

“IN CASE YOU CAN SPEAK FINNISH, THERE’S NO PROBLEM”

Reconstructing problematic identity-positions in migrant care workers’ organisational discourse¹

Abstract

With a discourse-analytical approach to interviews conducted in Helsinki, this article examines how foreign-born care workers make sense of their work-related identities and the structural conditions they inhabit. The analysis demonstrates how, in the interviews, “a migrant care worker” was easily recognised as an identity-position problematic-by-default. Nevertheless, the interviewees were also able to utilise multiple different, more particular identity-positions related to their migrant histories (e.g. “a Finnish speaking migrant”, “a migrant with the right attitude”). However, partly due to these particularisations, and unintentionally, potential problems in work-place relations (e.g. discrimination) came recognised as private matters dependent on particular individual characteristics.

Keywords

migrants • discrimination • care work • interviews • positioning

Received 10 September 2012; Accepted 15 April 2013

1 Introduction

Care work organisations in the Nordic region, as well as all-over the global north, are increasingly recruiting migrant care workers, commonly incomers from poorer countries. Public policy discourse, in particular, often conceives migrant (i.e. foreign-born) care workers as a valuable and welcomed resource (especially) in the context of the looming workforce shortages caused by the aging populations (Nieminen & Henriksson 2008; Isaksen 2010). Furthermore, especially in eldercare, migrant care workers are often conceived as highly skilful, capable and motivated employees (Gavanas 2013; Näre 2013).

At the same time, however, other kinds of stories are also brought forward. Empirical studies give evidence of exclusion, discrimination and the emergence of new divisions of labour in the already divided and hierarchical field of care work (Omeri & Atkins 2002; Laurén & Wrede 2008; Nieminen 2010; Healy, Bradley & Forson 2011). In many studies in Finland and elsewhere, care workers of migrant backgrounds, or of a particular national background, report being undervalued with respect to their professional skills and qualifications. Besides educational diplomas being considered invalid as foreign (Omeri & Atkins 2002; Nieminen 2011), studies also report on mistrust towards migrant care workers’ professional skills in more everyday-based workplace relations (Allan *et al.* 2004; Nieminen 2010; Healy, Bradley & Forson 2011; Dahle & Seeberg 2013; Näre 2013).

The current article supplements the existing literature in two ways. First, while the existing research has mostly focused on migrant (i.e. foreign-born) care workers in the profession of a (registered) nurse

Antero Olakivi

Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki, Finland

(see Laurén & Wrede 2008 for an exception), this study approaches care workers operating as practical nurses (“lähihoitaja” in Finnish). Practical nursing makes an interesting case because as Laurén and Wrede (2008: 20) point out, in recent public debate, it has been viewed as work to which it is particularly desirable to recruit migrant employees.

Second, the existing research has mostly analysed interview-accounts of migrant nurses’ work experiences, and subsequently *explained* these experiences by referring to category systems (Nieminen 2010), ideologies (Allan *et al.* 2004) or, say, inequality regimes (Healy, Bradley & Forson 2011). This article, instead, examines how care workers of migrant backgrounds, as competent language users and members of society (Garfinkel 1967), *themselves* make use of the same categories and “ideologies” while explaining their experiences in research interviews. The article thus examines how workplace relations are *talked into being* (Nikander 2006) as phenomena with social and political relevance. The main arguments put forward are that although discrimination may, in research interviews, sometimes seem exceptional, at other times, relations between migrated and native employees may appear as *difficult-by-default*. Accordingly, the identity-position of “a migrant care worker” may appear as purely problematic. While other, less constraining positions also exist, they may seem more difficult to warrant. To ground these arguments the article presents analyses of four interview excerpts derived from data collected in public eldercare organisations in Helsinki in 2011 and 2012.

* E-mail: antero.olakivi@helsinki.fi

2 Identity-categories in organisational discourse

A number of scholars (Fournier 1999; Alvesson & Willmott 2002; Webb 2006) have acknowledged how contemporary organisational discourses shape, or aim to shape, employees' occupational, professional and other identities as means to manage organisational practices. In case identities, or identity-categories, are not understood as private property but as *people's resources* for classification and sense-making (as in ethnomethodology, see Antaki & Widdicombe 1998), then the mere *assigning* identities to individual employees may serve similar functions. Scholars have acknowledged how, in particular, gendered and ethnic categorisations often play role when individuals are assumed to fit (or not to fit) in particular jobs (Bradley & Healy 2008; Webb 2006). For instance, caring for older people is at times defined as a *naturally* female-gendered practice (Paoletti 2002) while some occupations in care work are defined as particularly suitable for migrant employees (Laurén & Wrede 2008: 20) or employees of a particular national background (Gavanas 2013).

These "identity politics" can work as a form of control as they legitimate divisions of labour (Acker 2006; Webb 2006). However, it has become commonplace in sociology to also acknowledge how identities not only control, but enable actions (Fournier 1999; Webb 2006). Professional identities, by definition, feature social *licenses* (Hughes 1984), i.e. interactional permissions to carry out tasks otherwise forbidden (thus, "a doctor" is licensed to carry out tasks "a nurse" is not). Similarly, a number of examples demonstrate how ethnic (Nieminen 2010: 164–166) and gendered (Grey 2003) identities, even those often (described as) restrictive, can (at least occasionally) turn into enabling resources at work. Finally, and importantly, individuals can always, at least potentially, be classified according to multiple identity-categories (Antaki, Condor & Levine 1996; Webb 2006; Killian & Johnson 2006).

In this article, I examine the use of the identity-categories of "a migrant" or "a foreign-born" care worker in Finland, and the social presuppositions related to these categories. In line with the above discussion, these presuppositions could be understood as discursive means to shape individual dispositions, to govern employees' behaviour and/or to justify existing divisions of labour. However, in order to avoid ungrounded emphasis on Discourse (as a determining structure) over discourse (as a process of interaction) (Alvesson & Karreman 2000), the focus in the following analysis is in explicating how, exactly, are these identities worked up and used in their situated contexts, and for what practical purposes (e.g. to justify, to explain) (cf. Antaki & Widdicombe 1998).

Discourse, in this article, is understood as an ongoing process where knowledge about complex organisational phenomena (e.g. relations, events and arrangements) is socially constructed and warranted. This approach is theoretically in line with epistemological relativism (Al-Amoudi & Willmott 2011) and relational constructionism (Hosking 2011). It acknowledges that complex organisational phenomena can be interpreted in ways that are multiple and conflicting but still intelligible, legitimate, consequential and real. *How* these interpretations (or rationalities) are put into action, in their situated contexts, is a question of empirical analysis. Unlike some critiques against relativism suggest (see Webb 2006: 8–9), this approach does not assume voluntarism or individualism in the process of shaping organisational realities/rationalities. Indeed, some rationalities are, in their situated contexts, always more legitimate and more easily warranted than others (Tsoukas 2000; Al-Amoudi & Willmott 2011; Hosking 2011). Organisational rationalities, thus, include a

dimension of power. With their help, members of society can also make in-situ distinctions between "right" and "wrong" organisational behaviours and "right" and "wrong" positions for particular identities in "organisational matrices" (also Nieminen 2010; Dahle & Seeberg 2013).

3 Approach: discursive psychology, positioning theory and ethnomethodology

The approach in the following analysis combines ideas from discursive psychology (Hepburn & Potter 2004; Nikander 2006; Billig 2009), ethnomethodology (Antaki, Condor & Levine 1996; Antaki & Widdicombe 1998) and positioning theory (Davies & Harré 1990). Instead of analysing identities as fixed, individual dispositions, the analysis examines how identities and selves are accomplished in the course of situated interaction, in this case, in interviews. Besides being accomplishments, identity-categories are also tools, utilised to serve various functions in text and talk (Antaki & Widdicombe 1998; Nikander 2006). The analysis focuses on explicating how participants (both "interviewers" and "interviewees") position themselves, each other and also third parties in the course of the interview interaction (Davies & Harré 1990). The concepts of "position" and "identity" are, by large, used interchangeably in what follows.

4 Data and methods

The data analysed in this study is drawn from interviews that were originally conducted as a part of a larger research project *The Shaping of Occupational Subjectivities of Migrant Care Workers: A Multi-Sited Analysis of Globalising Elderly Care*. The project gathered multiple different data sets and took several different theoretical perspectives to different research questions. Among others, the project included on-site interviews of 32 participants who were working as practical nurses (or in similar associate positions) in public eldercare organisations in Helsinki. The interviewees came from several different work-units. All of them had a migrant background. The majority of them, and all those cited below, had migrated from the former Soviet republics, Sub-Saharan Africa or South-East Asia, typically at least five years ago. The majority of the participants (and all those cited) either had a qualification of a practical nurse or were just about to acquire it.

The interviews were conducted in the premises of the participants' workplaces in 2011 and 2012 by altogether four researchers (usually one at a time). The participants were informed about the topics of the project (including hierarchies and divisions of labour and the experiences of care workers of migrant backgrounds). The participants were also informed that their participation is voluntary and that identifying them out from the published reports would be made as difficult as possible.

The interviews contained thematic sections such as migration to Finland, work and study history, experiences in current work and ideas on nursing work in general. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in verbatim (see Appendix: Transcription notation). 29 interviews were conducted in Finnish and three in English. Transcribing interviews and translating transcriptions are affairs full of important decisions (Nikander 2006; Willig 2012). These decisions were not made easier by the fact that our interviewees did not speak Finnish as their first language. In what follows, the *analytically most relevant* parts of the shown excerpts are translated into English as

literally as possible, while elsewhere the dialect may have been slightly modified. The analyses were conducted with the original tape-recordings. The translations presented below were checked by a number of Finnish-speaking colleagues.

In what follows, I will present an analysis of four selected interview excerpts concerning migrancy/ethnicity/nationality in care work. The analysis focuses on the dynamics of positioning that are examined in relation to particular *story lines* (Davies & Harré 1990). Story lines help participants to make sense of the moral rights and responsibilities of each party at stake (whether physically present or not). An interview itself might be understood as a story line that places normative expectations on participants (e.g. “to ask sensible questions” and “to give accountable answers”). Once a story line changes (say, from “an interview” to “a debriefing session”) also positions and the respective expectations change. However, besides this “meta” story line of an interview, also other, more topic-related story lines always exist. These story lines draw from prior experiences, life-histories, common knowledge on social structures, stereotypes, interpretative repertoires, and so on (Davies & Harré 1990; Wetherell 1998; Nikander 2012).

Identity-positions also reflect participants’ *orientations* (Antaki, Condor & Levine 1996; Antaki & Widdicombe 1998). Multiple identities might be available for participants in an interview, but only some of them can attain “orientation” at once. In the following analysis, however, the concept of orientation is utilised in a broader sense. Besides identities, participants orient to particular story lines while disregarding others.

Lately, some researchers in the field of discursive psychology have turned against interviews and preferred utilising “naturally occurring” data (Hepburn & Potter 2004). Still, I agree with Nikander (2012) in that interviews can be used as long as they are approached as real-life encounters on their own right and not just as technical means for collecting “information”. In this article, the interviews represent fragments of organisational discourse, bits of the “long conversation” dealing with migrancy and organising care work. In its small part, the following analysis sheds light on the different meanings related to being “a migrant care worker in Finland”.

The analysed excerpts are chosen to capture some variation in a certain kind of discourse (see the next subsection). Although the data contains similar excerpts, the presented ones are anything but representative. They are all singular occasions. However, as suggested above, interview-accounts still draw from wider knowledge (Nikander 2012); based on what is supposed to be known (or not known) by the other interlocutor, matters can be explained in length, omitted, or only implied at. To ensure smooth conversation, certain generalisations have to be accomplished and displayed, but this has to be done by the participants (interviewees and interviewers) themselves, and not by an analyst.

5 Formulating the research agenda

In the interviews, and in other conversations we had with foreign-born care workers during the project, we were often told convincing stories on racism, discrimination and unequal treatment, as well as equally convincing stories on the absence of any such affairs. Curiously, the experiences of discrimination, although often harsh and distressing, were frequently presented as highly *exceptional* and attributed to particular misbehaving individuals rather than ongoing organisational practices. Curiously as well, in the case of

the narratives on absent discrimination, it was often the *absence* that was presented as exceptional, something to be explained, while the *starting point* was that nationally diverse workplace relations (as a shorthand for relations between migrated and native employees) would be difficult-by-default.

In a way, there seemed to be a more or less tacit assumption on that nationally diverse workplace relations (as a shorthand, again) would typically entail problems. This assumption was, arguably, partly caused by how the study originally became framed for our research participants. As researchers familiar with previous studies on discrimination and injustice and also interested in working for their prevention, we arguably made these topics salient even when we did not explicitly bring them up (albeit in fact the title of our project originally mentioned “new ethnic hierarchies”). Thus, while expecting to hear about injustices, we unintentionally made other kinds of experiences seem unexpected. However, these assumptions were not only “our” assumptions, but as members of the same society, our research participants were clearly able to recognise them as well.

Perhaps, in this context, the presented explanations for the experiences of non-discrimination served a special kind of interactional function. On one hand, these accounts acknowledged the commonplace assumption (discrimination exist) as generally valid, while on the other hand, they demonstrated it incorrect in their particular case (and usually in a convincing way). Arguably, the accounts also served for various other functions that are, however, out of the scope of this article. My point is not only to ask *why* we got these accounts, but also *how* they were interactively put together as socially intelligible rationalisations, and with what consequences.

Recent studies (see the introduction) have typically focused on accounts of discrimination. My aim in this article is to focus on more positive accounts. Clearly discrimination and injustice, and justice and fairness, can exist in practically all workplace relations. Still, how they are socially recognised and made publicly accountable is a question of political relevance. As a methodological note, I maintain that these apparently mundane stories on non-discrimination can be as revealing as the shocking stories on discrimination. In addition, these (in my opinion) credible accounts can help *mapping the language* of fighting against unequal treatment. Not least importantly, they shed light on what positions besides the commonplace “victim of discrimination” are legitimately available for care workers of migrant backgrounds.

6 Analysis

In the interviews, the *absence of discrimination* was commonly rationalised by references to either individual (employee-related) or collective (work-team-related) particularities. The first interview excerpt belongs to the former class. The excerpt follows a discussion (not shown here) about how more and more people of *migrant backgrounds* are recruited as care workers in Finland. This tendency, in the interviewed participant’s opinion, relates to the fact that young Finnish adults have more opportunities and do not want to work with the current low wages in care work, whereas from a global perspective, the Finnish wages seem high in any case, even in care work. This general frame (migrancy in Finland), arguably, makes the term *background* intelligible when the interviewer (I) invites the participant (P1) to discuss the advantages and disadvantages related to *her own background*.

Excerpt 1

- 1 P1: do you think *your own background*
2 has given you any advantage or
3 disadvantage in your work?
4 P1: (2.0) no (2.0) I don't- (.) no
5 advantage or disadvantage.
6 I: yeah-
7 P1: I mean not once has any bull- (.)
8 bull ((laughs)) um *bullying* taken place (.)
9 anywhere (.)
10 I: yeah-
11 P1: *I think it so much depends on your*
12 *personality how you relate to other*
13 *people (.) the same way the other*
14 *people will relate to you.*
15 I: yeah (.) yeah (.) are there by the way
16 any clients of migrant backgrounds
17 or foreign backgrounds=
18 P1: =um yeah (.) I do have (.) two clients
19 I mean. (.) one has like (.) been
20 living in Finland (.) what did s/he say
21 six or eight years (.) s/he is originally
22 from St. Petersburg (.)
23 I: yeah-
24 P1: and s/he doesn't (.) barely speaks any
25 Finnish (.)
26 I: okay (1.0) do you speak Russian (.)
27 yourself?
28 P1: *yeah (.) I do speak Russian (.)*
29 *Estonian (.) and a bit of English.*
30 I: yeah (.) well then you in a way do
31 have a bit of advantage (.)
32 P1: *yeah yeah ((enthusiastically))*
33 I: because of your language skills.
34 P1: right (.) yeah

The ambiguous question on advantages and disadvantages might refer to multiple issues, but what P1 takes up is the issue of “bullying”. Thus, while the preceding discussion has been on wages and financial relations, a new topic is now introduced. Note that prior to this excerpt nationally diverse workplace relations as such have not been discussed in the interview. Nor has discrimination been mentioned in any way. Thus, the new topic is really introduced by the participant (although, as discussed above, the way in which the research was originally framed may have also played a part).

While introducing “bullying”, P1 ignores the possibility that her background might be a positive resource, and instead adopts an identity of at least a potential object of mistreatment. In order to argue that, in the end, she has not been bullied, she also utilises several “extreme case formulations” (Pomerantz 1986): *not once* has *any bullying* taken place *anywhere* (Lines 7–9). Arguably these formulations are, again, designed to deal with what everybody (or at least the interviewer) is likely to know about nationally diverse work-relations, and to justify her counter-intuitive experiences. On lines 11–14 she moves on to further explain these experiences, namely the absence of discrimination, by emphasising her own, individual agency and responsibility (“it depends on your personality”, “how you relate to other people the way they relate to you”). At the same time, however, by beginning her account with “I think” she also leaves room

for alternative opinions (see Billig 2009): this is how I think, you might think differently. The interviewer, nevertheless, accepts her argument (“yeah, yeah”) and introduces a new topic (the client base).

From this point onwards the story line begins to change, and finally, P1’s “background” is co-constructed as a positive resource. However, what is at stake here is no more her migrant background as such or her identity as a migrant care worker, but her particular identity as a Russian-speaking care worker. This shows again how identity-positions are not fixed but open for reconstruction. However, this latter positive identity seems much less salient – in the interview – than the problematic identity of a migrant care worker oriented to in the first place. Even on lines 26–29, when the interviewer already seems to be taking the discussion to a more positive direction, P1 seems to orient to his question as a more or less neutral inquiry on her language skills. Thus she answers with a list of the languages she speaks. Only after the interviewer *explicitly* notes her skills in Russian language as a *positive resource*, she aligns with the new idea and her surprise on line 32 marks this sudden, unexpected shift in the story line. However credible her new resourceful position is, in the context of this interview, a more restricting interpretation of her migrant background seems to have been more readily available.

The story line that takes migrancy as a potential problem is evident also in the beginning of Excerpt 2. Again it is the interviewer (I) who introduces the topic of “differences between nurses of Finnish and foreign backgrounds”. P2, in turn, orients to the issue of “differences” as a question of “getting along”. Note that again this excerpt is the first time that the relations between migrated and native care workers are brought up in the interview. With the laughter, following the introduction of this new topic (Lines 6–12), the interlocutors perhaps display their understanding about the topic’s potentially sensitive nature. What the interviewer first introduces as a distinction between “Finns” and “foreigners”, P2 takes up as a distinction between “us” and “them”. P2’s background in Somalia has already been mentioned in the interview, and it is displayed again in the excerpt.

Excerpt 2

- 1 I: are there like (.) in your opinion (.)
2 any differences between the nurses
3 of Finnish and foreign backgrounds?
4 P2: no-
5 I: no-
6 P2: *not in our ward in any case*
7 *((laughs))*
8 I: yeah ((laughs))
9 P2: *((laughs)) everybody gets along (.)*
10 *with us and we get along with*
11 *everybody (.)*
12 I: yeah (.) yeah ((laughs)) (2.0) um (.)
13 and there’s nothing in (.) in like ways
14 of working or (.) work orientations-
15 P2: no-
16 I: no differences-
17 P2: not in my opinion (.) everybody
18 works here and (.) (.)
19 I: yeah (.) um (1.0) does it matter in a
20 broader sense like (.) um (.) does it
21 make any difference that there are (.)
22 there are people of different ethnic
23 backgrounds like- (.) does it- (.) does

24 it have any *good or bad* sides in it?
 25 P2: well (1.0) in my opinion it (.) it is
 26 good that there are like multicultural
 27 I: um
 28 P2: people at work like (.) *luckily we*
 29 *have* (.) *we have* a Somali and (.)
 30 then we've got those others (.) from
 31 other countries as well then *the Finns*
 32 *as well-*
 33 I: um
 34 P2: in my opinion it is very good that (.)
 35 that way you can see how the others
 36 work and=
 37 I: =yeah um=
 38 P2: =then as *we consider* (.) *at least we*
 39 *consider being with the elders as*
 40 *very important because we* (.) *in our*
 41 *own country we keep our elders in*
 42 *our own homes-*
 43 I: um (.) um (.) um
 44 P2: and respect the elders a lot so (.) to
 45 us it comes very easily-
 46 I: yeah (.) yeah (.) yeah
 47 P2: naturally.
 48 I: yeah (.) um (.) okay

In her account on getting along, the category “our ward” works as a particularisation: they are getting along in her ward, but she cannot say on behalf of the other wards (Line 6). This particularisation may again be seen to validate the commonplace assumption of at least potential problems in getting along. When the interviewer (I) aims to broaden up the topic (Lines 12–18) and asks P2 to confirm whether there are no differences in the ways of working and the work orientations either, P2 readily gives a confirmation: no, there are no differences. Only after the interviewer *explicitly* opens up the possibility that there might be some positive matters at stake (“does it have any good or bad sides”, Line 24), P2 begins to reflect on the advantages of “multiculturalism” at the workplace. On one hand, she seems to approach “multiculturalism” as a quality of individual people, and not as a quality of a group. On the other hand, it is not just the Somalis and “the others” who *are* multicultural, but she also lists “the Finnish” workers and this way ethnifies them as well (Lines 31 and 32). This ethnification is more apparent when she later names the Finnish workers as a group that shares similar, and not so positively valued, attitudes towards care work (not shown here).

What is however more important for the current purposes is that at this point of the dialogue, P2 has already adopted a completely different identity-position compared to that of “a nurse of a foreign background”. While talking about multiculturalism as a positive resource (“luckily we have...”), she talks as a member of her work-unit. Finally, on lines 38–48, with backup by the interviewer, P2 works up an *ethnic* identity for herself: The importance of taking good care of elders is rooted in her cultural heritage. She further notes how in her “own country” elders are kept at home. This notion arguably works to concretise (Verkuyten, de Jong & Masson 1995) the otherwise abstract notion on her cultural heritage. In addition, the notion on keeping elders at home could be read as critique towards the “Finnish” system of institutional care.

In a convincing way, P2 is able to use ethnicity as a resource in building her professional identity. However, one might say, her ethnic identity as a natural caregiver (also Gavanas 2013) might also turn

out to be a constraining one. Indeed, after the excerpt above, she actually goes on (not shown here) to claim how complaining about tight timetables at work would be impossible for a care worker with her cultural background. Instead, she argues, one always needs to find time for the elder residents. Thus, this particular identity enables her to act as a committed professional care worker, while at the same time, it constrains her from complaining about scarce resources. Nevertheless, perhaps neither of these aspects (constraining or enabling) should be overdramatised. It might be more important to note the multiplicity of identity-positions available for P2, as “a nurse with a foreign background”, “a member of a work-unit” and “a nurse with Somali background”, even within this short excerpt.

Doing ethnicity in the above shown way was not very common in our interviews. A lot more emphasis was given on skills in Finnish language as an issue with *special relevance* (Day 1998) for migrant employees. Perhaps the language talk was salient (also Näre 2013) partly because unlike race and ethnicity, language actually is, in Finland, an officially legitimate base for differential treatment in recruitment in care work (Laki terveydenhuollon ammattihenkilöistä 1994). In any case, the language issue comes up in the following excerpt as well. The excerpt starts after P3 has commented on her experiences as a temp(orary employee) in other workplaces (not shown here). These experiences have taught her to know the places to avoid, and finally she has come to choose her current place of work.

Excerpt 3

1 I: what makes this a good place to
 2 work in?
 3 P3: in here (.) um people are (like) (.)
 4 um like (1.0) my experiences from other
 5 places and (.) why I wanted to be
 6 here ((laughs)) (.) is that *this place*
 7 has a good atmosphere immigrants
 8 are not bullied *in here* ((laughs))
 9 I: oh yeah ((in a surprised voice))
 10 P3: and in here it's (.) really important to
 11 us (.) because (1.0) I have
 12 experienced every employee here
 13 who are among the older ones in our
 14 unit ((the ward has two units)) they
 15 (.) *I am the first* (.) *immigrant-*
 16 I: yeah=
 17 P3: =who came here *they stood*
 18 *listening to me* ((laughs)) (.)
 19 and understood that my Finnish
 20 probably *improves*=
 21 I: =yeah=
 22 P3: =like (.) a little bit but (.) it
 23 is not that bad (.) it was
 24 so bad when I started (.)
 25 I: yeah
 26 P3: but I can do (.)
 27 I: yeah
 28 P3: *they understood that I can work* (.)
 29 I: yeah
 30 P3: although I could not speak (1.0) well
 31 *I don't know if it is that important*
 32 I: yeah

33 P3: in this occupation, is it more
34 important to speak (.) yes you must
35 (.) be able to speak somehow
36 I: yeah yeah
37 P3: but is it that important that one (1.0)
38 can speak so well somewhere (.) on
39 the level three (.)
40 I: yeah
41 P3: *or is it important that one can take*
42 *care of people* to help in here
43 I: yeah

Also P3 talks about her workplace (“our unit”) as a place with a good atmosphere and a place where immigrants are not bullied (and at this point, she also makes a brief identification as a member of her unit). Like P2, P3 takes this condition of non-bullying as somewhat exceptional. In a way, this is another example of work-team-related particularisation. At the same time, however, she also takes a somewhat ambiguous stance towards the language issue and potential discrimination. At first, she seems to orient towards understanding discrimination: the fact that she was the first immigrant in her ward, and had trouble with the Finnish language, makes it *surprising* that her colleagues stood up with her. To her, these facts are almost acceptable reasons for discrimination. (The rationale of explaining discrimination with the notion of being “the first immigrant” can be detected from the other interviews and from other studies as well (Omeri & Atkins 2002).) The co-workers, in her case, did something exceptional: they *understood* she was “able to work” despite her troubles with the Finnish language. The co-workers deserve credit for their understanding nature: they did not have to understand, but they did. It was exceptional that she was not bullied, and more particularly, it was exceptional that her abilities were recognised by her colleagues.

After this point, however, P3 makes one more exceptional claim: it might not be altogether important to speak flawless Finnish, it might be more important to give care to the residents. With this argument she is able to reconstruct the preferred occupational identity of a (practical) nurse in a manner that makes room for non-native Finnish speakers. At the same time, however, the credibility of this identity is taken as somewhat questionable, which is marked by several reservations: it is just an idea that comes up, she “doesn’t know” if it is important to speak flawless Finnish or not. The whole statement is made in a form of a modest suggestion. The backdrop, still, is the antithesis of the claim: to expect flawless Finnish is the point of departure, a part of the local rationality that is now being questioned.

Also the final excerpt is about using Finnish language at work. It is a part of a longer discussion about discrimination at work (not shown here). P4 has first denied having any experiences of discrimination. Nevertheless, she has told about a racist encounter with a *resident*. Like often, however, she has attributed this encounter to the resident’s illness, mitigating the resident’s agency and, thus, responsibility (for this discursive act, see Wood & Kroger 2000: 101–102). This is the point where the excerpt starts from, as the interviewer asks P4 about similar encounters with her co-workers.

Excerpt 4

1 I: then how about friend- (.) like
2 workmates (.) are there any who are
3 like (.) any of them-
4 P4: in my opinion it’s (.) it’s like one

5 thing that I know that *in case you can*
6 *speak Finnish there’s no problem*
7 I: um
8 P4: in case your Finnish is not bad
9 I: yeah
10 P4: the *Finns* do stress it.
11 I: so it’s like-
12 P4: it is that in case you can’t speak
13 ((Finnish)) somehow-
14 I: yeah-
15 P4: or at least I have heard that often.
16 I: well in case you have not been
17 mistreated then have you heard
18 people talk about other people or that
19 some others would have experienced
20 something like this in here (.) like
21 criticism-
22 P4: yeah we had that (.) we had a temp
23 (1.0)
24 I: yeah
25 P4: *an African guy very bad*
26 *skills in Finnish* and-
27 I: yeah
28 P4: *but he has been working like (.)*
29 *although not literal but physical*
30 *work we do a lot of pretty physical*
31 *work over here-*
32 I: yes you do-
33 P4: quite well.
34 I: yeah
35 P4: *and of course those temps are hard*
36 *to find* we have two nurses who can’t
37 speak and um (1.0)
38 I: yeah.
39 P4: well (.) can’t speak- I’m saying (.)
40 *not all have to be leaders (.) they can*
41 *work.*
42 I: um

On lines 5 and 6, P4 argues that discrimination is a problem mainly in case one does not speak Finnish. In a sense, the fact that she has not encountered discrimination (a claim she has made already earlier, not shown here), is explained with the fact that she can speak Finnish. At the same time, the absolute necessity to speak Finnish is again left with some ambiguity. On line 4, P4 is using the phrase “in my opinion”, implying a possibility for alternative opinions (Billig 2009). On line 10, she justifies her opinion by noting that speaking (fluent or at least not bad) Finnish is something that “the Finns” seem to expect. This way she opens up the need to speak Finnish for political negotiation. It is not a structural condition or something taken for granted. Instead, it is a condition created by the Finns. The Finns have political power over the issue.

However, P4 is not distancing herself from these expectations. Instead, she is able to authorise her own identity as a legitimate care worker with the reference to “the Finns” and their expectations. She still identifies as an immigrant nurse, but at the same time, takes a distance to *particular people* in this category (for this strategy, see Snow & Anderson 1987; Day 1998). Namely, she is distancing herself from the position of “an immigrant without language skills”. It is not she but the other care workers that might be mistreated because of

their deficient language skills. Curiously though, by constructing a commonsensical division between manual and literal labour (Olakivi 2012), she is able to create a legitimate work role for these “other” immigrants (namely, the African guy) as well. As a consequence, she is able to resist the Finn-originated need to speak Finnish, but while resisting it, she ends up constructing a new subordinate position for immigrant labour (see also the distinction between leading and doing on lines 40 and 41).

Excerpts 3 and 4 make an interesting comparison. On one hand, P3 seemed to take her lack in Finnish language skills as a feasible explanation for workplace discrimination. Self-evidently, the problem was that *she* did not speak Finnish, and not that *they* did not have a common language with her workmates or clients. On the other hand, she was able to reconstruct the core idea of nursing work in a way that reduced the need to speak fluent Finnish (what might be important instead, would be to take care of the residents). In fact, this kind of reconstruction can be detected from accounts by care work managers as well (Koivuniemi 2012). In the case of P3, however, this reconstruction was made only vaguely, with several reservations and in a form of a suggestion rather than a claim. This hesitation, again, displayed the starting point: A person without fluent skills in Finnish just might not be a fully competent and capable one to work as a practical nurse in Finland. Compared to P3, the case of P4 is very much different with respect to its story line. At first, P4 too explained her positive (or not-negative) working-life experiences with her fluency in Finnish. However, unlike P3, P4 explicitly positioned the Finns, with their demands, as an active party in the language matter. Again unlike P3 who (vaguely) questioned the need to speak Finnish in *her own* job, P4 warranted a *different* workplace-position for “the other” immigrant nurses whose Finnish would be less fluent. Thus, P3 and P4 had entirely different strategies for creating space for care workers who might have difficulties with the Finnish language. The one of P3 seemed more egalitarian, but the one of P4 seemed easier to warrant.

7 Discussion and conclusions

A discussion on new hierarchies in care work has emerged while health and elder care organisations in Finland and in other Western countries have started to recruit more employees of migrant backgrounds. In this article, I have examined some local ways of making sense of these changes. My focus has been on (some) organisational rationalities that were assumed and displayed while care workers of migrant backgrounds were, collaboratively with interviewers, talking care work into being in research interviews. More particularly, I have examined how social identity categories, related to the participants’ migrant backgrounds, were made relevant and displayed in interview interaction.

As Näre (2012: 41–49; 2013) has noted, in contemporary societies, “migrancy” can be understood as a social category on its own right, somewhat distinct to categories related to “race” and “ethnicity”. Indeed, our research participants were also able to recognise and utilise the category of a migrant as a social identity-position. Again in line with Näre (2012: 46), this category was easily recognised as a largely problematic one, an identity that mainly entails troubles at the workplace.

Arguably, this problem-orientation was partly due to how the study became framed for our research participants. As researchers familiar with previous studies, media reports, commonsensical assumptions and so on, we admittedly entered the field with interests in uncovering

injustices. As a consequence, we may have created a situation where everything that does not fit to these assumptions is something surprising, something that asks for an explanation. At the same time, however, this problem-orientation was clearly recognisable and experientially relevant for our research participants as well. This kind of self-evidential connection between migrancy and discrimination is also familiar from other studies (e.g. Killian & Johnson 2006), and indeed, it can also bring important issues to political fora and thus help to fight against unequal treatment. However, if connections become too self-evident, there is a risk that they start to appear unchangeable and *apolitical*. In some of our interviews, the self-evident problem-orientation started to resemble acceptance, when, for example, it appeared to be mere business as usual that the first immigrant at a workplace would encounter difficulties.

In this article, I have presented an analysis of four excerpts where participants rationalised their *positive*, and credible, experiences at work. All these explanations shared a striking quality: they all counted on and placed responsibility upon (individual) employees. Some referred to the interviewed care workers’ personal qualities such as attitudes or skills in Finnish language, some to qualities of other closely related people, such as the tolerant workmates. Accounts stating that discrimination would be impossible because, say, *it is sanctioned at the workplace*, were strikingly absent (and not just in the cited interviews, but generally in the gathered data). As a consequence, fighting against discrimination became recognised as an affair that by large depends on individual qualities rather than structural or organisational factors. In these accounts, a workplace or an organisation as such was not recognised as an agent with responsibilities (cf. Wood & Kroger 2000: 101–102). This perhaps reflects the broader trend of individual responsabilisation that has been discussed in several studies on work and organisations (e.g. Webb 2006).

However, besides the perhaps unintended consequences of privatising responsibilities, these same particularisations had another dimension that is perhaps more important for the main argument I would like to put forward. The particularisations demonstrated how the problematic identity of a migrant care worker was by no means the only identity available for the interviewed participants. Even within the shown excerpts, practically few lines of text and talk, manifold identity-positions were employed by the interviewed care workers. Some of these positions seemed to go around or reinvent the position of a migrant care worker (e.g. “a Russian-speaking care worker”), some of them particularised it in the name of ethnicity/nationality (e.g. “a migrant care worker with a Somali background”) or in the name of some other characteristics (e.g. “a migrant care worker with the right kind of attitude”, “a Finnish speaking migrant care worker”). Some identity-positions clearly exceeded the position of a migrant altogether (e.g. “a member of a work-unit”). These particularisations and regroupings were not just any categorisations but true identity-positions that related to particular story lines and structured participants’ orientation in the interviews. Regardless of the above discussed consequences, all of these particular identities seemed at least more enabling than the constraining identity of a migrant care worker.

These reinventions and particularisations show forcefully how identity-positions can, potentially, be reworked. Obviously, this does not mean that discrimination, or even its salience, becomes worked away. In addition, what has been demonstrated above is that although positions *can* be reworked, some positions are always more easy to rework than others. Some positions are, in their local contexts, more easily available than others. Thus, what the above analysis

points out is that it is not enough to ask what positions (e.g. “skilled”, “competent”) are available for care workers of migrant backgrounds, but also how, when, on what grounds and on what conditions they are available.

Finally, although the above conclusions are drawn from interview data, I have no reason to believe that the same rationalisations, categories and other resources are not at least *available* in other contexts as well. The interview excerpts could be understood as small bits of the “long conversation” related to organising care work. At the very least, the same *multiplicity* of identity-positions must exist also outside the interviews. Thus, the presented analysis warns against hasty conclusions on how Discourse, as a determining structure with a capital D (Alvesson & Karreman 2000), shapes long ranging organisational phenomena, such as foreign-born care workers’ personal dispositions and abilities to act. This is not to say that Discourse does not matter, but how it exactly matters may be more uncertain than is often appreciated in sociological studies.

M.Soc.Sc. **Antero Olakivi** is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki. He has worked as a researcher in the Academy of Finland project “The Shaping of Occupational Subjectivities of Migrant Care Workers: A

Multi-Sited Analysis of Globalising Elderly Care” (2011–2015). His research interests deal with sociology of work and occupations, especially in the context of public service organisation, and from the theoretical perspectives of discursive psychology, positioning theory and ethnomethodology.

Appendix: Transcription notation

(.)	Short pause of less than 1 second.
(1.0)	Timed pause (in seconds).
.	Downward intonation.
?	Upward intonation.
-	An interruption in talk.
<u>text</u>	Words emphasised in talk.
()	Unclear or vaguely heard utterance.
=	Turn follows immediately another.
((text))	Clarificatory information.
text	Analytically relevant material.

¹This study has been funded by the Finnish cultural foundation and the Academy of Finland (project number 251239).

References

- Acker, J 2006, 'Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations', *Gender & Society*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 441–464. DOI: 10.1177/0891243206289499.
- Al-Amoudi, I & Willmott, H 2011, 'Where Constructionism and Critical Realism Converge: Interrogating the Domain of Epistemological Relativism', *Organization Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 27–46. DOI: 10.1177/0170840610394293.
- Allan, H T, Larsen J A, Bryan K & Smith P A 2004, 'The social reproduction of institutional racism: internationally recruited nurses' experiences of the British health services', *Diversity in Health and Social Care* 2004, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 117–125.
- Alvesson, M & Karreman, D 2000, 'Varieties of Discourse: On the Study of Organizations through Discourse Analysis', *Human Relations*, vol. 53, no. 9, pp. 1125–1149. DOI: 10.1177/0018726700539002.
- Alvesson, M & Willmott, H 2002, 'Identity regulations as organizational control: producing the appropriate individual', *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 619–644. DOI: 10.1111/1467-6486.00305.
- Antaki, C, Condor, S & Levine, M 1996, 'Social identities in talk: Speakers' own orientations', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 473–492. DOI: 10.1111/j.2044-8309.1996.tb01109.x.
- Antaki, C & Widdicombe, S 1998, 'Identity as an Achievement and as a Tool' in *Identities in Talk*, ed C Antaki & S Widdicombe, Sage Publications, London pp. 1–14.
- Billig, M 2009, 'Discursive psychology, rhetoric and the issue of agency', *Semen*, vol. 27, no. 1. Available from: <<http://semen.revues.org/8930>>. [Last accessed 27.1.2012.]
- Bradley, H & Healy, G 2008, *Ethnicity and Gender at Work. Inequalities, Careers and Employment Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Dahle, R & Seeberg M L 2013, 'Does she know Norwegian?' Ethnic dimensions of hierarchy in Norwegian healthcare workplaces, *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 3, no. 2. DOI: 10.2478/v10202-012-0018-4.
- Davies, B & Harré, R 1990, 'Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 43–63. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x.
- Day, D 1998, 'Being Ascribed, and Resisting, Membership of an Ethnic group' in *Identities in Talk*, ed C Antaki & S Widdicombe, Sage Publications, London pp. 151–170.
- Fournier, V 1999, 'The appeal to "professionalism" as a disciplinary mechanism', *The Sociological Review*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 280–307. DOI: 10.1111/1467-954X.00173.
- Garfinkel, H 1967, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Gavanas, A 2013 'Elderly care puzzles in Stockholm; strategies on formal and informal markets', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 3, no. 2. DOI: 10.2478/v10202-012-0016-6.
- Gray, A 2003, 'Enterprising femininity: new modes of work and subjectivity', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 489–506. DOI: 10.1177/13675494030064003.
- Healy, G, Bradley, H & Forson, C 2011, 'Intersectional Sensibilities in Analysing Inequality Regimes in Public Sector Organizations', *Gender, Work and Organization*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 467–487. DOI:10.1111/j.1468-0432.2011.00557.x.
- Hepburn, A & Potter, J 2004, 'Discourse analytic practice' in

- Qualitative Research Practice. Concise Paperback Edition, ed C Seale, G Gobo, J F Gubrium & D Silverman, Sage Publications, London pp. 168–184.
- Hosking, D M 2011, 'Telling Tales of Relations: Appreciating Relational Constructionism', *Organization Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 47–65. DOI: 10.1177/0170840610394296.
- Hughes, E C 1984, 'Professions' in *Sociological Eye. Selected Papers*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick pp. 374–386.
- Isaksen, L W 2010, 'Introduction' in *Global Care Work. Gender and Migration in Nordic Societies*, ed L W Isaksen, Nordic Academic Press, Lund pp. 9–22.
- Killian, C & Johnson, C 2006, "I'm Not an Immigrant!": Resistance, Redefinition, and the role of Resources in Identity Work', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 60–80. DOI: 10.1177/019027250606900105.
- Koivuniemi S ed 2012, *Maahanmuuttajataustainen koulutettu hoitohenkilöstö sosiaali- ja terveydenhuollon työyhteisöissä*, Tehy ry, Helsinki.
- Laki terveydenhuollon ammattihenkilöistä 18 a § (2007)
- Laurén, J & Wrede, S 2008, 'Immigrants in Care Work: Ethnic Hierarchies and Work Distribution', *Finnish Journal of Ethnicity and Migration*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 20–31.
- Nieminen, S 2010, 'Neuvotteluja ammatillisesta jäsenyydestä – maahanmuuttajasairaanhoidajat terveydenhuollon työyhteisöissä' in *Vieraita työssä*, ed S Wrede & C Nordberg, Gaudeamus, Helsinki pp. 147–171.
- Nieminen, S 2011, 'Maahanmuuttajasairaanhoidajien työläät tiet ammattiin' in *Terveysalan ammatit ja koulutus*, ed A Laiho & T Ruoholinn, Gaudeamus, Helsinki pp. 224–246.
- Nieminen, S & Henriksson, L 2008, 'Immigrant nurses in Finland: Political negotiations on occupational membership' in *Care Work in Crisis*, ed S Wrede, L Henriksson, H Höst, S Johansson & B Dybbroe, Studentlitteratur, Malmö pp. 199–218.
- Nikander, P 2006, 'Constructionism and Discourse Analysis' in *Handbook of Constructionist research*, ed J A Holstein & J F Gubrium, Guilford Publications, New York pp. 413–428.
- Nikander, P 2012, 'Interviews as Discourse Data' in *Handbook of Interview Research (second edition)*, ed J F Gubrium, J A Holstein, K Mackinney-Marvasti & A Marvasti, Sage, London pp. 397–413.
- Näre, L 2012, *Moral Economies of Reproductive Labour. An Ethnography of Migrant Domestic and Care Labour in Naples, Italy*, SSKH Skrifter 31, University of Helsinki Press, Helsinki.
- Näre, L 2013, 'Ideal workers and suspects: Employers' politics of recognition and the migrant division of care labour in Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 3, no. 2. DOI: 10.2478/v10202-012-0017-5.
- Omeri, A & Atkins, K 2002, 'Lived experiences of immigrant nurses in New South Wales, Australia: searching for meaning', *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 495–505. DOI: 10.1016/S0020-7489(01)00054-2.
- Olakivi, A 2012, 'Henkisen ja ruumiillisen työn erottelu työnjaon käytäntönä' in *Pyhtää: yhteiskunnallinen ja psykologinen muutos. Sosiaalipsykologista seurantatutkimusta 1975–2007*, ed K Helkama & A Olakivi, Helsingin yliopisto, Helsinki pp. 51–94.
- Paoletti, I 2002, 'Caring for older people: a gendered practice', *Discourse & Society*, vol. 13, no. 6, pp. 805–817. DOI: 10.1177/0957926502013006758.
- Pomerantz, A 1986, 'Extreme Case formulations: A way of legitimizing claims', *Human Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 219–229.
- Snow D A & Anderson L 1987, 'Identity Work Among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 92, no. 6, pp. 1336–1371.
- Tsoukas, H 2000, 'False Dilemmas in Organization Theory: Realism or Social Constructivism?', *Organization*, vol. 7 no. 3, pp. 531–535. DOI: 10.1177/135050840073012.
- Verkuyten, M, de Jong, W & Masson, C N 1995, 'The construction of ethnic categories: Discourses of ethnicity in the Netherlands', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 251–276. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.1995.9993863.
- Webb, J 2006, *Organisations, Identities and the Self*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Wetherell, M 1998, 'Positioning and Interpretative Repertoires: Conversation Analysis and Post-Structuralism in Dialogue', *Discourse & Society*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 387–412. DOI: 10.1177/0957926598009003005.
- Willig, C 2012, *Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation in Psychology*, Open University Press, Berkshire.
- Wood, L & Kroger R O 2000, *Doing Discourse Analysis. Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.