure the results chapter are (1) authentic lament, (2) language choice and its motivations, (3) protection, ownership, and responsibility, and (4) contemporary functions of the lament.

In RTA, the data, coding, and themes may affect the formation of the research questions (Terry et al. 2017). During the process of analysing the data, I changed the first research question to address the findings from the data more precisely. My original research question was related to the meanings of lamenting in Karelian identity, but since not all respondents identified as Karelian, the research question was modified to take this into account. Because the data addressed the meaning of lamenting from various perspectives, rather than only in relation to the construction of Karelian identity, the revised research question, “How are language, continuity, and change negotiated in contemporary lament practices?”, was formed to capture the range of meanings attached to contemporary lamenting.

While discussing the method, Braun and Clarke (2021) bring out the importance of researchers’ reflection on their understandings of language and reality. Providing a transparent description of the analysis includes acknowledging and recognizing the decisions made during the process (Braun & Clarke 2006: 80). My analysis started from the respondents’ words, but the resulting analysis is my perception of the reality produced by their utterances. Therefore, I want to avoid language that describes themes as “emerging” or “appearing” from the data. Thematic analysis, alongside other qualitative methods, is vulnerable to the beliefs and values

of the researcher (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir 2016: 40). Naturally, my interests guided me while planning the questionnaire and interviews, and the questions present in them encouraged certain topics. Braun et al. (2019: 848–849) refer to the researcher in RTA as a “storyteller, actively engaged in interpreting data through the lens of their own cultural membership and social positionings, their theoretical assumptions and ideological commitments, as well as their scholarly knowledge”. While doing the analysis, I stayed aware of my role and acknowledged the fact that my ideologies, values, and lived experience participate in how I design the questionnaire, conduct the interviews, interpret the data, and use terminology in my analysis (Braun et al. 2019: 857).

3.2.1.1 Discourse analysis

RTA offers tools for identifying larger patterns in the data, but it “does not provide tools for a detailed and fine-grained analysis of language practice that some discourse analytic approaches offer” (Braun & Clarke 2021: 43). Thematic analysis, especially with latent coding, may overlap with some forms of discourse analysis (see Braun & Clarke 2006: 13–14). In this study, discourse analysis is applied as a supporting approach: while thematic analysis is used to recognize and interpret patterns across the data, discourse analysis is used to analyze individual utterances and segments. To analyze respondents’ attitudes, values, ideologies, and positioning, it was necessary to understand how these meanings were produced in the data. Discourse analysis was used as a supporting tool, as it guided latent codes and, after the formation of the themes, was used to examine language use in context and the implicit dimensions of discourse (cf. Alejandro & Zhao 2024: 466).

Discourse analysis studies language in use and how meanings are produced. It is a tool for analysing how speakers perform communicative acts, achieve communicative goals, communicate beliefs, present different understandings, and adopt identities. When discourse is seen as a social construction of reality, texts are approached as communicative units embedded in social and cultural practices. The observable form of language use, such as a text, is seen as part of a broader continuum of time and situation and is interpreted in relation to it (Gee 2025: 5; Paltridge 2012: 7, 12; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019: 1.1; Pälli & Lillqvist 2020: 374–375).

To analyze speakers’ attitudes, values, and positionings, I paid attention to modality, especially the linguistic expressions of necessity, obligation, and permission. In Finnic languages, the modal domains of possibility and necessity can be expressed through various grammatical means. In Finnish and Karelian, these means include certain verbs, moods such as the potential, imperative, and conditional, as well as modal adverbs (Kehayov & Torn-

Leesik 2009: 365). However, as many modal verbs are polyfunctional in both Karelian and Finnish, the meaning of the verb in a sentence depends heavily on the surrounding context (see Kehayov & Torn-Leesik 2009: 372; Hakulinen et al., 2004 § 1552).

The analysis of grammatical elements was part of the broader analysis, in which the participants' positioning was mapped through the narratives that they built in their responses. In practice, this meant noticing and identifying patterns in how respondents categorized things, created oppositions, distinguished between groups, discussed permission and obligation, and gave suggestions. Through such acts, identities, social positionings, and ideologies may be constructed and made visible, as language functions "not only for sharing knowledge but also for performing actions and enacting identities" (Gee 2025: 5).

However, like many other qualitative methods, discourse analysis also includes a high degree of subjectivity, and it should be noted that the following analysis is based on my understanding and interpretations of the meanings produced. In addition, I analyzed written texts and the possibilities for analysis were more limited than when analysing spoken language, as oral language uses multimodal means to convey a message (Gee 2025: 4).

My position is outside the communities I discuss. Although I have family roots in Suojärvi, the Karelian language and culture have not been visible in my family. I do not practice lamenting myself. These aspects were acknowledged and reflected on throughout the analysis.

3.3.3 Textual analysis

Textual analysis was used to analyze contemporary lament texts. Textual analysis can be used to demonstrate which meanings are created through language and how these meanings are brought into being (Heikkinen 2020). The texts are written presentations of laments, and the analysis concerns only the linguistic features visible in their textual form.

According to Heikkinen (2020: 1.6), textual analysis understands 'genre' as a cultural practice that shapes both how texts are produced and how they are understood, framing what kinds of meanings can be interpreted from them. A genre is not only produced by the performer but also by the listeners, for whom the genre works as an interpretative perspective involving, for example, expectations and attitudes (Valk 2012: 359). In this study, lament is understood as a "speech style oriented to the production and reception of a particular kind of text" (Bauman 2004: 3–4). When analyzing contemporary laments, the analysis aims to capture how wider meanings are produced through the text: the genre features of Karelian laments are not limited only to the linguistic register but also include the wider cultural meanings that the tradition carries.

The analysis moved from the larger to the smaller: I first analyzed each lament as a whole, then moved to the level of poetic lines, from there to individual words, and finally to the level of morphemes. When analyzing the texts, I took notes with three different focuses. First, I wanted to see how the laments follow the genre of Karelian lamenting: what kinds of characteristic traits are visible in the texts, and how the laments position themselves in relation to the tradition. Second, I focused on metaphoric language: what is said in the lament, and how meaning is built through figurative expression. I also analyzed the themes of the laments and read them alongside my questionnaire and interview data, positioning the textual themes in relation to the answers I received in the questionnaire and the interviews. Finally, I analyzed the language itself. I looked at how Karelian and Finnish are mixed and what kinds of linguistic choices are made in different parts of the laments. In addition, I paid attention to the use of epithets and traditional expressions. For this part of the analysis, Aleksandra Stepanova's Karelian lament language dictionary *Karjalaisen itkuvirsikielen sanakirja* (2012) was crucial.

4. Findings and discussion

My first research question examines how continuity, change, and language are negotiated in contemporary lament discourse. This question is discussed through the formed themes that structure the section: 1. *Authentic lament*, 2. *Language choice and its motivations* 3. *Protection, ownership, and responsibility*, and 4. *Contemporary functions of the lament*.

The second research question concerns the textual form of laments in today's Finland. My analysis is based on seven contemporary lament texts that aim to portray the diverse forms of lament and lament-inspired songs in 21st-century Finland. The linguistic forms of laments will be discussed in section 4.2.2.

4.1 Authentic lament

The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) gives multiple definitions for the adjective ‘authentic.’ One of them is: “Presenting the characteristics of the original; accurately reproducing a model or prototype; made or done in the original or traditional way.”

The theme *Authentic lament* focuses on mapping lamenting practices as legitimate, real, just, or correctly done. It captures my perception of how the respondents participate in constructing narratives where certain lamenting practises are framed as more authentic than others. Bendix (1997: 7) describes the search for authenticity as “an emotional and moral quest”: when declaring something authentic, the declared subject may also legitimate the authenticator. Like ‘tradition’, ‘authenticity’ is built on dichotomy: as tradition opposes modernity, authenticity opposes inauthenticity or fake (Bendix 1997: 9). The discursive construction of authenticity therefore always has evaluative dimensions, reflecting the moral values of the participants.

Fenigsen and Wilce (2012: 105) argue that in the field of Finland's lament-revival, several competing authenticities make “authenticity claims and assessments vulnerable to contestation”. The aim of authenticity can manifest as a search for a replica of a so-called traditional lament. In this case, the goal may be impossible to achieve; as lamenting has been based on improvisation, even perfectly replicated lament represents a replica (Wilce & Fenigsen 2012: 111; Nenola 1972: 213). Similarly, the original contexts of performance are something impossible to reach or even understand, since our “understanding of them and of the reality associated with them has transformed” (Arukask 2011: 131). In the excerpt (1), the interviewee addresses the topic, suggesting that the only way to preserve the tradition is to adapt it to new contexts:

- (1) *No siis kun ei ole mahdollista enää se entinen konteksti, niin pakkohan se on johonkin jotenkin jollain tavalla, että se pysyy elämässä, tuoda jollakin tavalla johonkin uusiin paikkoihin. Se itkuvirsi. IN04_23*

‘Well, since the old context is not possible anymore, then it has to [go] somewhere somehow, in some way. That it stays alive, [we must] take it, in some way, into some new places. The lament.’ IN04_23

In the data, these new contexts and their relation to authenticity are negotiated. Through communicating which kind of practices are seen as suitable, the respondents describe the values that they attach to laments. In this section, these values are further described in the subthemes *of modes of transmission and intergenerational continuity, lament language and desired register, and ritual seriousness and suitable contexts.*

4.1.1 Modes of Transmission and Intergenerational Continuity

When the respondents were asked about their memories and experiences of hearing laments (Q2), their answers divided into two groups: those who reported hearing laments only through archives, contemporary performances, and media, and others who described personal memories of hearing laments within their family or local community contexts. Family memory was a strong way of situating oneself in relation to tradition; even the respondents who had only encountered laments through media or archival material mentioned the absence of lamenting within the family and therefore participated in framing the family as the primary point of reference for transmission. Memories of hearing a grandmother, relative, or community member lament were described as emotionally intense and meaningful, as shown in (2) and (3).

- (2) *Minulla on muistoja äitini itkuista. Hän kertoi niiden taustoista. Hän valitti, ettei itke niin hyvin kuin ennen. Elämä on sortanut äänen. Minusta itkun kokeminen oli liikuttavaa, sydäntä pakahduttavaa. ri46_q04_01*

‘I have memories of my mother's laments. She told me about their background stories. She complained that she is not crying as well as she did before. Life has suppressed [her] voice. I think experiencing a lament was moving, heart-wrenching.’ ri46_q04_01

- (3) *Muistan isoäitini [vuosi] [nimi] kertoneen minulle satunnaisesti äänellä itkemisestä [pitäjä Raja-Karjalassa]: missä tilanteissa, itkijöistä, jotain sanoista yms. ja kerran (!) hän yllättäen esitti minulle äänellä itkemistä. Nenäliina poskella, itkemisasento, pätkä itkua. En tiedä improvisoiko hän vai tuliko se "sydäimestä". En muista, liittyikö se häihin vai haudalla itkemiseen. Jotain hyvin vakuuttavaa ja vaikuttavaa tuossa tilanteessa oli, koska muistan sen. Tämä tapahtui 1960-luvun puolenvälin tienoilla, jolloin olin 12–15-vuotias. ri30_q04_01*

‘I remember that my grandmother [name] [age] occasionally told me about lamenting in [parish in Border Karelia]: in which situations [it happened], about the laments, something about the words etc. And once (!) she unexpectedly performed lamenting to me. [There was] a tissue on the cheek, a crying position, an excerpt of a lament. I don’t know whether she was improvising or if it came out of [her] “heart”. I don’t remember if it was related to a wedding or lamenting at a grave. There was something very persuasive and impressive on that occasion, because I remember it. This happened around mid-1960’s, when I was 12-15 years old.’ ri30_q04_01

While the question only concerned memories of hearing laments, the respondents also shared their memories of a family member describing their own experiences of encountering Karelian laments, see (4) and (5), or staying in contact with laments. These memories may act as a parallel form of continuity, as the references to family lineage can function as a way of maintaining continuity with the tradition without direct personal experience of laments.

- (4) *Raja-Karjalasta kotoisin olevan mummini veli on muistellut kuinka heillä kävi itkijä kodissaan kun he olivat lapsia. ri31_q04_01*

‘My grandmother’s brother, from Border Karelia, has reminisced about how a lamenter visited their home when they were children. ri31_q04_01’

- (5) *Olen kuullut niitä lähinnä dokumenteissa. Jotain muistoja pappa on niistä kertonut lapsuudestaan. ri20_q04_01*

‘I have heard them mostly in documentaries. My grandfather has told some memories of them from his childhood.’ ri20_q04_01

Family lineage also remained central when asking about the meanings of lamenting (Q14), as the respondents positioned themselves in relation to it. Lamenting has been seen as a way of connecting with one's ancestors, and this aspect was often brought out as one of the core meanings of participating in tradition. The respondent in the example (6) emphasizes that the tradition was upheld by the female members of the family, while in the excerpt (7), the experience of connecting with the deceased family members is expressed through articulating the feeling of lamenting with a voice that dates back centuries.

- (6) *Se on olla osa pitkää matriarkalista ketjua ja koen sen hyvin tärkeäksi.*
ri50_q14_01

‘It is to be a part of a long matriarchal chain, and I find it very important.’
ri50_q14_01

- (7) *Jotain syvää yhteyttä omaan sukuun. Yhteyttä omaan ääneen joka tulee jostain vuosisatojen takaa kun alan itkemään.* *ri31_q14_01*

‘Some deep connection to my own lineage. A connection to my own voice that comes from somewhere centuries ago when I start to lament.’ *ri31_q14_01*

When discussing the transmission of the tradition, learning from elders was highly valued even when it did not occur through family lineage. In the interviews, participants shared memories of encountering or being taught by well-known lamenters from the older generation, such as Martta Kuikka and Klaudia Vonkkanen. In example (8), the respondent’s use of the verbs *sain oppia* (‘I got to learn’) conveys a sense of respect and implies a perception of having been in a privileged position. The respondent in the example (9) uses the word *autenttinen* (‘authentic’) and continues with describing their encounters with well-known lamenters. Notably, the generational transmission is emphasized as the interviewee identifies the encountered lamenter as the “daughter of Oksenja Mäkiselkä”.

- (8) *Mun ensimmäinen itkuvirsiopettaja oli Martta Kuikka, et mä sain oppii tälläselta niinku karjalaiselta osaaajalta, sain sen ensikosketuksen itkuihin* *IN06_16*

‘My first lamenting teacher was Martta Kuikka, so I got to learn from a Karelian expert, I got the first exposure to laments.’ *IN06_16*

- (9) *Et mä oon kuullu silleen niinku tosi autenttista, sit mä oon tavannu myös Martta Kuikan aikanaan jossain itkuvirsikurssilla oli jo tosi kauan aikaa sitte varmaa* *30*

vuotta sitten ekat, mä oon tavannu Klaudia Vonkkasen joka on Oksenja Mäkielän tytär, jotka on sit molemat itkijöitä IN05_11

‘So I have heard really authentic [ones], also I have met Martta Kuikka back then at some lamenting course, it was a long time ago, probably the first ones were [held] about 30 years ago. I have met Klaudia Vonkkanen, who is the daughter of Oksenja Mäkielkä, from whom both are lamenters’ IN05_11

Proximity to elder lamenters was also framed as granting authority, legitimacy, or knowledge in relation to tradition. Some respondents referred to the elders’ interpretations of appropriate themes, contexts, and the boundaries of lamenting practice, and used this knowledge in their own teaching practice. In the excerpt (10), the interviewee describes using the acquired knowledge in guiding those wishing to lament.

(10) *Sitten minä olen yrittänyt neuvoa niin kuin minua vanhemmat itkijät neuvoi.*
IN04_10

‘Then I have tried to advise [others], as the lamenters older than me advised me.’
IN04_10

As not all contemporary lamenters have had the opportunity to encounter lamenters of the older generation directly, archival recordings have functioned as a way of studying laments. Recordings, archived laments, and online materials provide access to the performances and can function as an alternative pathway of learning. In responses, using archived materials is also described as a supporting tool for writing laments and listening to older laments as a way of practising the genre-like use of voice for performing laments out loud.

The narratives presented connect authenticity to questions of transmission: family lineage is mentioned so often that the data portrays it almost as the normative way of contact with laments. Learning from elders, especially recognized lamenters, is treated as symbolic capital and as a source of legitimacy for contemporary practice. At the same time, other learning pathways, such as recordings, workshops, and written materials, are not presented as wrong, and many practitioners describe their contact with laments happening through these mediums. In a sense, all these forms may allow participation within the continuity of oral transmission, whether by aiming to imitate the style of old recordings and written materials based on oral laments or through participation in lamenting courses. In course settings, the teachers may have

learned from recognized lamenters and now pass their version of that knowledge forward in their own teaching. Therefore, even without direct contact with the older generation of lamenters, participants may perceive participation as a way of gaining partial access to older generations' knowledge through a chain of transmission.

4.1.2 Lament Language and Desired Register

In addition to transmission, respondents linked authenticity to specific features of lament language. In this section, I focus on how respondents understand lament language as a distinct and recognizable register. Since these features expand across different languages, the emphasis in this section is not on language choice, but on the desired poetic features and linguistic elements of the lament register.

In the questionnaire and interviews, the nature of lament language was addressed (Q10). The linguistic form of laments and their features were discussed both by active lamenters and those who have engaged with laments only as listeners. Respondents widely acknowledged that lament language differs from everyday speech. The distinction between *itkukieli* ('lament language') and *puhekieli* ('spoken language') or *arkikieli* ('everyday language') appears not only in responses to the question but also elsewhere in the material, especially in interviews where participants reflect on writing laments. Some descriptions are more detailed than others, but the following features associated with Karelian laments are clearly recognized by respondents: distinctive vocabulary, metaphorical expression, diminutives, and alliteration. The distinction between two separate language forms is most visible in cases where respondents describe the process of creating laments as a translation (11) (12) from "everyday language" to "lament language."

- (11) *mietin sitä sisältöä ja kyllä mä ensin mietin sitä ihan sillai arkikielisesti, tavallaan että mitä asioita mä niinku siihen, mitä siinä itkussa olis ja mitä mä haluan siinä sanoa ja sitten mä rupeen sitä niinku koristelemaan tai ikään kuin kääntämään sillai itkukielelle, tai itkuiselle kielelle, sille semmoselle runolliselle itkukielelle.*
IN03_07

'I think of the content [of a lament], and at first, I think of it in everyday language, like what things I— what there could be in the lament and what I want to say in it. And then I start to decorate it, or kind of translate it into lament language, or lament-like language, into poetic lament language.' IN03_07(1)

- (12) *Ja sitä ajattelin kanssa kurssilla voisi kanssa, jos on sananikkaruus vähän tuntematon laji, nii käydä semmoista pientä sanakirjanomaista niinku että jokainen voisi piirissä sit sanoo jonkun sanan mikä itselleen merkityksellinen ja sitte voi jokainen yrittää keksiä sille sanalle sitten itkukäännöksen- tai version, et auringolle ja äidille ja lapselle ja miehelle ni, mitä näkökulmia sitä sitten heräisi ja rikastuttaisi itkusanavarastoa kultakin että ei ois sitten omien – et harjotuttaisi sitä kanssa on monta tapaa sanoa sama asia näkökulmista. IN01_54*

‘And I was also thinking, in a [lament] course, if people are not so familiar with being a wordsmith, [we] could do smallish dictionary-like [exercises], like everyone in the circle could say a word that is meaningful for them and then everyone could try to invent a lament translation for this word – or a version, like a version for the sun, a mother, a child, and a man, so what perspectives that would awaken and enrich lament vocabulary for each so it wouldn’t be – to practice that there’s many way of saying the same thing from [different] perspectives.’ IN01_54

As the excerpt (13) illustrates, following the register of laments was often seen as necessary. The strength of the placed boundaries varies between respondents. Some lamenters express that in their own practice, they find following the conventions of the language important. Others evaluate that, in general, a text cannot be considered a lament if it does not contain the special language, as only meeting the conditions of “lament language” marks the text as belonging to the genre. These views were often expressed through constructions that indicate necessity (e.g., “it must...”, “it should...”). Linguistic features are thus not framed as optional stylistic choices but as conditions for authenticity.

- (13) *Ja minulle on tosi tärkeätä, että se kieli on on kaunista ja että se on nimenomaan siinä on itkuvirren piirteitä. Että mä oon vähän semmoinen poliisi, että kun on, on. Meillä on nykyisin siis Suomessa niin monta erilaista erilaista tapaa lähestyä tätä itkuvirttä. Ja minä en kaikesta tykkää. IN04_05*

‘And for me, it is very important that the language is beautiful and that it specifically has the features of a lament. So, I’m kind of a police officer, since we currently have so many different approaches to this lament in Finland. And I don’t like all [of them].’ IN04_05

The use of metaphoric language was a commonly recognized feature amongst the respondents. Metaphors were described in different ways: I interpret references to “using nature imagery”, “poetic language”, and “circumlocutions” as descriptions of metaphoric expression. Metaphors are not only an indicator of belonging to a genre, but respondents also attribute important functions to them. For example, respondents describe metaphoric expression as helping the listener of a lament to “tune into the same frequency with the lamenter” (IN03) and as helping to regulate the feelings associated with lament performance, working like “a diluter, water or turpentine when mixing paint”, making the feeling “easier to work with” (IN05). Metaphoric expression, alongside other poetic elements, is seen as contributing to the ritual function of a lament, as shown in the excerpt (14) below.

- (14) *Itkukieli eroaa mielestäni arkikielestä sen ritualistisen luonteen ja funktion vuoksi. Näen itkukielen ihan omana kielenä, jonka intentio on erilainen ja rituaalitalanteeseen sidonnainen. Itkukieli on koukeroista, usein kaunista ja monipuolista, kuin kirjontaa. Symboliikan, metaforien ja monipuolisuutensa vuoksi itkukielessä on minulle jotain samaa kuin perinne käsitöiden kuvioissa.*
ri64_q08_01

‘Lament language differs from everyday language because of its ritualistic character and function. I perceive the lament language as an independent language that has a different intention tied to its ritualistic occasion. Lament language is intricate, often beautiful, and multifaceted like embroidery. Because of its symbolism, metaphors, and diversity, I see lament language as somewhat similar to traditional handicraft patterns.’ *ri64_q08_01*

In addition to metaphors, alliteration was frequently mentioned as one of the important features. People involved with lament teaching described encouraging the creation of “chains based on alliteration” (IN04) as a central working method in course settings. As Finnish functions as the language of instruction in many contemporary contexts, and participants may not speak Karelian (see Wilce 2011: 576; Tenhunen 2006; Silvonen & Kallio 2023: 48), I interpret that the instruction may guide the participants toward alliteration and metaphors, as these features function as recognizable markers of the genre and are easy to transfer into Finnish-language laments.

One question in the online questionnaire concerned improvisation (Q07). In the responses, improvisation was not framed as necessary in achieving authenticity; many described relying on written text to some degree, for example, writing down topics and using the written notes as a supporting tool. While others express writing a text down and trying to memorize it, respondents also point out that even when a lament is written down or memorized, it does not remain fixed in performance (15) but rather shifts from one performance to another. Thus, improvisation is not required, but the written version is still not always treated as the lament's final form, and the living and shifting form of lament is recognized as one of the features building genre-likeness.

- (15) *Tavallaan se tekstin taso on ikään kun luonnostaso, et eihän ne koskaan, sitte siinä itkutilanteessa, nii ainahan se elää se kieli. Se on tavallaan sellanen valmisteleva taso että se on kirjoitettu tälleen näin. IN03_41*

'In a way, the textual form is like a draft, that they never-, in the situation of lamenting, the language is always changing. It is kind of a preliminary level that it is written down like this.' IN03_41

As mentioned above, following the linguistic elements of the lament register is not directly related to the language choice. When discussing the linguistic elements of laments, speakers often do not specify whether they mean Finnish-language lamenting or lamenting in Karelian; instead, they focus on the poetic elements they associate with laments. Many of the opinions concerning authenticity are related to following the lament register rather than simply whether a lament should be in Karelian or in Finnish. In the following excerpt (16), the interviewee suggests that a lament does not have to be written in Karelian or Ingrian to be recognized as a lament following the Karelian or Ingrian lament tradition, as the register and the poetic features of Karelian or Ingrian lament can be applied across languages.

- (16) *Mun mielestä itkuvirteen kuuluu tietynlainen kieli jotta se on niinku karjalaisen tai inkeriläisen perinteen mukainen itkuvirsi, olipa se kieli sit niinku mikä hyvänsä. IN02_07*

'In my opinion, a certain kind of language belongs to the lament for it to be a lament in accordance with Karelian or Ingrian tradition, regardless of the language.'

IN02_07

Even though multiple respondents express appreciation for a range of lamenting practices, they still distinguish traditional practices from “different” ones, suggesting that the practices that do not follow the traditional register are understood as belonging to a different category (17). In the example (18), the respondent describes non-Karelian laments as *siisti* (‘clean, neat’) and compares them to store-bought Karelian pies. I interpret the metaphorical expression connected to a perceived lesser degree of authenticity: homemade Karelian pies may be coarse and uneven, while the Karelian pies produced in a factory are uniform in shape. The respondent further expresses that in their household, only the husband buys these store-bought Karelian pies, which may indicate a difference in preference.

- (17) *mä haluaisin välttyä sellaselta vastakkainasettelulta et joku on niinku tärkeämpää tai parempaa tai näin että mä ajattelen et se on vaa erilaista* IN02_38

‘I would like to avoid this kind of opposition that something is more important or better or so on, I think that it is just different’ IN02_38

- (18) *Syöväthän kaikki karjalanpiirakoitakin ja niitä tehdään kovin monenlaisia - ehkä suomalaiset, ei-karjalaiset ”siistit” itkut ovat kuin kaupan karjalanpiirakat, joita meille ostaa vain mieheni – vähän minusta salaa.* ri50_q12_02

‘Everyone eats Karelian pies, too, and those are made of many different kinds – maybe Finnish, non-Karelian, “neat” laments are like store-bought Karelian pies, which are bought for us only by my husband – a bit secretly.’ ri50_q12_02

4.1.2.1 Ritual seriousness and suitable contexts

Following the register typical of Karelian lamenting is closely tied to the practice’s ritual dimension, as its features serve specific functions. This understanding is also carried into contemporary practice, where authenticity was discussed in relation to the manner of participating in the tradition. Therefore, the register includes not only the linguistic forms, but also suitable topics and purposes of performing laments. Discussions about linguistic choices are therefore intertwined with considerations of appropriate performance contexts.

When respondents described when and where lamenting is suitable, they often highlighted the tradition’s ritual character. Likewise, when asked about the meanings of laments (Q14), respondents mentioned remembering and maintaining contact with *tuonilmaiset* (‘otherworld’). As illustrated in the excerpt (19), contemporary lamenting is not perceived as existing only

outside of ritual contexts. Instead, the respondents perceive transitional points of life as a natural setting for lamenting.

- (19) *Karjalaisessa itkuperinteessä eri riitit ovat olleet tärkeä paikka itkulle, esim naimisiin meno tai hautajaiset. Mielestäni myös nykypäivänä nämä kaksi paikkaa ovat yleisiä itkun aiheita, varsinkin hautajaiset. Itkun voi toki tehdä melkein mistä vain, mutta karjalaiseen itkuun näkisin että myös nykypäivänä olisi tärkeää että itku on osa karjalaisia riittejä ja yhteisöä nykypäivän kontekstissa esim muutto, merkkipäivä, omalle lemmikilleen. ri31_q13_01*

‘In the Karelian lament tradition, different rites have been important places for laments, for example, weddings and funerals. In my opinion, also in the present day, these two places are common topics for a lament, especially funerals. Sure, a lament can be made about pretty much anything, but I think that for a Karelian lament, also in present days, it would be important that the lament is part of Karelian rites and community, in contemporary contexts [it could be], for example, related to moving, important days, to one’s own pet.’ ri31_q13_01

The discussions about suitable contexts are also connected to ideas of appropriate lament topics and the directionality of lamenting. When boundaries were set in relation to lament topics, respondents argued that the topic of a lament should be meaningful and that a lament should be directed to someone (20). These understandings are visible in the analyzed laments of Section 4.2.2, too.

- (20) *Mutta jokainenhan voi omaksua tavallaan minkä lähestymistavan haluaa. Tuntuu ainakin siltä, että nykyaikana kaikki saa tehdä mitä haluaa, mutta minun mielestä sen pitäisi olla sellainen aihe, joka koskettaa. Jos ajattelen vaikka hautajaisia tai häitä, niin niissä on aina ollut se yksi henkilö, johon se liittyy. Tavallaan se itku, josta itketään, että samalla tavalla vaikka se ei ois henkilö, niin se olisi joku asia, joka koskettaa useampia ihmisiä. Että se ei ole sitä omaa omaa surua. Tottakai se oma suru tulee sieltä jollain tavalla, että sä saat myös itseäsikin siinä osittain terapoitua, mut se ei oo tärkeintä. IN04_27*

‘But everyone is free to adopt the approach that they want. At least it feels like nowadays everyone is free to do whatever they want, but in my opinion, it should be a topic that is touching. If I think of, for example, funerals or weddings, there

was always that one person that the lament was related to. In a way, the lament that is being cried, even if it would not be about a person, that it would be about something that touches multiple people. That it is not just one's own grief. Of course, one's own grief comes through in some way, so you can partly therapize yourself there too, but it is not the most important thing.' IN04_27

The common topics for laments seem to be guided by the need to express emotions, whether personal or communal. Topics may concern personal losses and relationships, but politics, inequality, and ecological crisis are also mentioned in the responses. Among the respondents, crying about one's own life or using lament as a therapeutic tool was sometimes not seen as suitable, since lamenting may be understood as having a communal function that extends beyond individual experience. The boundaries around topic choices are not drawn through direct prohibitions but rather by framing the lamenter as the one who expresses the grief of the community (21). Respondents perceive that this special role comes with certain constraints (22). Therefore, interpret that the ritual seriousness that is attached to lamenting directs the choice of topics: one should not be lamenting about things that are not meaningful to them.

- (21) *Itku on myös taba tuuva ezillä omua tunduo, da suaha yhteizön suru sanoiksi da iäneksi jotta se voiiaan kokie yhessä. Se ei ole midänä modernie päivänlaskumaijen yksilöterapijaa kussa yksilö viijäh yksinäh kunnettahto erilleh omista armahista inehmisistä. Siinä on terapia elementti keralla a se on enemmän yhteizön kuin yksilön terapiaa. Timi Volotinen*

‘A lament is a way to express one's own feelings too, and a way to put the community's grief into words and [give it a] voice, so that it can be experienced together. It is not something [like] the modern Western countries' individualized therapy, where an individual is taken somewhere away from their own beloved people. There is a therapeutic element [in lamenting] too, but it is more for the community rather than for the individual.’ Timi Volotinen

- (22) *On siinä varmaan joitain syvyysasioita, mitä en osaa ehkä sanoittaakaan tässä. Rituaali, muistaminen, yhteys "mysteeriin", tosissaan, vakavasti otettava, läsnäolo, keskustelu... Jotain tällaisia tulee nyt mieleen... Itkun maailma on jotain sellaista, "minkä kanssa ei leikitä" - mikä johtaa siihen, että itkua ei ole hyvä tehdä*

ainoastaan esittävästi. Joku asettautuminen itkijän rooliin täytyy olla.
ri52_q14_03

'Probably there is something about depth, that I maybe might not be able to put into words here. Ritual, remembering, a connection to the "mystery", being sincere, [something to] take seriously, presence, conversation.. Something like this comes to my mind now... The world of a lament is something that "should not be played with" – which leads to that lamenting should not be done only as a performance. [There] must be some kind of positioning into the role of a lamenter.' *ri52_q14_03*

As authenticity can be constructed from multiple overlapping categories that can sometimes contradict each other, it may rather be understood as plural than singular (Haapoja 2017: 67; Fenigsen & Wilce 2012). My analysis suggests that for a lament or a lamenting practise to be perceived as authentic, the three presented dimensions are considered: intergenerational transmission, linguistic form and the register, and the suitability of contexts. Therefore, authentic lament is not created just by using the language in a way that mirrors the older laments, but also through the social pathways through which the tradition is learned and embodied, as well as positioning to lamenting in a way that reflects understanding of the ritual seriousness.

4.2 Language choice and textual analysis

As the respondents answered questions about language choice (Q11, Q12), their responses touched on larger meanings attached to lamenting practices. The following theme, *Language choice and its motivations*, captures negotiations concerning continuity and change. The discussions indicate the perceived meaning and value of the Karelian language in Karelian lamenting practices, illustrate the flexibility of contemporary practices, and present the challenges of transforming the tradition to suit modern contexts. Overall, I interpret the responses as suggesting that honest emotional expression and successful communication are the main motivations behind language choice. These two motivations also relate to the perceived functions of laments, as the language choice seems to be aligned with the lamenter's intention; what is the reason for lamenting, and what a lament is supposed to do.

The second part of the section shifts from metalinguistic discussion to the textual analysis of contemporary lament texts.

4.2.1 Language choice and its motivations

In the questionnaire, participants were asked about the choice of language in lamenting (Q10). Participants reported lamenting in Finnish, Karelian, and in mixed forms where elements from both languages are combined. Language choice was explained through practical and ideological factors. The responses portray diverse understandings of contemporary lamenting practices, as some respondents attach strong value to language choice, while others attribute little to no importance to the question.

For many Karelian speakers, Karelian was the chosen language since it is their mother tongue and the “language of the heart”. In excerpt (23), the respondent further specifies that their chosen language is not Karelian, but Border Karelian. Border Karelia was not a linguistically uniform territory but rather an area where different languages and dialects were in contact and mixed. Thus, the languages spoken in the area differed both from the Eastern dialects of Finnish and the Karelian dialects spoken in Russia. In the area, Finnish Savo dialects and the south-eastern transitional dialects of the Sortavala region were spoken, and in addition, South Karelian, a dialect of Karelian Proper, and Olonets Karelian also influenced one another. Since both Karelian dialects were spoken in the area, the term *rajakarjalaismurteet* (‘Border Karelian dialects’) encompasses both (Massinen, Palander & Koivisto 2024: 23; Uusitupa, Koivisto & Palander 2017: 67, 73, 105). The respondent underlines identifying with this language variety by calling it their mother tongue.

(23) *Minulle itkun kieli on (raja)karjala ja se saa olla vanhaa ja pitääkin olla. Se kieli on oma sisäinen äidinkieli ja samalla itkun kieli. ri52_q08_03*

‘For me, the language of the lament is (Border) Karelian, and it may and should be old. That language is [my] own inner mother tongue and at the same time the language of the lament.’ ri52_q08_03

As illustrated in excerpts (24) and (25), choosing Karelian over Finnish was also based on emotion. Some respondents also noted that Karelian and Finnish sound different, which affects the recognizability and reception of the lament. If Karelian is one's first language, it may naturally enable the most straightforward emotional expression. The preference for Karelian may be linked to the aim of maintaining authenticity that is perceived to be connected to the linguistic form. However, the perceptions of Karelian “feeling right” may be related to the ritual meanings discussed above: as the Karelian language and especially the Karelian lament

language are associated with the communicative functions of the lamenting, other language forms may be perceived as less suitable.

- (24) *Itken aina karjalaksi. En "osaa" itkeä suomeksi. Itkukielen taika on minulle karjalan kielessä: suomeksi itkeminen tuntuu kiusalliselta, epäkunnioittavalta, jopa kornilta. ri64_q10_01*

‘I always lament in Karelian. I “can’t” lament in Finnish. The magic of lament language for me is rooted in the Karelian language: lamenting in Finnish feels awkward, disrespectful, even corny.’ ri64_q10_01

Some respondents described that their lack of proficiency in Karelian led them to lamenting in Finnish. Others expressed a desire to lament in Karelian but felt constrained by limited competence. In these cases, Finnish or a “mixed language” was described as a necessary alternative rather than as the preferred option. Respondents explained that they may add Karelian (lament language) vocabulary into otherwise Finnish laments (25) or intentionally look for Finnish words similar to the ones used in Karelian lament language (26). In addition to inserting traditional Karelian circumlocutions and epithets within otherwise Finnish-language laments, a phonological feature of palatalizing the consonants while performing laments was mentioned.⁴ The descriptions of mixed forms show the laments' desire to follow the Karelian lament register when lamenting in Finnish. For respondents who report not speaking Karelian, partial knowledge of the language may be enough to write a lament that aligns with the participants' perception of a “right kind of” lament text. This suggests that perceived alignment with the style of traditional Karelian laments is not necessarily tied to the use of the Karelian language.

- (25) *Suomen ja karjalan sekoituksella, suomen kieli suuremmassa roolissa koska en karjalan kieltä juuri osaa, mutta olen kokenut tärkeäksi myös lisätä karjalan kielistä itkukieltä mukaan; se kuulostaa ja tuntuu oikeammalta. ri31_10_01*

⁴ Palatalization of the consonants is not limited only to Karelian, since the palatalization of the consonants is also typical for Finnish Savo dialects, spoken in Eastern Finland. However, I interpret that when the respondent IN04 talks about palatalizing and “softening” the consonants in their laments, it refers to bringing Karelian-language elements into laments, which are written with a mix of Karelian and Finnish language elements.

‘[I lament] with a mix of Finnish and Karelian, Finnish [has] more prominent role because I barely know Karelian, but I have found it important to also add lament language in Karelian language; it sounds and feels more right.’ ri31_10_01

(26) *Itkuja tehdessäni pyrin käyttämään vanhoille karjalaisille itkuille tyypillisiä tyylikeinoja. Yritän myös etsiä karjalaisten itkujen tapaista sanastoa ja käyttää niitä suomeksi.* r11_q08_02

‘When creating laments, I aim to use the stylistic means that are typical of old Karelian laments. I also try to look for vocabulary typical of Karelian laments and use them in Finnish.’ r11_q08_02

It should also be noted that since Finnish and Karelian are closely related, they share a significant amount of lexicon and morphosyntactic features. Among the Karelian dialects, the North Karelian dialect of Karelian Proper has developed in close contact with Finnish and shows structural and lexical similarities with it (Sarhimaa 2022: 273). Eastern Finnish dialects and Border Karelian dialects also resemble each other in certain aspects (see Massinen, Palander & Koivisto 2024: 28). For this reason, drawing a clear-cut distinction between Finnish and Karelian is not always possible – nor meaningful – in practice. For example, a respondent (IN05) describes using the personal pronoun *mie* (*I*) in their lament texts, which is normally not a part of their idiolect in everyday speaking situations. This personal pronoun can be interpreted either as a Karelian Proper personal pronoun or as a dialectal variant of Finnish.

Across the responses, the using Finnish was seen as acceptable and sometimes as necessary for the continuation of the tradition (27). At the same time, respondents recognized various challenges related to transferring the Karelian tradition that was once oral into Finnish form. The challenges of shaping the tradition in a form suitable for today's Finnish contexts are not only related to language, but also to the changed cultural context. The difficulty concerns not only language but also the change of broader ways of living and understanding reality. This was also acknowledged by people associated with teaching: the responses illustrated in the excerpts (27) and (28) portray what kind of questions have been involved when bringing the tradition to the Finnish society and Finnish-language environments.

(27) *Alussa meillä oli todella iso kysymys se et miten me niinku ylipäätään voidaan tehdä tätä suomen kielellä ja suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa et miten tää niinku*

ylipäättään voi toimia, eli näitten kysymysten ratkaseminen oli siinä alussa tosi merkittävässä roolissa. IN06_22

‘In the beginning, it was really big question for us that how we can do this at all with the Finnish language and in Finnish society, like how can this work in general, so finding a solution to these questions played a really crucial part in the beginning.’
IN06_22

- (28) *Mutta sitä sitten mietin tosi montakymmentä vuotta, että miten se voisi jatkua. Kun ihmiset ei osaa karjalan kieltä, niin miten tätä perinnettä voisi jatkaa? Ja sitten on tavallaan kehittänyt semmoiset suomen kielellä. IN04_15*

‘But then I was thinking of it for many decades, that how could it go on. When people don’t know the Karelian language, how could the tradition be continued? And then [I] sort of have developed these kinds of [methods] in Finnish language.’
IN04_15

4.2.1.1 Accessibility, Directionality, and the Language of the Heart

Since the respondents perceive the communicative function of the laments as crucial, the language choice was affected by the audience’s ability to understand. Audience, in this case, can refer to the people listening to an on-stage lament performance (29) or the otherworld. If lamenting serves to establish a connection with a community and the deceased, shared language is important, and therefore, language choice can be modified according to the context (30).

- (29) *Siihen aikaan itseasiassa karjalan kieli ei ollu samalla tavalla pinnalla ollenkaa ku nytte että sitte mä pohdin myös tosi paljon sitä et jos mun yleisössä kukaan ei osaa karjalaa nii miten sit taas yleisö ymmärtää niitä mun itkuvirsiä? IN02_10*

‘Back then actually Karelian language was not so visible as it is now, so I was thinking about it a lot that if no one in my audience knows Karelian, how can they understand my laments?’ IN02_10

- (30) - *Mummi ja muut itkijät ovat kertoneet, että edesmenneet ymmärtävät vain itkukieltä. Pitäisikö kieli valita kohdekuulijoiden mukaan? ri50_q11_03*

‘- My grandmother and other lamenters have told that the deceased only understand lament language. Should the language be chosen according to the listeners?’
ri50_q11_03

Language choice was also related to accessibility. The responses expanded to discuss lamenting practices that are not tied to Karelian culture and reflected experiences of operating in multilingual and international contexts. Teachers shared that lament workshops may include participants whose first language is neither Finnish nor Karelian, and in such settings, the language and teaching methods may shift accordingly. The following excerpts (31) and (32) illustrate different teaching approaches: while the respondent IN04 encourages the participants to follow the poetic features of the Karelian lament register regardless of the language, the respondent IN06 uses methods that draw on the common elements across different lament traditions.

- (31) *Tai että jokainen sillä omalla tunnekielellä, että on jo ollutkin englantilaisia tai ruotsalaisia kurssilla. Niin minä olen sanonut, että tekkää omalla kielellä ja yrittäkää löytää. Eli yrittäkää löytää niitä metaforia eli kiertoilmaisuja eri aiheille ja sitten tehdä niille alkusointuketjuja eli samalla kirjaimella alkavia sanoja.*
IN04_16

‘Or that everyone with their own language of emotions, so there has already been some English and Swedish [speakers] in the courses. So I have told [them] that do it in your own language and try to find. Try to find metaphors, circumlocutions for different topics, and then do alliteration-based chains so words that start with the same letter.’ IN04_16

- (32) *Nii sit tuolla ulkomailla opiskellessa mulla on tavallaan muodostunu sellasii tekniikoita jotka ei oo niin sidoksissa karjalaiseen tai suomalaiseen kulttuuriin tai siihen kieleen. Se mikä on edelleen tärkeätä ja on itseasiassa hyvin universaali piirre itkuvirsikulttuureissa on semmonen ruumiillisen muistamisen tapa. Et esimerkiks ku karjalassa puhutaan lapsesta “kallis kannettuni, kantamaiseni, synnyttämäiseni” tai äiti on “ihala imettäjäni” niin se on tämmönen fyysisen muistamisen muoto. Ja ihan sama piirre löytyy vaik kreikkalaisista itkuvirsistä, et siellä kun näitä itkuja jossa poika on kuollu sodassa nii se äiti muistaa sitä poikaa nimenomaan synnyttämisen ja hoivan muodostamien muistojen kautta eli tällänen*

ruumiillinen muistamisen tapa. Ja se on jos joku on universaalia niin se. Siinä ollaan hyvin vahvasti ihmisyydessä kiinni, ihmisyyden ytimessä. IN06_32

‘So then, during my studies abroad, I have formed these kinds of techniques that are not so much tied to Karelian or Finnish culture or language. The thing that is still important – and actually a very universal trait in lamenting cultures – is this way of remembering through the body. So, for example, when in Karelia they are speaking about a child as “my beloved carried, one I gave birth to” or the mother is “my sweet birthgiver,” so this is a form of this kind of physical remembering. And the same trait is found, for example, in Creek laments, so when there [are] these laments where a son has died in a war, then the mother remembers the son through birth-giving and the memories formed by caregiving, so this kind of physical way of remembering. And if something is universal, then that. In that we really touch humanity, the core of humanity’ IN06_32

In addition to the word *tunnekieli* (‘language of emotion’), words such as *sydämen kieli* (‘language of the heart’), *oma kieli* (‘one’s own language’), *äidinkieli* (‘mother tongue’) were mentioned in the answers. The idea that the language choice should be free was often based on the idea of a “language of the heart,” suggesting that lament is best expressed in one’s first or emotionally closest language.

(33) *Oma tunnekieli lienee paras. ri11_q11_01*

‘One’s own language of emotions is likely to be the best.’ R11_q11_01

Some participants see that language choice should be aligned with the history of tradition, and lamenting happening in languages other than Karelian should be recognized as representing something other than traditional Karelian lamenting. In interpret that the verb *pidäizi/pitäisi* (‘should-CON’) in the excerpts (34) and (35) is used to express necessity, which is softened with a conditional.

(34) *Ku pagizemma karjalazesta perindehestä, sen pidäizi aivin olla karjalaksi da vie itkuloin kielellä. Muiten se ei ole elävyä kulttuurua vuan tyhjä ezittämistä ri19_q11_01*

‘When we are talking about Karelian tradition, it should always be in Karelian and in addition in the language of the laments. Otherwise, it is not living culture but empty expression’ ri19_q11_01

- (35) *Jos itketään perinteisiä itkuja, ne pitäisi esittää karjalan kielellä, riippuu mistä päin Karjalaa itkut ovat peräisin. ri46_q11_01*

‘If traditional laments are being cried, they should be performed in Karelian language, depending on where in Karelia the laments are from.’ ri46_q11_01

The discourse concerning inclusion and accessibility is not only related to working in multilingual environments, but also to non-Karelian-speaking Karelians. Respondents emphasized that not all Karelians speak Karelian and that the lack of heritage-language competence should not exclude individuals from participating in lamenting. Identification with both Finnish and Karelian ethnicities should be acknowledged. In addition, the trauma of assimilation and losing one's heritage language is mentioned, and that drawing clear borders that exclude Finnish language lamenters can be an act of emotional violence. The respondent addresses the possibility of overlapping Finnish and Karelian identities in the excerpt (36). As identifying as Karelian is generally understood as being based on one's own self-identification, no one should be restricted from participation, especially without knowing how they self-identify.

- (36) *En lähtizi suoraan sanomah, jotta suomalaiset ei voitais itkuloa luadie libo itkie iänellä, sen täh ku suomalaisen joukkoh kuulutah äijän karjalazie, kumbazet ei tiijetäh "lasketaanko" heidä karjalaziksri19_q12_02*

‘I wouldn’t directly say that Finns couldn’t compose laments or cry with voice, since inside the group of Finns also belong many Karelians, who don't know if they are “counted” as Karelian.’ ri19_q12_02

The theme *Language choice and its motivations* shows that the discussion of the languages of (Karelian) laments encompasses multiple values that define contemporary lament discourse. Firstly, language choice reflects the various meanings of Karelian identities in Finland and connects to the discussions of ownership, authenticity, and proper use of the tradition (see Hytönen-Ng 2023; Silvonen & Kallio 2023; Silvonen 2026). The discussed

importance of the Karelian language in the lamenting practice describes the values where the practice is seen as tightly connected with Karelian culture and language. Even though the wish to preserve the traditional forms is expressed by some participants, at the same time, the descriptions of multilingual lamenting describe the flexibility of lamenting practices and the perceived importance of the tradition's ability to adapt to keep existing in contemporary Finland.

4.2.2 Textual analysis of laments

After examining the metalinguistic talk related to contemporary laments, this section will focus on actual realizations of linguistic form in contemporary lamenting practices.

It should be noted that the genre-markers of a lament are not limited to linguistic form but also include the setting in which a lament is performed, where genre-likeness may be built using multiple means, including sobbing, creaky voice, and other characteristics related to the laments' bodily expression and affects (e.g., Silvonen & Stepanova 2020). As no audio or video recordings were included in the data, the analysis in this chapter is limited to textual features and to how they contribute to the construction of lament as a recognizable register. The chapter asks how these textual features function in the laments, what kinds of meanings they produce, and how they position contemporary lamenting in relation to the archival practices.

The chosen laments illustrate the topic choices and functions that are discussed in Sections 4.1.3 and 4.4. The excerpts have been selected to illustrate the linguistic features discussed in the analysis and to introduce the diverse forms of laments in Finland.

4.2.2.1 Contemporary laments in Karelian

The analyzed laments written in Karelian build their expression through formulaic language typical of Karelian laments. The vocabulary and expressions found in laments are not used in everyday speech, and they have developed specifically within the genre (see A. Stepanova 2012). For this reason, the language of the following laments should be analyzed from the perspective of Karelian lament language.

Karelian laments analyzed are numbered as follows: L1: *Itku Äidin Haudalla*⁵ and L2: *Ystävän itku*⁶. Both laments index the genre of Karelian laments not only through language choice but also through alliteration, parallelism, and traditional circumlocutions. Genre recognizability is therefore constructed through a combination of linguistic and stylistic

⁵ 'Lament on the Grave of a Mother' by Noora Kauppila

⁶ 'Friends' lament' by Emmi Kuittinen

features, and the laments illustrate how the genre features are used in maintaining continuity with older Karelian laments.

The directionality of the laments is expressed within the first poetic lines, as they both begin by addressing someone. The following excerpts portray the use of the avoidance register typical of Karelian laments. In both excerpts, the first poetic lines contain circumlocutions. In the excerpt (L1_01), *ihala ilduigäne ijättäjä* ('sweet evening-aged nurturer') and *armozeni* ('beloved-DIM-1SG.POSS') and *kandajaženi* ('carrier-DIM-1SG.POSS'), both in diminutive forms and containing the first-person possessive suffix, are used to refer to the mother. These morphological features typically express close relations between the addresser and addressee and indicate honour (e.g., E. Stepanova 2017: 248; Wilce & Fenigsen 2015). The verb *kuannutella* ('awaken-FREQ', derived from *kuonnuttoa*) is in frequentative form and expresses the lament's ritual character, as it refers to awakening the deceased at a memorial meal or addressing them at the grave (A. Stepanova 2012: 142; E. Stepanova 2014: 133). The formula of awakening appears exactly in the same form in the lament of Klaudia Ivanovna Mihailova (SKNA 6593: Virtaranta & Virtaranta 1999: 30).

(L1_01) *Vuotaz opin kuannutella nemmil pädövil päiväzil, ihala ilduigäne ijättäjä,*

'Wait, I'm trying to awaken on you this beautiful day, sweet evening-aged nurturer'

kallis armozeni / Kandajaženi

'Beloved love / the one who carried me'

The lament L2 uses a traditional avoidance register by referring to a female friend as different types of birds (L2_01). In Karelian laments, the circumlocutions for young women were often based on the names of different bird species, such as 'chicken' and 'duck' (A. Stepanova 2012: 123, 183). *Kazvindoikanazeni*, *sorzazeni*, and *anhelini* are marked with the first-person possessive suffix *-ni*. These suffixes are used to mark the referent as "one's own", drawing social lines (Stepanova 2017: 284). *Kazvindoikanazeni* and *sorzaseni* are diminutive forms (*-ze*, *-se*). In addition, the lament starts with an interjection *oi* ('oh'). Interjections are considered a part of the lament register, and they often function in expressing the affect, maintaining rhythm, and segmenting the poetic lines. Interjection *oi* can start a new poetic line, and its typical placement in laments is in front of a circumlocution being used for a person who

is central in the lament, meaning the one lamented about or addressed (E. Stepanova 2017; 69, 97; Silvonen 2020; Silvonen 2020; Silvonen & Stepanova 2019).

(L2_01) *Oi kaunis kazvindoikanazeni / armas abie anhelini*

‘Oh my chicken-who-grew-with-me / My lovely sorrowful angel

da čoma sorzazeni

‘And my beautiful duck’

In the analyzed Karelian-language laments, circumlocutions are not only used to refer to external referents. Traditional epithets such as *kylmäne* (‘cold’) and *palehtunut* (*apeutunut*, ‘sorrowful’ or ‘frozen’) are combined with nouns such as *naine* (‘woman’) and used to refer to the lamenter’s ego, as visible in the excerpt (L2_02). The circumlocutions used for one’s ego would be built similarly in all regions of Karelia: a negative epithet such as *imeh* (‘grieving’) could be used alone, or a noun would be combined with negative epithets (A. Stepanova 2012: 55). Throughout the lament L2, different circumlocutions are used for the ego of the lamenter, such as *vilu vierijäine* (‘cold sorrowful; roaming’) and *imehtynyt eläjäni* (‘sorrowful; surprised person.1SG.POSS’) (see Appendix 6). The L1 uses the epithet *vierehtynnyäle* (‘sorrowful-ALL’) to refer to oneself. The poetic lines in the excerpt (L1_02) portray how the lament uses archival laments, this time combining lines from two laments of Klaudia Ivavnova Mihailova (SKNA 6593: Virtaranta & Virtaranta 1999: 20, 24, 34).

(L2_02) *kyzyn kylmäne naine tugie tulizih tuskasih*

‘I’m asking cold woman for support in fiery pain’

pakičen palehtunut naine parembie eloksuzie

‘I’m begging sorrowful woman better life’

(L1_02) *N-olledgo ylen äijjäl suuttunnuh konsa ed vierehtynnyäle ñi midä virkkele?*

‘Are you upset with me since you are not speaking to me?’

Ed ñi konzu olluh , vaivane vaikkaine, ainos kiurukiälyzil kitšerdelit

‘You never were, poor silent, you always sang with a tongue of a lark’

Alliteration repeats in the L2, as the words of a poetic line often start with the same phoneme. In the following poetic lines (L2_03), the avoidance register is used to refer to the female friend and to a child with the words *armahan aigomazen* ('beloven-GEN intended-DIM-GEN') and *ainovazen ajateltuzen* ('only-DIM-GEN thought one-DIM-GEN'). According to A. Stepanova (2012: 98), both words are used as circumlocutions for children. Further, in excerpt (L2_04), the child is referred to with a circumlocution *livutetun* ('upbringed-GEN'), the friend with *linduzellani* ('bird-DIM-ALL-1SG.POSS'), and the lamenter's ego with *imehtynyt eläjäni* ('sorrowful living-1SG.POSS'). In the (excerpt L2_03), the frequentative verb *andelizin* ('give-FREQ-COND', derived from *andoa*) is used.

The excerpt (L2_04) suggests that the used dialect is the South Karelian variety of Karelian Proper, since the consonant *d* is voiced, and the first-person personal pronoun is realized in the form *mie* instead of Olonets Karelian *minä*. In the words *armahalla abiella anhelillani* and *linduzellani*, the Karelian Proper syncretic adessive-allative case marker -lla is visible.

(L2_03) *andelizin armahalla abiella anhelillani*

'I would give to my beloved sorrowful angel'

armahan aigomazen, ainovazen ajateltuzen

'a beloved child, the only one in thoughts'

(L2_04) *luadizin livutetun linduzellani mie imehtynyt eläjäni*

'I would make a child for my bird, me sorrowful human'

L2 uses semantic parallelism in its expression: the same semantic content is expressed in the lament in multiple different poetic lines, as shown in the excerpt (L2_05). In addition, the same circumlocutions that are built on phonetic alliteration repeat throughout the text. Again, the excerpt portrays the marking of the social relations in the circumlocutions used with the first-person possessive suffix *-ni* in the words *anhelillani* ('angel-ALL-1SG,POSS') and *sorzazeni* ('duck-dim-1SG.POSS').

(L2_05) *Mintäh ei ole annettu armahie aigomazie armahalla abiella anhelillani*

'Why no children were given to my beloved sorrowful angel'

ei ole suanun sulie sulgazie čoma sorzazeni

'has no had her own sweet children, my beautiful duck'

kuulu ei kuvottuloi kuvaamazie

‘No sign of woven reflections [children]’

In L1, semantic parallelism through the motif of the silence of the deceased is repeated across the poetic lines. The motif used in lines (L1_03) symbolises the separation and new status of the deceased. The formulas referring to the silence of the deceased appear also in Jeudokia Fedorovna Sofronova’s lament (SKNA 7592; Virtaranta & Virtaranta 1999: 94) in slightly different form: “*G_on naižen kandajažen kai kuldažed i kiälyäd luuhužian i lukkužien tuakse lukkoiltu. G_on naižen kandajažen huuluat kai valgeiloil vahapetsättižil petšätoittu.*” The motif of silence expressed through ‘bony locks’ seems to be an part of Jeudokia Fedorovna Sofronova’s lament idiolect⁷, as it appears in her other laments too (SKNA 7592; SKNA 7593; Virtaranta & Virtaranta 1999: 90, 106). The formulaic expression of the tongue and the lips appears in Klaudia Ivanovna Mihailova’s (SKNA 6593; Virtaranta & Virtaranta 1999: 22) lament as well. As discussed in chapters 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, using archived laments was described as a tool for writing contemporary laments. Based on the analyzed lament L1, it seems that archival laments may guide individual expression and function as a resource in one’s creation, and the composition process can be based on combining elements from multiple archived laments.

(L1_03) *A nämmil ehtožoloil ehtäžil olet kai ehtäzet vaivane vaikkaine.*

‘These evenings, you poor are only silent’

Sinu kuldažed i kiälyäd luuhužian i lukkužien tuakse lukkoiltu,

‘Your golden tongue has been locked behind locks made of bones’

huuluat ka valgeiloil vahapetsättižil petšätoittu

‘lips sealed with white wax seals’

Communication with the otherworld and ritual functions are noticeable in both texts. In L1, the lamenter speaks to the deceased, asks questions, and encourages them to speak and come back to life. L2 is directed to *syndyzet*, as shown in the following excerpt (L2_06). Throughout the lament L2, the lamenter is expressing their own grief on behalf of a friend and addressing

⁷ See E. Stepanova 2014: 6, 224

syndyzet, asking for help in friend's sorrow. If following the traditional classification of laments into ritual and occasional laments, L1 would be positioned in the context of ritual death laments, and L2 would be positioned more in the category of occasional laments.

(L2_06) *Nyt vain ruguolen abuo armahil syndyzil*

‘Now I only pray for help from beloved syndyzet’

annelgua armahimmat aigazet abiella anhelillani

‘Give better times to my beloved sorrowful angel’

4.2.2.2 Contemporary laments in Finnish

The three Finnish-language laments differ considerably from one another in both form and expression. In these laments, belonging to the genre is indicated in distinct ways. L3 *Armon viitta Rukous Ukrainan kansalle ja koko ihmiskunnalle*⁸ concerns the war in Ukraine and resembles a prayer in its form. The second Finnish lament L4 *Harakan haaveet*⁹ builds its expression through alliteration and metaphor, while the third lament, L5 *Metsäitku*¹⁰ combines alliteration and metaphorical language with several traditional linguistic features typically associated with the Karelian lament.

L3 starts with a direct address: as visible in the excerpt (L3_01), the first poetic string is directed to God. The poetic line further continues with a request given in an imperative form: *suojele sinä meitä* (‘protect.IMP you us-PAR’). In traditional Karelian laments, the possessive suffixes are typically in first person singular (e.g., E. Stepanova 2011: 134; E. Stepanova 2014: 57), but in the L3 *taivaallinen isämme* (‘heavenly father-1PL.POSS’), a reference to God, is marked with the first-person plural possessive suffix *-mme*. The next poetic line contains a plural diminutive form *poloisia*, (‘poor-DIM-PL-PAR’), which is used to refer to humankind. The lament's affect is built with the use of sorrowful interjections such as *oi* and *voi*.

(L3_01) *oi taivaallinen isämme, suojele sinä meitä, ettei pahuuden valta saa meistä otetta,*

‘Oh heavenly Father, protect us, so that evil's power won't get a hold of us’

voi meitä poloisia, jos meitä johtaa vallan menettämisen pelko

⁸ Cloak of Mercy a Prayer for the People of Ukraine and the Whole Humankind by Pirkko Fihlman

⁹ Magpies' dreams by Minna Hokka

¹⁰ Forest lament by Emilia Kallonen

‘oh us poor, if we are led by the fear of losing power’

Similarly, L4 has a communicative function, as the excerpt (L4_01) portrays the lament starting with a request: the conditional form of the verb, *kuulisitko* (‘hear-COND-2SG-Q’), signals the speaker's respectful orientation to the addressee. The respect is also expressed with the following circumlocutions, in which the addressee is further referred to as *kuusikkokasvoinen kallis kaikkivaltias* and *suuri siunaajani, suojanantajani* (‘great blessing one-1SG.POSS, giver of protection-1SG.POSS’). Alongside the use of the avoidance register, the circumlocutions function like metaphors: they portray the forest as having a face made of spruces and as a place for seeking refuge. The excerpt also portrays the use of alliteration: while the first poetic line follows strong phonetic alliteration based on first syllables, in the following poetic line, the phonetic alliteration is weak, as it is only based on words starting with the same consonant, *s*.

(L4_01) *Kuulisitko, kuuletko kuusikkokasvoinen kallis kaikkivaltias*

‘Would you hear, do you hear, spruce forest-faced beloved almighty’

Salapuolisilla sijoillasi suuri siunaajani, suojanantajani

‘In your mysterious abodes, my great blessing one, my giver of protection’

Alliteration based on the word-initial syllable is also visible in L5, as illustrated in excerpts (L5_01) and (L5_02) below. The lament L5 follows a narrative style and is structured in sections: the speaker alternates between descriptions based on metaphoric expression, addressing their lover directly, and narrating their inner experiences. When addressing the lover, *ainoani* (only-1SG.POSS) is marked with a first-person possessive suffix. The expression on the lament is metaphoric, and some objects are hidden in circumlocutions: for example, *kahisevaa* (‘rustling-PAR’) and *kilisevää* (‘jingling-PAR’) may be understood as referring to money, as the adjectives portray the physical attributes of the money with the description of the sounds that it makes.

(L5_01) *Harakka hartaimman hauraimman haaveen hautasi haavikkoon.*

‘A magpie buried the most devout, most fragile dream in an aspen grove.’

Himmeni hilpeys, tummeni taivas lemmen ennen lämpimän.

‘Joy dimmed, the sky of love darkened that once was warm with love.’

(L5_02) *En kaipaa kahisevaa, kilisevää, kehuja, ruusupuskaromantiikkaa.*

‘I do not long for rustling, jingling, praise, rose-bush romance.’

Haleja halajan harmauteeni: armahda, ainoani.

‘I yearn for hugs in my grey state: mercy me, my only one.’

The excerpts (L5_03) and (L5_04) indicate that the lamenter’s ego is associated with the magpie that is introduced in the first poetic line. The following poetic lines consist of a description of a fly descending (*lentoni laskussa*), which may be understood as a metaphor for the narrator’s low mood, and further describe a lover caressing their wings (*silitellen siipiäni*), which may be interpreted as a description of physical affection. In the following excerpts, two frequentative verb forms that appear in the lament are visible: *lomaillessa* (‘vacation-FREQ-INF-INE’) and *silitellen* (‘caress-FREQ-INF’).

(L5_03) *Lentoni laskussa lemmityn lomaillessa lemменleikeistä.*

‘My flight is descending as my lover is withdrawing from the love’s play’

Rakkaani rautarinta, kivenkova koiraani

‘My love with a steel heart, male animal hard as stone’

(L5_04) *koskemalla kourillansa kehoani kevyesti, silitellen siipiäni.*

‘by touching my body gently with his hands, caressing my wings.’

A metaphorical expression related to birds is also visible in L4. In the excerpt (L4_02) *poloinen peipponen* (‘poor-DIM chaffinch-DIM’) is used to refer to oneself. Furthermore, the lamenter calls herself *paleltunut piikapuolukkainen*, (‘frozen maid-lingberry-DIM’) in which metaphors typical to Karelian lament language are used in Finnish forms: in traditional Karelian laments *kylmäne*, *kylmäozalline*, *viluozalline*, *kylmäine* are used in forming circumlocutions for the lamenter’s ego. All these words belong to the semantic field expressing feeling or being cold (A. Stepanova 2012: 55-58). Using the word ‘lingonberry’ is also related to the expression of traditional laments: names of berries were typical in White Sea Karelia in forming compound circumlocutions for referring to girls (A. Stepanova 2012: 158). Noticeable here is also the writer’s creative way of forming compound words: the nouns **peilisipalanen* and **piikapuolukkainen* are not conventional lexemes. *Peilisipalanen* is a compound word

created from the nouns *peili* ('mirror') and *palanen* ('piece'). In standard language, these words would be written separately, leaving a space in between. The Finnish expression mirrors traditional circumlocutions for the lamenter's ego, as they would sometimes consist of compound words such as *kargierukkane* ('sorrowful-poor-DIM') and *kylmärukkane* ('cold-poor-DIM'). The created noun *peilisipalanen* is marked with the second-person singular possessive suffix, which communicates the lamenter as belonging to the addressee.

(L4_02) *Minä paleltunut piikapuolukkainen, peilisipalanen*

'I frozen maid-lingonberry, a piece of your mirror'

poloinen peipponen

'poor chaffinch'

The following excerpts (L4_03) and (L4_04) show how the lament follows alliteration in its expression. The teardrop motif in (L4_03) draws on traditional Karelian laments. In L4, the lexical item *kyynelvesilläni* ('tear-water-ADE-1SG.POSS') suggests that a traditional Karelian circumlocution has been adapted to Finnish orthography and morphology. In Karelian laments, equivalent forms include *kyynelvedyzet*, *kyynelvedyset*, and *kyynälvedyöt* (A. Stepanova 2012: 79-80). Visible is a frequentative verb form *kostuttelen* ('water-FREQ.1SG', derived from *kostuttaa*). The excerpt (L4_03) further portrays the relationship between the lamenter and the addressee, as the second-person possessive suffix in the poetic line *vartuin vaaraksi luomakunnallesi* ('grow-PST.1SG danger-TRANSL creation-ALL-2SG.POSS) expresses an action by the lamenter directed toward the addressee. Furthermore, the lines illustrate using environmental worry and guilt as central themes that shape the lament's expression.

(L4_03) *Kun kuumilla kyynelvesilläni kostuttelen*

'When with my hot teardrop-waters I water'

karpalovarpaidasi, pehmeitä pieluksia petäjäpylväilläsi

'your lingonberry-toes, soft pillows in your pine pillars'

(L4_04) *vartuin vaaraksi luomakunnallesi*

'I grew to be a danger to your created world'

Raivasin korvet

‘I cleared the forests¹¹,

raastoin rannat riekaleiksi

‘I tore the beaches to shreds’

Of the three Finnish laments, L3 is the least closely connected to the linguistic register of traditional Karelian laments, as the language used closely resembles everyday spoken language. Instead of using circumlocutions, the text is built on literal expression. As shown in the excerpts (L3_02) and (L3_03), the text mainly consists of declarative sentences, which are used to describe situations.

(L3_02) *Kaikiällä on hätä, pahuus ja pelko on lähtenyt tappaamaan ja tuhoamaan*

‘There’s distress everywhere, evil and fear have gone to kill and destroy’

kansalaisia, jotka elivät rauhassa.

‘citizens, who lived in peace.’

Edustavat avoimuutta, rakentavaa voimaa, arvoja jotka vahvistavat ihmisyyttä.

‘They represent openness, building force, values which strengthen humanity.’

(L3_03) *Herra, monet kaupungit on tuhottu.*

‘Lord, many cities have been destroyed.’

Ihmiset ovat lähteneet evakkotielle.

‘People have left for a route of evacuation.’

Joutuneet jättämään kotinsa ja maansa.

‘Had to leave their homes and countries.’

However, also L3 has a directional orientation: in the text, the Christian God is addressed explicitly through formulations such as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These word choices and especially the lament ending with the word *Amen* makes the reader connect the lament to a register of a Christian prayer.

(L3_04) *Suojaa meitä rakkauden ja armon viitalla löytämään uusi alku*

¹¹ Korpi has an additional meaning of a spruce swamp.

‘Protect us with the coat of love and grace to help find a new beginning,’

uusi polku koko ihmiskunnalle,

‘new path for the full humankind’

tätä me pyydämme isän, pojan ja pyhän hengen nimeen Amen

‘this is what we ask in the name of the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit Amen’

Compared to other analyzed Finnish laments, L4 is more closely connected to linguistic register features associated with Karelian laments. As the earlier excerpts show, the poetic lines are constructed based on alliteration. Other typical features illustrated in the excerpt (L4_04) include the use of avoidance vocabulary, such as *armasmieliset armahtajaiset* (‘beloved-minded-PL merciful ones-DIM-PL’). Both *armasmieliset* and *armahtajaiset* appear in plural forms, and the latter is additionally marked with a diminutive. Furthermore, parallelism is visible through the repetition of poetic lines, and frequentative verbs such as *annelkaa* (‘give-FREQ-IMP.2PL’) are also present.

The mythological level and communicative function are evident in the lament, as the lamenter uses expressions such as *suuret siunaajat salapuolisilla sijoilla* (‘great-PL blessing-PL secret-sided-PL-ADE location-PL-ADE’) when asking for forgiveness and wisdom. *Salapuolisilla* is a non-lexicalised compound word: an adjective formed from *sala-* (‘secret’) and *puolinen* (‘sided’), marked with the adessive case. The excerpt further shows the lamenter turning toward divine powers; however, instead of explicitly referring to *syndyzyt*, the terms used leave more room for interpretation, making the addressee less clearly defined.

(L4_04) *Antakaa anteeksi armasmieliset armahtajaiset,*

‘Forgive us, beloved-minded merciful ones’

Annelkaa anteeksi meille mielettömille,

‘Forgive us, us with no mind’

suuret siunaajat salapuolisilla sijoilla

‘great blessers in secret-sided locations’

Annelkaa meille viisautta varjella elämää

‘Give us the wisdom to protect life’

The Finnish laments focus on different topics that also emerged in the questionnaire responses. L3 concerns the war in Ukraine, is structured as a prayer, and addresses the grief and suffering of a wider collective, here understood as humankind. L4, according to my analysis, addresses a personal experience of an unhappy romantic relationship. L5 expresses an individual experience but simultaneously adopts a more collective orientation by voicing sadness and concern about the condition of forests and nature.

4.2.2.3 Contemporary Laments in Mixed Karelian-Finnish Forms

The two laments, L6 *Armahazelle muamolleni*¹² and L7 *Itku Yhdysvalloille*¹³, analyzed here, combine elements from both Karelian and Finnish. In both texts, this mixed form is visible in the combination of Karelian and Finnish lexemes, especially with the embedded use of Karelian lament-language avoidance vocabulary and epithets within otherwise Finnish vocabulary and grammar. Apart from the use of circumlocutions, the other linguistic elements of the lament register are used similarly as in the Karelian and Finnish laments introduced before – through metaphors, possessive suffixes, alliteration, parallelism, frequentative verbs, and diminutive forms. The analyzed laments differ in their topics and orientations, as L6 expresses personal grief, while L7 voices a more collective pain by addressing global inequality.

Excerpts (L6_01) and (L6_02) show that in the lament, ‘mother’ receives six different circumlocutions: *kallis kantajani* (‘beloved carrier-1SG.POSS’), *suloinen synnyttäjäni* (‘sweet birthgiver-1SG.POSS’), *kaikenajat kaipaamani* (‘perpetually-PL missed-1SG.POSS’), *armas emoseni* (‘beloved mother-1SG.POSS’), *kaunehen kevätperho* (‘beautiful spring-butterfly’), *kultahinen keijusiipi* (‘golden fairy-wing’) *oma sydänkäbyseni* (‘own heart-pine-DIM-1SG.POSS’). Many of the laments' circumlocutions follow the traditional Karelian avoidance register: the mother is referred to with nouns derived from verbs; circumlocutions such as *kantaja* (‘carrier’, from *kantaa*, ‘to carry’) and *synnyttäjä* (‘birthgiver’, from *synnyttää*, ‘to give birth’). The deverbal agentive nouns are typical of circumlocutions for mother in Finnic lament vocabularies. In Karelian laments, the circumlocutions for mother are built based on verbs expressing different acts and responsibilities attached to motherhood and the role of a mother (Nenola-Kallio 1982: 214-215; A. Stepanova 2012: 28). In the lament excerpts (L6_01) and (L6_02), these deverbal agentive nouns are further marked with a first-person singular possessive suffix, and the noun *oma* (‘own’) which expresses the family relationship between

¹² For my beloved mother by Jaana Suviniitty

¹³ Lament for the United States by Emmi Kuittinen

the lamenter and the addressee. Word *sydänpäyseni* ('heart-pine-DIM-1SG.POSS') (Finnish *sydänpäy*, Karelian *šeänpäy*, *šiänpäy*, *syönpäy*, *syväinpäy*), a term of endearment, is made further softer with a diminutive form and a first-person possessive suffix.

(L6_01) *Kallis kantajani, Suloinen synnyttäjäni, Kaikenajat kaipaamani*

'My beloved carrier, My sweet birthgiver, My perpetually missed'

(L6_02) *Armas emoseni, Kaunehen kevätperho*

'my beloved mother, beautiful spring-butterfly'

Kultahinen keijusiipi, Oma sydänpäyseni

'golden fairy-wing, my own heart-pine'

The first three poetic lines of L7 reveal linguistic traits typical of Karelian laments: as shown in the excerpt (L7_01), the lament starts with addressing someone with the lines containing a frequentative verb: *annahan mie rupielen* ('let.IMP.2SG-PTCL me start-FREQ-1SG'). Later in the lament, frequentative verbs such as *peruutella* ('reverse-FREQ') *viimottaa* ('rain-FREQ') *lehautella* ('flame') and *yritellä* ('try-FREQ') are used (see Appendix 10). The interjection *oi* ('oh') builds and transmits affect, and the following circumlocution *vaimala vartuvuoni* ('sorrowful body-1SG.POSS) refers to the lamenter's ego. Further, the circumlocution *Apeamielisen Amerikan alahaisia allimarjaisia* ('sorrow-minded-GEN America-GEN sorrowful-PL-PAR bird-berry-DIM-PL-PAR') following phonetic alliteration is used to refer to the citizens of The United States. *Allimarja* ('bird-berry') is a traditional circumlocution used for a (non-married) girl (A. Stepanova 2012: 55).

(L7_01) *Annahan mie rupielen, oi vaimala vartuvuoni*

'Let me start now, oh my sorrowful body'

Huokaelen huolellisesti näitä huomisen huoliani

'Sighing with care my sorrows of tomorrow'

Apiemielisen Amerikan alahaisia allimarjaisia

'Sorrowful America's sorrowful bird-berries'

Alliteration is used throughout the L7, as most of the laments' poetic strings contain alliteration. In the excerpt (L7_02), the Karelian conjunction *kuni* ('as long as') is used at the beginning of the poetic string, which is followed by phonetic alliteration based on the first syllables of the words.

(L7_02) *Kuni haluavat hallita hartaasti haisevilla hataroilla haluillansa*

‘until they want to rule devoutly with their stinky flimsy desires’

In the lament L6, the lamenter's ego is concealed with the words *kurjan vartuoni* ('poor-GEN body-1SG.POSS') and *kurja raukka* ('miserable poor one'). *Kurja varduo* is a formulaic circumlocution used for a lamenter's ego in the Seesjärvi region (A. Stepanova 2012: 56). In addition to the circumlocutions, the excerpt (L6_02) illustrates the laments' vocabulary, which consists of words existing parallel in both Karelian and Finnish languages. In many of these cases, the vowels such as *aa* and *ää* appear as long vowels instead of diphthongs (Finnish *maailma* – Karelian *moailma/muailma* 'the world').

(L6_03) *Miksi jätit kurjan vartuoni*

‘Why did you leave my poor body’

Tänne hyisiin hyhmiin yksin elämään

‘In these cold slushes to live alone’

Kurja raukka ympär maailman

‘Miserable poor one around the world’

Olen tallanut tainnuttaakseni ikäväni

‘I have walked to get rid of my longing’

In the following excerpt (L6_04), Karelian lexical items such as the conjunction *da* ('and') and the noun *bunukkasesi* ('grandchild-DIM-2SG.POSS') are used. The word *kallehet* ('beloved-PL'), which also exists in the Finnish language, is recognizable as Karelian by its inflected form (Finnish *kalliit*, Karelian *kallehet*). Again, the lamenter's ego is concealed with a circumlocution *kurjavarduoni* ('miserable body-1SG.POSS'). After the verb *katso* (in Finnish 'look.3SG.IMP', in Karelian has an additional meaning of 'protect') the following

personal pronoun *meitä* ('we-PAR') may be understood to refer to the person lamenting and their children, since the lament is directed to the lamenter's mother.

(L6_04) *Katso meitä kurjavarduoni*

'Look at us, my miserable body'

Da kallehet bunukkasesi

'And your beloved grandchildren'

In both analyzed Karelian-Finnish laments, communication with *syndyzet* is present: in the excerpt (L6_04), a request for an easier life is proposed to the *syndyzet*, and in the excerpt (L6_05) *tuonilmaisissa* ('otherworld-PL-INE') is mentioned. In this example, the bird analogy is visible in words such as *lentosi tuonilmaisissa* ('flight-1SG.POSS otherworld-PL-INE') and *ikävälintusi* ('sorrow-bird-2SG-PL'). The mythological elements in L7 form out of the direct connection with *syndyzet*: In (L7_02), *syndyzet* is asked to give bravery to humankind to help the weaker in need.

In the following excerpts, both laments combine elements of Finnish and Karelian languages. In the excerpts (L6_05) and (L6_06), Karelian language is visible in lexical items such as *kebien* ('easy-GEN'), *murginalle* ('meal-ALL'), and again, conjunction *da* ('and'). The lexical items used, both Finnish and Karelian, can behave according to either Finnish or Karelian morphology: some words follow Finnish morphology, such as *uneen* ('sleep-ILL'), and some follow Karelian morphology, such as *kaikil* (all-ALL). Some lexical items that exist in parallel in Finnish and Karelian may have a different semantic meaning in Karelian: in the excerpt (L6_05), the compound word *sulasieluazi* ('sweet-soul-1SG.POSS') has the word *sula* (Finnish 'melted' 'liquid', 'running'), which in Karelian semantically extends to positive adjectival meanings such as good, gentle, and sincere (KKS). In excerpt (L7_03), the mixing of Karelian and Finnish language elements is achieved with the inclusion of Karelian lexical items that are part of the lament avoidance lexicon, such as *kallehet syndyzet* ('great-PL divine powers-PL') and *alahaisille allimarjaisille* ('sorrowful-PL-ALL bird-berry-PL-ALL'). Otherwise, the poetic lines are written in Finnish, which is recognizable from the morphological elements (such as the inflection of the nouns in plural, such as *rakkautta* ('love-PAR'), whose inflection would be *rakkahutta - rakkahuttu* in Karelian), Finnish lexicon and orthography, and the long vowel *aa* instead of diphthongs.

(L6_05) *Suokoon suuret syndyzet*

'May the great syndyzet grant'

Kebien elon meille kaikil

'Easy life to all of us'

(L6_06) *Tehkööt ne lentosi tuonilmaisissa kebieksi*

'May they make you flight in otherworld light'

Huuhtokoon huoliaisesi ja ikävälintusi

'Rinse your worries and your sorrow-bird'

Ne eläissäsi kurittivat sulasieluazi

'Those, while you lived, punished your sweet-soul'

Jottet murginalle da uneen kyennyt

'So that you weren't able to eat or sleep'

(L7_03) *Oi armahat kallehet syndyzet*

'Oh beloved precious syndyzet'

Antakaa meille kaikille alahaisille allimarjaisille

'Give to us all, sorrowful bird-berries'

Rohkeutta roimasti roihauttaa

'Bravery to ingnite in great amount'

Rakkautta kaikille rauhan raajarikoille

'love to all the cripples of peace'

4.2.2.5 Continuity and change in contemporary laments

The textual analysis supports the respondents' descriptions of lament language as a form distinct from everyday speech. The analyzed laments portray that in lament texts this distinction is constructed through features such as circumlocutions, frequentative verbs, metaphoric expression, alliteration, parallelism, and possessive suffixes. The "gentle expression" described by respondents is realized through the frequent use of diminutive forms.

One respondent (IN04) identified posing questions as a central element of lament texts; this feature recurs in the analyzed laments, where questions appear often.

The textual analysis shows that plural forms, possessive suffixes, and frequentative verbs are often used. These features were not mentioned in the responses at all. However, multiple respondents described that in lament language, the words are “made longer”, which is a description that suits both frequentative verb forms and diminutivized nouns with possessive suffixes. Although possessive suffixes and frequentative verb derivatives were not directly named in the questionnaire and interview answers, their use in the analyzed laments suggests that contemporary lament composers recognize them in practice as elements that contribute to the formation of the lament register.

At the same time, the analyzed material shows that these linguistic features do not have to be realized uniformly. Contemporary laments can be constructed through different combinations and degrees of traditional elements. Recognizability as a lament is not tied to the chosen language alone. As laments of the Finnic peoples share multiple features, many of the features associated with Karelian laments appear across different lamenting traditions (E. Stepanova 2014; E. Stepanova 2017). Thus, features such as parallelism and the use of avoidance vocabulary cannot be attached to only Karelian laments.

The analysis shows that “lamentness” can be built through multiple features, and these features can be used selectively. Depending on the aims of the writer, a contemporary lament may resemble a traditional Karelian lament very closely, for example, by building its expression from language and formulas adopted directly from earlier laments, or it may take a freer form. For marking the genre of laments in the text, sorrow interjections like *oi* (‘oh’) or formulations such as “poor me” and “poor us” can be enough. The mixed forms reflect particularly well what also appears in the questionnaire data: language mixing occurs, for example, through the insertion of Karelian circumlocutions and epithets into otherwise Finnish-language texts, as well as using Karelian lexical items alongside Finnish ones. When mixing languages, the poetic lines produced maintain their grammaticality (e.g., Poplack 1980).

The analyzed laments also reflect the belief world ingrained in them. Apart from L4, all analyzed laments contain some level of communication with the otherworld, divine powers, the deceased, or other greater powers. The belief worlds of laments are also visible in the repetition of bird motifs: birds appear in the laments at the level of circumlocutions, but also L6 refers to *ikävälinnut* (‘sorrow-birds-PL’) and compares the deceased mother to a butterfly. These elements are typical of Karelian laments, as in vernacular beliefs, birds were seen as messengers operating between two worlds, and the deceased were believed to visit the living

in the form of butterflies (E. Stepanova 2015a: 13; Frog 2020; Söderholm 1989: 179–181; E. Stepanova 2011:133, 138.).

4.3 Protection, ownership, and responsibility

The field of contemporary lamenting in Finland has been described as having an “ongoing dispute about the ownership of Karelian laments.” Central questions concern who is allowed to lament and in which contexts lamenting is perceived as appropriate (Silvonen & Kallio 2023: 40–41). As Silvonen (2026: 117) notes, the field is marked by divergent understandings of lamenting, which may create friction: “For example, for some, lamenting is self-expression that aims for cathartic release, while for others, it is upholding Karelian culture.” The theme *Protection, ownership, and responsibility* was formed to capture the boundary work concerning who is allowed to lament and under what conditions.

Questions of ownership surfaced especially in responses about taking Karelian lamenting beyond Karelian contexts – for example, using lament as a therapeutic tool for audiences beyond people with Karelian backgrounds. The interviewees also addressed this topic, and even when they did not articulate a clear stance, they often discussed ownership in relation to ethical questions involved in positioning themselves as teachers. In the discussion related to boundaries, the concept of responsibility surfaces frequently. Responsibility seems to be tied to positioning oneself ethically within the tradition, and the following analysis further outlines what this means in practice and how the participants aim to achieve it.

4.3.1 (Karelian) Lament as universally available

A large part of the respondents treated lament as universally available, regardless of the lamenter’s background. This openness was rooted in the fact that laments exist in many cultures, and a person does not need to place their own lamenting practice strictly within the Karelian lamenting frame. Excerpt (37) demonstrates how some respondents frame laments as a wider entity, of which Karelian lamenting forms one branch.

(37) *Äänellä itku ei ole vain karjalainen perinne vaan sitä on ollut niin lähikansoilla kuin eri kansoilla ympäri maailman, jotka esittävät sitä omilla kielillään omine erityispiirteineen. ri31_q11_02*

’Crying with a voice is not only a Karelian tradition but it has existed within the close kindred peoples, and peoples around the world, who [all] perform it in their own languages and characteristics.’ ri31_q11_02

One group of respondents was broadly open to anyone lamenting within a clearly Karelian frame, regardless of the practitioner's background. This openness was often justified through a discourse of sharing (38), sometimes supported by analogies to other widely shared Karelian cultural practices, such as baking Karelian pies (39).

(38) *Kyllähän itkut olivat alkujaan terapiaa, joten ne kuuluivat kaikille. Niin on nytkin, vaikka aika ja kulttuuri, jossa elämme on kaukana Karjalasta. ri46_q12_02*

‘Laments were originally therapy, so they were for everyone. So it is now as well, even though the time and culture where we are living is far away from Karelia.’
ri46_q12_02

(39) *Pitää olla vapaus kuten karjalanpiirakan leipomiseen ri26_q12_01*

‘[One] must have the freedom [to lament], such as to bake a Karelian pie’
ri26_q12_01

Participants also noted that for a tradition to remain alive, it must adapt to new forms and shifting contexts. Although some responses criticize neo-lamenting, the changes the tradition is undergoing are often approached with acceptance and interest. Setting tight boundaries or positioning oneself as someone who can tell others what to do was generally avoided, and drawing strict lines in relation to participation was seen as something negative, as the excerpt (40) portrays.

(40) *Ei mikään instanssi pysty rakentamaan kontrollikoneistoa, joka vahtii kaikkia vaikka nyt maailmalla tuotettuja teknobiisejä, jossa vedetään äänellä itkua. Mistä tulisi sellainen tarve paimentaa muita? Sehän olisi ihan kauheaa ja kaiken kukkuraksi ilotonta. ri52_q12_02*

‘No institution can build a control mechanism that supervises all, for instance, currently produced techno songs in the world that contain crying with a voice. Where would this kind of need to shepherd others stem from? That would be totally awful and on top of everything, joyless.’ ri52_q12_02

Cultural exchange was presented as something that can be positive; this was discussed not only in relation to Karelians but also to other minority groups. IN06 raised a concern about the

discussion of cultural appropriation turning against itself in its purpose (41): if strict borders of ownership and the fear of crossing them stop people from trying to understand other cultures, the division between groups may grow.

- (41) *Mutta että tää ilmiö meidän maailman ajassa et meillä kulttuurin puolella, niinku tänäpäivänä esimerkiksi sibelius-akatemiassa on kansanmusiikin osastolla semmosia opiskelijoita jotka ei koe et heillä on oikeutta opiskella vaikka saamelaista joikua tai karjalaisii runonlauluja enää ja tää on musta ihan järkyttävää et se on menny näin pitkälle. Et tietysti appropriaatio on kysymys erikseen mut se että pelätään opiskella, pelätään oppia ymmärtämään toista kulttuuria niinku loukkaamisen pelossa nii se vaan syventää sitä etäisyyttä kansojen välissä. Et mehän nimenomaan tarvittas enemmän sitä, meidän täytyis enemmän oppia toisiltamme et me ymmärrettäs toisiamme, ja sen ymmärryksen kautta me aletaan ymmärtää niitä rajoja et mikä on loukkaavaa ja mikä ei. Mut jos me ei enää uskalleta tutustua toisiimme niin sehän on ihan hirveetä* IN06_48

'But this phenomena in our world's time that we [have] in the sphere of culture, today, for example, in Sibelius Academy there are in the department of folk music these kinds of students who do not feel like they have the right to study, for instance Sámi joik or Karelian Kalevala-Metric Oral Poetry anymore and I perceive this as shocking that it has gone so far. Of course, appropriation is a separate question, but the thing that [people are] scared to study, scared to learn to understand another culture, in the fear of insulting, leads to the distance between people growing. Because we precisely would need more of that, we should learn more from each other so that we could understand each other, and through that understanding we start to understand the borders better, what is insulting and what is not, but if we don't dare to get to know each other anymore, then that is really horrifying.'

IN06_48

4.3.2 Boundary making and conditional participation

Questions related to lamenting in Finnish settings and themes of cultural appropriation were acknowledged across the material, both among respondents identifying as Karelian and those positioned outside the community. Respondents pointed out that there is no established Finnish lament tradition to draw on. This means that, in practice, contemporary lamenting in Finland is often anchored in Karelian models regardless of the practitioner's ethnic identity. One reason

is that the most visible organizer of lament trainings, *Äänellä Itkijät ry*, explicitly operates within a Karelian framework (e.g., Wilce 2011). As a result, participants might become confronted with questions of cultural appropriation. Respondents acknowledge the injustice Karelians have faced in Finland and therefore do not approach participation in a minority tradition in Finnish contexts as ethically neutral or uncomplicated, and the critical debate in relation to the topic is perceived as justified (42).

(42) *Varmaan karjalaisilla on siitä, tai sanotaan ainaki osalla, on siitä oikeutus olla jyrkkää mieltä. IN01_37*

‘Probably the Karelians have, or let’s say at least some [Karelians], have the right to have a strong opinion about it.’ IN01_37

The respondents’ careful stance on the topic signals a high level of respect for the tradition. Worries about the misuse of the tradition are both internal and external, as the respondents reflect on their own practice and whether it is done ethically or not, but also comment on the practices implemented by others. The careful attitudes and concerns of misuse may stem from multiple sources. First, as the cultural practice is highly valued, people want to protect it: contemporary applications may be viewed as distorting the “right” way of approaching laments. Second, as the discussions about cultural appropriation have raised, the concerns may relate to wanting to avoid judgment from the outside. Third, the ritual and religious meanings attached to the tradition may demand a respectful approach, as the wrong approach may be perceived as dangerous or leading to unsuccessful communication.

Overall, practitioners consider these questions when reflecting on their own practice. This has resulted in the respondents wanting to specify the terminology used: respondents described making the distinction between laments and Karelian laments visible in their word choices: as the excerpt (43) illustrates, using the word *itkuvirsi* (‘lament’) instead of Karelian *äänellä itkeminen* (‘crying with a voice’) places the practice in a broader, less culturally specific frame. As the IN02 expresses that referring to the genre of laments instead of the Karelian practice is “safer”, being cautious with the terminology may be related to the wish to avoid accusations of cultural appropriation.

(43) *Että aiemmin mä sanoin että mun itkut on äänellä itkemistä ja käytin sitä sanaa koska mä halusin näyttää jotenkin sen kunnioituksen siihen karjalaiseen perinteeseen. Mutta sitte kun muutamia vuosia sitten alko keskustelut liittyen*

kulttuuriseen omimiseen ja karjalaiseen kulttuuriin ja itkuvirsiin. Nii sit mä rupesin miettimään että tää voidaan myös kokea loukkaavaksi et jos mä kutsun itseäni äänellä itkijäksi ja sitte mulla on kuitenkin myös siellä kaikkia tämmösiä nykyaikasia tulkintoja ja miten mä oon sitä tehny ja näin nii sit mä oon ajatellu et se itkuvirsi on tavallaan sanana turvallisempi IN02_29

‘So, before I said that my laments are ‘crying with voice’ and I used that word because I wanted to somehow show my respect for the Karelian tradition. But then, some years ago, these conversations regarding cultural appropriation and Karelian culture and laments started. So, then I started to think that this may be experienced as insulting; if I call myself “one who cries with voice,” and then I also have all these modern interpretations in there, and how I have done it, and so on. So, then I thought that ‘lament’ as a word is kind of safer.’ IN02_29

Lamenting was sometimes perceived as inseparable from Orthodox religion (ri50) and, as illustrated in excerpt (44) below, deeply associated with Karelian culture. For this reason, the discomfort with non-Karelian people lamenting may be rooted in the tradition’s ritual character and religious aspects. As with the previously discussed expectations concerning suitable registers and contexts for lamenting, older ritual frameworks are reflected in the expectation that practitioners should approach lamenting with respect and responsibility.

(44) *Ei minulla ole valtaa ketään kieltää, mutta tuntuu omituiselta ajatukselta että joku muu kuin karjalainen itkee äänellä. Kenelle hän itkee? Kenen tavoilla?* ri18_q12_02

‘I don’t have the power to forbid anyone, but as a thought, it feels weird that someone other than Karelian cries with a voice. For whom are they lamenting for? With whose customs?’ ri18_q12_02

Instead of posing direct prohibitions, respondents more often framed participation as conditional. Across the responses, a recurring formulation suggests that “everyone can lament as long as they respect the tradition.” Respect operates as a moral condition for participation, although it is most of the time left undefined. In my analysis, respect seems to be linked to knowledge: a disrespectful approach to lamenting is one that is based on misinformation or on a lack of awareness of the tradition’s history, especially its ritual meanings. Excerpt (45)

illustrates how participation in activities associated with Karelian lamenting, without knowledge of the history and cultural context of the tradition, is framed as problematic in multiple responses.

(45) *Sidä ei nikonza pidäizi erottua karjalazesta kulttuurasta. Suurin vuitti suomalaisista, kumbazet itkuista tiijetäh da kumbazien keralla olem paissun duumaiččou, jotta iänellä itkemine on midätahto ylehisuomalazta perinnehtä. Tämä on miun mieles viärin. ri19_q12_01*

‘It should never be separated from Karelian culture. Most of the Finns who know about laments and with whom I have spoken about laments, think that crying with a voice is whatever shared Finnish heritage. I think this is wrong.’ ri19_q12_01

The responses suggest that teachers are often positioned as responsible for maintaining and transmitting appropriate forms and meanings. Instructors reflect on their sense of responsibility by talking about the importance of creating a safe environment when working with people who are in a strong emotional state. While some teachers welcome framing lament as healing, others prefer to approach laments through methods that emphasize other aspects. Intentionally avoiding the connection to healing or therapeutic aims can also be interpreted as a strategy of responsibility, and some teachers express that, for organizing therapeutic courses, specific training for this purpose is required. The excerpt (46) illustrates how teachers recognize that different kinds of agents work in the field, and rather than drawing strict boundaries of what is allowed and what is not, they tend to distance their own practice from other approaches that do not align with their vision. In the excerpt, IN01 explains that if they feel like they are unable to offer what the client is wishing for in a lament training, they prefer to suggest that the client may work with another lament teacher instead.

(46) *Ja saattaa olla et mulla on kyllä ihan oma pikku uniikki näkökulma tähän tarjontaan ja olen kyllä selostanut tyypeille jotka ohjaan eteenpäin ja kerron oman näkemykseni muista kouluttajista. Kun toiset painottavat näkemykseni mukaan tekniikkaa, ja toisilla on tunne, ja toisella on sitten kristillisyyys ja toinen on niinku vähän ehkä arkaaisempi, pakanallisempi ja rumpuja - - että pidän tärkeänä että jokainen saa, pääsee semmoselle kurssille mihin luulee, tai mikä sopii heille, ja mihin voivat sitte helpoimmin pystyvät antautumaan kenenkin opettajan saattelemana. IN01_27*

'And it may be that I have my own unique perspective on the [courses] offered, and I have explained it to people whom I guide forward. I view that some [teachers] emphasize technique, some emotion, someone else has a Christian emphasis, and someone else [has an approach that] is a bit more archaic and pagan, and [involves] drums – – so I find it important that everyone can participate in a course that is suitable for them and where they can open themselves, guided by whichever teacher. IN01_27'

Perceived responsibilities of a teacher include informing participants about the tradition and Karelian culture, and about how contemporary interpretations are tied to the older tradition. The ethical problems mentioned in excerpt (47) relate not only to cultural appropriation but also to the communicative function of laments: within the older ritual framework, lamenting opens a channel to address the deceased and the otherworld. Those involved in teaching highlight the importance of having knowledge, as they want to provide accurate information in teaching contexts. As portrayed in the excerpt (48), learning about lament traditions in general can also be motivated by wanting to situate one's own practice intentionally and articulate one's own stance in the case of conflicting opinions.

- (47) *Mun mielestä siis tärkeintä itseasiassa siellä kursseilla on se et mä kerron mitä se perinne on ollut. Kun tavallaan sitä niinku kieltä ja kaikkea voi ihminen opetella lopun ikäänsä, mut jos se ei tiedä minkä asian kanssa se on tekemisissä nii musta siinä tulee niinku aika isoja eettisiä ongelmia* IN02_19

'In my opinion, the most important thing in [my] courses is that I tell what the tradition has been. Because in a way, the person can learn the language and all that for the rest of their life, but if they don't know what they are dealing with, there are quite major ethical problems involved in that.' IN02_19

- (48) *Mun on niinku sen takii pitäny niinku opiskella, ja varmaan kaikkien muidenkin varmaan opiskella, sitä itkuvirsien, niinku mistä ne tulee ketkä niitä on laulanut, mis niitä on laulettu, että tota, että mä en ensinnäkin oikois mutkia ja samaan aikaan pystysin perustelemaan miks mun on tärkeä toimia ite näin.* IN05_57

'For that reason I've had to study, and probably all the others must have had to study the laments, like where do they come from and who have sang them, where have

they been sang, um so, that I wouldn't, first of all, cut corners and at the same time I would be able to justify why it is important for me to act like this.' IN05_57

The theme of responsibility was also discussed in relation to how the teachers name, frame, and advertise their work. Respondents expressed a wish for greater transparency, especially in distinguishing more clearly between practices based on Karelian tradition and those that are not. This can be linked not only to concerns about the commercialization of minority tradition but also to the effort to preserve its form; modern interpretations may guide the practices in directions that no longer maintain the meanings the participants attach to Karelian lamenting. The excerpts (49) and (50) illustrate understandings of respectful practice, which root on precisely communicating the cultural meanings that the tradition is based on. A respectful approach to teaching may also include a language-political dimension: by using Karelian in course settings or informing participants about the status of the Karelian language, lament courses may aim to protect and strengthen the position of Karelian in Finnish society.

(49) *Tietynlainen eettinen vastuu tulee itkijällä olla, ja ajattelen että eettisyys kumpuaa tiedosta eli koulutuksesta. Koulutuksissa tulee mielestäni nostaa esiin itkuvirsien alkuperä ja kunnioittaa sitä, mutta mielestäni koulutettu itkuvirsien tekijä voi tehdä sitä eettisesti myös eri yhteyksissä ri28_q12_01*

‘The lamenter should have some kind of ethical responsibility, and I think that ethics stem from knowledge, so from education. In my opinion, in trainings the origin of laments should be brought up, and it should be respected, but in my opinion an educated maker of laments can do this ethically across different contexts’ ri28_q12_01

(50) *On mahdollista käyttää, kun ei "omi perinnehtä", eli kun tuopi esih niijen taustan ta merkityksen karjalaisilla. Tärkietä olisi vahvistaa myös karjalan kielen olemassaoloa. ri15_q12_01*

‘It is possible to use [laments] when one is not “culturally appropriating”, so when one brings out their background and significance for Karelians. It would be also important to strengthen the presence of the Karelian language’ ri15_q12_01

Lamenting is not primarily seen as an individualized therapeutic technique, and using laments with therapeutic intentions is sometimes opposed. This is connected to how the role of

the lamenter is described. A person lamenting is seen as someone who carries, voices, and guides the grief of others in their community, and therefore lamenting about things too personal or close to the lamenter was sometimes seen as something not suitable. The therapeutic nature of lamenting is not rejected but understood as collective rather than individual. Some respondents also articulate that if lamenting is used as a practice with therapeutic intentions, they wish that it would be clearly separated from the Karelian lamenting tradition (51).

- (51) *Esim itkuvirret terapeuttisena hoitomuotona tulisi erottaa karjalaisesta konseptista eikä niin että kuitenkin opetuksessa viitataan jatkuvasti karjalaiseen perinteeseen; ehkä tällaista terapeutista itkua varten pitäisi kehittää selkeä konsepti joka ei käytä karjalaisen äänellä itkemisen elementtejä täysin irrallisina osina kulttuurista? ri31_q12_02*

‘For example, laments as a therapeutic practice should be separated from the Karelian context and not like that, regardless of, in teaching, referring to Karelian tradition is constantly done; maybe for this kind of therapeutic lament, a clear context should be developed that does not use the elements of Karelian crying with voice completely separate from the culture?’ ri31_q12_02

4.4 Contemporary functions of the lament

The theme *contemporary functions of the lament* captures the perceptions of the functions of lament in a modern age and how its uses in the 21st century are discursively constructed.

In my data, respondents discursively divide lament as a genre into subtypes. Respondents use different wordings to refer to different kinds of laments: *arkistoitku* (‘archived lament’) to refer to older, recorded materials; *nykyitku* (‘contemporary lament’) and *hoitava itku* (‘healing lament’) when discussing laments performed in present-day contexts; and simply *itku* (‘lament, cry’). In the excerpt (52), the respondents' reference to “modern lamenting” illustrates the discourse in which present-day lamenting is perceived as distinct from the lamenting practices of the past.

- (52) *Nyt esiin on tullut moderni itkeminen, johon suhtaudun hieman epätietoisesti. Syynä kai ikäni. Olen syntynyt 1946. ri46_q08_02*

‘Modern lamenting has emerged now, towards which I have a bit of an uncertain stance. The reason might be my age. I was born in 1946.’ ri46_q08_02

Not all participants see a reason to separate the old and modern laments conceptually. When lamenting is understood as something natural for the human species, the fact that tradition is changing and developing new forms is perceived expected. According to this understanding, there is no need to separate lamenting in today's Finland from lamenting across the globe in earlier times; challenging the term of neolament can be based on the idea that lamenting as an expression has been present since the earliest times. If lamenting is understood as a natural expression characteristic of human nature, there is no need to speak about function; lament does not do but is. In the excerpts (53) and (54), the respondent IN05 discusses the modern understandings of laments and questions the classification of "lost" and contemporary laments.

- (53) *koska itkuun liitetään, ehkä siihen aikaan ei niinkään, mutta liitetään, et se on ollut tietynlainen kulttuurin ilmentymä, mut tietysti siihen aikaan se on ollut enempi semmonen, et varmaan melkein- en tiää itkeekö kaikki mut hirveen monet itki ja se oli monelle vaan luontasta. IN05_36*

‘because a lament is accompanied by, maybe not really, during that time, but [nowadays] it's accompanied by [a thought] that it's some kind of an expression of culture, but of course during that time, it has been more like, that almost- I don't know if everyone was lamenting, but so many did, and it was just natural for many.’
IN05_36

- (54) *ei oo erikseen niinku nykytkua ja menetettyä itkua taikka mun mielestä myöskään nykyshamanismia tai vanhaa shamanismia. Tai kansanlauluja ja -laulajia, mun mielestä on vaan lauluja. IN05_66*

‘There is no separate contemporary lament and lost lament, or in my opinion, also contemporary shamanism or old shamanism. Or folk songs and folk musicians, in my opinion, there's just songs.’ IN05_66

Regardless, a shared pattern across the responses is that there is a need for lament, especially in the modern age. According to the responses, lament serves a range of functions at both the individual and collective levels. These discussions also mirror respondents' perceptions of the challenges of the 21st century, as lament is described as having the potential to aid, for example, transforming from individualistic society to a more collective one and breaking the stigma around death, grief and showing emotions. The following sections analyze this through laments'

possibilities for processing emotions and healing, voicing collective concerns, as a means of connecting with one's roots, and finally, as a way of communicating with one's ancestors.

4.4.1 Processing of emotions and healing lament

Research on lamenting has discussed the laments' affects and their expression of them (Silvonen 2022; Silvonen & E. Stepanova 2020). In my data, feeling emotions and processing them was described as one of the primary functions of a lament. While some responses mention that lamenting can also be connected to feeling joy, most of the respondents consider lamenting as a practice helping with regulating difficult emotions and processing grief. In many cases, the respondents do not further define the word *tunne* ('feeling'), which, according to my analysis, suggests that not all strong or negative feelings are acknowledged; they are rather felt in the body, and the physicality of the expression of lament is perceived to work as a tool for "making the feelings visible" (IN02, ri31) and "releasing the feeling" (ri48). This narrative emerges not only in answers where the meanings of lamenting are described explicitly, but also through personal anecdotes and memories: participants describe turning to lamenting during difficult periods in their lives and refer to situations in which lamenting helped them process emotions or cope in moments of personal crisis. Respondents describe lamenting as a way of letting go of one's burdens, and as a practice for regulating and releasing emotion (55). Alongside *hoitava* ('healing'), laments are also characterised as *kirkastava* ('clarifying'), *puhdistava* ('cleansing'), and *terapeuttinen* ('therapeutic').

(55) - *itkun tehtävään on purkaa sitä patoutunutta tunnetta tai tunnetta joka muuten patoutuis sisimpään helposti jos jotain traagista tapahtuu niinku suuri ero* IN05_26

‘After all, the task of a lament is to release the emotion that’s stuck or a feeling that would get easily stuck inside if something tragic happens, like a major separation’
IN05_26

This framing of lamenting as a tool for emotional work is also noted by people involved in lament teaching. Among respondents with experience of teaching lamenting, it is recognized that participants come to courses for many reasons, and a wish to process emotions is one of them (56). Teachers note that people often arrive in situations of sadness or loss and are seeking ways to process their difficult experiences, and teachers may feel the need to modify the content of their courses on lament accordingly, as the excerpt (57) shows.

(56) - *Monet ajattelee jotenkin, että se on itsensä terapoimista, joka minusta ei ole se olennaisin asia. Totta kai siis usein sinne tulee ihmisiä, joilla on, jotka on kokenut suruja ja jotka haluaisi jotenkin purkaa sitä ja näin. IN04_09*

‘Many [people] think somehow that it is self-therapy, which is not, in my opinion, the most central thing. Of course, oftentimes, people who have experienced grief come there and they would want to release it somehow and so on.’ IN04_09

(57) *ja tässä vuosien varrella kun se oma osaaminen ja ymmärrys tästä itkuvirresta on kasvanu, ja aika on muuttunu, et aika on kriittisempää, ihmisillä on enemmän suruja ja ihmiset on väsyneitä kantaa niitä suruja, et tänä päivänä mun on vaikee kuvitella et ryhmä ihmisiä jaksais kuunnella yhtä päivää niinku historiatietoo koska ihmiset oikeesti tulee itkemään. Ei ne tuu luennoille, ne tulee itkemään. IN06_23*

‘and during these years, as my skills and understanding of lamenting have grown, and time has changed, time is more critical, people have more grief, and people are tired of carrying this grief, so it’s hard for me to imagine that in this age, a group of people would have the energy to listen to a [lesson of] historical knowledge because they come to cry. They are not coming for lectures; they come to cry. IN06_23’

Many respondents mention having participated in lament trainings or courses. The participants describe the courses as meaningful or pleasant, and only one respondent reports a negative experience. Regardless, many respondents also express concerns related to using lamenting with a healing intention, especially in course settings. These concerns relate to safety, or the earlier discussed right use of the tradition. In general, respondents’ accounts of the healing power of lament are not directly articulated within the framework of healing lament courses. Rather, the healing aspect is seen as stemming from the nature of lament itself. However, an individual might experience a lamenting course as an easy way to familiarize oneself with lamenting and build a community around the practice (cf. Hytönen-Ng & Kallonen 2023a).

4.4.1.2 Collective concerns

Among the respondents, lamenting is framed not only as a tool for personal and individual processing of emotions but also as a social practice with the potential to aid in times of crisis. This is visible when asking about the typical topics of modern laments (Q13): the respondents

describe that lament topics can reflect the worries of a modern person, which include politics, climate change, and general maailmantuska ('Weltschmerz'). War is also brought up as a multidimensional theme for lamenting: lamenting about war can be a way of expressing sadness and worry over the general state of the world, but it can also function as a way of coping with a grandparent's or great-grandparent's war trauma and with the intergenerational traces it has left. In addition, two respondents (IN05, IN06) describe lamenting having a function specifically for men, helping them with difficulties expressing emotions, and "learning how to cry". As the excerpt (58) illustrates, lament may be described as a tool especially practical in the current age, but the challenges that lamenting can solve are not always explicitly worded.

(58) *Nykymaailman tilanteessa ja tilanteesta johtuen löytyy tukuttain asioita, tunteita yms, joiden käsittelyssä itkuvirsiperinteellä voi/voisi olla merkittävä tehtävä, mahdollisuus lisätä ihmisten hyvinvointia. ri30_q13_01*

'In the situation of today's world and caused by the situation of today's world, there can be found a bunch of things, feelings etc., that the lament tradition can/could have a significant task in processing them, the possibility to increase the well-being of people.' ri30_q13_01

Lament may be perceived as a means of challenging social norms and therefore transforming society. The social norms that the respondents comment upon are individualism, perceiving death as taboo, not showing emotions openly, and following old gender roles. While the other respondents express that lament may be useful for a person or a collective through more abstract descriptions, IN06 gives a concrete example of how lamenting could contribute to well-being at the societal level (59).

(59) *Tällä hetkellä mun tavoitteena tai unelmana olis se että itkuvirret saatas osaks, tai ei välttämättä itkuvirret, mut se tieto ja ymmärrys surusta ja kuolemasta mikä itkuvirsien kautta tulee, et se saatais osaks sairaanhoidon koulutusta EU-tasolla. Et kymmenien vuosien aikana meil on ollu hoitoalan ihmisii jotka on loppuun palaneita, ja ne tulee meidän kurssille ettiä välineitä niinku käsitellä niitten asioita ja sit ne saa meiltä ne välineet. Et nyt ku on tällänen iso systeeminen murros menossa, maailmassa, että meillä ei yksinkertasesi oo enää varaa tähän yksilökeskeiseen elämäntyyliin ja meidän on pakko mennä takas yhteisöllisiin*

asioihin nii mä haluaisin olla viemässä niitä välineitä sinne missä niitä eniten tarvitaan. IN06_07-08

‘Currently my goal, or a dream, is that laments could be part, or maybe not necessarily laments, but the knowledge and understanding of grief and death that are transmitted through laments, that it could be used as a part of healthcare education at the level of the EU. So, over the decades, [in our courses] we’ve had people from the healthcare sector who have experienced burnout, and they come to our courses to find tools to process their things, and then they get the tools from us. Now that this big systemic transformation is happening in the world, we simply can't afford this individual-centered lifestyle anymore, and we must go back to those communal things, so I'd like to be there providing the tools where they are most needed.’ IN06_07-08

Respondents reported encountering lamenting at a demonstration (ri54) and performing laments at demonstrations and other public events held for the cause of protecting nature (IN01, ri64). An interviewee (IN01) used the term *tilausitku* (‘commissioned lament’) to refer to situations in which an organisation invited them to an event specifically to perform a lament and further describes receiving similar requests (60). These experiences suggest that lamenting can function as a public speech act and be used to voice collective concern and mark an event as significant. In analysing the acts of the organisation *Itkijänaiset*, operating between 1980 and 2000, Yoken and Turunen (2026: 109) discuss that public lamenting worked as a way of breaking the gendered cultural behavioural norms, and lamenting in places that carry political, social, or economic significance functioned as a way of incorporating “human emotion into overly rationalised political decision making”. Performing laments in such settings may also be perceived as an art form including ritualistic features (Latvala-Harvalahti 2023: 150; Kauppila 2020).

(60) - *tuolla meileissäki haetaan että tule niinku itkemään tämä meidän tekemä itku
johonkin tapahtumaan luonnon puolesta kautta
ilmastoitku ni semmosia, semmosia itkuja IN01_13*

‘[In my] e-mails [they] are asking: “come and cry this lament, environmental lament, that we wrote to be performed in some event for the nature”, so that kind of laments.’ IN01_13

Overall, contemporary lamenting seems to be used to voice concerns that touch wider collectives such as society and humankind. Laments may address events geographically far from the lamenter, allowing them to participate in collective grieving. This portrays how broader societal change shapes the practice: in a globalised world, respondents may conceptualise their community not only as a local group but as humanity at large. The lamenter's responsibility to carry and heal collective sorrow can extend across continents. At the same time, lamenting about war or other distant crises may function to provide a space for the lamenters' own emotional work to be processed simultaneously.

Similarly, lamenting for the climate reflects the expanded sense of community, as the boundaries of a community expand beyond one's immediate surroundings to include, for example, trees, animals, and future generations. When participants were asked about typical topics for lamenting, oftentimes the concern for nature was mentioned. Climate change is a recognized challenge to the mental well-being of a person: emotional distress and feelings of anxiety, guilt, fear, and anger are responses to the ecological crisis (Ágoston et al. 2022; Bourque & Cunsolo 2014; Comtesse et al. 2021; Clayton et al. 2017). 'Ecological grief' refers to grief felt in response to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and landscapes. As the climate crisis is "unending or ongoing", the loss without answers or closure can be challenging to process (Cunsolo & Ellis 2018: 275, 279). I interpret that lamenting for nature offers a way of addressing, processing, and expressing ecological grief; in private and public settings, either individually or collectively (cf. Cunsolo & Ellis 2018: 279). Since lament is seen as a ritual practice tied to life's turning points and transitions, climate lamenting suits the frame: humans are living through a collective turning point, marked by the realization that current ways of consuming and living are not sustainable, and lamenting for the climate can be understood as a natural response to a shared crisis.

4.4.2 Identity work

Lamenting can also provide a means of strengthening one's connection to Karelian heritage, negotiating belonging, and positioning oneself in ancestral continuity. As discussed in Section 4.1, interest in Karelian lamenting is often anchored in family background and narratives of intergenerational continuity. In the responses, 'roots' (*juuret*) are used to refer to the experiences of intergenerational continuity and one's experience of belonging in a family lineage. In the following excerpt (61), the interviewee discusses common motivations for participating in lament courses and suggests that people with Karelian heritage see the courses

as a place where people participate with an aim of getting more familiar with their family history and heritage.

- (61) - *Suomessa on ollu tosi paljon ihmisiä joilla on jotain sukujuuria Karjalaan ja jotka on kiinnostunut omista juuristaan, haluu ymmärtää oman sukunsa historiaa paremmin ja heillä on niinku tämmösiä motiiveja, ja tää on yks sellanen motiivi mikä on Suomessa vielä hyvin vahva. Suomessahan on ihan, mä en ees tiedä kuinka paljon, mutta todella monella on jonkinlainen sukulinja menee sinne Karjalaan ja sit jos käsitetään Karjala laajemmin nii vielä enemmän, tarkotan ei pelkästään karjalankieliset alueet vaan myös karjalaismurteet. Et jos nekin käsitellään Karjalaks nii sitte tietysti tulee vielä satoja tuhansii ihmisiä enemmän* IN06_11

‘In Finland there have been really many people who have some kind of family lineage in Karelia and who are interested in their own roots, they want to understand their family history better, and they have these kinds of motives, and this is a motive that is still really strong in Finland. In Finland, there are, I don’t even know how many, but really many, who have some kind of family lineage going back to Karelia, and then if we understand Karelia more broadly, I mean not only Karelian-language regions but (Finnish) Karelian dialects, then it’s even more. So, if those are also conceptualised as Karelia, well then there are hundreds of thousands of people more’ IN06_11

For a person with a Karelian background, a lament can function as a tool for strengthening one's bond with the lost terrains or past generations: according to Hytönen-Ng (2023: 80-81), a Karelian lament may help to build a bridge to the past, and the intangible cultural heritage can function as a tool for connecting with the history of one's own family. In the following excerpt (62), the word ‘roots’ surfaces again; the respondent connects the meanings of lamenting directly to their heritage and family history. As the respondent further describes the feeling of grief related to the experienced loss, I interpret that for them, lamenting functions as one way of upholding the connection to the culture that is perceived as lost. Even in cases where the respondents do not lament themselves or engage with contemporary laments, the tradition can be highly valued, respected, and experienced as deeply meaningful.

(62) Se merkitsee todella paljon. Se kertoo omista juuristani ja äidin puolen suvun elämästä. Elämästä, jota ei enää ole. Olen tehnyt kiertomatkoja rajan takana Karjalassa ja koen surua itäisen karjalaisuuden katoamisesta. ri46_q14_01

‘It means very much. It talks about my own roots and the life of the family from my mother's side. About a life that no longer exists. I have done tours in Karelia beneath the border, and I experience grief about the loss of the eastern Karelianess.’
ri46_q14_01

4.4.3 Communication with the otherworld

In addition, the responses show that lamenting is perceived as still closely tied to ritual contexts. Regardless of the societal changes that have happened throughout the centuries and decades, people still encounter major life transitions, losses, and death. Therefore, lamenting as a practice can fulfil similar functions today as it did in the past. Responses communicate the mythological understandings attached to laments through describing laments' communicative functions. Many participants mention *syndyzet* or discuss the theme of connecting with the otherworld through lamenting. The laments analyzed in section 4.2.2 support this finding. This suggests that even though contemporary lamenting is most visible in contexts such as lamenting courses, emotional work, and on-stage performances, the practice should not be framed primarily through these settings. Instead, responses show that the ritual dimension of lamenting is still perceived as essential, and that establishing contact with the otherworld remains one of its central purposes. When discussing laments, the term *pyhä kieli* (‘sacred language’) surfaces several times. An interviewee (IN05) also shares a personal story of experiencing that their relationship with a close relative who had passed away got better after lamenting for them. The following excerpts aim to portray the multiple ways that the power of the lament and the mythological understandings related to it are communicated:

(63) - *Mie duumaičen što itkuvirziloillä olemma sežo yhtevyhes syndyzien kera. Da sen tähän virzittelijällä pidäy olla äijän vägie.* ri77_q05_01

‘I think that with laments we are also in contact with the *syndyzet*. And for that reason, the lamenter has to have lots of power.’ ri77_q05_01

(64) *Siinä samalla matkataan muistissa. Saadaan yhteys muistin paikkoihin, edesmenneisiin muistin kautta. Itkun syy, liikuttaja, nousee jostain ikaikaisesta kyynelten lähteestä, sukupolvien ja aikain takaa, ehkä ikuisuudesta, jokin sisäinen sanoittaja, viisaus, mitä se on... saa itkun kohoamaan ilmoille silloin, kun on sen*

aika. Itkijä on mukana tai jäsenotelee jonkin muuttuneen tilan, liikutaan tilasta toiseen, statuksesta toiseen, siirtymä... ri52_q14_01

‘At the same time, in it one travels in memory. One gets a connection to the places of memory, and through the memory one connects with the deceased. The reason for the lament, a moving force, arises from some kind of ancient fountain of tears, from beneath generations and time, maybe from eternity, some kind of inner lyricist, knowledge, what it is... makes the lament arise when it is the time for it. A lamenter is accompanying or organizing a changed space, moving from one space to another, from one status to another, a transition...’ ri52_q14_01

- (65) *Vieras, kiehtova taito, jonka haluaisin osata. Tuntuu tärkeältä saada silläkin tavalla yhteys sukuun tuonilmaisissa. Kulttuuriperintö, joka ei ole vielä kadonnut maailmasta, mutta on kadonnut minulta, kun enää ei ole elossa isovanhempia joilta voisi kysellä heidän kylän tavoista ri18_q14*

‘A foreign, intriguing skill that I would like to have. It would feel important to contact my family in the otherworld like that, too. A cultural heritage that has not yet disappeared from the world, but has disappeared from me, since I don’t have any living grandparents from whom I could ask about the customs of their villages’ ri18_q14

- (66) *Äänellä itkeminen on minulle syvällinen muoto lähestyä ja olla osa maailmakaikeutta. Omassa kokemuksessani itkuihin asetutaan, niiden sisällä ollaan yhteydessä moneen suuntaan. Äänellä itkemiseen sisältyy kollektiivisen suremisen aspekti, kosketus omaan luontoon ja suruun sekä yhteys esivanhempiin (joita ovat ihmisten lisäksi myös kasvit, maaperä, vesistöt, kallio, monimuotoinen luonto). Äänellä itkeminen on minulle liekin kantamista, suunnistamista pimeässä. ri64_q14_01*

‘Crying with a voice, to me, is a deep way to approach and be part of the universe. In my own experience, one places oneself in laments, being in contact towards multiple directions inside them. Crying with a voice is accompanied by the aspect of collective grieving, a connection to one's own nature and grief, and the connection with the ancestors (which are, in addition to humans, the plants, soil, cliff, and diverse nature. For me, crying with a voice is carrying a flame, navigating in the dark.’ Ri64_q14_01

5. Conclusions

Using combined qualitative methods, this study aimed to understand how language, continuity, and change are negotiated in contemporary lamenting practices. In addition, the study examined the linguistic forms of contemporary laments and analyzed the extent to which they maintain or renew the elements of archival Karelian laments. By approaching the topic from multiple perspectives and focusing both on the textual forms of the laments and the participants' reflections on them, the study contributes to providing a deeper understanding of the 21st-century lamenting practices that are pursued in Finland.

The findings show that continuity with earlier lamenting practices is discursively constructed and, in practice, achieved through a selective and adaptive application of the register elements of Karelian laments. Respondents constantly evaluate questions of continuity and change; especially in transformed and transforming contexts, maintaining a sense of connection to older practices may be perceived as important. Even in the absence of a direct connection to past generations, a sense of generational continuity can be achieved through interacting with archival practices. Studying laments can function as a way of responding to disrupted intergenerational transmission, as not everyone has had the opportunity to learn lamenting in their community.

When it comes to the linguistic form of the laments, the findings suggest that the contemporary lament texts maintain continuity with the older laments through the application of multiple grammatical elements: diminutives, plural forms, frequentative verb derivatives, and possessive suffixes. Linguistic and poetic similarity can be achieved in multiple ways, and older laments may serve as models that can be adapted. Traditional Karelian circumlocutions and epithets are used, and alliteration and parallelism recur in the contemporary lament texts. Maintaining continuity does not primarily depend on the choice of language but rather on the recognized register features of Karelian laments.

The analyzed Finnish laments show that the genre features are perceived as flexible enough to be applied across languages. The genre of laments can be encoded in texts at multiple levels. At the macro level, sorrowful interjections, alliteration, parallelism, and metaphors help communicate the lament genre. At the micro level, small details, such as translating Karelian lament vocabulary into Finnish and adapting it to Finnish morphosyntax, communicate the genre of Karelian laments. Since the genre-likeness of a lament is built on performance, in textual forms, it can be enough to mark a text as a lament simply by using sorrowful interjections. Outside of my analysis are the multiple ways of communicating the genre beyond

the level of the text: for example, naming the practice as “Karelian”, holding an *itkuliina* (‘crying cloth’) against the face, or aiming to produce vocal patterns that imitate the recordings of archival laments are used to mark the genre.

Laments that mix Finnish and Karelian show that language is perceived as a resource that can be used according to the composer’s needs. Naturally, inserting the lexicon and formulaic expressions of Karelian lament language into an otherwise Finnish lament text creates the impression of mixed language. Karelian vocabulary can be visible outside of the traditional circumlocutions, too. The closeness of the languages allows the lexicon of both languages to be used, and within a text, there can be poetic lines that alternate between following Karelian and Finnish morphosyntax.

The respondents see Karelian-language lamenting practices as valuable and communicate a sense of admiration for Karelian lament language. A wish to lament in Karelian can encourage learning Karelian, and lamenters with partial knowledge of Karelian aim to bring the language into laments alongside Finnish. When it comes to negotiating continuity and change, using the Finnish language is not rejected, as the language choice is seen as something that should be aligned with honest emotional expression and the suitability of contexts and listeners.

The study identified four themes across the responses and interviews. The themes of authenticity, language choice, protection and ownership, and the contemporary functions of lament together answer questions of how lamenting practices in Finland are perceived, valued, and defined. Together, the themes convey that respondents attach significant value to the practice and understand it as deeply meaningful: from language choice, topics, and performance contexts to the evaluation of ethical questions and the careful naming of the practice, many aspects of participation in the practice are thoroughly considered.

Continuity and change are also visible in the functions of laments. The communicative function of lamenting is perceived as important, but in addition, lamenting is perceived as having the power to change social structures and challenge social norms. Regardless of the participants seeing lamenting as having beneficial effects on the well-being of an individual, lamenting is framed more as a practice with collective intention and function.

High respect for the tradition, combined with different meanings associated with the practice, may explain the tensions in the field. Course settings and semi-institutionalised lament teaching are perceived as complex areas that should be approached with a certain level of ethical consideration. In general, it is expected that the tradition is approached with a sense of respect by everyone partaking in lamenting. Respect is perceived as being related to being informed about the tradition’s history and the functions that it has historically served; according to my

analysis, the expected knowledge is multidimensional and includes questions about ethnicity and cultural appropriation, as well as ensuring safe communication with the otherworld.

The ideas of authenticity are connected to communicating how a lament should or should not be. The Finnish-language word *oikea* has a semantic field in which multiple meanings exist and partly overlap. *Oikea* can be used to refer to ‘real’, ‘authentic’, ‘right’, and ‘just’, and this adds a layer of difficulty to the analysis. At the same time, the broad meaning of *oikea* is descriptive when discussing the participants’ reflections on authenticity. *Oikea*, ‘authentic’ lament may be a lament that *tuntuu oikealta* (‘feels right’), meaning that the lamenting practice is aligned with the laments intentions, and is sincere in expressing feeling.

The perceived importance of following the linguistic register of laments may be related to the aim of authenticity. However, I interpret that the wish to follow a certain linguistic form is also connected to the perceived functions of a lament. Traditionally, following the right register was perceived as crucial for successful and safe communication with the otherworld. One of the main functions of contemporary lament communicated by the respondents was related to connecting with the deceased. I argue that violating the lament register may be perceived as dangerous, or that lamenting in “everyday language” is seen as misinterpreting the real meaning of lamenting in general. Thus, today’s lamenting practices show that the language form is still attached to the function of the lament and *vice versa*.

The limitations of the study mainly concern the design and the distribution of the online questionnaire. Since the questionnaire was distributed through the University of Eastern Finland and *Karjalan Sivistyseura*, it is possible that the distribution may have shaped the respondent profile. Unfortunately, the distribution of the questionnaire through the channels of *Äänellä Itkijät ry* was not possible. If revisiting the topic in future research, to reach a larger number of respondents, the questionnaire should be distributed through more channels. In addition, the design of the questionnaire may have led to some confusion in responses, as in the questionnaire, it was not always defined whether the question referred to Karelian lamenting practices or lamenting practices in general. In the questionnaire, both the terms *äänellä itkeminen*, which refers to Karelian lamenting, and *itkuvirsi*, which refers to lamenting in general, were used. Therefore, the respondents used both terms with different meanings; some respondents used the term *äänellä itkeminen* to refer to all existing lamenting practices, and some respondents explicitly stated that this term should be used only in a Karelian context. In designing a questionnaire for future research, the terminology should either be explained at the beginning, or the questions should be designed so that this kind of confusion between the terms does not occur.

If laments are created in performance, one might ask why to analyze textual forms. I find collecting and studying textual forms a valid way of gaining insight into how traditions are preserved and transformed in the digital age. The fact that laments are shared in textual form instead of alongside oral transmission already communicates a major transformation in the ways of practicing lamenting. As digital environments are an essential part of modern life, the movement of lamenting into online spaces reflects the everyday realities of people in the 21st century.

I see the study of linguistic forms of contemporary laments and lamenting practices in digital environments as a relevant direction of research in the future. Conducting similar research with a broader range of respondents should be considered, as there are as many interpretations of contemporary laments as there are lamenters. The present dataset captures only a small proportion of this variation. Similarly, the size of my corpus of lament texts does not reflect the popularity of lamenting. Due to time constraints and the realistic scope of a master's thesis, a collection of lament texts had to be narrowed down to seven. For further research, analyzing more written laments would help to gain deeper insight into modern lament practices.

The initial aim of the study was to map out language attitudes related to lamenting, but as the findings show, the discussion around lamenting expanded to fields much broader than language alone. The talk about language is simultaneously talk about values and meanings attached to lamenting; it concerns Karelian identity, belief systems, and what laments mean on an individual and collective level. The results show that lamenting in Finland is still a relevant cultural practice, which is constantly shaped by a changing society. As a human expression, lament adapts to the needs of the modern person. However, one of the most important results is that Karelian lamenting is still highly connected to Karelian identity, family, vernacular beliefs, and connecting with the otherworld. Thus, I think further research into contemporary lamenting practices may function as research into understandings of death and the relationships of the living and the dead.

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Karjalaiset itkuvirret 2000-luvun Suomessa: kielelliset piirteet ja asenteet.

Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan karjalaiseen itkuperinteeseen pohjautuvaa äänellä itkemistä Suomessa. Tutkielma käsittelee itkuihin liittyvää metalingvististä puhetta sekä itkujen toteutuneita kielellisiä muotoja. Tutkimuskysymykset ovat seuraavat: Miten kieltä, jatkuvuutta ja muutosta käsitellään nykyitkemistä koskevassa diskurssissa? Säilyttävätkö vai muokkaavatko itkut perinteisten karjalaisten itkujen leksikaalisia ja kieliopillisia piirteitä?

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu verkkokyselyn vastauksista, haastatteluista sekä seitsemästä karjalaksi, suomeksi ja molempia kieliä yhdistäen kirjoitetusta itkusta. Analyysissa yhdistetään laadullisia menetelmiä: temaattista analyysia, diskurssianalyysia ja tekstianalyysia.

Analyysin tulokset viittaavat siihen, että nykyitkut pyrkivät säilyttämään perinteisten itkujen kieltä. Samaan aikaan itkujen kieli uudistuu. Itkuvirsirekisterin noudattamista pidetään tärkeänä, ja se suhteutuu 'aitouden' tavoitteluun ja itkun funktioihin. Rekisteri käsitetään joustavana: karjalaisten itkuvirsien tyylillisiä piirteitä voidaan muokata ja soveltaa eri kielille.

Koska itkuperinteeseen suhtaudutaan suurella arvostuksella, itkuvirsien harjoittajilta odotetaan kunnioittavaa lähestymistapaa. Käytännössä kunnioitus linkittyy tietoon, turvallisuuteen ja karjalaisten vähemmistöaseman tunnustamiseen. Tulokset osoittavat, että 2000-luvun Suomessa itkuvirsi on edelleen vahvasti yhteydessä karjalaiseen identiteettiin ja tuonpuoleisen kanssa viestimiseen, mutta sille on myös kehittynyt uusia käyttötapoja vastauksena nykyajan tarpeisiin.

Karjala itkud 21. sajandi Soomes: keelelised mustrid ja hoiakud. Kokkuvõte

Selles uurimuses käsitletakse nüüdisaegseid itkemispraktikaid Soomes, keskendudes peamiselt karjala itkutraditsioonidel põhinevatele praktikatele. Magistritöös analüüsitakse nii itkudega seotud metalingvistilist kõnet kui ka nende keelelisi vorme: uuritakse, kuidas käsitletakse nüüdisaegset itkemist puudutavas diskursuses keelt, järjepidevust ja muutust ning kas nüüdisaegsed itkud säilitavad või muudavad arhiivitud karjala itkude keelelisi jooni.

Ainestik koosneb 26 veebiküsitluse vastusest, kuuest intervjuust ning seitsmest karjala keeles, soome keeles ja segavormides kirjutatud itkust. Analüüsis kasutatakse kvalitatiivseid meetodeid: temaatilist analüüsi, diskursusanalüüsi ja tekstianalüüsi.

Tulemused viitavad sellele, et nüüdisaegsed itkud säilitavad, kuid ka muudavad traditsiooniliste karjala itkude vormi. Traditsioonilise itkuregistri järgimist peetakse oluliseks ning seda motiveerib 'autentsuse' taotlus ja itku funktsioonid. Registri keelelisi elemente tajutakse paindlikuna, kuna karjala itkude süntaksit saab rakendada itkudes eri keeltes kirjutatud itkudes.

Kuna itkutraditsiooni hinnatakse kõrgelt, oodatakse itkemiselt lugupidavat lähenemist. Praktikas seostub see turvalisuse, teadmiste ja karjalaste kui vähemusrühma positsiooni tunnustamisega Soomes. Analüüs näitab, et 21. sajandi Soomes on itk endiselt tugevalt seotud karjala identiteedi ja teispoolsusega suhtlemisega, kuid sellele on kujunenud ka uusi funktsioone vastusena nüüdisaja vajadustele.

Appendix 1. The content of the online questionnaire in Finnish

1. Ikäryhmä (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-55, 55-64, 65-74, 75 +)
2. Sukupuoli (nainen, mies, muu, en halua sanoa)
3. Onko sinulla karjalaisia juuria? Puhutko karjalan kieltä? Miten karjalainen kulttuuri näkyy elämässäsi?
4. Onko sinulla muistoja tai kokemuksia itkuvirsien kuulemisesta, ja jos on, minkälaisia?
5. Oletko itse aikaisemmin itkenyt äänellä tai esittänyt itkuvirsiä?
6. Miten aloit itkemään äänellä?
7. Itketkö yleensä improvisoiden vai käytätkö valmiiksi kirjoitettua tekstiä?
8. Millä tavalla itkukieli mielestäsi eroaa arkikielestä? Pyritkö jäljittelemään itkussasi vanhoille karjalaisille itkuvirsille tyypillisiä elementtejä (esimerkiksi tyylillisiä keinoja tai itkuvirsissä esiintyvää sanastoa)?
9. Oletko osallistunut koulutuksiin, kursseille tai yhteisöllisiin tilaisuuksiin, joissa on harjoiteltu ääneen itkemistä?
10. Itketkö suomeksi, karjalaksi vai molemmilla kielillä?
11. Onko sinulla ajatuksia siitä, millä kielellä itkuvirsiä tulisi esittää?
12. Millaisia ajatuksia sinulla on siitä, jos itkuvirret erotetaan karjalaisesta kulttuuriyhteydestä? (Esimerkiksi koulutukset ilman yhteyttä karjalaisuuteen ja itkuvirret terapeuttisena hoitomuotona) Kuuluvatko itkuvirret mielestäsi kaikille?
13. Mitkä ovat mielestäsi modernien itkuvirsien tyypilliset aiheet?
14. Mitä äänellä itkeminen merkitsee sinulle?

Kyselylomakkeen vastauksien lisäksi kerään tutkimukseeni myös itkutekstejä. Jos haluat jakaa kirjoittamiasi itkuja tai tahdot muuten keskustella teemasta kanssani, voit halutessasi jättää yhteystietosi alle.

Kiitos kyselyyn vastaamisesta!

Appendix 2: The content of the online questionnaire in Karelian Proper, South Karelian

Translation was done by Elena Rapa.

1. Igäjoukko (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-55, 55-64, 65-74, 75 +)
2. Sugupuoli (*mies, naine, muu, en taho sanuo*)
3. Ongo siula karjalazie juurie? Pagizetgo karjalaksi? Kuin karjalane kulttuura nägyy siun eloksessa?
4. Ongo siula muistuo libo kogemusta itkuvirzilöin kuulemizesta, da ollou, mimmoista?
5. Oletgo iče aijembah itken iänellä libo ezittän itkuvirzilöi?
6. Kuin rubeit itkemäh iänellä?
7. Itetgö ylehes improviziiruijen libo käytätgö valmeheksi kirjutettuo tekstua?
8. Kuin itkukieli siun mielestä eruou jogapäiväzestä kielestä? Pyrritgö jällittelemäh siun itkussa vanhoilla karjalazilla itkuvirzilöillä tiipallizie elementtoi (ezimerkiksi stiilalliz ie keinoloi libo itkuvirzilöissä eziindyjiä sanastuo)?
9. Oletgo ottan ozua opassuksih, kurssoilta libo yhtehizöllizih pidoloih, kumbazissa on harjoteldu iänellä itkemistä?
10. Itetgö suomeksi, karjalaksi libo mollemmilla kielillä?
11. Ongo siula ajatuksie siidä, millä kielellä itkuvirzilöi pidäis ezittiä?
12. Mimmozie ajatuksie siula on siidä, jos itkuvirret erotetah karjalazesta kulttuurayhtevyöstä? (Ezimerkiksi opassukset ilman yhtevyttä karjalazuoh da itkuvirret terveuttizena hoidomuodona) Kuulutahgo itkuvirret siun mielestä kaikilla?
13. Mit ollah siun mielestä modernoin itkuvirzilöin tiipallizet tiemat?
14. Midä iänellä itkemine merkiččöy siula?

Kyzelyankietan vastauksien lizäksi keriän tutkimukseh i itkutekstoi. Tahtonet jagua siun kirjuttamie itkuloi libo tahot muiten paissa tiemasta miun kera, voit jättiä yhtevystiijot alla.

Passibot kyzelyh vastuamizesta!

Appendix 3. The content of the online questionnaire, translated into English

1. Age group (*18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-55, 55-64, 65-74, 75 +*)
2. Gender (*Female, Male, Other, I do not wish to specify*)
3. Do you have Karelian roots? Do you speak Karelian? How is Karelian culture visible in your life?
4. Do you have memories or experiences of hearing laments, and if so, what kind of?
5. Have you previously cried with a voice or performed laments yourself?
6. How did you begin lamenting?
7. Do you usually lament by improvising, or do you use pre-written text?
8. How do you think lament language differs from everyday language? In your own laments, do you aim to follow a language form that is typical of Karelian laments? (for example, stylistic features or the vocabulary used in laments)?
9. Have you participated in trainings, courses, or community events where crying with a voice has been practiced?
10. Do you lament in Finnish, Karelian, or both languages?
11. Do you have thoughts about which language laments should be performed in?
12. What are your thoughts on separating laments from the Karelian cultural context? (For example, trainings without a connection to Karelian culture or the use of laments as a therapeutic method.) In your opinion, do laments belong to everyone?
13. What do you consider to be typical themes of modern laments?
14. What does lamenting mean to you?

In addition to the questionnaire responses, I also collect lament texts for my study. If you would like to share laments you have written or otherwise discuss the topic with me, you may leave your contact information below.

Thank you for responding to the questionnaire!

Appendix 4. Segmentation and coding of the questionnaire responses.

362	ri15	ri15_q11_01	Hyvä ois ainaki tietyä, jotta tunnettuja itkujä ei ole esitetty suomeksi. Kun itkuperintehien alkuperät ollah tiijossa ta niitä kunnivoitetah ta tuuvah esih, voit itkeä hos millä kielellä. Kunnivoittamini voipi olla myös karjalaisen yhteisön kannalta tärke dielo.	respect_for_tradition + language_choice + karelian_tradition
363	ri15	ri15_q12_01	On mahdollista käytyä, kun ei "omi perinnehtä", eli kun tuopi esih niijen taustan ta merkityksen karjalaisilla. Tärkietä olisi vahvistaa myös karjalan kielen olemassaoloa.	+ cultural_appropriation + karelian_tradition + respect_for_tradition
364	ri15	ri15_q14_01	Yhtevyttä meitä ennen elänehiä kanssa.	syndyzet +
365	ri24	ri24_q04_01	Ajattelin, että osallistuminen olisi vapauttavaa, mutta ei se ollut sitä minulle. Ahdistuin tunnekuohusta ja reagoin voimakkaasti. En ollut varautunut kollektiivisen tunteen voimaan. Koin, että oma itkuääni on surkea. Haparoisin vain menemään. odotin että ääni olisi voimakkaampi, se oli siis uutta	+ lament_courses
366	ri24	ri24_q06_01		+
367	ri24	ri24_q08_01	Pystyin jäljittelemään yksinkertaisia malleja ja muodostin itse sanoja, jotka olivat samanhenkisiä.	+ imitation + improvisation
368	ri24	ri24_q10_01	Molempia kieliä käytettiin	+ finnish_lament + karelian_lament
369	ri24	ri24_q11_01	Mielestäni monikielisyys olisi tarpeen	+ language_choice
370	ri24	ri24_q12_01	Mielestäni kuuluvat kaikille mutta lähteitä ja juuria pitää kunnioittaa maininnalla	respect_for_tradition + freedom_to_use + shared_tradition
371	ri24	ri24_q13_01	Ystävän puolesta koettu suru, lapsen menetys, puolison kuolema, laps	+ lament_topics
372	ri34	ri34_q14_01	Omaa perimääni, koettuja asioita, monia suuria tunteita.	roots + emotions
373	ri34	ri34_q12_01	Itkuvirsiä ei saisi irrottaa asiayhteydestään tai alkuperästään, näistä pitäisi kertoa kunnolla ja pohjata itkuvirret tälle.	respect_for_tradition +

Appendix 5. Itku Äidin Haudalla, Noora Kauppila

Itku Äidin Haudalla © Noora Kauppila (2019)

Vuotaz opin kuannutella nemmil pädövil päiväzil, ihala ilduigäne ijättäjä, kallis armozeni
kandajaženi

I opin mittumih luadužih sinun helövät hengyäd on i lähetetty?

Ilduigäne ijättäjä, kallis armozeni kandajaženi

En jo kuannutelle ñi kirikközvonažil da ñi pappiritužian ke

Vain kuannuttelen omil kyynälvedyžil

Ka o suuret luužažet roittu, minun sibjolois sirotkolois kiyñälyžis

Ka o joga kohtažez luužažet, veži kazvatettu da...

Ilduigäne ijättäjä, kallis armozeni kandajaženi

Livaile jo lijjajad littšiäzet

Kapsahtelei jo katluttuloile kyndypiähyžile,

Kyhäittelei jo kymmenile kyzibarbahužile

N-olledgo ylen äijjäl suuttunnuh konsa ed vierehtynnyäle ñi midä virkkele?

Ed ñi konzu olluh , vaivane vaikkaine, ainos kiurukiälyzil kitšerdelit

Miu turtive tuuditutteži keke pagiižid.

Kai soloveilinduzet soitettih, peutsoilinduzet pattšahažien piäs pajatettih.

A nämmil ehtožoloil ehtäžil olet kai ehtäžet vaivane vaikkaine.

Sinu kuldažed i kiälyäd luuhužian i lukkužien tuakse lukkoiltu,

huuluat ka valgeiloil vahapetsättižil petšätoittu

Ka ol linduzil siibyät pakuttu, I kai ol soloveil'induzil i iänyt sammuttu

Da kuldažil i kägöhyzil o kubužet kai kirvottu

Pohjatuuluzien puhalleldavat, aivozien ahavien ajeldavaksi jäin

Kui ruvennen jälles sinun kaimailtuu n-elämäh?

Ka keneh suojih rubien?

Ka keneh suojih rubien

Appendix 6. Ystävän itku, Emmi Kuittinen

Oi kaunis kazvindoikanazeni

armas abie anhelini

da čoma sorzazeni

Mie imehtynyt eläjäni ilmuajelen näidä igävänaluzen iččeni innollizen suurie igäväzie

kujerdelen kurjane čoman sorzazeni suuret suruzet

virittelen vierijäne virdyözet ilmoim vualimazen vieronazista

Kuinba voizin auttua atkalane armahasta abieda anhelieni

kuinba voizin murendua mielabiet mielikanazeni

Mintäh ei ole annettu armahie aigomazie armahalla abiella anhelillani

ei ole suanun sulie sulgazie čoma sorzazeni

kuulu ei kuvottuloi kuvaamazie

Kuin vain voizin vilu vierijäne

andelizin armahalla abiella anhelillani armahan aigomazen, ainovazen ajateltuzen

kaunehen kuvamozen kandazin kallehella kazvindoikanazella

luadizin livutetun linduzellani mie imehtynyt eläjäni

Kenbä ozais auttua armahasta abieda anhelieni

ottais pois onehtunuolda ilman suuruot igäväzet

sulattais čoman sorzazeni suuret suruzet

Nyt vain ruguolen abuo armahil syndyzil

annelgua armahimmat aigazet abiella anhelillani

kyzyn kylmäne naine tugie tulizih tuskasih

pakiččen palehtunut naine parembie eloksuzie

Appendix 7. Itkuvirsi Ukrainan kansalle ja koko ihmiskunnalle, Pirkko Fihlman

The lament is retrieved from a public post published on the Facebook page of Äänellä Itkijät ry, 9.3.2022. As the text was written in capitals, the form is kept original in the Appendix.

ARMON VIITTA

RUKOUS UKRAINAN KANSALLE JA KOKO IHMISKUNNALLE.

OI TAIVAALINEN ISÄMME, SUOJELE SINÄ MEITÄ, ETTEI PAHUUDEN VALTA SAA MEISTÄ OTETTA, VOI MEITÄ POLOISIA, JOS MEITÄ JOHTAA VALLAN MENETTÄMISEN PELKO

KAIKIALLA ON HÄTÄ, PAHUUS JA PELKO ON LÄHTENYT TAPPAAMAAN JA TUHOAMAAN KANSALAISIA, JOTKA ELIVÄT RAUHASSA. EDUSTAVAT AVOIMUUTTA, RAKENTAVAA VOIMAA, ARVOJA JOTKA VAHVISTAVAT IHMISYYTTÄ. NYT VALLAN HIMO JA PELKO TAHTOO TUHOTA TÄMÄN MAAN JA SEN KANSALAISET.

SÄÄLIMÄTTÖMÄSTI NUORET VIATTOMAT VARUSMIEHET LÄHETETTIIN TAPPAMAAN TOISIA VIATTOMIA IHMISIÄ, LAPSIA, ÄITEJÄ JA VANHUKSIA.

HERRA, MONET KAUPUNGIT ON TUHOTTU. IHMISET OVAT LÄHTENEET EVAKKOTIELLE. JOUTUNEET JÄTTÄMÄÄN KOTINSA JA MAANSA. MONI ON MENEHTYNYT RAUNIOIHIN.

HERRA, MISTÄ SAAMME VOIMAA VOITTA PAHUUDEN VOIMAN.

HERRA, ANNA SINÄ ARMON VIITTASI LASKEUTUA SUOJAKSEMME, KÄÄNNÄ HYÖKKÄÄJIEN KATSE NÄKEMÄÄN TUHON JÄLJET, ANNA ARMOA IHMISKUNNALLE.

HÄVITÄ HERRA PEDON VOIMA, JOTTA VALO AUKAISISI SOKEAT SILMÄT. SOTILAAT KIELTÄYTYISIVÄT PALVELEMASTA PAHUUTTA, MIKÄ TUHOAA JOKAISEN IHMISEN JA KANSKUNNAN.

SUOJAA MEITÄ KAIKKIA, ANNA INHIMILLISYYDEN JA HUOLENPIDON LÄMMÖN LOISTAA PÄÄLLEMME.

SUOJAA MEITÄ RAKKAUDEN JA ARMON VIITALLA LÖYTÄMÄÄN UUSI ALKU, UUSI POLKU KOKO IHMISKUNNALLE, TÄTÄ ME PYYDÄMME ISÄN, POJAN JA PYHÄN HENGEN NIMEEN

AMEN

Appendix 8. Metsäitku, Emilia Kallonen

4. metsäitku, san. /säv. Emilia Kallonen

Valamossa 09/2023

Kuulisitko, kuuletko kuusikkokasvoinen kallis kaikkivaltias

Salapuoilisilla sijoillasi suuri siunaajani, suojanantajani

Kallistelisitko kuusikkokorviasiomaluodulesi lapsellesi, pienelle peilisi palaselle

Kuulisitko kanervakorvillasi

Kun kuumilla kyyneltesilläni kostuttelen

karpalovarpaidasi, pehmeitä pieluksia petäjäpylväilläsi

Minä paleltunut piikapuolukkainen, peilisipalanen

poloinen peipponen

Tulin tuoksuville turvaturpeillesi, tuhma tuhlaajaisesi

Aarnivaltaisiesi valtaaja

omaluotuisesi omena

tulin uhkaksi omallesi

vartuin vaaraksi luomakunnallesi

Raivasin korvet

raastoin rannat riekaleiksi

erehdyin ottamaan omakseni

tuhlasin tuhmasti tuhannet turpeesi

kaikki kauniit kuusikkokorvet

Halulla holhsin hokiasi

himolla hallitsin hiljaisinta havikkoasi

minä omaluotusi onneton omena

Antaisitko anteeksi!

Antakaa anteeksi armasmieliset armahtajaiset,

Annelkaa anteeksi meille mielettömille,

suuret siunaajat salapuoilisilla sijoilla

Annelkaa meille viisautta varjella elämää

Appendix 9. Harakan haaveet, Minna Hokka

Harakka hartaimman hauraimman haaveen hautasi haavikkoon.
Himmeni hilpeys, tummeni taivas lemmen ennen lämpimän.
Lentoni laskussa lemmityn lomaillessa lemmenleikeistä.
Rakkaani rautarinta, kivenkova koiraani
pesäämme tilkitsee, auttaa askareissa.
En kaipaa kahisevaa, kilisevää, kehuja, ruusupuskaromantiikkaa.
Haleja halajan harmauteeni: armahda, ainoani.
Suklaata suudelmien sijaan annat; vaan ei sydän syty suklaasta.
Makea mahasta maahan päätyy, kenties kerran kukkasia kasvaa.
Valittuni vaalimana sydämeni sirkutteli,
nyt kyynelistä poski kastuu.
Toisinaan sentään, hiukkasen hänkin autuuden tuulahdusta tuo
koskemalla kourillansa kehoani kevyesti, silitellen siipiäni.

Appendix 10. Itku Yhdysvalloille, Emmi Kuittinen

ITKU YHDYSVALLOILLE (2016, kun Donald Trump oli voittanut presidentinvaalit)

Annahan mie rupielen, oi vaimala vartuvuoni
Huokaelen huolellisesti näitä huomisen huoliani
Apiemielisen Amerikan alahaisia allimarjaisia
Suurten suvantojen surumielisiä sulattelijoita
Kuni haluavat hallita hartaasti haisevilla hataroilla haluillansa
Pelolla pelkästään peruutella perimmäisten peltojensa sijasilla
Kylvää kylmyyttä meidän kaikkien kylläisille kylille
Vilua viimottaa vihannoille vierisijasille
Oi armahat kallehet syndyzet
Antakaa meille kaikille alahaisille allimarjaisille
Rohkeutta roimasti roihauttaa
Rakkautta kaikille rauhan raajarikoille
Ymmärrystä yritellä vielä yhteen yhyttämistä
Lempeä leiskuen lehautella leveillä sijasillamme
Armahtakaa meitä syndyzet

Appendix 11. Armahazelle muamolleni, Jaana Suviniitty

Transcribed 30.1.2026 based on a video recording. The author of the lament has seen the transcription and accepted it.

Kallis kantajani
Suloinen synnyttäjäni
Kaikenajat kaipaamani
Ikuisesti ikävöimäni emoseni
Miksi jätit kurjan vartuoni
Tänne hyisiin hyhmiin yksin elämään
Kurja raukka ympär maailman
Olen tallanut tainnuttaakseni ikäväni
Nyt sen ilmoille ilmoitan
Että suuret syndyzet sen tyvestäisivät
Tehkööt ne lentosi tuonilmaisissa kebieksi
Huuhtokoon huoliaisesi ja ikävälintusi
Ne eläissäsi kurittivat sulasieluazi
Jottet murginalle da uneen kyennyt
Armas emoseni
Kaunehen kevätperho
Kultahinen keijusiipi
Oma sydänekäbyseni
Katso meitä kurjavarduoni
Da kallehet bunukkasesi
Suokoon suuret syndyzet
Kebien elon meille kaikil

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18.05.2025