



**UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU**

Turku School of
Economics

The power of language in shaping people's perceptions about the future of work

How is the future of work discussed in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat,
and who is represented in these conversations?

Futures Studies
Master's thesis

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10.07.2024
Turku

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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Number of pages: 63 pages + appendices 5 pages

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This qualitative research explored how the future of work was discussed in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat during the autumn of 2022. The data comprised 37 text samples of varying text types, most of them opinion pieces. The decision to analyse news media discussions was motivated by the media's influential role in shaping people's perceptions. The study aimed to examine how language use might influence people's perceptions of the future of work and the portrayal of different social actors in these discussions. It focused on how the future was depicted in various texts and aimed at analysing the linguistic choices made in the discussions related to the future of work. The aim was to identify which social actors and perspectives were highlighted over others. The guiding motivation of the research was that the construction of a sustainable future requires considering the diverse needs of social actors. The processes that aim to shape the future should involve people from varied backgrounds, with diverse values and desires.

The theoretical framework operated through a socio-constructivist perspective and combined the principles of futures studies to the prior research on work and its development. The data was analysed through critical discourse analysis. The findings indicated that the discourses in Helsingin Sanomat were twofold: on the one hand emphasising productivity and competitiveness and on the other sociocultural aspects. The study found out that an underlying nationalist ethos motivated certain attitudes towards the development of the future of work. It was also detected that the representations of different social actors often generalise certain qualities attributed to different social groups.

Moreover, the findings indicated that the linguistic choices, particularly the usage of tone and verbs, might influence the way a specific development of the future and the certainty of it will be perceived. The concluding statement emphasized that these images of the future of work might further affect individuals' views of their identities, their beliefs about themselves as workers, and their perceptions of their ability to influence the future. Therefore, it is crucial to highlight the important role language plays in shaping our perceptions of the future.

Key words: futures research, the future of work, critical discourse analysis, power dynamics, media discourse, images of the future

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Tässä laadullisessa tutkimuksessa selvitettiin, miten työn tulevaisuudesta keskusteltiin Helsingin Sanomissa syksyn 2022 aikana. Aineisto koostui 37 tekstistä eri tekstilajeista, joista suurin osa oli mielipidekirjoituksia. Uutismediakeskustelujen tutkimusta ohjaava motiivina oli journalistisen median merkittävä rooli yksittäisten ihmisten käsitysten ja todellisuuksien muovaamisessa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, miten kielenkäyttö voi vaikuttaa ihmisten käsityksiin työn tulevaisuudesta ja eri yhteiskunnallisten toimijoiden esittämisestä näissä keskusteluissa. Tutkimus keskittyi tulevaisuuden ulottuvuuksien kuvaamiseen eri teksteissä ja pyrkiä analysoimaan kielellisiä valintoja joita työn tulevaisuuteen liittyvissä keskusteluissa tehtiin. Tavoitteena oli tunnistaa, mitkä yhteiskunnalliset toimijat ja näkökulmat nousivat muiden yläpuolelle. Tutkimuksen johtajatuksena oli tuoda esiin, että kestävä tulevaisuuden rakentaminen edellyttää erilaisten yhteiskunnallisten toimijoiden tarpeiden huomioimista. Tulevaisuuden muokkaamiseen tähtääviin prosesseihin tulisi osallistua ihmisiä erilaisista taustoista, sekä monipuolisista arvopohjista ja toiveista. Yksilöiden yhteiskunnallisen vallan epätasapaino voi kuitenkin vaikuttaa siihen, mitkä ideat asetetaan etusijalle, mikä voi johtaa epätasa-arvoisiin tulevaisuuskuviin.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys toimi sosiokonstruktivistisesta näkökulmasta ja yhdisti tulevaisuudentutkimuksen periaatteet aikaisempaan työtä ja sen kehittämistä käsittelevään tutkimukseen. Aineistoa analysoitiin kriittisen diskurssianalyysin avulla. Tulokset osoittivat, että Helsingin Sanomien diskurssit olivat kaksijakoisia: toisaalta tuottavuuden ja kilpailukyvyn korostamista ja toisaalta sosiokulttuuristen näkökulmien painottamista. Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että joidenkin tekstien taustalla oleva nationalistinen eetos motivoi tiettyjä asenteita työn tulevaisuuden kehittämistä kohtaan. Tuloksista havaittiin myös, että eri yhteiskunnallisia toimijoita ja sosiaalisia ryhmien ominaisuuksia yleistettiin ja esitettiin yksipuolisesti.

Lisäksi tulokset osoittivat, että kielelliset valinnat, erityisesti äänensävyjen ja verbien käyttö, voivat vaikuttaa siihen, miten tietty tulevaisuuden kehitys ja todennäköisyys nähdään. Loppupäätelmänä oli, että koska nämä kuvat työn tulevaisuudesta saattavat edelleen vaikuttaa yksilöiden näkemyksiin identiteetistään sekä heidän uskomuksiinsa itsestään työntekijöinä ja yksilöinä, on korostettava, kuinka tärkeä kielen rooli on tulevaisuuskäsityksiemme muokkaajana.

Avainsanat: tulevaisuudentutkimus, tulevaisuuden työ, kriittinen diskurssianalyysi, valtasuhteet, mediadiskurssi, tulevaisuuskuvat

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1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, imagining the future has been a significant element of planning and decision-making as it allows individuals to assess the potential outcomes of different actions and make favourable choices for them (Masini 1993, pp. 3–6). Similarly, ideas and thoughts about the future of society are often shared publicly, allowing people to collectively contemplate various possibilities and how different decisions can impact society's development. However, as some individuals and groups have better access to public platforms, they wield greater influence over how these ideas are framed and perceived. (Van Dijk 1993; 2015.) While considering the future can help people prepare for the unknown, predictions about what may happen can also limit people's ideas about what kind of future is even possible. If specific future scenarios are repeatedly emphasised, they may unnecessarily influence beliefs about what can happen and result in failure to consider alternative outcomes. (Bell 1997, pp. 75–80.)

Moreover, viewing the future as predetermined can cause people to forget that it remains open until it becomes a reality. This perception can lead to passive reactions to collective decisions, potentially resulting in unfavourable outcomes, as actions are based on a narrow interpretation of interests and what is desirable (Masini 1993; Dunmire 2010). To avoid this outcome and ensure a sustainable future, it is critical to consider diverse perspectives from social actors with varied worldviews, values, and desires (Masini 1993 pp. 8 – 10; Dator 2019).

The impact of media institutions on shaping discussions and disseminating information and knowledge cannot be understated (Gameson et al. 1992). It is essential to recognise that the media content and its construction play a role in shaping people's perceptions (Fairclough 1992, p. 113; 2003). While news media helps individuals make sense of the world around them, it also stirs drama and encourages action by speculating about the consequences of different events (Dunmire 2010). Accordingly, the issues in news media hold significant power in shaping our perception of the future. To truly understand how media affects people, we must examine how linguistics and rhetorical choices are used in social practices (Cotter 2015).

This thesis examines discussions surrounding the future of work as presented in media. The evolution of novel tools and technologies throughout history has resulted in significant changes, leading to new ways of organising work and creating unforeseen jobs and occupations. The past also shows how the development of work has significantly

impacted society on multiple levels. (e.g., Magnusson 2014; Edgell, Gottfried & Granter 2016, pp. 1 –13). Given the high uncertainty surrounding future development, it is unsurprising that topics concerning work and its future are actively discussed in media. As work is so central to human life, numerous actors are motivated to predict the future trajectories of working life and the possible further impacts and influences these development processes may have (e.g., Carmel & Sawyer 2023). However, less attention has been given to how these various considerations about the future of work may shape the future of work itself. Since language plays an influential role, studying the representations that can impact people's interpretations and understanding how they are formed in social practices is essential. Therefore, this study investigates how language can influence people's perceptions about the future of work. Thus, instead of speculating about the future of work, this study examines how different topics considering the future of work are being discussed in newspaper media and how different social actors, meaning individuals and collective participants engaging in intentional actions, are involved in these discussions. Accordingly, a qualitative discourse analysis with a critical approach will be conducted on 37 selected text samples published in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat.

1.1 Research questions and objectives

The critical discourse analysis is applied to answer the following research question: *How is the future of work discussed in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat in Autumn 2022, and who is represented in these conversations?*

The research is guided by the following redefined research questions:

- How are topics related to the future of work framed in discussions within Helsingin Sanomat and how are future dimensions depicted in them?
- Whose perspectives and voices are highlighted in discussions about the future of work in Helsingin Sanomat and how do these representations influence their positioning within these discussions?

The empirical research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Enhance the understanding of how language within Helsingin Sanomat may influence readers' perceptions of the future of work and the positions of different social actors.
- Demonstrate how critical discourse analysis can be practically applied in futures research, providing insights into how language shapes people's perceptions about the future.

1.2 The structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as followed: After the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 explores the purpose of future-oriented thinking, the interest of futures researchers in people's ideas about the future, and the influence of power relations on these future images. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the transformation of work in the Global West, focusing specifically on Finland, and describes recent debates about the future of work.

Chapter 4 introduces the key concepts and ideas of discourse analysis, followed by a description of the specific characteristics of its critical approaches. The final sub-section presents recent research literature using a critical discourse analytical approach to examine the future of work. Chapter 5 details the methodology, focusing on the research process. It includes a description of the research material, a step-by-step explanation of the data collection and analysis processes, an introduction of the analytical framework, the researcher's position, and the digital tools used during the research process.

Chapter 6 outlines the findings of the analysis. It begins by describing the authors of the selected newspaper texts and the contexts in which topics were discussed. It then details how different topics related to the future of work were discussed, identifying two discourses in the analysis. A sub-section focuses on the future dimension, explaining the varying ways it was depicted. Finally, it describes the representations of different social actors in the selected text samples.

Chapter 7 examines the analysis findings in relation to the research questions and discusses them in the context of prior research, followed by an evaluation of the study. The final part of Chapter 7 provides conclusions and suggestions for future research directions.

2 WHY THE FUTURE FASCINATES US

2.1 The purpose of future-oriented thinking

Future-oriented thinking is an intrinsic aspect of human nature, as making good choices and finding the best solutions in the present requires comprehending what may happen (Masini 1993, pp. 3–6). We continually construct and reconstruct our knowledge and expectations about the world in our everyday lives based on new observations and experiences. Simultaneously, we create images of the future that emerge, particularly in response to significant events that evoke emotions within us (Rubin 1998). These images, Bell and Mao (1971, p. 23) express, are expectations about “the state of things to come at some future time”. Future images are essential in helping us comprehend our perceptions and analyse and organise our interpretations of reality into a practical and manageable order (Rubin 1998; Rubin & Linturi 2001). Thus, future-oriented thinking guides us in navigating our lives and profoundly influences our decision-making processes and actions, enabling us to respond to challenges and adapt accordingly.

Our visions of the future are shaped by various factors, including knowledge, emotions, personal perspectives and values, and prevailing societal attitudes and realities, as discussed by Rubin (1998). According to her, the challenge lies in the tendency of the human mind to think narrowly and resist change. Despite our best intentions, the outcomes of our decisions and actions can often have far-reaching consequences that were not originally intended. For instance, if we become fixated on negative trends that we perceive as threats to our future, we may react defensively and adopt coping strategies instead of exploring proactive and creative solutions. (Rubin 1998.) At an individual level, ideas of the future can impact a person’s current state of mind and ability to make decisions. If these future images are overly negative or do not accurately reflect reality, they can negatively impact motivation levels. (Rubin and Linturi 2001.)

Moreover, the common idea of relying on grand narratives that depict historical development as a progression towards a more sophisticated, in which we are said to exist today, can make us view the future as a linear extension of the past and present as a passive outcome. Suppose we see the future as predetermined (because specific future scenarios are dominating the public sphere). In that case, we may give up and become passive towards collective decisions, resulting in future outcomes that are unfavourable to us (Dunmire 2010). Inayatullah (2008) also explains that seeing the future as inevitable, with only a possible direction, results in making the same mistakes again.

2.2 Why do futures researchers want to explore people's future images?

It is crucial to recognise that questions and issues about the future carry ethical implications and are influenced by one's sociocultural background and societal position (e.g., Masini 1993, pp. 39–46; Bell 1997, pp. 87–88). Therefore, futures researchers are interested in ideas about the future and how different drivers can shape the future (Dator 2019). The various interpretations (images of the future) people make about possibilities and preconditions can offer insight into the prevailing attitudes and experiences of the time (Rubin 1998; Dator 2019). Moreover, future researchers share that creating a more democratic future demands exploring alternative development paths from diverse perspectives (Masini 1993, p. 26; Bell 1997, pp. 93–95).

Likewise, to create a sustainable future, it is essential to continuously challenge peoples' cognitive patterns by asking fundamental questions about our values, desires, and what they do not want. To assist individuals in understanding future scenarios and how their future images are formed, it is essential to explore processes that shape these images. (Masini 1993, pp. 1–14; Bell 1997, pp. 95–97.)

From future researchers' perspectives, challenging ideas about the future based on the status quo is made possible by the pluralisation of the future (Gidley 2017, p. 45). Constructing alternative images of the future helps develop new ideas and possibilities and prepare for uncertainties (Inayatullah 2008). Collective futures thinking opens discussion for values and opinions and encourages people to explore and evaluate alternative ideas. (Rubin 1998). Future researchers can enable individuals to reveal their preferred outcomes and explore how these can be achieved by facilitating the creation of alternative futures (Dator 2019).

2.3 The influence of power relations on people's future images

Although the future remains unknown, some ideas about what it might hold are more widely accepted than others. As Rubin (1998) noted, various factors influence our perceptions of the future. Political and governmental forces play significant roles in shaping the future scenarios shared in the public sphere. As explained in the introduction chapter, media is crucial in spreading information about what is happening in society. While staying informed by media can help individuals understand how recent events might affect them and how they can prepare for changes, information can also affect people negatively (Dunmire 2010). Ramos et al. (2019, p. 4) identify two "very damaging trends" that hinder ordinary individuals from acting for a better future, leading

them to rely on professionals and experts. The first trend they refer to is fatalism, wherein people perceive themselves as victims of decisions made elsewhere, often not aligning with their own interests. The second trend identified is called “elite futurism”, representing the colonisation of the future to benefit the interests only of a few. Those interests “are either rooted in business, like the many commercial visions of smart cities [...] or in the interests of big government”. (Ramos et al. 2019, p. 4.) Furthermore, Dunmire (2010) notes that those future scenarios that suggest alternative future directions and challenge the current global order are often denied because decision-makers seek to maintain their power.

Dufva and Lähdemäki-Pettinen (2023) highlight that some societal positions have a greater possibility to shape the future as these actors have better access to define and share images of the future and formulate what is possible, and in this way, influence what actions are taken. They emphasise that different social groups do not have equal opportunities to impact the decisions considering the future to assist in seeking answers to questions such as who gets to present ideas about the future and how different social groups are heard. Ahlqvist and Dufva (2015) also highlight decision makers’ ability within political and governmental contexts to control the future and achieve desired objectives through the right decisions. Agreeing with this, Dunmire (2010) asserts the need to examine how the future is constructed in social practices and the stakes discourses about the future. Also, Dufva and Lähdemäki (2023) agree that understanding social processes regarding the creation of future images contributes to broadening the influence of other actors on envisioning the future and considering who can influence the future.

As an advocate of critical discourse analysis, Dunmire (2010, p. 247) emphasises that: “[...] by controlling public discourses concerning what the future can and will be, modern institutions are able to shape the future in their image.” For example, Dunmire (2010, p. 256) distinguishes between representing future events and needed actions through the usage of “might”, “is” and “must,” and highlights how describing unknowns with “certainty,” as “statements of fact” portrays specific future scenarios as inevitable. This strategy is present in all social practices, among both “normal” people and public figures. However, it depends on the platform where a text is shared and by whom.

The influence of power on what ideas of the future become accepted has also created discussion within the field of futures research (e.g., Inayatullah 1993; Sardar 1993; Dator 2005). Critical futures research emerged to highlight the pluralism of different actors’ expectations, perceptions, and beliefs about the future, striving to shed light on different

cultures. It was acknowledged that despite aiming for neutrality and objectivity, it is evident that the methodologies of the scientific field reproduce power asymmetries and conventional perspectives. With their basis on constructivism and poststructuralism, critical futures studies delve into the examination of underlying power structures. Compared to "traditional" futures research, critical futures researchers aim to emphasise questioning dominant ideas, like everlasting economic growth, and identify less acknowledged political or social forces that affect possible outcomes. (Ahlqvist & Rhisiart 2015; Son 2015.) Rubin (2017, pp. 252–253) notes that even though pluralism is emphasised in the contemporary field of futures research, there are even more alternative options than those commonly recognised "alternative" future scenarios. Moreover, she highlights that the essence of critical futures studies lies not so much in seeking alternative future outcomes as in clarifying the reasons behind our thoughts and ideas about the future.

As this research aims to explore social processes of how language is formulated when discussing the future and by whom, it is reasonable to take a critical approach to analysing the collected data. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge a central weakness of this type of approach, as pointed out by Gidley (2017, p. 68), which is its "perceived subjectivity". Thus, the common challenge with highly critical approaches is to be critical merely for the sake of criticism. To address this, it is important to be transparent with the research process and to openly declare one's political stance, perspective, objectives and principals (Van Dijk 1993). Regardless of the challenges, increasing the level of attention and critical perspectives on how future images are constructed and how these constructions factor into specific interests while undermining others is imperative. This is crucial for securing a collectively desirable future, and it is precisely what this research aims to contribute to.

3 THE TRANSFORMATION OF WORK

3.1 Toward contemporary working life

The historical narrative of Finland's transformation into a prosperous welfare state often begins with the war reparations which Finland was forced to pay to the Soviet Union after the war periods. The financial pressure compelled the young state to develop large-scale production industries, necessitating a significant labour force. (Pyöriä 2006, p. 30–32.) In post-war Finland, the impact of the industrial revolutions became prominent; foreign modern technologies helped companies enhance their efficiency and introduced essential management trends (Mannevuola 2020, pp. 84–110). After Finland's development started, including the rise of the welfare system, the transformation path towards industrialised wage-working occurred rapidly (Pyöriä 2006, pp. 38–39).

The duty to attend school, starting in 1948, marked a turning point for the young country toward modernisation. However, even though extended education began to contribute to the upward-going social movement, the preceding war periods significantly influenced the cultural environment during that era. The earlier generation also passed the strong work ethic on to their children, which became an integral part of Finnish culture and is prevalent even today. (Hoikkala 1999 pp. 395–426.) The active development of the education system has enabled Finland to adapt to ICT technologies and globalisation as the state has been capable to re-structure its industry sectors. Today Finland is a global information society where knowledge work dominates Finnish industry sectors alongside with service work. (Pyöriä 2006, pp. 38–41; Melin & Saari 2019; Alasoini et al. 2023.)

Over the past four decades, it has often been remarked that the Global West has embraced neoliberalism, diminishing the state's role, glorifying the free markets and individualism (Thorsen 2010). Since the late 1970s, the international trend of deregulation and neoliberalist ideas have led to the global expansion of the free market and an increase in the power of capital. The reduced governmental control enabled international trade on a larger scale, providing greater flexibility to companies. The rise of ICT technology started creating new business and growth opportunities. However, globalisation also brought heightened competition and complex, interrelated crises, making it impossible to predict outcomes. (Magnusson 2014; Edgell, Gottfried & Granter 2016.) With the diminished role of the state, individuals must now bear the risks previously shared with the state and employers (Herod & Lambert 2016). Nevertheless, from a neoliberalist perspective, negative externalities fall under “the bad individual

choices” (Thorsen 2010, p. 204). Also influenced by these developments, modern Finnish society must be able to adapt to constant and accelerating change (Pyöriä 2006, p. 197).

Digitalisation has brought significant structural changes in many industries, making employment more insecure. Most Western industrial production has shifted overseas, primarily to the Global South, where labour is inexpensive and less regulated (Magnusson 2014). Labour markets in the Global West have become predominantly service-oriented and knowledge-based, leading to structural shifts and a widening gap between rich and poor (Ngoc Ngo et al. 2022). Many agree that we are witnessing a new technological paradigm shift; the fourth industrial revolution, manufacturing 4.0, is occurring (Collan & Michelsen 2020). Advancing technologies have also raised concerns about how people will make enough money and whether employees can obtain support and security from their employers. For instance, the platform economy has drastically altered the treatment of workers, leading to increased precarious work and forcing individuals to take on personal risks. (Herod & Lambert 2016.)

Labour and employer unions play a critical role in securing employees’ rights as collective agreements secure certain salary levels and employee rights (Begg, Fischer & Dornbusch 2008, pp. 214 – 231; Heinonen et al. 2004, p. 21). However, globalisation has decreased the value of domestic bargaining because maintaining competitiveness at the international level is crucial (Lainà & Sippola, 2023). For instance, opting for cost-based competition over quality-based competition and disbanding labour unions have significantly impacted employees’ rights (Herod & Lamber 2016). New solutions are needed as work changes and new challenges in the labour market emerge. Nevertheless, according to Mannevuola (2020, p. 149), resistance to change is a common phenomenon in Finland, which is why new solutions, such as basic income, are often perceived as impossible.

Even though many office jobs and data transformation tasks are disappearing due to mechanisation and automatisisation, Western countries are increasingly facing a lack of workforce. There are many reasons, such as structural economic changes, overqualification, and unmet needs (Heinonen et al. 2004, pp. 18–19). From an economic point of view, labour-based immigration offers a faster solution to meet the labour market needs and contribute to the country’s economy compared to education alone. However, as the global trend of an ageing population is declining, so is the size of the workforce. Finland is already facing competition from other countries. Many are concerned that

Finland lags behind other countries in developing its immigration system. (Dufva et al. 2017; Jokinen, Pitkänen & Luoma-Keturi 2021.)

Finnish working culture

Organising work in a way that minimises unemployment and benefits companies, citizens, and the state requires long-term planning (Heinonen et al. 2004, pp. 51–52). In Finland, active labour politics aims to support the unemployed, improve people's job situations, and contribute to social resources by motivating people to find work. Thus, the Finnish modern labour market is interconnected with many social welfare state services, such as social security and tax payments and the Finnish education system. (Heinonen et al. 2004, pp. 27–28.)

The working culture in Finland is often characterised as low-hierarchic and open, achieved through active dialogue between employees and employers. Aiming for consensus is a value often associated with traditional Finnish culture. A self-directing and team-based working practice where employees can influence their own work and work environment is characteristic of many Finnish organisations. (Ylöstalo 2007; Alasoini et al. 2023.)

Finnish employees value individualism, which encompasses high work autonomy, the ability to act based on one's own solutions, self-direction, and control over one's tasks (Ylöstalo 2007; Alasoini et al. 2023). Ylöstalo (2007) also highlights the increasing presence of collectivism in work life, noting that individuals must take responsibility and face increasing requirements for work and productivity. Mannevuola (2020, pp. 282–285) describes how Finnish people have become more independent and disciplined, focusing increasingly on individual achievement. While being an average working person was once the norm, today, every citizen is responsible for earning money and striving for success. Moreover, she notes that independence and collectivism coexist harmoniously in today's society, both rooted in self-discipline. In an individualist society, the emphasis is always on improvement and efficiency, even during recovery from burnout. Accordingly, learning to function better seems to have become a fundamental goal of Finnish life. (Mannevuola 2020, pp. 282–285.)

Also, in Finland, the labour market has become more fragmented and precarious. For example, temporary agency work has become a permanent, although a small, part of the Finnish labour market (Melin & Saari 2019). Work intensification has globally emerged as a notable trend over the last two decades, closely linked to the tenets of modern

capitalism (Pérez-Zapata et al. 2016). Even though Finnish society firmly rests on principles of equality and inclusion, it is difficult for immigrants to get employed (Melin & Saari 2019). Globally, discrimination continues to perpetuate inequalities and injustice in the labour market. Securing a job depends not only on an individual's education, prior experience, or cognitive abilities but also on gender, race, personality, and age, all of which influence one's employability and wage levels. (Heinonen et al. 2004, pp. 33-44; Begg, Fischer & Dornbusch 2008, pp. 214–231.)

3.2 Debates about the future of work

As work plays a crucial role in maintaining economic security and societal functions, the future of work is a significant topic of interest among multiple actors. There is a consensus that megatrends, including demographic changes, advancing technologies, climate change, and globalisation, are all significant drivers shaping work, making it challenging to control development paths toward the future of work (e.g., Barbosa et al. 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how quickly working life can change, as many people were forced to remote work, leading to an accelerating digitalisation of work processes. These exceptional living and working conditions reshaped perceptions of where and how work is done, blurring the line between free time and work, and prompting individuals to re-evaluate the meaning of work. While the long term-effects of COVID-19 are difficult to predict, it is widely agreed that the global crisis the pandemic unleashed has had an impact on the future of work. (e.g. Autor, Mindell & Reynolds 2020; Alsos & Dølvik 2021.)

The impact of advancing technologies depends on society's actions

Technological advancements, especially AI and automation, and their potential impacts on society are frequent themes in discussions about the future of work and raise many concerns. For instance, in the MIT's report "The Work of the Future: Building Better Jobs in an Age of Intelligent Machines," Autor, Mindell and Reynolds (2020) highlight that the integration of new technologies have already resulted in lower wages and labour market bifurcation, and this trend will likely continue. Barbosa et al. (2022), who studied future trends in automation, employment, study, welfare society and economy to create scenarios for work in 2050, estimate that the number of available low-skill and low-wage jobs will be significantly lower in the future due to technological advancements.

However, while automation could dehumanise work, it also offers new job opportunities requiring more creative and social skills, and providing increased flexibility, personalised education, and reduced workloads. (e.g., Autor, Mindell & Reynolds 2020; Carmel & Sawyer 2023). Alsos & Dølvik (2021), who conducted a study on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers, investigating potential opportunities and challenges the future presents for Nordic countries and their existing working models, cri that while the impact of technological change is powerful, the influence of other changing forces is often overlooked. Moreover, they highlight that despite considering the impact of megatrends – globalisation, climate change, demographical changes, technological changes – one should keep in mind that the development depends on human agency, such as, economic actors and their strategic actions. Similarly, Autor, Mindell & Reynolds (2020) and Barbosa et al. (2022) emphasise that the impact of technology depends on whether it supports or replaces human work, highlighting the need for transparency and ethical considerations, and better actions from society to control technological companies.

Barbosa et al. (2022) also emphasise that advanced technologies will impact all types of work. For instance, Kokkinen et al. (2020) highlight that professional requirements will become more demanding, necessitating continuous learning and updating skills. Moreover, Dufva et al. (2017) predict a shift toward networked organisational structures and self-directed work, which we also witnessed during the pandemic. Alsos & Dølvik (2021) warn that the growth of gig work, enabled by the platform economy, challenges the traditional employment model and risks increasing marginalisation and inequalities.

New work practices require new mindsets and flexibility

According to Barbosa et al. (2022), employers and managers already recognise the need for organisational change, especially in countries facing worker shortages. Employers must increasingly consider how to engage employees and provide further training to keep pace with technological and social changes. Kokkinen (2020) highlights that while new mindsets, attitudes, behaviours and work practices evolve, adapting to new forms of career and changing work requires supporting well-being, psychological safety, and resilience. Moreover, she notes that climate change will create also new jobs, affect work conditions and productivity, and influence behaviour.

Carmel and Sawyer (2023), who conducted an extensive literature review of future-of-work research with a focus on knowledge work, emphasise that the future of knowledge work and whether it will meet individual need largely depends one employers’

premises – whether employers want more productivity or intrinsically motivated employees. They also consider whether increasing work flexibility will lead to more time spent working and whether jobs will become more holistic or task-oriented.

Changes in the labour market necessitate reviewing the social support system

As new work forms create new type of contracts, many countries struggle with organising their labour markets, leading to financial insecurity despite job availability. Regulations are needed to protect workers' rights and balance the effects of technological advancements with societal needs. Governments must implement policies to manage advancing computerisation and prevent mass unemployment, which is essential for achieving a sustainable work landscape in the future. Redesigned safety nets and inclusive social practices are crucial. (Alsos & Dølvik 2021; Barbosa et al. 2022; Dufva et al. 2017.)

Another megatrend, an ageing population will significantly affect the labour market conditions in the Global North. According to Alsos and Dølvik (2021) and Barbosa et al. (2022), this necessitates the raising the retirement age, reviewing the social support system and providing new ways of work such as part-time job opportunities.

Moreover, Alasoini et al. (2023) emphasise that improving work in the life long term requires joint international efforts aimed at trust, open dialogue and cooperation among different actors. Additionally, education systems play a crucial role in adapting to rapidly changing labour markets (Alsos & Dølvik 2021; Barbosa et al. 2022; Carmen & Sawyer 2023). Likewise, investing in innovative development processes not only creates jobs and boosts economic growth but also complements technological change and address competitive challenges (Autor, Mindell & Reynolds 2020).

3.3 Debates about the future of Finnish work

Finnish debates about the future of work align with international discussions. A major concern for the Finnish labour market is increasing labour shortages, especially due to the aging population, and the significant need of labour-based immigration. Furthermore, Kokkinen (2020) claims that mental health issues caused by intensive and unsecure working life can lead to more people dropping out from the labour market.

Also, the uncertainties and threats climate change create impact individuals' psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, climate change will broadly affect physical work conditions and productivity as well as influence behaviour. (Kokkinen 2020.) The green transition not only change people's behaviour but also creates new business opportunities

(Alasoini et al. 2023; TEM 2023). TEM (2023) also emphasises that competitiveness requires renewing labour market structures and boosting entrepreneurship. Dufva et al. (2017) stress that sustainable development becomes more important than continuous economic growth. Competitiveness should be achieved by solving global challenges, not merely by improving productivity. Additionally, the Finnish Labour Ministry highlights the impact of the current Ukraine war and the closure of Russian market as the dominant role of China, increasing technological competition and rising protectionism, on the productivity and the state of the Finnish industry sectors. (TEM 2023; Alasoini et al. 2023.)

The future of Finnish work depends on innovation and adaption within the labour market. (VN 2022). According to Kokkinen (2020), addressing labour shortages require supporting workplace diversity and creating better conditions for workers needing flexibility or support, such as for those with disabilities or those unable to work full-time. While institutions and organisations play a role, the motivation to innovate work must come from workplace-level.

The report “Kohti jaettava ymmärrystä työn tulevaisuudesta” (Towards shared understanding about the future of work) by Dufva et al. (2017) provides an analysis of various views on what changes plausibly may significantly impact the future of work in Finland, identifying two main discourses. The first discourse focuses on the near future, emphasising productivity and competitiveness by integrating new technologies efficiently, increasing profits, and enhancing employee productivity. Automation is prioritised for profitability, implying that work is done by people as long it remains economical. Employers maintain control over the working conditions and processes. The second discourse challenges the traditional definition of work and suggests most people will become information workers, with future work forms deviating from current paradigms, potentially blurring role divisions. This discourse focuses on the meaningfulness of work, downplaying financial considerations and global competition. (Dufva et al. 2017.)

4 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR FUTURES RESEARCH

4.1 Introduction to discourse analytical research

Discourse analysis, originating from various disciplines, has been widely applied with diverse approaches across various contexts (Wodak 2001). The pressing necessity to understand the increasing complexity of the modern world has made it a popular approach for studying societal issues through language use (van Dijk 1993). Above all, the primary contribution of discourse analysis, and what distinguishes it from traditional qualitative methods, is that rather than trying to understand what socially generated ideas and objects mean, it aims to get more insight into how socially generated ideas and objects are constructed and maintained through communicative practices (Fairclough 1992; Phillips & Hardy 2002). Discourse analysts try to find deeper explanations for why a social reality exists as it is by studying texts and the properties of language in more detail (van Dijk 1993).

Essentially, discourse research is committed to a social constructivist view and, thus, posits that language is not neutral but used for varying purposes, significantly shaping and perpetuating different social realities (Phillips & Hardy 2002, p. 2; Burr 2015). Because of the complex characteristics of language, discourse analysis focuses on examining representations, interpretations and conceptualisations people produce to understand how they structure their understanding of reality (Fairclough 1992; 2003; 2012). Thus, the interest of discourse analysis is in those processes that construct and maintain the social world (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p. 2). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) further examines what role discourses have in producing and maintaining power imbalances at the societal level, emphasising social power and dominance within groups or institutions. (Van Dijk 1993; 2015; Wodak 2001.)

4.2 Understanding discourse

Fairclough (2012, p. 11) defines discourse as collectively shared “semiotic modalities”, including language, gestures, and visualisations. These modalities influence each other within social processes and interact with social structures, practices, and events, constructing meanings of the world and social reality from the perspectives of social groups. Accordingly, discourse should be perceived as a form of action. Fairclough

(2003) suggests that processes of meaning-making involve three elements: text production (producers and presenters), the text itself and the text reception (its interpreters such as readers or listeners). As these three elements are interconnected, studying their relationships is necessary. Also notable here is that in the context of discourse analysis, “text” encompasses all verbal actions, not just written forms.

Different social groups form because individuals perceive social reality differently, leading to multiple competing discourses that interpret the surrounding reality and what is perceived as truth (Phillips & Hardy 2011; Burr 2015, pp 2– 5). Based on a particular discourse, each group agrees on rules determining how a subject is defined and treated. Moreover, Van (2008, p. 6) explains:

As discourses are social cognitions, social specific ways of knowing social practices, they can be, and are, used as resources for representing social practices in texts. Discourses not only represent what is going on, they also evaluate it, ascribe purposes to it, justify it, and so on [...] (Van 2008, p. 6)

Fairclough (1992, pp. 86 – 95) describes *a discursive event* as being simultaneously a text (spoken or written language), a discursive practice, and a social practice. To gain a deeper understanding of discursive events, it is essential to comprehend these different elements. According to him, *discursive practices* are maintained and continuously re-negotiated within the group in text production, distribution and consumption processes. In *social practices*, actions and behaviours are continually shaped by social structures, power relations, and the unique characteristics of participants’ social activities. In a parallel manner, these social practices yield outcomes that impact both social structures and dynamics. Based on these three elements, Fairclough (1992) has constructed a three-dimensional framework.

Phillips and Hardy (2002, pp. 4–5) endorse this framework, explaining that it “connects texts to discourses, locating them in historical and social contexts, by which we refer to the particular actors, relationships, and practices that characterise the situation under study”. The three-dimensional framework by Fairclough (1992) will be presented in the methodology chapter, and I will utilise it to analyse the data.

Genre

The concept of genre can be understood as a socially approved particular type of semiotic activity within a specific context. Genres guide how language is supposed to be used and signal what its interpreters can expect. Examining text within a particular genre

encompasses not only a specific text type but also particular processes of producing, distributing, and consuming texts. Different genres are frequently associated with particular styles, norms and functions. For instance, styles vary according to how the text is produced (mode: written or spoken), the nature of the relationship between participants (tone: formal or intimate), and the chosen rhetorical mode (argumentative or descriptive) of the text. (Fairclough 2012, pp. 10–11; Hodges 2015, pp. 45–49.)

Different genres are organised into specific forms of discursive and social actions. Specific text types within a genre are each constructed to adhere to the normative conventions of their specific style. (Fairclough, 2012, p. 10.) In this research context, the genre under investigation can be perceived as newspaper journalism, which consists of multiple types of texts. The text types included in the data of will be introduced in the methodology chapter.

Intertextuality and discursivity

Hodges (2015, pp. 42–56) highlights the interconnectedness of texts, using the term intertextuality to demonstrate how text producers combine other texts with their own, similar to using citations. Intertextuality enables a better understanding of texts, as links between texts over time ease people’s interpretation processes and connect people. However, intertextuality also passes assumptions from previous texts, thereby contributing to certain discursive practices that guide how topics are supposed to be discussed. Fairclough (1992, p. 103) explains that the notion of intertextuality highlights the dynamic nature of texts and the idea that no text exists in isolation; texts can shape prior texts and transform prevailing social structures. Similarly, Phillips and Hardy (2002, pp. 4–5) assert that individual texts are not meaningful; understanding discourses necessitates examining entire bodies of text, seeking interrelations between texts, and studying how they evolve and take new textual forms.

While intertextuality refers to a text producer combining other texts (e.g., citation), interdiscursivity refers to constitutive intertextuality - a discourse appearing within another discourse. Texts seamlessly blend different situations and subject positions. Thus, there is more than one set of orders of discourse within a network of social practices. (Fairclough 1992, p. 117.) Within these practices, the relationship between such elements can often be contradictory (e.g., being a “customer” of the university as a student). It is plausible that boundaries between these settings and practices become so naturalised that these subject positions are experienced as complementary. However, these boundaries

might become a focus of contestation and struggle under different social circumstances. (Fairclough 1992, pp. 68–69.)

The purpose of examining discourses

People's actions and behaviours are constantly shaped in social practices by social structures, power relations, and the specific characteristics of participants' social activities. In parallel, these social practices produce outcomes that impact both social structures and dynamics. Discourses do not merely prescribe how one should think, communicate, and behave; they also profoundly influence our identities, worldviews, and construction of reality, often operating beneath the surface of our awareness. While we may, to some extent, make conscious choices, we cannot entirely control all our actions or fully determine how we perceive and construct our understanding of reality. Thus, discourses have tangible impacts and consequences on individuals and society. (Fairclough 1992, pp. 62–72.)

Understanding social interactions requires examining the discourses that give them meaning. Similarly, comprehending the social and historical context is essential to understanding discourses and their impacts. (Phillips & Hardy 2002, pp. 2 – 5.) As Phillips and Hardy (2002, p. 3) assert, “Without discourse, there is no reality, and without an understanding of discourse, we cannot comprehend our reality, experiences, or ourselves.”

4.3 Critical approaches to discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysts assert that power is always present in social relationships, influenced by distinct positions held by various actors and the quality of their unequal relationships. Accordingly, the primary objective of CDA is to gain insight into the complex social dynamics among various social groups and the factors shaping these dynamics (van Dijk 2015, pp. 466 – 467.; Wodak 2001, p. 2). Social actors have different levels of access to influence social structures, making certain voices more privileged over others. Consequently, some actors have more control over discourse, enabling them to shape the spread of knowledge, opinions, and ideologies, while others end up in more passive positions, susceptible to being influenced. (Van Dijk 1993; 2015, pp. 469 – 470.)

Van Dijk (2015, p. 469) defines social power as the control one group has over others. Those who exercise such power possess privileged access to socially esteemed resources such as education, status, or wealth. Social power is embedded in social systems through

laws, social rules, cultural habits, and everyday actions, making it not necessarily visible. Furthermore, van Dijk (1993, pp. 249–250) presents the term dominance is used to refer to “the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups”, distinguishing it from legitimate and acceptable power forms.

Within the context of CDA, power and control have a significant cognitive dimension. Control over communicative acts and the contexts and structures of text and talk can be exercised at many levels by those in positions of power. Asymmetric power relations manifest in various ways and can occur in different situations. Cognitive influence can align with the interests of the recipients, as seen in informative social content or educational efforts. (Van Dijk 1993; 2015, pp. 472–474.) For example, power dynamics in family conversations differ significantly from those interactions in public bureaucratic institutions. Furthermore, recipients are more responsive to information from people or institutions that they experience as trustworthy or authoritative – when the presenter is trusted; it becomes easier to succeed in the argumentation process.

Effective power in modern society is primarily cognitive and strategically enacted to change the minds of others in one’s interest (van Dijk 2015, pp. 472–474). In this research context, actors with active access to communicative events, such as media interviews, or those who possess the authority to determine what gets published, wield considerable influence over public discourse.

Due to the complex nature of many social problems, CDA is not based on any specific research field or theory but requires a multidisciplinary approach and sensible evaluation of what theories and methods are most relevant and suitable (van Dijk 1993). According to van Dijk (2015, pp. 466– 467), all relevant methods in the humanities and social sciences can be applied to CDA, which is why he claims that CDA should not be seen as a particular method of discourse analysis but as a field of research. Van Dijk (1993) asserts that analysts adopting this approach should explicitly declare their political position, viewpoints, objectives, and principles as social reality cannot be studied from the outside and somehow be revealed. This principle applies to research in general: language use is inherent to the research process, and all participants actively construct meanings for the world (van Dijk 1993; Phillips and Hardy 2002, pp. 12–13).

Fairclough (2003) emphasises that while a text cannot be thoroughly analysed, it can be made more understandable and “real enough” through analysis. Every textual analysis is selective, involving constant choices about the specific questions asked and the objects of interest. Van Dijk (2015) and Fairclough (2003) stress that micro-level textual analysis

must be linked to the macro-level social analysis, viewing text analysis as a supplement to social analysis, not a replacement.

Critical approaches to futures studies can easily be connected to critical discourse analysts' ideas about social power. Similar to the aims of discourse analysts, examining whose ideas about the future are heard aims to highlight how some actors have better access to influence others' cognitive processes and actions. Thus, in the context of futures research, it is important to consider why certain discourses dominate the construction of future images in public discussions.

Analysing linguistical choices in the representations of social actors is central to CDA, as the meanings constructed and conveyed in clauses affect how text consumers interpret the text (Fairclough 2003). Text producers adopt specific positions and assign positions to other social actors. Their linguistic choices enable them to portray social actors in different lights, influencing how readers perceive them through various text patterns. (Jokinen et al. 2016, p. 273; van Leeuwen 2008.) Examples of these linguistic choices are the inclusion and exclusion of different social actors in texts, whether they are activated or passivated and are represented personally or as socially categorised. These choices can be socially significant and often align with text producers' interests, such as strengthening some actors' positions while weakening others. (Fairclough 2003; van Leeuwen 2008.) In this research, I will utilise some key variables introduced by van Leeuwen (2008) in his Social Actor Network to analyse different social actor representations in data (see section 5.3 for more details).

4.4 Recent CDA research on the future of work

A great deal of research has utilised a critical discourse analytical approach to examine news media (Cotter 2015). However, its use in futures research, particularly in exploring how the future of work is discussed, appears limited. Recently, Ćwikła and Lindell (2023) used critical discourse analysis to study visual data on "images of the future of work" from Polish and Swedish web pages, exploring the potential social impact of these visualisations. Their research revealed that visualizations of the future of work primarily portrayed stereotypical framings, without creating alternative scenarios or mirroring popular predictions about the future of work (Ćwikła and Lindell 2023, p. 10).

Research on the future is relevant to everyday life and is conducted across academic fields, not limited to the scientific discipline. A study exploring future work was done in the field of employment relations by Ainsworth and Knox (2021), who utilised a critical discourse analytical approach to examine the contribution of ideas about the future of work to the policy-making in Australia's employment relations and labour markets. Their analysis of the data provided by an Australian government Inquiry reporting indicated that instead of focusing on future work conditions, the Inquiry primarily investigated ideas considering the present. As an outcome, Ainsworth and Knox stated that their use should be questioned if narratives about the future are not coherent or concrete enough.

In a study by Bareis and Katzenbach (2022) on the impact of sociotechnical imaginaries on national strategies for integrating AI technologies, the researchers analysed how future images influence the development of society. They studied several countries' AI policy documents strategies regarding integrating AI technologies into societies and how the sociotechnical imaginaries co-shaped the role of AI in this development. Their analysis showed that the narratives of AI strategies are similar, aligning with popular AI tales, even though the respective imaginaries suggest how AI integration should be handled differently between countries. They (2022, p. 875) point out that "their framing of discourses, opinions and actions are as much enabling as they are restricting, disclosing a double performative, political role."

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Material

This study analysed 37 text samples published in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat (HS) from July 1, 2022, to December 31, 2022. The decision to analyse texts published in news media was motivated by the significant influence that media institutions hold over public discussions and their active role in reproducing societal power dynamics. HS was chosen due to its extensive readership and influence. Being Finland's most widely read newspaper (KMT 2022), it dominates the country's media landscape. HS is distributed nationwide and published in print and online formats. The HS Editor formulates the newspaper's guiding principles as follows:

Helsingin Sanomat is an independent daily newspaper that promotes and strengthens democracy, social justice, and freedom of opinion. The newspaper fulfils its mission primarily through fair, fast, and reliable news delivery.

Helsingin Sanomat determines its position independently, independent of political or economic decision-makers or other pressure groups. The paper also follows this line of independence in its daily news coverage. In trying to defend and strengthen the democracy of a pluralistic society, Helsingin Sanomat pays special attention to the realization of freedom of opinion.

According to Helsingin Sanomat, understanding and balanced development of society is only possible when the continuity of versatile information that serves all citizens is guaranteed. In its news broadcasts, Helsingin Sanomat aims to create an overall picture that contains the information necessary for citizens to make their own decisions.¹ (HS 2020)

Given the selected time frame, it was reasonable to focus on recently published texts as the ideas and understanding of future development paths of work are constantly

¹ Helsingin Sanomat on sitoutumaton päivälehti, joka pyrkii edistämään ja vahvistamaan kansanvaltaisuutta, yhteiskunnallista oikeudenmukaisuutta ja mielipiteen vapautta. Tehtävänsä lehti toteuttaa ensisijaisesti tasapuolisen, nopean ja luotettavan uutisvälityksen avulla. Helsingin Sanomat määrittää kantansa itsenäisesti, riippumatta poliittisista tai taloudellisista päätöksentekijöistä tai muista painostusryhmistä. Tätä riippumattomuuslinjaansa lehti seuraa myös päivittäisessä uutisvälityksessään. Pyrkinessään puolustamaan ja vahvistamaan moniarvoisen yhteiskunnan kansanvaltaisuutta Helsingin Sanomat kiinnittää erityistä huomiota mielipiteen vapauden toteutumiseen. Helsingin Sanomat käsityksen mukaan yhteiskunnan tasapainoinen kehitys on mahdollinen vain silloin, kun kaikkia kansalaisia palvelevan, monipuolisen tiedonvälityksen jatkuvuus on taattu. Uutisvälityksessään Helsingin Sanomat pitää tavoitteena sellaisen kokonaiskuvan muodostumista, joka koostuu kansalaisten omaehtoisille ratkaisuille tarpeellisista tiedoista.

evolving. (Note for the reader: this thesis's data selection and collection process was done in early 2023.) Also, the length of the time frame and size of the data needed to be appropriate for the scope and requirements of a master's thesis. Additionally, the selection of the time frame was based on the assumption that work had returned to a "normal" state, meaning that the media was likely to focus less on the exceptional circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data selection and collection

Data collection began by exploring all types of texts published in the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper. For this, I used a digital database, The Collections of the National Library of Finland.

The following criteria guided the selection process of texts to be examined:

- The central theme is work in the Finnish context.
- The text discusses the future development of work or ongoing developments from a future perspective.
- The text addresses the future dimension of work.

The texts published in HS were initially selected through word-based searches using the Boolean Searching. Since the language used in HS is Finnish, I used Finnish search words² equivalent to the following English words (presented in the same order as in the footnote): "work", "career", "occupation", "labour market", and "working life" with the words followed: "future", "development", "turning point", and "change".

Initially, I did not set any limitations regarding text types. After selecting those texts that appeared to match my criteria, I reviewed them again. At this stage, I decided to exclude texts focusing on individuals' personal futures, sports, texts considering how the future of work had been seen in earlier times, prospects for individual companies, cultural reviews and descriptions, and the texts published in HS's weekly special publication as these texts were duplicates of daily newspaper content.

The final selection criteria were determined by the absence of texts with the future of work as their central theme. Consequently, in most of the selected texts, the future

² (presented in the same order): "työ", "ura", "ammatti", "työmarkkina", "työelämä" with: "tulevaisuus", "kehitys", "murros" and "muutos".

dimension of work is not the primary focus. Instead, the central themes of these texts revolve around various developmental trends related to work across different subject areas. Nevertheless, considering the impact of language, even minor references to future work can influence readers' perceptions of the future, which is why it is crucial also to investigate those discussions that, while not primarily focused on the future, still express ideas on how various work-related issues and their possible development paths should be addressed.

After selecting the text samples, their digital versions were searched on the HS webpage (see Appendix 1: The list of links to the selected articles). The different types of text samples selected are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The types of text samples

Text type	Number of text samples
Editorial	2
Personal interview	2
Guest writer, column	3
Readers' opinion pieces	22
News	6
Column	1
Feature article	1
All	37

As shown in Table 1, the collected texts encompass variety of types: editorials (2), personal interviews with international experts (2), columns (3) authored by guest writers, news (6), a feature article, a column written by an HS journalist and readers' opinion pieces (22). Jaakkola (2013, pp. 173 – 178) describes these different text types and their specific characteristics as follows. Editorials are argumentative subject texts that follow the common principles of the newspaper. They typically address current societal phenomena and provide facts and expert-provided information to strengthen statements. Personal interviews and feature articles are both neutral text types that still allow more freedom for expression and linguistic choices, with the author's voice present. Personal interviews are often conducted with public figures such as politicians, artists, or executives, providing information based on the journalist's observations. Feature articles are longer, fact-based texts based on a more thorough investigation of issues, such as a

news event considered intriguing. While columns are opinion pieces, they must also adhere to journalistic guidelines; for instance, every argument must be valid. A news article is a reportative text type efficiently providing new, fact-based information about what has happened, where, and when. Opinion speeches published in newspapers are brief, concise, and focus on a specific topic. The author's voice can be personal, aiming to draw attention to the topic and express their thoughts, viewpoints, and arguments while justifying them. Opinion speeches often conclude with a recommendation or a suggestion. (Jaakkola, 2013, pp. 173–178.)

The observation that most selected texts were published in the readers' opinion section (22 out of 37) could potentially impact the analysis and findings because opinion speeches are inherently more argumentative and persuasive than other journalistic text types. However, newspaper readers are informed that individuals author these opinion texts and are typically aware of the text type, which may lead them to approach these pieces differently than texts written by the media. It was also purposeful to include readers' opinion pieces in the data material, as they are essential for increasing interaction and enabling discussions on topics and points of view that the newspaper might not otherwise address.

5.2 Data analysis

To ensure a structured analysis process, I uploaded the selected texts to the text analysis program NVivo and marked each according to its respective text type. The authors of the text samples were also listed according to the personal information provided, such as their occupation, role in the HS edition team, and educational background.

Following this, I thoroughly reviewed the texts published in HS to identify different topics discussed, such as the labour market, employers, unemployment, working life needs, employee rights, labour markets, Finland as a working society, salary issues, needs for the labour force, work culture, education, future challenges, youth and children. Additionally, I coded the parts that specifically discussed the time dimension under the categories of past, present, near future, and future in the long term.

However, as the research was not intended to be a thematic analysis, I then focused on identifying central discussions and their overall themes rather than specific topics. The central themes I identified in the selected texts covered current issues and phenomena related to the development of Finnish industries, working life and sociocultural aspects, the impacts of technology, labour shortages, work and values, students, immigration and

education. Subsequently, I created summaries of these themes to provide contexts for analysing how the future time dimensions are depicted and how different social actors are positioned and represented. The social actors described in my findings (see Chapter 6) were grouped based on their similarities and the contexts in which they appeared. Nevertheless, it is important to note that many social actors were represented in multiple contexts and had various roles.

Moreover, I have used text examples from the data to illustrate my findings and support my interpretations. Quotations were selected for their relevance and effectiveness in demonstrating the conclusions. As the data is in Finnish, both the original and translated versions of the text from the articles have been included (the original texts in Finnish are presented in footnotes).

5.3 Analytical framework

As presented in Chapter 3, the methodological approach of this study is critical discourse analysis. To analyse discursive events I utilised Fairclough's Three-dimensional framework (1992) which distinguishes between three components: text analysis, processing analysis and social analysis. Moreover, to analyse in various ways of how social actors are represented in the selected text samples in more detail, I utilised van Leeuwen's (2008) Social actor network analysis. However, for this study, I did not delve into sub-categories that elaborate on specific cases in detail, as this study aims to investigate different representations of actors on a more general level. The following categories were used in the analysis to examine how social actors were represented and positioned in the empirical data.

5.3.1 Three-dimensional framework

As described by Fairclough (1992, pp. 72–96), *text analysis* involves a detailed examination of the text's content and form. This includes analysing vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and overall structure. Additionally, text analysis considers the text's coherence, the type of speech acts it forms, and its intertextuality. Together, these elements cover the text production and interpretation processes and the text's formal properties. *Discursive practice analysis* examines texts' production, distribution and consumption, exploring how these processes relate to discourse practices that link texts and social practices. Finally, *analysis of social practice* aims to explain these discourse practices by relating

them to sociocultural practices and wider contexts. Questions of power dynamics are of central interest in this dimension.

5.3.2 Social Network Analysis

Van Leeuwen (2008) highlights the importance of investigating the inclusion and exclusion of different actors in texts. Whether to include or exclude social actors depends on the interests and purposes the social actors (producing the text) have concerning their intended readers. Exclusion does not necessarily leave any trace; social actors involved in assumably relevant actions are excluded in this case. This type of radical exclusion becomes relevant when critically comparing different representations of the same social practice.

Exclusion can occur through suppression or backgrounding.

- *Suppression*

Suppression occurs when the social actor(s) under discussion are not referred at all.

- *Backgrounding*

Backgrounding is a less radical type of exclusion. the social actors are briefly mentioned somewhere in the text but without further explanation.

Inclusion can manifest in multiple ways; the following descriptions of distinct categories represent specific forms of inclusion.

- *Role allocation*

Role allocation refers to assigning roles to different actors in representation, and how social actors are represented – whether they are activated or passivated in texts. These roles do not necessarily have to reflect the actual relationships between those social actors, as representations can change or rearrange these representations. A text producer can depict others as “the Actors” who can make things happen and influence others or as “the Affected”, implying they are those affected by actions. Roles in representations can be active or passive, meaning that social actors can be portrayed as actively involved practitioners in an activity or as mere passive recipients.

- *Personalisation/Impersonalisation*

Representational choices that personalise social actors represent them with their names, personal pronouns or any other choice with semantic features related to humans. In contrast, impersonalising participation of someone can occur by referring to someone with referring words typically used for non-human subjects.

- *Genericisation / specification*

Van Leeuwen (2008) distinguishes between generic and specific representations of social actors, which can significantly affect how individuals perceive them. Social actors can be represented as groups, “classes”, or as distinct, recognizable individuals. By grouping individuals into social categories, people tend to associate the attributes of the category with specific individuals, ultimately influencing their perception of them.

- *Determination*

Social actors can be represented in two ways: through their identities, called "nomination", or through the functions they share with others, “categorisation”. People with higher status are usually nominated, while characters without names achieve only "passing" functional roles. This means "they do not get identified by readers or listeners".

5.4 Subjectivity and the position of the researcher in qualitative research

In qualitative research, the researcher holds a relatively powerful position, determining how data is interpreted and structured. When conducting a critical discourse analysis opening up the researcher’s position is particularly essential (van Dijk 1993). As a master’s student in futures studies with a background in business and cultural studies, a highly critical person, and lacking previous experience conducting a critical discourse analysis, I may make interpretations and assumptions that more experienced researchers might find problematic. Additionally, my sociocultural status as a white, highly educated, Finnish millennial female can influence how I select, understand, analyse, and perceive the texts. Furthermore, I believe that work should offer individuals more than just income and that employers should provide a comprehensive supportive system, respecting workers’ rights, and enabling employees’ opportunities to express their opinions and influence organisational development.

While the interpretation of data is inherently subjective, this does not diminish its value. The essence of a social constructionist view is to recognise the diverse interpretations of texts. Other individuals may highlight different but equally essential themes that another person might have overlooked. (Burr 2015, pp. 119–125.)

5.5 Assisting digital tools

During the writing process of this thesis, I utilised several digital tools to enhance the flow and readability of the text. I employed both Chat GBT-3.5 and Grammarly tools for proofreading purposes. Since the original language of the selected articles is Finnish, the in-depth analysis was conducted in Finnish. However, I used Google Translator and Chat GBT-3.5 to translate the data for the final presentation. In the final phase of the thesis writing process, I employed the Chat GBT-3.5 tool to improve the grammar, clarity and precision of my text. To achieve this, I entered text excerpts into the tool to explore more nuanced expressions and word alternatives, particularly for verbs, from the tool's suggestions. I found this approach reasonable as I am not a native English speaker, and it also enhanced the educational aspect of the thesis writing. When utilising Chat GBT-3.5, I followed the principle to enhance the articulation of my ideas without re-writing entire sentences. While using these tools, I systematically compared texts they generated with the original material to ensure consistency and accuracy.

6 FINDINGS

6.1 In what contexts was the future of work discussed?

Table 6.2 presents the various positions held by the authors according to the information provided alongside the text samples.

Table 2. Authors of the selected text samples

Positions of the authors	Number of the authors for given texts
<i>Authors of the opinion speeches</i>	
Leading positions	12
Politicians (members in parliament)	3
Master's degree or higher (5 teachers, a lawyer, a translator, a specialty doctor, 4 researchers, a scientific author, and a coordinator)	14
<i>Other authors</i>	
Guest writers (a chair of an association, a consult, an executive)	3
Hs journalists	9
	Total 41

As shown in Table 6.2, the number of authors (41) varies from the number of articles (37), as some opinion texts had two or three authors. However, it is essential to remember that text production usually involves several persons; for instance, when it comes to texts published in a newspaper, the editorial team is always involved in text production to some extent. Most (14) authors of the opinion pieces were highly educated authors, although whoever can send opinion speeches to the newspaper. Moreover, 12 authors were in some leading position in a company or organisation, sometimes in a recognised one. Three authors of the opinion pieces were politicians. Also, the guest writers were highly positioned, one of them being an executive, another a chair of an association, and the third a consultant. Nine of the samples were written by HS journalists or editors.

The selected text samples highlighted several key factors expected to significantly influence future of work in Finland. However, some discussion topics appeared more popular, likely due to their current relevance, which is a factor daily newspapers typically prioritise.

As illustrated in Table 6.3, the text samples were divided according to frequently addressed themes: the development of Finnish industries, working life and sociocultural aspects, the impacts of technology, labor shortages, work and values, students, immigration, and education.

Table 3. Key themes of the selected newspaper texts

Key themes of the text samples	Text samples
The development of labour market	Samples 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 33
Working life and sociocultural aspects	Sample 8, 9, 19, 23, 29, 31, 32
The impacts of technology	Samples 1, 13, 25, 37
Labour shortages	Samples 11, 21, 30, 35, 36
Work and values	Samples 16, 18
Students' experiences	Samples 6, 10, 17
Immigration	Samples 20, 26, 27, 28, 30, 34
Education	Samples 12, 14, 15, 22, 24
	Total 37

The themes covered in the selected articles demonstrated significant variety, highlighting the extensive breadth of work as a topic. However, the themes often overlap, with texts frequently addressing multiple topics simultaneously their digital versions were searched on the HS webpage (for detail, see Appendix 1: The list of links to the selected articles). For example, although only two text samples were categorized as ‘labour shortages’, the worsening labour shortages in many Finnish industries were a recurrent theme in the text samples. The lack of labour due to the ageing population was often linked to the challenges specific sectors were facing or anticipated facing in the future. Various political actions were frequently motivated by the need to address the labour force shortage. The quality of education was also frequently connected with labour shortages, with the development of the Finnish education system considered a significant factor for future economic stability. Discussions about immigration often arose with labour shortages, as there is a consensus on attracting more work-based immigrants to sustain Finland’s welfare system amidst an ageing population. While some discussions focused on immigrants primarily as a labour force solution, others emphasized their diverse needs, advocating for improved attitudes towards them and better immigration policies. The need for labour market reforms was also connected to broader societal values.

Education emerged as another prominent theme interwoven with several discussions. It was deemed crucial for functioning in the labour market, securing a better future, and creating a healthier society. On the one hand, the educational sector was linked to the lack of skills needed by companies, highlighting the urgent need for educational reforms to better align education with emerging labour market needs. On the other hand, some text samples focused on ensuring high-quality education and equal learning opportunities, critiquing recent changes in the education sector that have led to learning problems and increased mental health issues among youth, as well as causing exhaustion among teachers. Value discussions were also intertwined with these education-related topics.

6.2 How were topics related to the future of work discussed?

The data analysis was conducted to explore the discussions about the future of work. It specifically examined how different future pathways are considered, how factors expected to change work are described and approached, and how the future time dimension is depicted.

The analysis revealed that discussions about the future of work were strongly connected to recent or upcoming political actions and solutions. Some texts provided concrete suggestions for change, while others mainly highlighted current or upcoming challenges from different perspectives. This illustrates how some actors take an active stance, envisioning the future and advocating for change, while others adopt a more passive role, viewing and accepting things as they are typically portrayed without seeking any alternatives. However, it is essential to note that the type of journalistic text significantly influences the writing style and author's tone. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, opinion pieces typically suggest actions, while news and many articles are expected to remain objective.

There were also reflections on whose responsibility it is to guarantee a better future of work. In texts dealing with work-based immigration, it was emphasised how important it is to think about how to make a change.

In the next section, I will outline the discourses identified in the analysis. I have categorised them into two distinct discourses between two identified discourses: a prevailing and challenging discourse.

6.2.1 Prevailing discourse: Future of work from the perspective of state and its needs and interests

The dominant discourse portrays the future of work from the perspective of state needs and interests – competitiveness and productivity. This is evident in discursive practices emphasising the need to prepare future workforces to ensure Finland has enough taxpayers and employees to sustain public services and secure competitiveness.

This discourse highlights the central role of the education sector in equipping individuals with “the right skills” and encouraging them to “pursue careers” because “young generation must secure Finland’s competencies needed in the future and status as a welfare state”. Policies regarding education, therefore, must be designed to address future competencies adequately. In an opinion speech (Text sample 4), the CEO of Finnish Startup Community suggests:

[...], we have to instil the will and courage to try in children already in primary schools. Coding must be introduced as a math-like subject for all lower grades, and university places in the technical field must be increased.³ (Text sample 4)

In Text sample 6, an employer’s description of students and their willingness to work can be perceived as a critique of individuals who prioritise their well-being before work, despite a significant labour shortage in the health sector:

Students’ attitudes have changed over the years. Nowadays, highly educated students also want to take vacations and no longer want to work as much during the summers.⁴ (Text sample 6)

Moreover, discussions critiquing government actions often justify alternative solutions by referencing the need to secure the country’s competitiveness and economic growth. For instance, Text sample 15 criticises the financial cuts made in the education sector and emphasises the importance of making the teaching profession attractive and ensuring that teachers remain motivated, reinforcing this message: “[...]If there are not enough qualified teachers, dreams of the country’s economic growth and improved competitiveness may be buried.”⁵

There is also an underlying national spirit discourse that supports views of productivity and competitiveness by emphasising shared nationality, using phrases like

³ Lisäksi meidän on juurrutettava yrittämisen tahto ja rohkeus lapsiin jo alakouluissa. Koodaus on tuotava matematiikan kaltaiseksi aineeksi kaikille jo alaluokille ja teknisen alan korkeakoulupaikkoja on lisättävä.

⁴ ”Opiskelijoiden asenteet ovat vuosien saatossa muuttuneet. Nykyään pitkälle koulutetut opiskelijat tahtovat pitää myös lomaa, eivätkä he enää halua tehdä kesäisin yhtä paljon töitä.”

⁵ Ellei kelpoisia opettajia ole riittävästi, haaveet maan taloudellisesta kasvusta ja kilpailukyvyyn paranemisesta voidaan haudata.

“we Finns” and “as Finnish people, we must aim[...]”. Text sample 2 is particularly striking and deserves a deeper analysis. This opinion piece, authored by two politicians, spends a significant part of the text reflecting on Finland’s history as a success enabled by collective effort:

Finland’s remarkable rise in just over a hundred years from difficult and modest starting circumstances to the forefront of the world’s advanced and prosperous nations is a tremendous success story. It has succeeded because our country has been built together, with the participation of all.⁶ (Text sample 2)

After the historical narrative, the focus in Text sample 2 shifts to current negative events, risks and threats, comparing past victories with potential future downfalls if “we cannot be flexible.” The aim appears to emphasize maintaining a shared national spirit for the welfare state’s sake, suggesting that Finland’s progress can only be achieved together. The authors use phrases that communicate togetherness such as: “strong democratic development”, “the entire population”, “a shared understanding”, “our country has been built together, with the participation of all”, and “the idea of our common Finland”. They portray “we” as one group with phrases like “[...] as we move towards a better future and tackle the imminent challenges.”

The authors of Text sample 2 also emphasise how Finnish people take care of each other: using phrases like “for the entire population”, “mutual trust between the parties”, “[...] (it has) improved working conditions of those dependent on their work”, “the labor market system [...] was able to assist and support the government of the time”, and “care for the weakest”. The final message in Text sample 2 emphasises the shared responsibility of every Finn to help save the welfare state is as follows:

Politicians bear significant responsibility, but the construction of a sustainable society still relies on collective effort. Without a shared understanding and vision of how to build a new and improved future for the labor markets, we, as a small nation, cannot effectively respond to the challenges of the present and the future.⁷

Furthermore, several significant assumptions can be noted in Text sample 2, such as, the desirability of Finland’s historical culture, national spirit, and welfare system. It is also

⁶ Suomen nousu runsaassa sadassa vuodessa vaikeista ja vaatimattomista lähtökohdista maapallon kehittyneiden ja vauraimpien maiden kärkeen on huikea menestystarina. Se on onnistunut, sillä maamme on rakennettu yhdessä ja osallistaen.

⁷ Meillä poliitikoilla on suuri vastuu, mutta kestävä yhteiskunnan rakentaminen syntyy edelleen vain yhteisenä ponnistuksena. Ilman jaettua tilannekuvaa ja näkemystä siitä, miten uutta, parempaa työmarkkinoiden tulevaisuutta rakennetaan, emme pysty pienenä kansakuntana vastaamaan tämän ajan ja tulevaisuuden haasteisiin.

assumed that work should be viewed as a duty for one's country. The desirable future is the one that ensures "the continuity of Finland's remarkable success story."

6.2.2 Future of work from the perspective of equal opportunities and wellbeing, sociocultural aspects

Another discourse, the challenging one, emphasises humanism when discussing the future of work. Discursive practices occur from the standpoints of equality, human well-being, and cultural aspects. In these discussions, the state's interest in securing Finland's future by focusing on the competitiveness and productivity of the labour market is critiqued.

According to this discourse, the future of work will fail if there is too much focus on economic factors. Topics such as securing the quality of professions, protecting culture, and providing different social groups with equal opportunities are highlighted. For instance, in Text sample 10, it is perceived that "the state does not value education on its own."

The focus is primarily on current political decisions and their negative impact on the future. Human qualities – intuition, creativity, and empathy – are emphasised, as these are skills that technology does not possess. Within this discourse, governmental actions like cutting financing and other resources are perceived as short-sighted and not aligning with society's expectations, leading to negative consequences such as reduced mental wellbeing among students and educators due to increased burden.

For instance, instead of focusing on productivity and competitiveness, the relevant question seemed to be how Finland could ensure equal opportunities for people. In several samples considering immigration, it was emphasised that decision-makers, those who determine immigration policies, wield substantial influences over the future of not only working life but also the future of individuals who are immigrants and refugees, along with their families. Likewise, it was claimed that decision-makers are responsible for Finns who will soon enter the workforce – children, youth and future generations.

In Text sample 8, the same theme was raised from a slightly different perspective by criticising how many professional groups, individuals and diverse life situations are ignored when narrowing the type of work discussed. Text sample 7 similarly highlights how the unique needs of individuals, such as physical disabilities, are often neglected despite many being capable of work. Text sample 30 points out that different geographic areas must be taken into account when discussing future work, and addressing labour shortages requires other measures, such as building better infrastructure and systems.

Above all, the highlights made in opinion pieces can be seen as a criticism of the imbalance in hearing the voices of different groups when developing solutions to the challenges of future working life on a governmental level. Specifically, the author of the opinion Text sample 19, a lawyer at The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), referenced a report created at a higher governmental level to support governmental decision-making and critiqued its one-sided perspective. According to her, the report focuses on topics that will benefit the economy (such as green transition, digitalisation, innovations, the mismatch in the labour market, employment rates, competitiveness and entrepreneurship). She argues that the report overlooks the employee's role in many cases, underscoring the importance of providing information about employee protection and integrating these considerations into the development of working life. By highlighting the central role of the ministry in securing proper employee rights in the future and critiquing the report of suppressing certain aspects considering employees, the author constructed an image of the ministry prioritising Finland's competitiveness over the human aspects of work.

The challenging discourse was also present in discussions considering advancing technologies and other external factors affecting the future of work, highlighting alternative approaches to its development. These texts highlighted the changing characteristics of jobs, focusing on non-monetary values and fulfilling new needs. For instance, optimistic scenarios are presented in a column (Text sample 1) instead of a threat picture.

Development has always changed working methods and led to the disappearance of professions. Mass unemployment hardly threatens us even in the near future. Until now, individuals and communities have always come up with new things to do instead of automated tasks. However, we could choose otherwise.⁸ (Text sample 1)

There were also discussions where changes in future working life were examined as opportunities, looking the future more broadly. In Text sample 16, the interviewed historian asked, "What kind of jobs would we have if we built them on a more hopeful image of people?"⁹

⁸ Kehitys on aina muuttanut työtapoja ja johtanut ammattien katoamiseen. Massatyöttömyys tuskin uhkaa meitä lähitulevaisuudessakaan. Yksilöt ja yhteisöt ovat tähän asti aina keksineet uutta tekemistä automatisoitujen tehtävien tilalle. Voisimme kuitenkin valita toisin.

⁹ Millaisia työpaikkoja meillä olisi, jos rakentaisimme ne toiveikkaamman ihmiskuvan varaan?

Individuals discussing the development of changing working conditions in the context of different occupations connected their experiences with societal status and associated their occupations with their identity (Text samples 6 and 17).

Opinion speeches challenged the prevailing discourse by presenting specific viewpoints and often included alternative recommendations or suggestions. This highlights the difference in tone between opinion speeches and articles published by HS, which require objectivity. Opinion speeches are a form of free speech that enables the expression of ideas that challenge the prevailing discourse.

What is interesting is how, also in conversations critiquing government actions, alternative solutions are justified by referencing the need to secure the country's competitiveness and economic growth. For instance, the author of Text sample 15 emphasized the importance of making the teaching profession attractive and ensuring that teachers are motivated to remain in their jobs, strengthening the message as follows: “[...]If there are not enough qualified teachers, dreams of the country’s economic growth and improved competitiveness may be buried.”¹⁰

6.3 How was the future dimension discussed in the text samples?

Overall, examining the choices of future tense was essential to text interpretation processes as these choices indicated, for instance, the level of certainty with which authors discussed possible future paths. One could identify several ways of considering the future events in the selected text samples, such as “Which direction X is going?,” “X will happen, unless”, “Not self-evident”, “if...then” and “X is threatened to become”. For instance, sentences could be formulated as follows: “The challenges in the future will be [...]”, “[...] is perhaps a utopia today, but may be true in the future”, and “Perhaps already in the near future”.

While time measures the duration between events, the abstract nature of the future made it necessary to examine different approaches to using the concept of the future and discuss future events and states. The discussions surrounding the future in the text samples were typically abstract, often employing vague terms such as: “in the long term”, “in the near future” and “for the future”. In some examples, the dimension of the future

¹⁰ Ellei kelpoisia opettajia ole riittävästi, haaveet maan taloudellisesta kasvusta ja kilpailukyvyn paranemisesta voidaan haudata.

was presented alongside specific subjects such as: “the future’s labour force”, “working life and its future”, “the skills of the future”, “the logic of the platform economy like Wolt is the future”, “the long-term problems of the public finances”, “future generations”, “better future of the labour market”, “future experts” and “future jobs”.

The concept of the future can be difficult to grasp without a clear understanding of its temporal scope. However, references to the specific timing of these future events are provided only in a few articles. For instance, in Text sample 32, a question was posed:

What would the working life of the future look like in 2032, if we now started seriously investing in the comprehensive development of young people’s and children’s working life skills?¹¹ (Text sample 32)

In Text sample 11, a clear comparison between the present and the future (defined as the year 2040) is made: “The current policy will not solve the labour shortage, which is already shaking companies operating in cities. Not to mention what happens in the 2040s.”¹² In Text sample 24, a more immediate time frame was defined (eight years ahead), but the time beyond remains ambiguous:

As younger age groups lag significantly behind comparable countries in terms of education level, the overall population’s education level will decline in comparison to peers, at least until the 2030s - and possibly even longer, unless action is taken.¹³ (Text sample 24)

As mentioned in the methodology part, conscious consideration of the future time dimension is not always apparent. Instead, it often refers to what is yet to denote the unknown. Therefore, it is important to inquire about the value of using the future time dimension.

The future time dimension in the selected articles was combined with various tones; some were aggressive, demanding, requiring and threatening – while others were positive, such as wishing, suggesting and arguing. A typical purpose of involving the future time dimension in writing seems to be to strengthen one’s opinion and persuade others about the necessity of a particular change or action, such as it was used at the end of an opinion text, as follows: “In the end, nothing more or less is at stake than the future of X”. One

¹¹ Miltä tulevaisuuden työelämä näyttäisi vuonna 2032, jos nyt alkaisimme tosissaan panostaa nuorten ja lasten työelämätaitojen kokonaisvaltaiseen kehittämiseen?

¹² Nykyisellä politiikalla ei tulla ratkomaan sitä työvoimapulaa, joka jo tällä hetkellä ravistelee erityisesti kaupungeissa toimivia yrityksiä. Puhumattakaan siitä, mitä 2040-luvulla tapahtuu.

¹³ Nuorempien ikäluokkien koulutustason jäädessä selvästi verrokkimaiden tasosta, koko väestön koulutustaso rapautuu suhteessa verrokkeihin vähintään vielä 2030-luvulle saakka – ja jopa pidempään, ellei ryhdytä kunnan korjaustoimenpiteisiin.

might, for example, critique a decision and state the ultimatum awaiting a specific group or society: “[...] I think there is a great danger that this will not be the case in the future.” Another common strategy involved constructing a positive or negative outcome from specific decisions, like “Finland can succeed in the future with the help of X and Y.” Likewise, to propose an alternative course of action, such as: “Let us fix the situation [...] to ensure X in the future.” Text sample 4 combined the future with a metaphor: “strike while the iron is hot, and the future is full of possibilities.”¹⁴

6.4 Representations of social actors

The social actors presented in the following sections are categorised according to their similarities and the contexts in which they were present. The categorisation is not a definitive solution, as actors usually have multiple roles depending on the context and situation.

6.4.1 Considering younger generation from the perspective of their future roles

The younger generations were emphasised in several samples where children or youth or young adults were often assigned dual roles as “future employees” and “taxpayers”.

Students

The term “highly educated” is often used interchangeably with “recently graduated” and “recently graduated unemployed”. Additionally, this group is generally referred to as “(university) students.” Despite there being no age limit for becoming a student at a university or school of applied sciences, students are frequently referred to as “young people”.

In the samples, including education discussions, students were usually not personally referred to nor described with other attributes but were represented on a general level. The student representative from the HYY (Text sample 10) made an expectation by highlighting individual differences among the student group and pointing out that some students cannot engage in work while studying. Other student representatives further emphasised that students are not a homogenous group and do not have equal opportunities, particularly considering their diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. (Text sample 10.) Thus, grouping students into one category risks resulting in unequal education opportunities.

¹⁴ Nyt kannattaa takoa, kun rauta on kuumaa ja tulevaisuus täynnä mahdollisuuksia.

An employer's perspective was shared in Text sample 6:

“Students” attitudes have changed over the years. Nowadays, highly educated students also want to take vacations and no longer want to work as much during the summers.¹⁵ (Text sample 6)

This comment, given by the Chief of Uusimaa Hospital District and separated from the text for emphasis, indicates that changed attitudes among students would contribute to the labour shortage in the healthcare sector, constructing a negative image of students prioritising themselves over work instead of filling their role as saviours of the welfare state.

Conversely, the professor interviewed in Text sample 9 highlighted: “[...] younger individuals who have experienced more uncertainty, declining well-being, and a lack of community”, underscoring the increasing pressure among young employees.

Children

Children were assigned roles such as “future workforce”, “future employees”, “saviours of the welfare state and Finland’s competitiveness”. Despite the considerations about children from the perspective of their future roles in the workforce, they were not personally engaged in discussions. This seems reasonable since their transition to working life will occur several years later. Moreover, children were often portrayed as those affected by current decisions, predominantly viewed through the lens of their future roles as employees. They were also depicted as passive recipients. For example, the author of Text sample 4, the CEO of the Finnish Startup Community, formulated as follows: “In addition to supporting startups to growth”[...], we have to instil the will and courage to try in children already in primary schools.”¹⁶

However, Text sample 15 which addressed current challenges within the Finnish education, the author stressed that children are “individuals with different qualities and needs”, pointing out the criticality of acknowledging that children have different needs and thus problematising the generalisation of this social group.

¹⁵ ”Opiskelijoiden asenteet ovat vuosien saatossa muuttuneet. Nykyään pitkälle koulutetut opiskelijat tahtovat pitää myös lomaa, eivätkä he enää halua tehdä kesäisin yhtä paljon töitä. ”

¹⁶ Lisäksi meidän on juurrutettava yrittämisen tahto ja rohkeus lapsiin jo alakouluissa. Koodaus on tuotava matematiikan kaltaiseksi aineeksi kaikille jo alaluokille ja teknisen alan korkeakoulupaikkoja on lisättävä.

6.4.2 Challenging the roles given to immigrants

Challenging the roles attributed to immigrants involves questioning how individuals outside the social group of “immigrants” portray them. Despite this portrayal, the discourse may suggest that authors advocate on behalf of this group. Authors recognise immigrants as individuals with diverse ethnicities, needs, and desires entitled to a safe and supportive work environment (Text sample 20).

Critiquing the prevailing discourse on immigrant representation entails examining how one social group uses language to depict another. In sample 26, where the author passively expresses: “It is said that Finland needs more immigrants to be the workforce of the future and to do the jobs that Finns can’t do or do for other reasons.”¹⁷ Readers may interpret this as implying that people coming outside Finland could be seen as second-class citizens. However, the author of Text sample 26 though, problematises this. Using alternative expressions to refer to immigrants aims to broaden readers’ ideas about them. For instance, Text sample 26 used phrases such as “when a person dares to move” and “a person who wants to be Finn”. Similarly, in Text sample 27, the author discussed immigrants using expressions such as: “those moving from elsewhere,” “those coming to the country,” “migrants,” “incomers,” and “those coming for work.”

There is a recurring emphasis on the need for a shift in attitude towards immigrants. Text sample 26 expressed this sentiment as:

Let’s start a new way of thinking: we want new residents in Finland to live a good life alongside us other Finns. People are always different, and Finnishness unites us as one nation.¹⁸ (Text sample 26)

In Text sample 27 it is emphasized that

[...] Those coming to the country should not be seen merely as protectors of “our” well-being. They are individuals with other needs besides employment.¹⁹ (Text sample 27)

¹⁷Suomen sanotaan tarvitsevan lisää maahanmuuttajia tulevaisuuden työvoimaksi ja tekemään niitä töitä, joita suomalaiset eivät osaa tai muusta syystä tee.

¹⁸ Aloitetaan uusi ajattelu: halutaan Suomeen uusia asukkaita viettämään hyvää elämää meidän toisten suomalaisten rinnalla. Ihmiset ovat aina erilaisia, suomalaisuus yhdistää meidät samaksi kansaksi.

¹⁹ Maahan tulevia ei pitäisi kuitenkaan nähdä vain ”meidän” hyvinvointimme turvaajina. He ovat yksilöitä, joilla on myös muita tarpeita kuin työpaikka.

Moreover, this underscores that immigrants should be seen as part of “we,” instead of viewing them outside of “our” social reality: “Together with those moving from elsewhere, we can sustain the national economy, population base, and welfare state.”²⁰

The portrayal of labour-based immigration often emphasised its desirability and value, distinguishing it from “other types of immigration”. However, Text sample 28 contends that foreign workers are labelled under one category, depicted in narrowly:

Job seekers with a refugee background are often seen in the labor market as a homogeneous, poorly educated group. Refugee status is not usually related to a person’s level of education, but those who have had to flee their home country include representatives of all educational levels and professional groups.²¹ (Text sample 28)

A problem that focusing solely on generalised representations can pose was noted by the author (a PhD candidate) of Text sample 8:

By only discussing one form of working life, we exclude many professional groups, individuals, and life situations from the conversation. In other words, we close our eyes to the diversity of working life. This also has an impact on the future structure of working life.²²

The impacts of language use on people’s attitudes were also underscored or explicitly addressed in several instances. For example, criticism was directed at narrowing categorisation and depersonalisation. In Text sample 26, the author urges Finns “to stop thinking of immigrants solely as a workforce.”²³ Also, in Text sample 34, the human side of immigrants was emphasized as follows:

Experts are people with families, not machines. Experts are not only highly educated specialised professionals, but we have a huge shortage of all kinds of workforce.²⁴ (Sample 34)

²⁰ Muualta muuttavien kanssa yhdessä voimme pitää yllä kansantaloutta, väestöpohjaa ja hyvinvointivaltiota.

²¹ Pakolaistaustaiset työnhakijat nähdään työmarkkinoilla usein homogeenisena, heikosti koulutettuna ryhmänä. Pakolaisuus ei kuitenkaan yleensä liity henkilön koulutustasoon, vaan kotimaastaan pakenemaan joutuneissa on kaikkien koulutustasojen ja ammattiryhmien edustajia.

²² Puhumalla vain yhdestä työelämästä suljemme keskustelun ulkopuolelle monia ammatti- ja ihmisryhmiä, sekä elämäntilanteita. Toisin sanoen ummistamme silmämme työelämän monimuotoisuudelta. Tällä on vaikutuksensa myös työelämän tulevaisuuden rakentumiseen.

²³ Lakataan ajattelemasta maahanmuuttajia vain työvoimana.

²⁴ Osaajat ovat ihmisiä perheineen, eivät työkoneita. Osaajat eivät ole vain korkeasti koulutettuja erityisasiantuntijoita, vaan meillä on valtava pula kaikenlaisesta työvoimasta

6.4.3 Portrayal of Finnish people

As this research was conducted in the Finnish context, Finnish people, commonly referred to generically as “Finns”, were actively involved in the data. This generalisation might give the reader the impression of Finnish people as a single, homogenous group of citizens sharing a unified mentality. Furthermore, the word “Finland” was frequently used interchangeably with “Finns”, suggesting that “Finland” does not refer only to the geographical area but can also encompass its inhabitants.

Authors discussing Finnish people often included themselves within this group by using inclusive language such as “we”, such as seen in the statement “We cannot afford for private sector growth to stall as the working-age population decreases (Text sample 11, an opinion text by a consultant and a chief of Confederation of Finnish industries)”²⁵.

The historical events of Finland were referenced in Text sample 2, an opinion text by two Members of Parliament discussing the Finnish labour market:

Universal and equal suffrage paved the way for strong democratic development, and raising the education level of the entire population was a gateway to a better future. Since the early decades of our independence, a shared understanding of the foundation of a functioning society, a social contract where work, entrepreneurship, and care for the weakest are central values, has united our nation. The idea of Our Common Finland has guided us in the development of social and healthcare services, as well as in our foreign and security policy, not to mention the traditional stability of our labor markets.²⁶

The phrase “The idea of our common Finland” portrays Finnish people as a unified team, actively involved in developing Finnish society together, helping each other despite suffering. Furthermore, the politicians’ claim that the Finnish society should be able to “adapt to each situation and circumstances as needed” (Text sample 2), emphasising that being a Finn is synonymous with being a hardworking citizen who prioritises their country and is adaptable under challenging times.

While Finns were typically represented impersonally, they were frequently positioned as the actors who should initiate action, exemplified in sentences like the one from Text sample 11: “If action is not taken in the matter, the situation will only worsen.”²⁷

²⁵ meillä ei ole varaa siihen, että yksityisen sektorin kasvu tyrehtyy, kun työikäisen väestön määrän annetaan vähentyä

²⁶ Itsenäisyytemme varhaisista vuosikymmenistä lähtien kansakuntaamme on yhdistänyt ymmärrys toimivan yhteiskunnan perustasta, yhteiskuntasopimuksesta, jossa työnteko ja yrittäminen sekä huolenpito heikoimmista ovat olleet keskeisiä arvoja. Meidän yhteinen Suomi -ajatus on kantanut niin sosiaali- ja terveyspalveluiden kehittämisessä kuin ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikassammekin. Puhumattakaan työmarkkinoittemme perinteisestä vakaudesta. “

²⁷ Ellei asiassa ryhdytä toimiin, tilanne vain vaikeutuu.

Moreover, in samples focusing on immigration, Finns were portrayed as active participants who were responsible for integrating immigrants. For instance, Text sample 28 asserts that “the change in attitude must start from the Finns themselves.”²⁸ However, these linguistic choices, whether referring to social actors generically or using passive voice, such as in the previous example – may not sufficiently clarify who should take the initiative and be considered responsible for initiating action.

6.4.4 Authorities shaping the future’s society and making decisions that affect others

Decision-makers, typically politicians and ministries, were frequently referred to when advocating for alternative solutions or specific actions. This portrayal positions decision-makers as active agents capable of making things effecting change. Their characterisation often remains indirect, focusing on their functional roles as powerful societal actors.

In various discussions concerning immigration, it was emphasised that decision-makers who shape immigration policies wield significant influence over the future of both working life and the lives of immigrants, refugees, and their families. Decision-makers were also seen as responsible for Finland’s future workforce, encompassing children, youth, and future generations.

While responsibility was consistently attributed to those in high positions across many texts, the impersonal representation of social actors complicates the reader’s interpretation process of who holds the agency to drive change. In discussions about immigrants, politicians and other decision-makers are distinguished from other Finnish citizens who are often referred to collectively as “Finns”, “Finland”, “society”, “nation” and “country”.

For example, a negotiator from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Text sample 4) criticises, “When politicians start talking about the problems in basic education, it sounds like populist politics approaching the upcoming elections”²⁹, portraying politicians incapable of doing their jobs.

Another critique emerged in Text sample 19, highlighting the ministry’s central role in securing future employee rights while critiquing their report suppressing certain

²⁸ asennemuutoksen täytyy lähteä suomalaisista itsestään

²⁹ Kun poliitikot alkavat kuitenkin puhua peruskoulun ongelmista, se kuulostaa populistiselta politikoinnilta lähestyvien vaalien alla. Koulutustason kannalta oikea kysymys kuuluu, miten saada yhä useampi nuori korkeakouluun ja saattamaan myös opintonsa loppuun.

aspects considering employees. This constructs an image of the ministry prioritising Finland's competitiveness over the human aspects of work.

6.4.5 *Employees*

In Text sample 32, the editorial from HS delves into the ongoing transformation of labour market and emphasises the need for changing work structures. The headline of the text is: "Every workhour should be worth it – Finland must be able to increase the number of working hours worked"³⁰. The editorial presents expectations of employees, thereby also portraying employees themselves as follows:

Employees' expectations are also changing; it is no longer taken for granted that employees aspire to long-lasting permanent employment for decades. Nowadays, many retire while still fully capable of working and would like to participate in the workforce in a lighter capacity during retirement.³¹ (Text sample 32)

This shifts the portrayal of employees from aspiring to stable careers to seeking flexibility and working opportunities even after retirement. However, the text does not elaborate on what today's employees desire before retirement. Instead, it is discussed that "[...] it can sometimes be in the employee's interest that the division between doing full-time work and completely giving up work is loosened."³² (Text sample 32) Consequently, employees are depicted generally through their expectations and actions, primarily framed as workers without further attributions or values. Employees are portrayed as either desiring full-time jobs or working part-time, even during periods like sick leave.

The article (Text sample 9), authored by an HS journalist focused on remote work and companies' desire for employees to return to offices. Three executives from different private companies—a telecommunications operator, a bank, and a media organization—each holding senior positions, were interviewed. An HR manager from a telecommunications company underscored: "It is everyone's task to be involved in building and developing the community. It does not work as well if we are always

³⁰ Jokaisen työtunnin tulisi kannattaa – Suomen on pystyttävä nostamaan tehtyjen työtuntien määrää.

³¹ Alustatalouden palveluiden yleistymisen lisää joustavien työsuhteiden tarvetta. Työntekijöiden odotuksetkin muuttuvat: ei ole enää itsestään selvää, että työntekijän haaveissa on vuosikymmenten mittainen pysyvä työsuhde. Monet jäävät nykyään eläkkeelle täydessä työkuunnossa ja haluaisivat eläkkeelläkin osallistua työelämään kevennetysti.

³² työntekijän etu voi toisinaan olla, että jako täysiaikaisen työn tekemisen ja kokonaan työn tekemisestä luopumisen välillä liudentuu.

remote.”³³ The HR manager further emphasized that: “Those employees who would only want to work remotely [...] may not always understand that they are part of a work community and not just producers of their own work performance.”³⁴ (Text sample 9)

This comment suggests that being an employee entails more than completing individual tasks; being a valued employee involves contributing to the company as a community.

Throughout discussions on company policies, each executive interviewed consistently used the pronoun “we”, stating “we want” or “we believe”. Interestingly, the article does not feature interviews with regular employees of these companies. While executives hold leadership roles within their companies, they also function as employees. However, the article does not address this dual role (Sample 9). Instead, all three executives interviewed represent their employers’ perspectives, positioning themselves outside the broader employee social group.

A professor from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, also commenting on remote work in Text sample 9, noted that “hybrid work can primarily serve the company’s interest, not the individual.”³⁵ The professor’s comment portrays employees as a group who seek autonomy in the workplace and control over their work responsibilities. Moreover, distinguishing between “the company’s interests” and “individuals” challenges the notion constructed by the interviewed executives of a of a cohesive work community, as indicated by their use of “we” and “us”.

The professor’s explanation regarding the varying needs of individuals highlights the diversity among employees, emphasising the nuanced relationship between an individual’s autonomy and their sense of belonging within the organisational structure (Sample 9).

In Text sample 16, an HS journalist interviewed an internationally recognised historian and author who portrayed employees as individuals with agency, desiring to influence more and be recognised as individuals rather than anonymous. The interviewee highlighted the other roles employees have outside the working environment, emphasising his view on people as “cooperative” and willing to participate [...] to be part of something bigger than themselves.”³⁶

³³ ”Brainstormingia ja kollegan kanssa ideointia ei tehdä yhtä paljon etänä kuin läsnä. Pitkällä aikavälillä etätyö tulisi heikentämään kilpailukykyämme, kun laadun heikentyminen näkyisi asiakkaille.”

³⁴ ”eivät aina välttämättä ymmärrä, että he ovat osa työyhteisöä eivätkä vain omien työsuoritteidensa tekijöitä.”

³⁵ hybridityö voi palvella ensi sijassa yrityksen, ei yksilön etua

³⁶ Ihmiset ovat yhteistyökykyisiä ja haluavat osallistua, olla osa jotain itseä suurempaa.

Nurses

Nurses engaged in discussions about evolving working conditions within their respective occupations highlighted societal perceptions and their occupational identities. For instance, nurses interviewed in Text sample 17 connected their experiences with societal status, exemplified by the chairperson of a Social and Healthcare Students' Association commenting on the Patient Safety Act:

There is a feeling that progress is being pushed backwards, and now the human rights of nurses are being vigorously violated. This causes panic, not only as a nurse but also as an individual.³⁷ (Text sample 17)

Similarly, another student representative from nursing education expressed frustration that demands for improved pay for nurses are sometimes unfairly portrayed, leading to perceptions of greediness: "People forget that we nurses are humans too."³⁸ (Sample 17.)

Companies

Companies were predominantly portrayed in terms of their role as employers, often represented through their actions. Specific companies and their business models or practices were typically cited as examples, briefly examining their policies. Finnish companies were characterised as "meritorious and responsible". They were also characterised as respecting the autonomy of employees, such as an interviewee of a security company (Text sample 13) explained:

Companies have now wanted, for example, programs that can be used to report working hours on a mobile device. But even in these services, the employees report the hours themselves.³⁹ (Text sample 13)

Moreover, Text sample 4 stated:

Although many of the companies have had to think about their profitability and take unpleasant adaptation measures, Finnish growth companies have grown in recent years in the traditional Finnish way: by minimizing expenses and systematically.⁴⁰ (Text sample 14)

However, companies and their policies were generally relegated to the background. For instance, in Text sample 4, the CEO of the Finnish Startup Community claimed that

³⁷ "On sellainen olo, että kehitystä viedään taaksepäin ja nyt tökitään lujaa hoitajien ihmisoikeuksiin. Asiasta tulee paniikki paitsi hoitajana myös yksilönä."

³⁸ "Ihmiset unohtavat, että me hoitajatkin olemme ihmisiä."

³⁹ Yritykset ovat halunneet nyt esimerkiksi ohjelmia, joiden avulla työtunnit voi ilmoittaa mobiilisti. Mutta työntekijät ilmoittavat näissäkin palveluissa tunnit ihan itse.

⁴⁰ Vaikka moni yrityksistä on joutunut miettimään kannattavuuttaan ja tekemään ikäviäkin sopeutustoimia, suomalaiset kasvuyritykset ovat kasvaneet viime vuodet perinteiseen suomalaiseen tapaan: kulut minimoiden ja järjestelmällisesti.

“Companies and work based on the logic of the platform economy like Wolt are the future.”⁴¹ This statement positions companies like Wolt within a narrative of future-oriented economic models, highlighting their perceived significance in shaping employment trends. However, the focus remains on portraying these companies through economic strategies rather than exploring their broader social impact or the implications for various stakeholders.

In Text sample 18, the interviewed world-known expert claimed: “Change is not the responsibility of individuals, but of governments and companies. And I don’t trust companies to regulate themselves at all.”⁴² This portrays companies as not taking responsibility for aiming toward a better future.

Labour unions as representatives (and responsible) of others

In an interview by HS (Text sample 5), a politician commented on a new, comprehensive salary program approved by other unions in the municipal sector, excluding Tehy and Super, which represent the social and health sectors. The politician highlights the situation as follows:

Even though the agreement brings to the municipal sector a general salary increase of about five per cent over five years, Tehy and Super require significantly more and explain that “the unions want an increase of up to 3.6 percent *every* year for five years.”⁴³ (Sample 5)

Notably, the word “every” was emphasized in italics in the article, possibly suggesting a deliberate emphasis by the politician or the editorial decision of HS. Depending on how the text is perceived, this stylistic choice may construct an image of these specific labour unions and their members as demanding or exceptional. Using italics can make the phrase stand out prominently if readers skim through the text.

However, the politician’s primary criticism is directed towards recent actions and the salary program agreed upon by labour unions and other representatives in the labour market. This context suggests that readers may not necessarily interpret Tehy or Super negatively. The politician stresses how decisions perceived as unreasonable by labour unions and other representatives could potentially disrupt the country’s economic

⁴¹ Woltin kaltaiset alustatalouden logiikkaan perustuvat yritykset ja työ ovat tulevaisuutta

⁴² Muutos ei ole yksilöiden, vaan hallitusten ja yritysten vastuulla. Enkä luota lainkaan siihen, että yritykset sääntelisivät itse itseään.

⁴³ “Tehy ja Super vaativat merkittävästi enemmän. Liitot haluavat viiden vuoden ajan jopa 3,6 prosentin korotuksen *joka* vuosi, esimerkiksi teollisuustyöntekijöille maksettavan palkan päälle.

balance. According to him, both individuals and companies will suffer unless better solutions are found, conveying a negative tone.

7 DISCUSSION

This research analysed how topics related to the future of work were discussed in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat during the autumn of 2022 and examined who was represented in these conversations. The study aimed to analyse how future dimensions were depicted in various newspaper texts and to examine the linguistic choices made in the discussions related to the future of work. Furthermore, the aim was to identify which social actors and perspectives were highlighted over others, and to explore how they were represented and how these representations could influence their positioning within these discussions.

The theoretical framework operated through a socio-constructivist perspective and combined the principles of futures studies to the prior research on work and its development. The data was analysed through critical discourse analysis. The research topic was considered relevant for several reasons. Constructing a sustainable future requires considering the diverse needs of social actors. The processes shaping the future should involve people from varied backgrounds, with diverse values and desires. However, the imbalances in social power individuals hold influence which ideas are prioritised, and furthermore, might lead to unequal representations of the future. Images of the future shared in the public sphere can influence individuals' perceptions of possible future outcomes and their sense of agency in shaping the future. As work is a universal topic with diverse perspectives on its future, certain perspectives dominate public sphere, potentially leading to unequal representations of the future. News media significantly impacts people's ideas and beliefs, making it a valuable research object for understanding how social practices and power dynamics shape the future of work.

In the following section, I will review the key findings based on the refined research questions separately. After this, I will evaluate the research and its qualities and present the final conclusions.

7.1 Examination of the results

How different topics related to the future of work are framed in discussions within Helsingin Sanomat and how future dimensions are depicted in them?

Initial observations at the beginning of data selection revealed a scarcity of HS newspaper texts specifically centred on the future of work. Consequently, texts discussing work and

its future to varying extents were selected. This decision was supported by Masini's (1993) assertion that the future is created in the present moment, and Rubin's (1998) claim that images of the future are formed and restructured in everyday conversations. However, analysing texts with different primary focuses limited the depth of analysis as the sections depicting the future dimension were typically brief, abstract, and often utilised vague terms, thereby complicating the understanding of the temporal scope being considered.

Topics related to the future of work were typically discussed in the context of recent or upcoming political actions and solutions, with a focus on the near future. Concrete suggestions for alternative actions were primarily found in opinion pieces, which can partly be attributed to the unique characteristics of this text type (Jaakkola, 2013). In contrast, other types of texts mainly highlighted current or upcoming challenges from various perspectives without providing concrete solutions. In most of the samples, the future dimension was discussed without specifying the temporal scope intended by the author.

Furthermore, in the selected text samples, mentioning the future often seemed to serve as a rhetorical choice to strengthen the message. The analysis also highlighted how readers could contemplate future dimensions without explicitly mentioning the term "future". For example, this could be achieved by posing open questions about possible directions events could take or by referencing potential risks they might entail.

Examining the use of future tense provided insights into the varying ways of discussing the future, as proposed by Dunmire (2010). For instance, the use of modal verbs "will" versus "might" can create a sense of certainty or possibility, respectively, shaping how readers envision future scenarios. The analysis also highlighted how the tone of writing can influence on reader's perception of author 'trustworthiness. It was also noted that text types, such as news articles and editorials, which aim for neutrality and objectivity (Jaakkola, 2013), may unintentionally use language that makes certain future events seem more likely than they actually are. Therefore, even minor linguistic choices can greatly impact how people perceive the future.

However, it is essential to recognise that while writers can attempt to influence readers' perceptions of the future through different tones and language choices, ultimately, the interpretation lies with the readers. Without considering the readers' perspectives, we can only speculate about how certain linguistic choices might affect their comprehension (Fairclough 2003). Additionally, since language can convey multiple

meanings, readers' interpretations of media discussions also depend on their individual understanding and their experiences, leading to varied interpretations of the same text. Moreover, the impact of individual texts varies based on multiple factors.

The themes discussed in the selected newspaper texts align with recent research on the future of work presented in this study, underscoring the profound impact of megatrends. In the Finnish context, the key themes discussed included the aging population's impact on labour market, increasing labour shortages, the need for increased competitiveness due to globalisation, and the demand for new skills.

The two identified discourses in this research aligned with those recognised by Dufva et al. (2017). The prevailing discourse emphasised the necessity of restructuring working life to adapt to challenges like intensified global competition, placing greater responsibility on individuals to adjust to evolving labour market conditions. The identified national ethos in discursive practices argued for the increased individual responsibility as part of Finnish culture.

The other identified discourse, 'the challenging one', emphasised humanism when critiquing governmental processes, questioning the economy's emphasis on competition. This perspective argued that excessive focus on competitiveness would undermine the future of work, advocating instead for ensuring equal opportunities and critiquing the imbalance in hearing diverse voices in governmental decision-making. These texts underscored non-monetary values and changing characteristics of work.

These two identified discourses in public discussion about the future of work can be linked to neoliberalist ideas (Magnusson, 2014; Edgell, Gottfried, & Granter, 2016). Finnish political decision-makers are under pressure to address challenges posed by globalisation and free markets, making international competitiveness a crucial factor. Consequently, there is an emphasis on optimising efficiency with economic factors often becoming the primary determinants of the future of work. Furthermore, the historical fact that financial pressure pushed the young Finland toward rapid success (Pyöriä 2006, p. 30 – 32; Mannevuola 2020, 84 – 110), could be another factor motivating certain decisions, as the human mind tends to favour strategies proven successful in the past.

The challenging discourse, which prioritises employee rights and critiques the emphasis on economic factors, acts as a counterforce to neoliberalism. In a fragmented and precarious labor market, securing workers' rights and addressing inequalities requires alternative perspectives. This discourse underscores the importance of considering societal factors, such as the diverse needs of individuals, in decision-making. These

considerations align with the promotion of human agency and ethical considerations in the development of new labor market practices, as highlighted by Autor, Mindell, and Reynolds (2020), as well as Barbosa et al. (2022) in their research on the future of work.

Moreover, an interesting observation was that even in conversations critiquing government actions, alternative solutions were sometimes justified by referencing to the need to maintain the country's competitiveness and economic growth. When discussing these alternative solutions, authors used specific terminology associated with the prevailing discourse, strategically employing these terms to legitimise proposed actions.

Overall, discussions highlighted increasing work requirements and productivity demands, which support Mannevu's (2020) assertion that Finnish citizens are expected to assume greater responsibility and strive for higher individual achievements. This trend also reflects neoliberal individualism, which reduce reliance on social support systems and shifts risks previously shared with the state and employers onto individuals.

Finnish labor politics have traditionally provided social support for the unemployed and contributed to social resources (Heinonen et al. 2004, pp. 27–28). Thus, improvements in Finnish work conditions have been driven by both economic and social factors. However, these identified discourses raise questions about whether decision-makers will remember that success relies on more than just productivity. Finland's history illustrates that while financial pressures have historically driven industrial development, modernisation has also been facilitated by the establishment of the welfare state and education system. As discussed in research on the future of work, securing the future of work necessitates governments to recognise new societal needs, develop policies and redesign social support systems as work undergoes radical transformation (Alsos & Dølvik, 2021; Barbosa et al., 2022; Dufva et al., 2017).

Whose perspectives and voices are highlighted in discussions about the future of work in Helsingin Sanomat and how do these representations influence their positioning within these discussions?

The analysis identified several social groups in discussions about the future of work: children, youth, young adults, labor unions, decision-makers, politicians, employees, immigrants, and representatives of companies/employers. Despite the inclusion of numerous social actors, they were often generalised into homogeneous categories, thereby presenting them impersonally.

For example, the Finnish people were often portrayed as sharing a unified mentality, and some groups were depicted through comparisons to idealised images. Expectations regarding members of different social groups and their needs appeared to be based on idealised images, which were used to justify decisions affecting them. Students, for instance, were portrayed as hard-working individuals who study efficiently, quickly enter the labour market to contribute to the productivity of the welfare state. Employees were often characterised based on the expectations and actions employers have of them, creating an impression that employees should be motivated to contribute in ways that go beyond simply completing assigned tasks. Moreover, employees were portrayed with without much consideration for their individual attributes, personal values, or unique qualities. The few employees interviewed, such as nurses, connected their occupations closely with their identities, highlighting that the purpose of work goes beyond merely providing an outcome.

It is essential to acknowledge that members of one social group may hold other, even conflicting roles and visions for the future. When individuals speak on behalf of social groups they belong to, they are often assumed to represent the opinions and ideas of the entire group. However, there is, a distinction between organised groups, such as that official representatives of labour unions aiming to protect employees' rights, and social groups that, in discursive practices, are grouped under a category such as students.

While it is sometimes necessary to group individuals and generalise them when discussing broad topics, this practice risks overlooking important factors. Moreover, it is important to consider that the topic under discussion influences the roles assigned to individuals. For instance, in this research's data, children, youth, and young adults were predominantly discussed in terms of their future roles as employees. However, if a social group is considered primarily through a role they are expected to have in the future, their current needs risk being overlooked. Likewise, oversimplifying the characterisation of a social group can narrow thinking.

The most insightful analysis focused on the representations of immigrants, revealing conflicts between stated aims and actions. Work-based immigration is highly needed for securing the future of Finnish labour market, and increasing the number of immigrants is a central goal. However, the current public discourse and political actions do not align with these aims.

The power of language was also evident in discussions concerning immigrants, where linguistic choices used in discussions about immigrants were criticized for categorizing

and depersonalizing individuals with diverse needs. It also became clear that the power to decide who is included or excluded lies not solely with decision-makers but also with groups of individuals and citizens. Immigrants should be seen as part of “we,” rather than viewed outside of “our” social reality. In shaping the future of Finnish work, Finnish citizens influence whether people are allowed and willing to move and stay in Finland. Likewise, companies, by deciding whether to open their doors to immigrants shape the characteristics Finnish working life. Thus, we all bear the responsibility of promoting inclusivity and driving cultural change.

Moreover, the analysis indicated that many participants in discussions perceive the evolution of work as extending beyond its intrinsic nature; workers’ roles and desired characteristics also change over time. For instance, technological advancements restructuring work organisations are transforming occupations and creating new identities for social actors. Therefore, generalising the nature of work and characteristics attributed to workers risks narrowing people’s social realities.

While responsibility was consistently attributed to those in high positions across many texts, the impersonal representation of social actors could complicate the reader’s interpretation process of who holds the agency to drive change. Conversely, there was an overarching tone of indirectly handing responsibility to individuals in the prevailing discourse. Linguistic choices, whether referring to social actors generically or using passive voice, often did not directly identify who should take the initiative and be responsible for action. The analysis indicated that the responsibility for taking concrete actions to address a specific issue is often left unassigned, potentially risking that problems may not receive adequate attention and effort.

As suggested by van Dijk (1993) and Wodak (2001), the analysis indicated that some social groups have more access to the media than others enabling them to influence public discourses. This influence was particularly apparent in the power dynamics between decision-makers and ordinary citizens, with politicians holding legitimate authority. Despite the opinion section of HS providing a platform for diverse viewpoints, it does not guarantee the presentation of various voices. The data indicated that socioeconomic status influences whose opinion texts are published, as all authors of the opinion pieces were highly educated or posing well-titled job, aligning van Dijk’s (1993, 2015) explanation of social power.

Building on Dunmire's (2010) assertion, the analysis underscored decision-makers' impact on public views by determining discussion topics and framing them to align with

their objectives, thereby shaping images of the future of work. While decision-makers received extensive coverage in HS, other actors often sought to critique their decisions and suggest alternative solutions. Moreover, decision-makers were portrayed as active agents capable of making changes, often depicted indirectly through their roles as powerful social actors in discussions.

Although many social actors are included in texts, this does not necessarily mean that they or their perspectives are truly involved within discussions. The analysis highlighted the varying ways of representing individuals (van Leeuwen 2008). As Fairclough (2012, p. 11) argued, discourse should be viewed as a form of action. It shapes how a subject is seen and treated; it is never just text. While the limited data prevents broader conclusions about the representation of certain actors, the findings illustrate how representations matter and can influence future development paths, indicating the need for continued research.

7.2 Evaluation of the study

Critical aspects in assessing the quality of this research lie in the criteria chosen for data collection. The broad scope of the research topic posed several challenges. The decision not to narrow down to a specific text types nor specifying the topic hindered the depth of the data analysis. A more narrowly defined research scope, such as focusing on a specific area of work, or a particular driver of change could have potentially resulted in more grounded insights and a more focused literature review. Alternatively, examining texts of the same type could have improved the quality of the data analysis by making the analysis process more systematic.

Thus, the loose criteria for data collection, resulted in somewhat unfocused data, making it challenging to connect findings. Nevertheless, the data served the objectives of this study by providing varying types of texts and content to understand the role of language in shaping people's perceptions about the future of work. It also enabled findings that illustrate how CDA can capture insights into social dynamics and their influence on images of the future by revealing different discursive practices.

Moreover, achieving a high-quality critical discourse analysis (CDA) demands both practice and a profound understanding of the specific areas of focus. Although the absence of academic expertise in linguistic studies limited my ability to examine

linguistic aspects in detail, CDA allows researchers to concentrate on areas of their expertise, such as futures studies, as I did in this research.

Finally, despite my efforts to maintain transparency and justify the decisions guiding this research, it is inevitable that the choices made were subjective. Like any researcher, my perceptions are shaped by discourses, influencing how I construct social reality, formulate my thoughts and communicate.

7.3 Final conclusions and future research

This research explored how the future of work was discussed in the various newspaper texts in the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat during the autumn of 2022. The study identified two discourses within Helsingin Sanomat concerning the future of work: one focused on productivity and competitiveness, and the other on sociocultural aspects. Additionally, an underlying nationalist ethos was observed to motivate certain attitudes towards the development of the future of work. The findings indicated that the linguistic choices, particularly the usage of tone and verbs, significantly influence how specific future developments and their certainty is perceived. The future can be depicted and discussed in various ways, even without explicitly mentioning the term “future”. Even minor linguistic differences can shape people's perceptions of the future, emphasising the power of language in framing our understanding and expectations.

Representation of social actors in media discussions not only involves their presence or naming them but also the attributes assigned to them and whether their perspectives are heard or overlooked. Representations of social actors often generalised certain qualities attributed to various social groups. Oversimplifying the characterization of social groups can narrow thinking and affect their sense of agency. Moreover, when social groups, such as young people are primarily viewed through their expected future roles, as future’s employees, their current needs risk being overlooked. Additionally, generalising the nature of work and workers’ characteristics in media risks limiting people’s thinking, even as the evolution of work influences workers' roles, identities, and characteristics over time.

The concluding statement is that these images of the future of work constructed in newspaper media can significantly influence individuals’ views of their identities, their beliefs about themselves as workers, and their perceptions of their ability to influence the

future. Therefore, recognising the significant role language has in shaping these perceptions of the future is crucial.

The discourse analytical approach used in this research has proven effective in examining how images of the future are constructed and influenced in newspaper media. It provides insights into how language shapes people's perceptions of the future and the roles different social actors might have through specific linguistic choices. Despite its limitations, this research has highlighted the significant influence of language on social processes shaping the future, underscoring the value of examining the role of language in futures studies. CDA offers a valuable tool for futures studies with a critical approach. As Rubin (2017) explains, critical futures research aims to uncover the reasons behind our thoughts and ideas about the future.

For future research utilising CDA within the field of futures studies, it would be beneficial to define the scope more narrowly, such as by focusing on a specific sub-topic of work, like employees' rights, or by selecting a specific social group. Researchers could also choose to analyse texts of a single type or focus on governmental or corporate reports or texts shared on other media platforms.

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APPENDIX: THE LIST OF THE SELECTED TEXTS (HS)

THEME: The development of labour market

SAMPLE 2 (reader's opinion)

15.07.2022 (issue 187)

"Tulehtunut työmarkkinatilanne ei palvele Suomea"

Transl. "The inflamed labor market situation does not serve Finland"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000008942558.html>

SAMPLE 3 (reader's opinion)

16.07.2022 (issue 188)

"Vastuullinen muotiteollisuus voi tuoda työtä Suomeen"

Transl. "A responsible fashion industry can bring work to Finland"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000008932465.html>

SAMPLE 4 (reader's opinion)

21.07.2022 (issue 193)

"Suomalaisten kasvuyritysten kupla ei ole puhkeamassa"

Transl. "The bubble of Finnish growth companies is not about to burst"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000008954036.html>

SAMPLE 5 (news: labour markets)

30.07.2022 (issue 202)

"Antti Rinne ryhtää kunta-alan palkkaratkaisun vaarallisena"

Transl. "Antti Rinne condemns the salary solution in the municipal sector as dangerous"

<https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000008963618.html>

SAMPLE 7 (reader's opinion)

11.08.2022 (issue 214)

Näkövammaisten työllisyys- ja koulutusaste nousee hitaasti

Transl. "The employment and education rate of the visually impaired is slowly increasing"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000008994002.html>

SAMPLE 33 (editorial)

27.11.2022 (issue 321)

"Jokaisen työtunnin tulisi kannattaa"

Transl. "Every working hour should be worth it"

<https://www.hs.fi/paakirjoitukset/art-2000009221495.html>

THEME: Working life and sociocultural aspects

SAMPLE 8 (reader's opinion)

14.08.2022 (issue 217)

"Keskustelu työelämästä on ympäröörä"

Transl. "Discussion about working life is vague"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009000758.html>

SAMPLE 9 (news: economy)

22.08.2022 (issue 225)

"Suomalaisyritysten etätyölinja on tiukentunut"

Transl. "The remote working policies of Finnish companies have tightened"

<https://www.hs.fi/talous/art-2000009010196.html>

SAMPLE 19 (reader's opinion)

03.10.2022 (issue 267)

”Tulevaisuuskatsaus sivuutti työntekijöiden aseman”

Transl. “The future review ignored the position of employees”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009105284.html>

SAMPLE 23 (guest writer)

21.10.2022 (issue 285)

Vieraskynä: Julkisoiloilla työskentelevien asemaa tulisi vahvistaa

Transl. “The position of those working in the public sector should be strengthened”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009140153.html>

SAMPLE 29 (reader's opinion)

10.11.2022 (issue 304)

”Barometri ei anna oikeaa kuvaa kulttuurialan töistä”

Transl. “The barometer does not provide an accurate picture of work in the culture industry”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009189885.html>

SAMPLE 31 (reader's opinion)

18.11.2022 (issue 312)

”Pohjoisen alue unohtuu usein työllisyyskeskusteluista”

Transl. “The northern region is often being forgotten about in employment discussions”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009170409.html>

SAMPLE 32 (reader's opinion)

24.11.2022 (issue 318)

Nuorille pitää opettaa enemmän työelämätaitoja”

Transl. “Young people need to be taught more working skills”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009208944.html>

THEME: The impacts of technology

SAMPLE 1 (HS opinion)

11.07.2022 (issue 183)

”Automaatio korvaa meidät, ja se voisi olla ihanaa”

Transl. “Automation is replacing us, and that could be wonderful”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000008914579.html>

SAMPLE 13 (feature article)

10.09.2022 (issue 244: Visio)

”Valvonnan alaiset”

Transl. “Employee surveillance”

<https://www.hs.fi/visio/art-2000009039968.html>

SAMPLE 25 (reader's opinion)

27.10.2022 (issue 291)

”Kirjailijan on voitava elää tekemällään työllä”

Transl. “A writer must be able to live on the work they does”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009153152.html>

SAMPLE 35 (editorial)

11.12.2022 (issue 335)
”Tekoäly ällistyyttää kyvyllään kirjoittaa”
Transl. “Artificial intelligence amases with its ability to write”
<https://www.hs.fi/paakirjoitukset/art-2000009254260.html>

SAMPLE 37 (reader’s opinion)
23.12.2022 (issue 347)
”On selvää, että tekoäly muuttaa tietotyön luonteen”
Transl. “It is clear that artificial intelligence will change the nature of knowledge work”
<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009280423.html>

THEME: Labour shortages

SAMPLE 11 (guest writer)
31.08.2022 (issue 234)
”Suomeen tarvitaan ulkomailta jopa 200 000 uutta työntekijää”
Transl. “Finlands needs up to 200,000 new employees from abroad”
<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009027114.html>

SAMPLE 21 (reader’s opinion)
17.10.2022 (issue 281)
”Villit sijaiskäytännöt rapauttavat opetusalaan”
Transl. “Wild substitute practices are ruining the education sector”
<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009127334.html>

SAMPLE 36 (news: economy)
16.12.2022 (issue 340)
”Tutkimus: Suuryritykset käyvät nyt kovaa kisaa työvoimasta”
Transl. “Research: Large companies are now fiercely competing for labour”
<https://www.hs.fi/talous/art-2000009268130.html>

THEME: Work and values

SAMPLE 16 (personal interview)
16.09.2022 (issue 250: Visio)
”Sinä pystyisit parempaan”
Transl. “You could do better”
<https://www.hs.fi/visio/art-2000009056281.html>

SAMPLE 18 (personal interview)
24.09.2022 (issue 258: Visio)
”Nationalismin uusi aika”
Transl. “A new age of nationalism”
<https://www.hs.fi/visio/art-2000009075238.html>

THEME: Students

SAMPLE 6 (news: health care)
04.08.2022 (issue 207)
”Hus: Ruuhkat johtuvat muutoksesta asenteissa”
Transl. “Helsinki University Hospital: congestion is caused by a change in attitudes”
<https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000008978132.html>

SAMPLE 10 (news: work life)

31.08.2022 (issue 234)

”Vastavalmistuneet korkeakoulutetut työllistyvät nyt hyvin”

Transl. “Newly graduated university graduates are now well employed”

<https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000009036363.html>

SAMPLE 17 (news: industrial actions)

20.09.2022 (issue 254)

”Opiskelija Suvi Pekkola ei houkuttele”

Transl. “Student Suvi Pekkola is not attracted to work in Finland”

<https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/turku/art-2000009075646.html>

THEME: Education

SAMPLE 12 (reader’s opinion)

06.09.2022 (issue 240)

”Kouluissa tulisi olla enemmän luovuuutta kehittävää opetusta”

Transl. “Schools should have more teaching that develops creativity”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009033412.html>

SAMPLE 14 (reader’s opinion)

13.09.2022 (issue 247)

Varhaiskasvatuksen opettajia myös ammattikorkeakouluista”

Transl. “Early childhood education teachers also from universities of applied sciences”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009060438.html>

SAMPLE 15 (guest writer)

16.09.2022 (issue 250)

”Opetusalalle kasaantuneisiin ongelmiin on viimein puututtava”

Transl. “The problems accumulated in the education sector must finally be addressed”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009069265.html>

SAMPLE 22 (reader’s opinion)

18.10.2022 (issue 282)

”Koulutuspoliittiset linjaukset pitää perustella hyvin”

Transl. “Education policy guidelines must be well justified”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009135286.html>

SAMPLE 24 (reader’s opinion)

20.10.2022 (issue 284)

”Tilastoharhasta iso väärinkäsitys suomalaisten koulutustasosta”

Transl. “A big misunderstanding of the Finnish educational level due to the statistical bias”

<https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000009140101.html>

SAMPLE 30 (reader’s opinion)

10.11.2022 (issue 304)

”Oppimisvaikeuksia ei aina tunnisteta”

Transl. “Learning difficulties are not always recognised”

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009187879.html>

THEME: Immigration

SAMPLE 20 (reader's opinion)

06.10.2022 (issue 270)

"Maahanmuuttajille pitää kertoa työelämän oikeuksista"

Transl. "Immigrants must be told about the rights of working life"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009112671.html>

SAMPLE 26 (reader's opinion)

28.10.2022 (issue 292)

"Arvoisat maahanmuuttajat, tervetuloa suomalaisiksi"

Transl. "Dear immigrants, welcome to be Finns"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009156512.html>

SAMPLE 27 (reader's opinion)

28.10.2022 (issue 292)

"Hyvä kohtelu houkuttelee lisää työvoimaa Suomeen"

Transl. "Good treatment attracts more workforce to Finland"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009160874.html>

SAMPLE 28 (reader's opinion)

28.10.2022 (issue 292)

"Työllistyminen ei ole yksin tulijoiden käsissä"

Transl. "Employment is not only in the hands of newcomers"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009157050.html>

SAMPLE 34 (guest writer)

10.12.2022 (issue 334)

"Osajien houkuttelu Suomeen vaatii syvällistä asennemuutosta"

Transl. "Attracting talent to Finland requires a profound change in attitude"

<https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000009239554.html>