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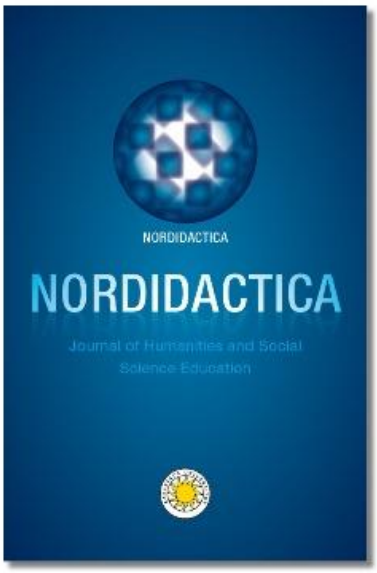

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From a Welcoming Rhetoric to a Narrowing One: Constructing Citizen Agency in Finnish Social Studies Textbooks

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Abstract: The article examines the ways in which the reader is positioned in the role of an active citizen in social studies textbooks in Finnish basic education. The Finnish core curriculum in general and the syllabus for social studies in particular both emphasize active citizenship as a central educational goal. Drawing on the frameworks of discourse analysis and textual interaction, the article analyses the linguistic and rhetorical means by which the reader is addressed and discusses the image of societal agency that is constructed. The results show that the introductory chapters employ an encouraging, "welcoming rhetoric" to depict an ideal reader who is about to grasp the potential to change the world. Theme-specific chapters indicate that this agency consists of some domain-specific actions in society, such as voting, while the reader is left with a reactive role regarding choosing a career and participating in the economy and offered quite limited ways to influence climate change and the ongoing ecological disaster.

KEYWORDS: AGENCY, TEXTBOOKS, SOCIAL STUDIES, DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Introduction

According to the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNBE 2014, p. 24), one of the main goals of a basic education is to provide the students with the skills to participate in society and influence the world around them. In the curriculum, competence in "participation, involvement and building a sustainable future" is one of the transversal competences covering all subjects across the curriculum. In the social studies syllabus in particular, the themes of participation and influence are presented as central subject-specific content. The main goal of the subject is to socialize students to engage in civic behavior and act as citizens in society. Textbooks are or should at least be routinely produced based on the guidelines of the core curricula; therefore, they also encourage readers to become involved and have an impact on society. However, how do they direct readers to engage in the role of an active, influential citizen?

This article examines the construction of agency by examining the following two research questions: How is the reader addressed when constructing agency? What linguistic means are employed to position the reader in an agentive role? This analysis, 1) notes the differences and similarities in the rhetoric of agency construction in the introductory chapters and later sections of textbooks and 2) unpacks them using discourse analysis tools. We are interested in the ways in which the reader is introduced to the role of an active citizen and whether the rhetoric changes when diverse domains of society are made the point of focus.

Agency has been conceptualized and defined in a variety of ways in different fields of scholarship. Our view aligns with Ahearn's (2010) definition of agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act," which can be examined from a discursive perspective via a close analysis of "meta-agentive discourse," that is, the ways of talking about agency (Ahearn, 2010). In our approach, a social studies textbook serves as the medium for the sociocultural mediation and construction of the capacity to act. Key concepts related to agency include participation, involvement, a sense of belonging, and power, all of which have been used to make sense of an individual's position as an active member of society. To better clarify and disentangle the concepts, we view influence as the capacity to describe an action from an individual's perspective and participation as framing an action in collective terms. The data is examined against this continuum of individual influence and collective participation.

Active citizenship, social studies, and textbooks

The goals of a social studies education include being socialized to participate in society and its institutions, providing a model of an ideal citizen and ideal civic behaviour, and demonstrating ways to move from national viewpoints to an awareness of global world citizenship. The notion of involvement is built into the main goals of basic education in general and social studies in particular. Finnish basic education has traditionally not devoted much attention to educating students on how to engage in active citizenship. However, since the early 2000s several projects have been devoted

to increasing democratic education within schools (Rautiainen, 2022). This was the result of political concern over low voter turnout (Hansen, 2016) and an international study revealing that Finnish students have little appreciation for democratic decision-making processes (Torney-Purta, 2002). Yet, there have thus far been few signs of a shift towards more democratic education at the classroom level, where teachers seem to neglect active citizenship (Fornaciari, 2022). In Männistö's (2020) view, one reason for this neglect is that democratic education in Finland is strongly tied to a traditional, representational understanding of democracy.

Published textbooks constitute only a part of all teaching material used in basic education, but they have a particularly strong role in subject teaching as epistemic authorities and by providing influential interpretations of how the aims of the core curriculum can be applied in practice. In social studies especially, Finnish textbooks have a central role since most social studies teachers in Finland are not specialized in social studies as their main subject but majored in history (Löfström & van den Berg, 2013, p. 60).

The construction of agency is connected to notions of civic engagement and democracy. By representing an image of normal, desirable and (im)possible ways of making an impact on the world in a democratic society, textbooks delineate the concept of democracy in a certain way. In this picture, some elements of democratic citizenship are predominant and self-evident, while others are peripheral or invisible. The dimensions of civic engagement, which range from disengagement to political activity, have been mapped in a variety of ways (Teorell et al., 2007; Ekman & Amnå, 2012). In studying Finnish social studies textbooks, Hansen and Puustinen (2021) have identified five domains of society: communities; participation and decision-making (politics); rules, safety, and well-being; economics, work, and markets; and finally, the society of media. In examining Finnish social studies textbooks before the latest core curriculum reform, Löfström and van den Berg (2013) found a strong emphasis on the representation that economic processes just happen and that politics and the economy are separate phenomena, with neutrality being a conspicuous aim of the textbooks. In another analysis of social studies textbooks, Mikander (2016) found that they depict globalization as a force of nature and all too easily omit the political dimensions of global trade and global inequality. Similarly, Hansen and Puustinen (2021, p. 869) conclude that "social studies textbooks fall short of the goals of the national curriculum" in that the ways they emphasize rules and expectations and introduce institutions do not encourage participation.

Citizenship education as a part of social studies teaching has recently also been addressed in curriculum research (Löfström & Ouakrim-Soivio, 2022). In addition to addressing the theme of citizenship, scholars have examined Finnish textbooks from a multifaceted perspective with a focus on diversity (e.g., Hahl et al., 2015). The construction of agency in textbooks has been studied, for example, in home economics from the perspective of gender performance (Anttila et al., 2015).

Studies on how textbooks address the issue of citizenship education have focused on such important questions as how they present images of an ideal citizen, whether passive and obedient or active and critical (see Albanesi, 2018, p. 23). Following this line of

research, it is intriguing to examine how society and the world are represented as being receptive to influence by the reader. Is the reader positioned as a passive or active agent and as obedient or critical in relation to specific domains of society? Representations of agency reveal, for their part, the extent to which active citizenship is or is not visible in textbooks and how different aspects of society are viewed through the pedagogical lens of the textbook genre.

From a subject perspective, this critical discursive inquiry can be seen as a way of deploying critical language awareness (see Fairclough, 1992b), which offers a framework for focusing on language as an arena of constructing social reality and renewing power relations in education. In practice, the construction of subject-specific knowledge and views of the world is done predominantly through language and texts. In the Finnish core curriculum, language awareness has a central role as a concept that crosses curricular boundaries. Analysing the language of how agency is constructed within the framework of social studies is one way of shedding light on the way language underpins and influences subject teaching.

Theoretical framework, data collection, and analysis

The qualitative analysis is informed by the frameworks of critical discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough, 1992a) and textual interaction studies (Hoey, 2001). Both linguistically oriented frameworks provide a perspective that directs focus to the concrete resources used in constructing agency and addressing the reader in the text, such as personal references and modality.

Our research questions deal with the representation of social reality, the various types of actors in the world and their potential actions, as well as how the reader is engaged in this type of representation. For this endeavor, the theoretical and methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see Fairclough, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) offers useful tools. Due to its flexibility, CDA has been widely applied in studies of textbooks. Many kinds of methods and perspectives have been developed and employed under the umbrella term CDA; they all share the aim of analysing how social reality is constructed and produced through language and other semiotic sign systems, thereby revealing underlying ideological assumptions and exercises of power. The study at hand focuses on critical discourse analysis of how knowledge is constructed in textbooks (Macgilchrist, 2018). A critical discourse analysis perspective provides a framework to closely examine the subjectivities and agencies that textbooks treat as natural and unravel what kinds of readers they place in a marginal position (see, e.g., Bazzul, 2014).

The dataset consists of three social studies textbooks, *Forum 9*, *Yhteiskuntaopin taitaja 9*, and *Memo 9*, written in Finnish and addressed to ninth graders in basic education. They have been published by three widely read commercial textbook publishers. Limiting the number of textbooks was necessary for the purposes of conducting an in-depth qualitative study. Given that the overall number of Finnish textbook series used in social studies is limited as well, textbooks from three of the

largest publishers provide representative data of 9th-grade Finnish textbooks. In Finnish basic education, students are first exposed to social studies in the 4th to 6th grade, yet social studies at the lower secondary school or junior high school level (grades 7 to 9), are taught mainly in the 9th grade. In Finland, textbooks are written by author groups usually consisting of teachers and sometimes researchers.

To study the writer and reader positions in a detailed manner, we draw on a dialogically-oriented linguistic approach, where school textbooks are seen as a forum of textual interaction between the writer and the reader (see Hoey, 2001; Thompson & Thetela, 1995; Thompson, 2012). The approach has been identified as a research tradition in its own right, called dialogically-oriented linguistic discourse analysis (Makkonen-Craig, 2014) or textual interaction studies (Virtanen & Kääntä, 2018). Within this framework, the writer and the reader are understood as positions created by the linguistic features of the text, such as personal references, questions, negation, explanations, modality, evaluation, and diverse rhetorical patterns. Thompson and Thetela (1995) refer to these positions as writer-in-the-text and reader-in-the-text to underscore the perspective of interaction written into texts. It is through this type of interaction that the construction of identities in textbooks takes place (see Tainio & Winkler, 2014). Actual readers may or may not challenge the options provided by the text. We look at the textbook text as a dialogic space (see Martin & White, 2005) created by the writer, where the writer's linguistic choices construct and provide a reader position. This position is seen as an identity option, a position built into the text for the reader to identify with (see Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). Named actors, general individual references (e.g., *a smart consumer*), institutions, and groups of people create the cultural landscape in which readers can position themselves. In addition, personal references are grammatical devices for constructing agency and provide a common ground for interaction in text.

We structure the ways of engaging the reader by analysing the roles in which the reader is placed and the textual strategies utilised. Thompson and Thetela (1995) distinguish between enacted and projected roles. In this classification, enacted roles refer to the positions of the speaker or writer and recipient inherently always present in language use. For example, the roles of information giver and accepter are inherently present when a claim is made in the text. Similarly, the complementary roles of the demander and giver of information are evoked when a question is asked. These roles structure interaction even in the case of rhetorical questions, where no actual response is anticipated. In written interaction, the enacted roles mimic face-to-face interaction (Thompson and Thetela, 1995, p. 108); practices of interpersonal action through text have evolved to utilise the affordances of a written mode. Enacted roles cannot be avoided in language use: they are built into interaction events. Projected roles, in turn, refer to the explicit labelling of participants, such as *you* or *me* or *a skilful citizen*. Here, participants are not only present in the interaction event but part of the representation and explicitly coded.

In drawing on discourse analysis and applying the notions of agency and textual interaction, the analysis is based on a qualitative method characteristic of textbook research on representations, namely interpretive close reading (for more on the position

of qualitative methods in textbook studies, see Carrier, 2018). The analytic steps included identifying sequences where a role as an agent is allocated to the reader. In all the textbooks, certain chapters more emphatically assumed this function: an opening chapter, where social studies as subject is (re-)introduced and the reader is placed in the role of a social studies student and instructed in the preferred stance they are encouraged to take as such; and a chapter devoted to making an impact on society. However, book-length texts tend to construct the reader position along the way, with the reader allocated different kinds of agency in chapters that focus on such themes as consumption and voting. The analysis here focuses on sequences where societal agency is addressed. For example, when examining chapters on consumption we approached passages where buying was labelled as *influencing* and a social actor labelled as a *consumer* was provided as the reader position and proclaimed to have *power* as focal to the agency construction process. The category formation of agencies was data-driven and is the result of analysis (see the "literature-based semi-structured grid" in Albanesi, 2018).

In the two following analytic sections, which address specific research questions, agency construction is examined from two perspectives: 1) What kind of a reader position is constructed in the introductory chapters and by what linguistic means? 2) How is the reader addressed during the agency construction process in later, theme-specific chapters? Finally, the results and their implications are summarized and discussed.

Introductory chapters: welcoming, persuading, and encouraging the reader to the role of an ideal social studies student

All the textbooks included in the dataset rhetorically place impact-making at the core of the subject in the opening chapter, where social studies as a subject is introduced[1] and its main goals are presented, including the goal of attaining agency within society. All the examined textbooks begin with a sequence that introduces the concept of society as well as social studies as a subject. This introductory move is done in a preface (*Yhteiskuntaopin taitaja*; hereafter *Taitaja*) or in an opening chapter (*Forum*), or both (*Memo*). Since the preface in *Taitaja* is arranged like a chapter, we refer to such sections here collectively as introductory chapters. The introductory chapters have a central role in constructing agency for the reader.

In the introductory chapters, the writer orients the reader in how to study social studies by characterizing the nature and the main goals of social studies as a subject. The goals, presented for the reader to adopt, involve making a difference and being able to change the world.

[1] The subject begins already in grades 4–6 but resumes after two years in the 9th grade.

1) Civil society refers to a society in which citizens actively participate in developing society. Thus, the goal of studying social studies is to learn to change the world.[2] (*Forum*, p. 11)

2) The goal of the subject is to help everyone develop an outlook on how society works and what kind of position an individual has in it. When one knows one's own rights and opportunities to influence actions, one can participate in developing society in an active, resourceful, and determined manner. (*Memo*, p. 9)

The aim of the subject is framed in terms of gaining agency and learning about participatory practices. The introductory chapters simultaneously a) argue for the significance of studying social studies and b) outline the role of a desirable citizen. An open personal reference is offered for the reader as a welcoming position, using the indefinite pronoun *jokainen*, "everyone" or "each and every one," and the so-called zero person (translated here – rather clumsily but to underscore the impersonal nature of the rhetoric – as the impersonal pronoun *one*).[3] A zero person is formed with a verb in the third-person singular but with no explicit subject, and it is used to make an open, indefinite reference (see Laitinen, 2006). It is quite common in Finnish and a useful device for addressing the recipient in a subtle way without contracting the dialogic space: in example 2, gaining knowledge is generally presented as a prerequisite for active citizenship, yet in the context of a textbook introductory chapter, it calls for an interpretation as hortatory towards the reader-student.

The manner in which reader-students should learn to participate in society is then further elaborated: an ideal citizen acts "in an active, resourceful, and determined manner." The writer employs a Goal-Achievement pattern (Hoey, 2001, pp. 145–150), wherein the set goal (to participate in developing society) is presented as achievable through the actions outlined by the writer and described in a zero person reference. Thus, a route of action is laid out for the reader to follow. The rhetorical pattern reflects an understanding of influencing as it is defined later in *Forum*, in a chapter dedicated to the theme of making an impact: "Influencing means taking actions in order to achieve a goal" (*Forum*, p. 164). As the following discussion will show, a Goal-Achievement pattern is also visible elsewhere as a structuring principle for agency construction.

Taitaja emphasizes more than the other textbooks the importance of knowledge and the skills needed to obtain it. Here, the image of having an impact consists of cognitive actions and communication: opinions, understanding, consideration, values, views, research, and arguments are central.

[2] The excerpts are translated from Finnish by the authors.
[3] Throughout the article, zero person is translated in this way to differentiate between it and second person address, since the use of these two interpersonal resources is a central dimension in the discursive analysis of our data. Often, the most fluent translation of zero person would include a generic *you* or a passive construction.

3) Every member of a community has a right to influence their own community. Every member of society therefore has a right to influence society. It is good to ponder one's own values and gain information from many different sources to form a foundation for one's own action. Broad basic knowledge helps one defend their own views and understand different opinions and values. (*Taitaja*, p. 8)

Here, straightforward evaluation ("it is *good* to ponder one's own values") serves as an hortatory directive for the reader. Again, a pattern of goal and achievement is delineated in the text: the (cognitive) goal is to argue for one's own views and understand different opinions and values, and the route to achieving this aim is to acquire a broad knowledge base. The grammatical means of presenting this line of action are, once more, the indefinite pronoun *jokainen [jäsen]* ("every [member]") and a zero person reference, both of which are readily available generic features of such introductory, subtly persuasive textbook passages.

One noteworthy component of the introductory chapters is the relationship of individual and collective perspectives on participation and action. On the one hand, the reason for studying a subject is to improve one's capacity to manage their own affairs, which underscores the individual perspective. In example 4, the reader is empowered by being given the right to influence society. In example 5, the individual perspective is demonstrated with the use of first-person singular.

4) Everyone has a right to influence society according to one's own values. A skilful citizen finds the information they need and has the ability to interpret it. (*Taitaja*, p. 6)

5) What do I do if I do not have the money to pay my bills? Am I entitled to student financial aid? How do I get a moped license? The better one knows the ways in which society functions, the easier it is to take care of one's own business. (*Forum*, p. 11)

In example 4, the reader is given permission to learn about their place in the world, implying that students have an inherent drive to make an impact on society. In example 5, a chain of action is built between knowing how society functions and taking care of one's own business. The first-person singular reference is employed to offer a position that students can naturally identify with and suggest exemplary actions that are both concrete and quotidian in nature to help students construct a clear image of how an individual can impact society.

On the other hand, action is described as being the result of collective aims to participate in different communities and institutions. In the excerpts, the verbs *toimia* ("to act") and *osallistua* ("to participate," "to be involved," "to engage") in particular connect individual agency to a larger collective. These lexical choices construct an individual's agency in general as a part of society.

6) If they want, people can also act in different organizations or found a political party. (*Memo*, p. 9)

7) They [Finnish people] can participate in society through, for example, their family, place of study, or free-time activity association. (*Memo*, p. 8, caption)

A collective perspective is in part built on the lexicogrammar of collectivity, with the plural form *[suomalaiset] ihmiset* ("[Finnish] people") as the grammatical subject and the verbs being in plural, whereas the already familiar references *everyone* (*jokainen*) and zero person are employed in the above individual-perspective excerpts. Describing the actions of people is a form of distancing compared to a direct second-person reference (see examples 8 and 9), and the strategy presents the reader with a range of options to consider and then possibly choose.

In example 4, the text uses a specific rhetorical device to address the reader: presenting and labelling a characterological figure, *a skilful citizen*, whose action is described. This indirect third-person form of address is frequently used in the textbooks. The writer uses a third-person reference to project the image of an ideal reader (on the same technique being used in advertisements, see Thompson & Thetela, 1995, p. 119). By depicting the attributes and actions of ideal (and non-ideal) characters, the writer indirectly addresses the reader with desired types of engagement. The characters are offered as a mould where the reader is assumed, and in this case, encouraged, to position themself. Thompson (2012, p. 85) has discussed the example of *a commonsense well-informed person* serving as such a mould in a newspaper editorial. In textbooks, there are several general third-person references of this kind that embody the expected citizen that the reader is encouraged to aim for. In addition to being *a skilful citizen*, the introductory chapter of *Taitaja* encourages the reader to become *a skilful influencer* (p. 8) and the preface of *Memo* encourages the reader to become *an active member of society* (p. 3).

Employing ideal character types is an indirect way of addressing the reader, as is the zero person. A zero person, as briefly noted above, is an open reference that offers a desired position but does not force the reader into it. Addressing the reader in second-person singular is a more straightforward way of engaging them. Directly addressing the reader as *you* obliges but also invites them in a more straightforward manner than its more generic alternatives (this is the case even with a more passive, "impersonal" use of *you*; see Thompson, 2012, pp. 86–87). In the following extracts, the reader is persuaded to seeing themself as an agent.

8) What kind of place is your ideal Finland of tomorrow? You can take part in making it a reality. (*Forum*, p. 9)

9) Memo gives you an idea of how Finnish society and the Finnish national economy work as well as how you can participate in and have an influence

> on their activity. [...] You will need these skills when you create your own path as an active member of society. (*Memo*, p. 3)

In example 8, the reader is given the possibility to envision and realize an ideal version of Finland. This empowering introductory rhetoric is constructed in such a way that, in *Forum*, the writer begins with the notion of a good life. The first subheading is "Towards a good life," and the text proceeds from describing the good life possible for an individual to the significance of communities and society in general. In example 9, studying social studies and, more specifically, engaging with the advice offered in the textbook *Memo* will equip the reader with both propositional knowledge ("gives you an idea of how Finnish society . . . work[s]") and procedural knowledge ("how you can participate and influence"). These forms of knowledge are presented as ways of achieving the goal of creating one's own "path", which is an entrenched and emphatically individual metaphor. A society in which individuals choose their own paths remains fixed and unchangeable. Moreover, a direct obligation in the form of the label *an active member of society* is imposed on the reader.

We have now seen how open personal references and direct second-person references are utilized to guide the reader to the position of an active citizen-agent. In addition, the first-person plural is also part of the textbook writer's toolkit of rhetorical devices.

> 10) Everyone has a chance to influence what kind of society we will live in in the future. (*Forum*, p. 10)

> 11) Social studies opens before us a world where everything affects everything: the EU affects our everyday life and, through our own decisions, we can affect, for example, the national economy of Finland and greenhouse gas emissions. (*Memo*, p. 11)

In these excerpts, the textbooks deploy a notion of togetherness, the inclusive *we*, as an interpersonal resource for educating the reader in active citizenship. To make the reader receptive to the overarching message of becoming an active democratic citizen, the texts view them as needing to be persuaded to take the position on both individual and collective grounds. The reader is addressed as a member of society, as a collective agent, whose common agency is recognized through use of the first-person plural. In example 11, the message is especially empowering: together, such big issues as the national economy and gas emissions (perhaps familiar from the news as recurring themes) are brought into the scope of issues that the reader can hope to "influence." *We* can be general or more specifically defined: interpretation is based on the context (e.g., Thompson, 2012, p. 85). Here, *we* forms an indefinite, broad ingroup. The rhetoric is persuasive and enticing; the reader-in-the-text is constructed as someone who does not take the role of an active citizen for granted but who must be convinced to adopt such a role. The figure of speech about the opening world is a case in point of the welcoming

rhetoric of the introductory chapters: the world is open, and the reader is invited (and persuaded) to step into it as an active citizen.

In summary, the ideal reader of the textbooks is presented with a series of goals and ways of achieving them, all laid out by the writer in the introductory chapters. However, the reader must be convinced: as can be seen from the excerpts, much rhetorical effort is exerted to assure the reader that they can have an impact, that they have agency if they only realize it. The opening sequences detail the role of an individual citizen with skills gained from studying, which prepare the student for a successful life in society. In keeping with the curricular goals of the subject, the reader is positioned as an active citizen. This is done by providing a position that the reader can readily identify with or by addressing the reader directly in the second person; thus, the dialogic space is regulated. By these means, the reader is introduced to the world of social studies and the textbook via a persuasive and encouraging discourse that could be labelled *welcoming rhetoric*: "with our help, by studying social studies and reading the textbook, you will learn to change the world." The world is open and the reader is welcomed to enter it as a capable citizen and to change it, if only they realize their opportunities. The textbook will help them learn the skills needed for this endeavour, just so long as the reader has faith in their own agency. The reader is left with a relatively wide dialogic space in which they are free to make choices. However, the dialogic space does place limits on their range of options in the form of some broad demands, such as the need to be *an active member of society*.

The kind of agency envisioned for the reader is made visible in the introductory chapters. On the level of declaration, the reader is explicitly given agency. Knowledge forms the basis of societal dialogue and decision-making; from an individual perspective, it forms the basis of personal agency as a member of society. What happens to this welcoming and empowering message as the reader moves forward? The actual roles written into the text in other parts of the books offer an interesting point of comparison to the explicitly described active ideal readers outlined in the introductory chapters (cf. Thompson, 2012, p. 98; Jaakola et al., 2014). The core curriculum and the textbook itself both call for an active agent as reader – it is therefore compelling to next scrutinize the later sections of the textbooks and thereby compare the active citizen-reader introduced in the opening chapters with the roles allocated to the reader-in-the-text in the later chapters of the textbooks.

Choosing to be an active citizen: demands in different domains of societal agency

We have now seen the starting position taken by the textbooks with respect to the role of an ideal reader and an ideal student of social studies in basic education, namely that they employ a welcoming rhetoric. How is this image reflected in the construction of a reader position and agency in latter parts of the textbooks, which focus on different themes? Our analysis in this section is twofold. On the one hand, we continue to examine the rhetoric of agency construction: the linguistic means of written interaction

between the writer and the reader in terms of agency construction. On the other hand, we structure the domains of agency that the writer of the textbook makes available to the reader. The section is divided into two parts: 1) active citizenship as a member of society and its institutions and organizations, and 2) agency construction in the economic sphere, namely consumption and the labour market, that is, positioning the reader as a consumer and a future employee. All three books devote separate chapters to how a reader can make an impact. However, since societal agency is a declared goal of the subject as a whole, ways of participating and having an impact are discussed throughout the textbooks, through more specific lenses under different subject-specific themes, such as voting as a democratic practice and consumption and its dimensions.

Overall, the reader is approached and engaged predominantly through an impersonal and distancing rhetoric. The textual flow introduces ways of obtaining agency as an active citizen, with each of the books providing descriptions of society and the world. However, the means utilized to address the reader are already familiar from the previous section: directly addressing the reader in the second person and more indirectly through reference to a zero person. Moreover, ideal characters (introduced above) are used as a rhetorical device for indirectly addressing the reader.

Active citizenship

The ideal of an active citizen is central to the core curriculum and is presented as a desired position for the reader in the introductory chapters of the textbooks. The textbooks provide this general ideal, associated with activity and engagement, as an image of successfully practicing societal agency. In example 12, the figure of an active citizen is utilized to persuade the reader to acquire a desired mode of being in society.

> 12) An active citizen succeeds in changing the world in a direction that they think is better. A passive citizen stands by when others make decisions about common issues. To which group do you belong? (*Forum*, p. 163)

In this excerpt, an individual needs to understand the role of an active citizen to have an influence, and hence being *an active citizen* is presented as a self-evident goal towards which the reader should orient themself. The writer uses a rhetorical strategy of providing an obviously unbalanced dichotomy between an active and a passive citizen and then posing a rather leading question. By this strategy, the reader is pressured to choose between these two options and assume the role of *an active citizen* as their only real choice. In posing this kind of direct question to the reader, "the discourse is designed to constrain the response" (Thompson, 2012, p. 91). The writer simultaneously utilizes the enacted roles of the speech event by posing a rhetorical question and thereby assigning a responsive role to the reader and the projected roles constructed by the labels *active citizen* and *passive citizen* as well as the direct personal pronoun reference *you* (Thompson & Thetela, 1995, p. 108). This layered use of interactive textual resources gives the passage rhetorical weight.

A weighty moral tone regarding an individual's choices is built into the dichotomy. "Passivity" can also be interpreted as a depiction of marginalized people. Here, differences in activity, be they connected to class or other divisions, are reflected simply as individuals' moral judgements. The position provided for the reader projects an individual psychological view of a human: a rational (neoliberal) subject making free individual choices. This view could be paraphrased as "be a chooser or be a loser": if you remain passive in the common democratic activities, you do not deserve to be viewed as a full-fledged participant of society.

What is noteworthy, is that the excerpt also presents a non-ideal character as the opposite of a desired one. These non-ideal characters are few but visible (another one can be seen in examples 15 and 16 below: a person who does not vote). The writer constructs a world of characters in which opting for one that is presented as desirable means gaining agency. The given alternatives are practically no alternatives at all, since their descriptions are laid out in an explicitly value-laden way: action attributed to ones who give up their chance of influencing are designed to blatantly contradict universally shared cultural and moral norms. From the perspective of written interaction, the writer offers the reader identity options of which some are clearly designed to be self-evidently opted and characterological figures are employed as a rhetorical device in this action. When compared to personal references addressed in the previous section, this way of engaging the reader is based on more subtle and impersonal persuasion. Here the engagement is perhaps subtle only grammatically, not so much pragmatically: a moralizing tone in describing such people is obvious.

As seen above, in the opening chapters the reader is introduced to collective forms of agency, namely participation in organizations. In the chapters focusing on ways of making an impact, the reader is introduced to a diversity of collective forms of action and institutions, such as political parties, parishes, associations and non-governmental organizations. Such agency is presented foremost as participation, as acting as a part in a collective of people.

13) Ordinary people can have an influence through different movements or non-governmental organizations or, for example, by supporting various projects. (*Taitaja*, p. 156)

14) Societal influencing is not just party politics but also grassroots-level action, such as arranging a spring bee on one's own home street or actively volunteering in a local sports club. Local democracy works only thanks to active people in villages and city districts. (*Forum*, p. 194)

Each of these excerpts lists and describes different types of participatory societal action with no direct personal references: the reader can (possibly) choose from a number of options. A collectively orientated, "community organizer" type of ideal citizen can be discerned in depictions of local influencing, where action is framed via institutions. In example 14, locally active people are positioned as ideal citizens and cornerstones of a democratic society. What is noteworthy is the explicit negation of the

perception that societal impact deals merely with party politics (on negation, see Fairclough, 1992a, pp. 121–122). The writer is oriented towards a shared assumption that societal impact-making is prototypically about party politics, and so part of constructing agency for the reader as an active citizen is to explicitly broaden this picture. A certain disregard for party politics among youth was identified already in the early 2000s (Torney-Purta, 2002). This finding helps explain the approach by the textbooks that a reader needs to be persuaded to participate in organizations or simply that possible misconceptions need to be addressed.

Democracy is positioned at the core of influencing, both conceptually and textually. For example, both *Memo* and *Taitaja* contain sections with the title *Vaikuttaminen* ("influencing"), each of which begins with a chapter on democracy and democratic states. The various methods by which the reader can acquire agency and influence society are introduced within the framework of democracy. Voting in elections is typically the predominant action through which the concept of democracy is presented in textbooks across the curriculum (Satokangas, 2021), and it receives notable attention also in our data. It is noteworthy that the writer devotes considerable space to addressing the issue of not voting and imposes a moral judgment on people who fail to see the significance of voting in elections. Hence, an unpreferred identity option is that of a non-voter.

15) One who does not use their right to vote gives up their chance to influence what kind of country and society Finland will become. (*Memo*, p. 189)

16) If only a small group of citizens votes in an election, then democracy is threatened because only they are exercising power. Decisions also affect those who do not vote. (*Forum*, p. 170)

In other words, social and political agency is only possible through voting. The writer gives a moral sermon to *those who do not vote*. Non-voter as an undesired identity option is a special role only for the *passive citizen*. *Taitaja* (p. 153) contains a relatively long passage in which the writer addresses the issue of failing to vote in elections. *Young people* are identified as a special object of concern.

17) Many scholars and decision-makers are especially worried about the passivity of young people. If young people do not vote and stand as candidates in elections, their voice will not be heard. (*Taitaja*, p. 153)

By describing the causes and effects of not voting in the third person, but still in an evaluative tone, the writer persuades the reader to acquire an appreciative view of voting. Describing the particular concern of passive youth raises the issue of how to properly engage with society for the student-reader: do you want scholars and decision-makers to worry about you? The category of young people is repeatedly deployed as a strategy to engage the reader without directly addressing them. A twofold rhetorical pattern concerning non-voters is visible in both *Forum* and *Taitaja*, that of presenting

the collective as well as the individual downsides of not voting: democracy becomes threatened and non-voters' voices are not heard, while others make decisions that affect them. In this picture, democracy is equated with voting, and individuals not voting poses a threat to it. Compared to the introductory chapters, the rhetoric of the later chapters adopts a normative and moralizing tone that is both strict and impersonal: a world with certain patterns and problems (and people who worry about it) is described and the reader is left to choose their role on these grounds. The world is no longer open and the reader is not empowered in the same way as in the introductory chapters; instead, the writer pressures the reader and envisions a space that consists of the (non-)choice between being an ideal citizen or a loser.

In the chapters that focus on influencing, the role of communication, of voicing one's opinion effectively, is central. Ways of reaching other people through traditional and new media are placed in the center of the chapters on influencing. These chapters in particular enlist different media that one can use to make their voice heard: social media, conversations during breaks, writing opinions in newspapers and on the web, and contacting decision-makers. The focus is on articulating one's thoughts regarding what should be done and what things should change. The writer underscores the *fashion* in which one communicates as well as *efficient means* of doing so.

> 18) A good influencer knows who it is worthwhile to talk to and in what situation. It is important to think about the way in which the case is made in order to get the message across. (*Forum*, p. 164)

> 19) A person who can make their case in an impressive fashion and justify their opinion convincingly has substantial power in society. Influencing will not work without tenacity; therefore, it is worthwhile for someone who wants change to come up with the most efficient means of making their voice heard. (*Memo*, p. 171)

In the excerpts, the writer characterizes the features that are required from an individual to efficiently influence society. A Goal-Achievement pattern involves action: efficient communication is the means of making a change. The modal expression *kannattaa* ("to be worthwhile")[4] constructs this type of goal and the best ways to achieve it. As a lexical choice, it functions as a way of convincing the reader that it is in their own best interest to acquire the skills necessary for having an influence in society. With respect to the role of being a *good influencer*, central capabilities consist of talking, building an argument, and formulating a message. As an identity option, this role is intriguing: a person who feels the urge to voice an opinion and influence the world around them is presented as a given starting point. What kind of dialogic space is there for actual readers then? Does the reader want to be this kind of figure, a person with

[4] This verb is not easy to translate. We have translated it as *to be worthwhile* so as to highlight the fact that it is beneficial to act in a given manner.

power? The tone is quite different from the rhetoric used in the introductions of the textbooks. The open world that the reader is now enticed to take part in, with the subtext "we will teach you to become an active citizen and change the world!", has become limited to stricter (non-)choices characterised by the question, "are you going to be an active and efficient influencer or not?" The way to exercise power is presented as rather straightforward, with the ability to voice an opinion and be convincing is enough for one to claim "substantial power in society." However, the concrete discursive resources and practices needed for efficient communication are not presented. If agency is gained through acquiring efficient communicative skills, the actual resources constituting those skills remain mysterious to the reader.

Agency in the economic sphere: the reader as a consumer and future employee

Consumption is repeatedly offered as a simple method to influence the world. The writer often treats buying as an action that the reader must be explicitly persuaded to view as having an influence. Here, the enacted roles being written in the text are that of the writer building an argument and the reader who must be convinced of it. Thus, the reader position is constructed as a person who views buying as an everyday activity that does not have an overly visible impact on society and the world, but nonetheless one that the reader should seriously consider.

20) Buying, too, is influencing (section heading, *Memo*, p. 101)

21) The consumer has power (section heading, *Forum*, p. 92)

22) The consumer has power. Buying is always influencing because buying supports the store and the product bought in it. (*Taitaja*, p. 89)

What is being said here from a democratic perspective? Making a difference is placed within the sphere of consumption, and the logic of consuming itself does not change. The role of consumer is presented as a form of agency introduced in the text with a welcoming, empowering rhetorical tone: the reader is awakened to see their agency and opportunity to influence the world via their choice of consumer goods. However, the practical means of changing the world become visible in the very banality of the options available to the reader. We saw in example 11 how the reader is empowered in the introductory chapter to think that everyone can influence the economy and environment. In a supplementary text to a chapter on marketing, dealing with the fact that T-shirts are priced based on the place and means of production, the reader learns that their purchasing power provides a concrete way of influencing society and the world.

23) An aware consumer knows what they pay for when buing a T-shirt. In the end, consumers decide what is sold to them. (*Memo*, p. 106)

The reader can even have an impact on the environmental crisis through consumption; the most concrete way of exerting personal responsibility is through making individual choices when buying products. Purchase decisions are the actual decisions that the introductory chapter referred to when providing an empowering ethos. The reader is led relatively far away from thinking about how political and economic systems are connected to the environmental crisis and ways of influencing it. This image of influencing through consumption limits agency to those who have the money to buy products.

At the same time as the reader is guided to see consumption as a form of influencing, people as consumers are represented as machine-like actors who mechanically and automatically react to such economic phenomena as inflation:

24) In good times, people consume more and prices can rise. (*Taitaja*, p. 124)

Thus, the consumer-citizen both has and does not have agency. Their agency is seemingly limited to the purchasing decisions they make when shopping. The consumer-agent is also point of focus in the textbook assignments. For example, in *Taitaja* (p. 128) the reader is shown some newspaper headlines about consumer confidence; however, the questions treat the concept of a consumer as given and the reader is directed to contemplate such issues as what the consumers' behavior and thoughts reflect about the state of the economy.

Agency as part of the economic system is presented in a narrow framework, and the possibilities to have an influence lie mostly in individual buying decisions. When addressing economic growth and finance politics, the writer employs abstract and institutional actors, such as the state, companies, and central banks. The economic and political systems are static; they are just there. An individual is given agency in only a limited number of arenas. The future is presented in the textbooks as an inevitability that the reader must anticipate and prepare for when making consumer choices that benefit certain companies, not as something that they can influence on a larger scale. Hansen and Puustinen's (2021) observations point in a similar direction; this way of viewing the economy seems to be dominant in social studies textbooks.

Another particular facet of economic and societal life that individual citizens have a relationship with is the job market. The textbooks construct a specific, identifiable role as an agent for the reader within the framework of employment. However, this role is tellingly limited. Agency with respect to the job market entails planning a career, seeking jobs, and preparing for future working life. Interestingly, influencing is presented as one resource by which an individual can better compete on the job market (*Forum*, pp. 164–165). The reader, as an enacted role, is addressed by the writer explicitly urging them to be active in job seeking.

25) A young person can seek information about vacancies. [. . .] It is worthwhile to contact employers even if they have not announced that they seek an employee. (*Taitaja*, pp. 92–93)

26) It is worthwhile to be active when seeking one's first job. One can contact employers by calling them on the phone, visiting the location, or sending an email. (*Forum*, p. 112)

27) An employer seldom summons a person sitting on their couch at home to work for them, so everyone must find their own job. (*Memo*, p. 48)

The agency provided for the reader, as it is constructed in the textbooks, comprises a reactive role in relation to the job market. The reader is addressed indirectly by labelling them *a young person*, referring to them by a zero person or using the indefinite pronoun *everyone*. This seemingly indirect form of address is relatively straightforward with modal expressions. Modality is expressed through the use of the verb *kannattaa* ("to be worthwhile") and the necessive construction *on etsittävä* ("everyone *must* find"), directed at the zero person and *everyone*. Thus, the writer does not directly address the reader, but instead describes a certain kind of world to which the reader *must* adapt. This strategy is used to encourage the reader to be active within the job market, even if the form of argumentation assumes an ironic tone ("An employer seldom summons a person sitting on their couch at home to work for them"). The ironic remark can be interpreted as patronizing, and yet it is another means of reducing the wider world to a limited number of alternatives.

The perspective is that of individuals acting on their own behalf in a fixed job market. The image of agency in the domain of working life is narrow not only in the present but also in the future. Future working life is depicted as a site of deteriorating employment, agreements, and working conditions. It is something that is just going to happen, so an individual must be prepared to learn new skills.

28) People must constantly study more during their working life, even several professions. Traditional, long-term employment contracts are rarer, as work becomes increasingly project based. In future working life, the ability to learn new things will be vitally important. (*Taitaja*, p. 97)

29) Due to upheavals in working life, employees are expected to have the desire to develop their own professional skills more and more and learn new things in the future. Sometimes, jobs in the field may cease to exist completely. Then, one must be ready to educate oneself for a whole new profession. (*Memo*, p. 44)

In the excerpts, the role left for the reader is that of a person with the capability to conform to a constantly changing working life. The writer constructs this role using general labels, such as *people* and *employees* as well as a zero person as an open reference, yet again with a more or less obvious strategy of speaking directly to the reader-student and imposing a particular modality ("people must … study; one must be ready") on them. Structural change is presented as a force of nature rather than a

political process (for similar observations about globalization, see Mikander, 2016, pp. 73–74). It is worth emphasizing that it is *desire* that is demanded of employees rather than *ability*. In this representation, the static society demands a specific attitude on the part of the individual; the student-reader must adjust themself to its conditions. This seems to contradict the notion of active citizenship. Not only one's actions but also one's will and attitudes are being steered. Hansen and Puustinen (2021, p. 870), whose observations about social studies textbooks point in the same direction, sum up the dilemma as follows: "The future is given and the past is unspoken." It is not only the future but also the past that is static. Recounting past upheavals in working life, such as changes in legislation and greater workers' rights as a result of industrial action, would paint a more contingent picture of a domain where change and the chance to have an impact are possible even within the economic sphere.

Conclusion and discussion

According to the core curriculum, Finnish basic education in general and social studies in particular have the weighty task of providing students with the skills needed to participate in society and influence the world around them. In this article, we have examined the ways in which the need for such agency is addressed on the concrete level of linguistic choices in textbook discourse. Finnish 9th-grade social studies textbooks present a versatile image of the agency available to the reader in society. In this image, the reader is first persuaded to view themself as an agent capable of having an impact on society. This goal can be achieved via gaining knowledge about how society works. What are the frameworks where this political citizen with the task of changing the world, *homo politicus*, is allowed to enter the textbook (see also Löfström & van den Berg, 2013, p. 60)? When looking at how this abstract goal of gaining agency is more precisely depicted in theme-specific chapters, we find that the reader can predominantly have an influence through voting, communicating their opinions, and consuming. Voting, writing an opinion piece, or making appropriate choices as an aware consumer are done mostly individually, whereas organizational action in the form of NGOs, political parties, and parishes represents a more collective kind of action. The analysis shows that the dialogic space between the writer and the reader narrows considerably when the textual action at hand moves from introducing the general idea of changing the world to actual ways of acting in society and the world.

We have also examined the rhetorical dimension of how the reader is addressed and have compared the ways in which agency is presented in the introductory chapters and in later chapters dealing with specific themes. The introductory chapters employ a "welcoming rhetoric": the world is open, and as the reader gains knowledge about social studies and society, they will become capable and free to change the world as they see fit. This rhetoric entails a relatively open and broad dialogic space for the reader. In later chapters, however, when the perspective narrows to a focus on specific themes, such as consuming and voting, the rhetorical stance becomes less welcoming and more restrictive. The world is a place comprised of active citizens and passive citizens; ideal

democratic citizens vote and passive ones do not, thereby posing a threat to democracy; potential good employees actively conform to employers' expectations and have the desire to constantly develop themselves, while others just sit on the couch and wait to be summoned by prospective employers. Thus, the reader is left with the (non-)choice between these value-laden alternatives and a narrower dialogic space.

It has been noted earlier (Löfström & van den Berg, 2013, pp. 60–63) that students' image of the economy and society more broadly is fragile and approximate. The image consists of institutions, abstractions, and impersonal structural forces and it lacks an exact space for human actors; the students may not even have agents to place in the "storyline" of events. In our data, economic structures and the ongoing climate disaster are domains where the reader is assigned limited agency and predominantly placed in a reactive role. The introductory chapters try to persuade the reader to see participation in society as important, and the writer may go to great lengths to steer the reader into recognizing the centrality of voting (and the moral disapproval of not doing so). On the other hand, the reader does not need to be convinced of the need to enter the labour market or see work as an important duty. It is the rational and efficient ways of pursuing them that require guidance. The textbooks present it as self-evident that students have an internal drive to pursue a career and only need to know how to conform to future structures and demands of the job market. Industrial action or imagining ways to alternatively shape working life seem to, from the outset, lie outside the world depicted in the textbooks.

From a linguistic standpoint, we identified conventionalized ways of constructing different kinds of agency for the reader: direct address with second-person references (*you*); large and indefinite ingroup references using the first-person plural *we*; and more impersonal resources, such as zero person references, indefinite pronouns, and characterological figures. The writer provides identity options that are easy to interpret as desirable and thereby imposes a indirect obligation on the reader. The desired result is that the actual reader takes the offered reader position (Thompson & Thetela, 1995, p. 111). Overall, these interactional resources are used flexibly in textbook discourse, which calls for interpretative, context-bound reading.

The writer utilizes a Goal-Achievement pattern (see Hoey, 2001, pp. 145–150) in the introductory chapters to delineate chains of influential action. The economy and institutional structures of society, however, are presented as unchanging. Our observations of the limited, conforming agency offered to readers in the domain of working life support Wheelahan's (2007) findings regarding the image of individual agency in working life constructed in vocational education and training (VET). She argues that competence-based training that focuses on concrete and practical competences locks (often working-class) vocational students out of influential discourses and powerful knowledge spaces – spaces for "thinking the unthinkable." As we have shown, a limiting view of young people in relation to the job market is visible already in the rhetoric of basic education textbooks.

How could chains of action be described otherwise? How can individuals have an impact on the economy or society? One way could be to expound more on the agency of citizens responsible for making historical social changes: to provide examples of not

only small everyday acts of impact-making (such as an individual student taking a stance on school food; see Mikander & Satokangas, forthcoming) but also large-scale social changes. The existing labor legislation, economic structures, suffrage, and social policies are all the results of contingent historical events when groups of people have made an impact through demonstrations, strikes, and other actions. To recognize this contingency as essential to society would be to perceive the future as open and thereby acknowledge an individual's and collectives' possibilities to change the world through participation and individual influencing. The hegemonic discourse of citizen agency reflected in textbooks narrows our social and political imagination. A more historically aware perspective would help construct a broader sense of agency for the reader and move from normative non-choices to agency-constructing options.

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