The South Lappish Book Language — an attempt to create a standard Sámi language in the 18th century

In the beginning of the 18th century the Swedish authorities wanted to strengthen the on-going missionary work in the Swedish parts of Sápmi in two ways; by the organization of schools for the children of the Sámi population, and by the translation of the Bible and other books into the Sámi language. To achieve these goals they found it necessary to standardize the Sámi language into a variety that could be used among the whole Sámi population in Sweden (and Finland). The result of this work is the variety that is referred to as the South Lappish Book Language. The South Lappish Book Language was used in all publications in Sámi printed in Sweden between the middle of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century (with a few exceptions).

If we apply the model of Haugen (1966) to the chronology of the standardization of the South Lappish Book Language, we find that it is easy to distinguish the three first steps of the model:

- Step 1: Choice of variety
  - Before 1744
- Step 2: Codification
  - 1744 - 1800
- Step 3: Elaboration of functions
  - 1800 – 1900

However, the standardization process never reached the fourth and last step: ‘Acceptance of the community’. Both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors have been suggested in order to explain this. In my talk I will discuss these factors and also to what extent we can find traces of the South Sámi Book Language in the written standards of the modern South and Lule Sámi languages.