The Concept of Subject Position in Empirical Social Research

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Modern social science treated individuals as representatives of a class, stratum or generation: work, class culture or the experiences of youth were seen as primary "engines" for people's actions. In post-modern social science, in turn, the actor has dissolved into a multiplicity of subject positions: individual has a great number of subject positions from which to choose, the situational usefulness of which are defined by face-to-face or textual relations of communication in such a way that the identification with the subject positions does not necessarily constitute a coherent class position or a consistent life history.

For example, in the 1960s and '70s in British cultural studies, identity was conceptualized in essential terms as determined by class position. The research concentrated on groups or subcultures that have a subordinate position in respect to the dominant culture (e.g. youth cultures), or on cultural forms that the elite culture had superseded or excluded from the circles of "civilization". The groups or subcultures were seen as living within the tensions of class society, aiming at solving the inherent conflicts of their parent culture (working class, middle class) through their subcultural practices, under the pressure of the dominant culture (Grossberg 1997, 116). The studies showed that these groups formulated imaginary or "magical" solutions in their subcultural practices (styles) to correct the contradictions that they experienced. So, the goal of the studies was to articulate for people (and for the culture) alternative subject positions that would make possible the formation of real resistance and a real counter culture.

Later, individual experience, everyday life, cultural practices and consumption have received stronger emphasis. Instead of approaching an individual's social relations and activities as efforts to solve the conflicts in the parent culture or as efforts to construct a master identity based on social class (occupation or generation), the environment for an individual's action has been conceptualized as a multiplicity of representational systems, heteronymous practices and conflicting social relations; in other words it is seen as being a process, in which a variety of different and conflicting subject positions evolve for the individual to

identify with and use (Hall 1996). The idea of a fully coherent, "rational" and self-knowledgeable agent has been derailed (Rattansi 1995, 251). The agent is thematized as a collage of subject positions, which have no predetermined relation to each other and which cannot be fixed into any kind of stable unity.

In this article I examine the suitability of the concept of subject position for empirical research involving discourse analytical tools. First I describe some theoretical discussions around the concept of subject position. Then I deal with the starting points and main problems one meets when empirically analysing the use of subject positions, after which I present one possible way of analysing their articulations in communication. Finally, I exemplify the discourse analytic framework with a data extract.

THE FRAGMENTATION OF A UNIFIED SUBJECT INTO INTERSUBJECTIVE SUBJECT POSITIONS

Stuart Hall (1992) describes the transition from a modern identity to later modern subject positions as a process in which the independent, undivided and unitary subject of Renaissance humanism of the sixteenth century and the Enlightenment's ideals of the eighteenth century dissolves and de-centres. Hall identifies five scientific "discoveries", discussions or movements which contributed to the questioning of the sovereignty of subjectivity: (1) the interpellation theory of Louis Althusserl, (2) Sigmund Freud's concept of unconsciousness, (3) the structural linguistics of Ferdinand Saussure, (4) the genealogy of Michel Foucault and (5) feminism as a theoretical critique and social movement.

According to Althusserl (1984) our relation to ourselves and to the world is structured by ideologies. Our identity does not develop spontaneously but derives its structure through a process in which we adopt, as addressed and interpellated by ideologies, subject positions that acquire a natural sense by becoming materialized in our everyday routines. Our identity could be constituted in many alternative ways, but by hailing ideologies we embrace and compartmentalize ourselves into social roles that maintain the continuity of the primary institutions of capitalist society (church, school system, law, family, army and so on).

Althusserl's theory had a strong position in the cultural studies of the 1970s and '80s. It opened up a discussion on the discursive foundation of subjectivity and created links for the entry of psychoanalytic subject theory into the analysis of cultural texts. For example, the British Screen theorists (like Colin MacCabe and Stephen Heath) who published in the film journal called *Screen* applied interpellation theory in the 1970s for the analysis of films by strengthening it with Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. When Lacan wrote that our subjectivities are constantly in process and always divided and that our comprehension of Us as unified is illusion, the Screen theorists argued that the classic Hollywood films

are particularly strong maintainers of this illusion of unity (Moores, 1993, pp. 12–16). For Screen theorists the films in question maintain the imaginary unity of the prevailing bourgeois (white middle-class male) subject position by positioning the viewer in a position which constructs for the spectators an illusion of transparency: the spectators imagine themselves to be looking directly, without noticing the role of the camera, at the consistent flow of events. This kind of subject position is, at least for Screen theorists, ideological. It symbolically participates in the naturalization of the dominant social order. The invisible gaze of the camera leaves the spectator no other option but to make the story mean what the text (i.e. the camera's look) suggests. At the same time spectators' illusion of themselves as coherent and sovereign agents is verified (ibid., pp. 12–13).

Althusserl's and Screen theorists' views on interpellation have severe limitations. The theories do not take into consideration the fact that the agent that a cultural text tries to interpellate into a specific subject position has experiences with alternative subject positions and thereby holds power over the siren-singing of discourses. Furthermore, the application of psychoanalytic theory for the analysis of the construction and reception of subject positions in communication leads to an emphasis on form at the expense of content and contexts. Because the theory as such is very general and universal, one cannot analyse the social and cultural specificity of subject positions and their connection to wider social structures through the use of the theory alone (Moores, 1993, p. 15). Too exclusive application of psychoanalytic subject theory creates an impression that cultural texts are "written by drives" and "received by drives": an individual does not direct the movements, angles and objects of the camera but the universal desire; the spectator is not an active agent but a victim, who is moved by the universal desire.

Therefore it has lately been emphasized that if we want to understand why an individual is touched by a specific cultural text, the main endeavour should not be to turn to universal desire but to ponder what kind of culturally valuable competences are linked to certain subject positions. Subject positions evolve in socio-cultural practices. We identify with them because they offer us viewpoints and classificatory schemas to think and act in concrete situations. Thus, instead of supposing that identification occurs automatically, we should analyse through what kind of intensities and mechanisms one situationally identifies with the subject positions circulating around us (Hall, 1996) or how subject positions are used as resources in concrete dialogues (Jokinen et al., 1993). The identification is necessarily momentary. As Saussure has taught us, meaning is by nature unstable. Even though we try to create firm and stable worlds and identities, our efforts to communicate include and are accessory to additional meanings over which we have no power and which rise to disturb the unambiguousness of our action (Hall, 1992).

Subject positions are partly produced by power, as Michel Foucault has made us understand. As we identify with and use subject positions we take part in the

(implicit) meaning struggle on what kinds of identity forms and world views should be considered as natural and truthful in particular situations (Shapiro, 1992, p. 3; Fairclough, 1992, p. 55). The increase in knowledge, as attached to specific subject positions with which one identifies, does not mean solely that one becomes more enlightened but also that one becomes subordinate to the discourses' expectations on what is normal, permitted and serviceable. The knowledge, arrived at through discourses, about the world and about oneself both subjugates and makes possible. By identifying with the subject positions and by using them as resources individuals solve the ambivalences between governance and the ethics of self or between discipline and self-care. The subject positions give us guidelines for deciding what one should consider in the situation or cultural environment where one acts as sanctioned, normal and desirable as distinct from prohibited, deviant and repulsive (Sarup, 1996, pp. 73, 87).

The British discourse analysis has emphasized the rhetorical nature of subject positions: all communicative situations, from political disputes to commonplace discussions, are rhetorical. Subject positions are relational categories that obtain their situational meaning in relation to other possible subject positions and discourses. In identifying with subject positions individuals take, more or less explicitly, a stand against competing positions, which mainly happens either by strengthening one's own position or by weakening competing positions (Billig, 1991, p. 72; Potter, 1996, p. 107).

In women's studies the analysis of different types of discourses has been used to shed light on how we are produced to understand ourselves as sexually divided subjects (men/women, fathers/mothers, sons/daughters). For example it has been observed that in films and ads the camera often looks at the object (zooms, comes to a stop or follows the object) by attending to the expectations and pleasures of men, and creates for the audience sexually divided subject positions from which to interpret the world of film or advertising (Mulvey, 1975; Messaris, 1997, p. 44; Butler, 1997b, p. 392). An especially difficult dilemma has been the question whether there are any essential gender-specific features which would separate the two genders biologically from each other and which would set conditions for the construction of and identification with certain subject positions. The researchers, who have their background in social constructionism, question the possibility of reducing subject positions to biology. Inter alia, Chantal Mouffe (1995)—who with Ernesto Laclau (1985) developed so-called articulation theory—builds her approach on the critique of essentialism. According to her, we can't reduce individuals to a common essence by fixing them to categories like "women", "men", "working class", "black people". The feeling of belonging to a group or a community does not arise from the necessities of biology or social structure but evolves from "family resemblance", from partial and momentary identification with the subject positions that are articulated (bridged) in connection with each other by a theory which appeals successfully to common experiences. Gender is not a stable and penetrating

factor for all social relations. It becomes significant as far as different practices, discourses and institutions construct its dividing force (ibid., p. 323).

SUBJECT POSITION, THE LIMITS OF THE DATA AND THE PROBLEM OF
EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Many discourse analytic approaches of today share the view that identity has no stable essence, that there exist many fragmentary and conflicting subject positions which are intersubjectively founded and receive their meanings contextually, situationally and rhetorically in relation to each other.

Different approaches understand, however, context, situation and rhetoric in different ways and give them different formulations in respect to empirical analysis. The tightest formulation can be found in conversation analysis and strict constructionism. For example, conversation analysist Emanuel A. Schegloff (1997) makes a distinction between endogenous and external contexts and emphasizes that analysis concerning, for example, the use of subject positions in face-to-face conversation should focus on "here and now" situations by concentrating exclusively on the participants' orientations and on the endogenous contexts of conversation (see also Wetherell 1998).

In relativist (British) discourse analysis, in turn, it is emphasized that one does not need to concentrate exclusively on participants' "here and now" orientations. One can also take into consideration the "mutual history" of participants, the larger horizons of expectations evolving in conversation and the ideological dilemmas and interpretative repertoires articulated in discussion (cf. Wetherell 1998). In interaction one not only maintains the social order of the "here and now" situation but also specifies and transforms matters which exceed the here and now situation like "solidified" practices (institutions), existing discourses (vocabularies, meaning systems, interpretative repertoires) and conventional power constellations (role combinations).

These above-described two approaches—conversation analysis and relativist discourse analysis—can be characterized as being data focused: the use of subject positions is analysed from the viewpoint of here and now interaction by anchoring interpretations, ultimately, in the internal micro features, contexts and rhetorical relations of the communicative situation. In post-modern and later modern approaches, critical cultural studies, realist discourse analysis and contextual constructionism the anchor for interpretation is laid outside the data. The type of analysis in these approaches can be characterized as "macro contextual": the use of subject positions is examined as part of the sociocultural, political and economic history of society (cf. Juhila, 1999). Often, when one analyses the use of subject positions, one makes use of cultural texts (films, news, novels, adds, theatre performances, archives, editorials) or authorities' (experts') speech. These sources are believed to preserve and crystallize the essential features of the

most powerful, public and common subject positions of the culture under examination. The activity of people, in turn, is believed to be revealed in that how they identify with and use the subject positions circulating around them. Encounters between cultural texts (subject positions) and users are handled as ritual or routine-like plays in which the social order of society (institution, nation, Western way of life etc.) is reconstructed.

In my opinion both data-focused analysis and macro-contextual analysis are, in their extremes, problematic. Among the critical and later modern cultural studies the empirical analyses are usually pretty impressionistic and based on abstractions, which is the case, for example, with Judith Butler's texts (e.g. 1997a and 1997b). Because Butler does not examine the constructions of subject positions concretely in the empirical data, the concept of subject position remains a transcendental mainstay, a blind area onto which she sometimes projects the dominant social order, and sometimes the opposing position that challenges it. For Butler the hegemonic social order is anchored in the gender system that she takes as pregiven and which she regards as multiply overdetermined. The dominant gender system is determined and materialized by the family drama of childhood (Freud, Lacan), by cultural and disciplinary repetition (Althusserl, Foucault, Gramsci) and by performativity (Austin) (Threadgold, 2000, p. 119). Within this framework Butler supposes that one's identifications with the subject positions of our culture either reconstruct "the law of the father" or react to it, more or less ambivalently. She examines the use of subject positions by supposing that there exists a relatively stable "gender system" reconstructed by hegemonic cultural practices, performances and frontier infringements. This analysis lacks focus on the active power of an individual to create reality and to attach themselves to particular values and temporal paths through specific subject positions. Individuals' deeds are examined as reactions to a normative gender system in which individuals' only freedom is to position (present) themselves in respect to prevailing interpellations of subject positions in terms of identification, negotiation or critical attitude or performance (cf. Pecheux, 1982 on identification, counter identification and dis-identification; Hall (1973) on dominant, negotiated and oppositional decoding).

If in Butlerian discourse analysis the subject position becomes abstracted, anchored and varied in relation to a normative gender system ("Master identity"), in discourse analysis, which concentrates on the microprocesses of interaction, the subject position is usually de-centred and looked at as a quickly changing role in interaction. When one reads the empirical studies based on conversation analysis or relativistic discourse analysis, one gets the impression that the subject positions are empty shells or armour which people can, each in turn, borrow for themselves or for others for presenting their action and their image in a positive light and in such a way that social order is maintained (cf. Craib, 1998, pp. 80–81). In these kinds of micro approaches the subject position is interpreted either as an interactional tool or as a classificatory category to distinguish one identity

image from another, at the cost of the identities' temporal continuity. For example, in analysing an interaction between a doctor and a 12-year old male patient, one may discover that the subject positions with which they identify is not only that of doctor and patient. In turns out that in their mutual conversation they also take up individualistic (individual–individual), masculine (man–man) and customer (servant–client) positions (Silverman, 1985; Suoninen, 1999, pp. 108– 110). One usually draws these kinds of conclusions by supposition that our culture offers relatively stable subject positions of doctor, patient, individual, man and client, for example, for the participants to use as a resource in their interaction. The analysis as such is focused on the interactional use of the subject positions at the cost of overlooking their internal features, which means that the analysis misses the fact that in different situations and interactional contexts the subject position of masculinity, for example, is linked to different values depending on what kinds of categories, story lines and perspectives it is articulated in.

Often, if one concentrates on analysing the micro aspects of interaction, one allots too little attention to the life history of individuals or to the practices of the larger social world. One implicitly supposes that an individual acts like a *tabula rasa* repeatedly entering into varying subject positions whatever the situation is. Or that the socio-cultural practices and social relations through which we are used to handling things do not set any conditions for the identifications, shifts and coarticulations of subject positions. Culture offers to us multiple and contradictory voices, story lines and viewpoints. So that we do not dissolve in their cross-pressure everywhere, this multiplicity should appear to us as subject positions through the use of which our action obtains consistency, depth and directionality. One can argue that the individual's memory and life history (or the history embedded in social institutions and practices) questions the idea of identities as empty places or masks that we can change from one situation to another without any consequences for how we orient to the future. In Bakhtinian terms (e.g. Bakhtin, 1981) each identification comments on earlier identifications and frames forthcoming identifications by binding us to the worldviews and traditions that exceed here and now situations. Also Paul Ricoeur (1992) stresses this: acquired identifications receive, at each moment, their temporal meaning by association with our biographical plot, of which we can have many but which all have to have a more or less crystallized course. While acting in a situation we can't freely identify with just any subject position. Our earlier life history maps out for us possible and impossible identifications that are, of course, in a constant state of change because of the choices we are continuously making (or not making).

Attempts has been made to conceptualize subject positions' continuity from one situation to another by developing eclectic theories of analysis, which are influenced by several traditions and in which microprocesses and macro processes are not separated from each other as strictly as either in data-focused discourse analysis, which emphasizes situationality, or in critical social theory, which bases its analysis, in turn, on the hegemonic or institutional order of society.

The most productive elaborations have been developed, in my opinion, among positioning theorists (Davies and Harré, 1990; Langenhowe and Harré, 1995; Harré and Langenhowe, 1999) and by Stuart Hall (1990). Hall suggests that the construction of subject position is framed by two dimensions, which are the distinction of oneself or Us from others (difference, rupture) and the positioning of oneself or Us or Others in history (continuity, re-telling the past). Positioning theory, again, on the one hand, argues that "adopting a 'position' involves the use of rhetorical devices by which oneself and other speakers are presented as standing in various kinds of relations. These include relations of power, relations of competence (knowledge/ignorance), relations of moral standing (trustworthy/trusting) and so on" (Langenhowe and Harré, 1995, p. 362). On the other hand, adopting a position takes place in relation to the categories and story lines evolving in communication (these categories and story lines may outline past events, present spaces, the future, the properties of persons or objects, relations, events, transformations . . .). Thereby the positioning is not solely determined by interactional factors but also by the content of communication. While I am discussing something with you, my position does not change merely in relation to you but also in relation to what we are discussing: things that happened 2000 years ago, the events that took place last week or the future. Also it matters whether our discussion is focused on cooking, on the state of the environment or on alcohol policy.

SUBJECT POSITION AS A POSITIONING IN RELATION TO CATEGORIES AND STORY LINES

By applying the ideas from positioning theory and from the formulations of Hall I define the subject position as a construction which, on the one hand, evolves in a specific relation to the audience and to the existing subject positions in a particular context of interaction and which, on the other hand, obtains its meaning by being attached situationally to categories and story lines (Törrönen, 2001). According to this definition subject positions evolve in communication as a co-effect of three elements: categories, story lines and positionings (viewpoints).

In texts (in cultural products, in speech) the narrators or the speakers articulate and locate their values, first of all, in mirror-relation to Others (Them) by making categorizations and classifications. I call this the spatial aspect of the construction of subject position. Through classifications we establish a boundary line between inside and outside, civilization and barbarism (Eisenstadt and Giesen, 1995), and sort of territorialize our understanding of civil life. This territorialization may happen, among other things, by expressing, in respect to the world or matter under discussion, (1) what kinds of social motives the speakers consider rational, self-controlled and autonomic as distinct from those that are irrational, passionate and dependent, (2) what kinds of social relationships are open, trusting and honorable as distinct from those that are secret, suspicious

and self-interested and (3) what kinds of social institutions are considered rule-regulated, contractual and equal as distinct from those that are arbitrary, class prejudiced and hierarchic (Alexander, 1998). In different situations and contexts of interaction these contrasts become attached to different contents. Their articulation into a segregation between Us and Them is not always based on strong binarity or opposition but may be delineated, also, as weakly "fortificated", in which case the boundary line between Us and Them is not so total and exclusive but rather flexible and convertible. A lightly bordered identity does not mean a weak self-esteem, rather the contrary. According to Zygmunt Bauman (1992) the continual protection of one's borders often means weak autonomy. A propped-up subject position lasts or shatters with the security of identity borders, which, in turn will not be protective enough if they are not looked after all the time.

Secondly, in communication the categorizations between Us and Them are embedded in historical paths that can be understood as particular story lines (Davies and Harré, 1990, p. 47). I call this the temporal aspect of the construction of subject position. We can trace the way the subject position is attached to temporal adjuncts by examining, among other things, how the speakers value, with pragmatic modalities, the action under consideration. There exist at least four groups of pragmatic modalities—obligation, want (will), ability and competence (Sulkunen and Törrönen, 1997a)—under which we can include manifold expressions. Obligation refers to deontic qualifiers, to expressions like compulsion, prohibition, command, permission or optionality. The modal group of wanting embraces, again, expressions indicating desire, passion, lust, willingness or unwillingness. Ability, in turn, expresses the situational resources (physical, psychic, social, technical) to act whereas the fourth, the modal group of competence, expresses know-how that are acquired and internalized (Törrönen, 1995, p. 46).

Tracing the value-orientations of subject positions by analysing the use of pragmatic modalities in communication differs, as an approach, from the norm theoretical tradition of sociology, in which orientations of social action have often been examined as determined by prohibitions and orders that are external to action itself (Sulkunen and Törrönen, 1997b, pp. 45–46). In this approach society is seen as a totality held together by commands and authorities, by respecting and following the "law of the father", which is, nevertheless, an untenable view, since the action is determined also by other modal qualifiers than rule-based obligations imposed by external authorities.

Furthermore, the norms as such are not slowly changing social facts or deep-structures of culture but relational determinants that each text and turn-taking is reundoing and reconstructing through, among other things, the mediation of modal qualifiers. So, an analysis of the use of pragmatic modalities discloses the value-orientations of subject positions to action. By means of pragmatic modalities the text/speech "names" objects under desire, will or obligation and demonstrates the abilities (resources) and the know-how (competence) that the culturally skilful performance of the action implies. Often the attachment of subject positions to

hoped-for value-orientations is strengthened by the story of the anti-subject, which exemplifies, as a warning story, what could happen if we don't adhere to the proper values in our action.

Thirdly, the categories and story lines are articulated into particular structures of interaction and viewpoint in communication. I call this the positional aspect of the construction of subject position. The positions and postures into which texts position speakers and audiences always evolve in intertextual relation to other possible positions, voices and viewpoints, on the one hand, and in relation to the categories and story lines, on the other hand. The positional aspect of subject position is important since it expresses whose identity (or part of the identity) the use of a subject position rhetorically strengthens and whose identity (or part of the identity), correspondingly, the use of a subject position weakens or shakes. Communication does not solely involve a lone actor whose boundaries temporalness and posture of identity are stabilized, transformed or performed. Also group identities, institutional identities, national identities and global identities are partly stabilized and transformed by discursive structures.

For example, in political science the security analysts have dealt with the international conflicts of today in a way that conflicts become problematized and solved from the nation-state's perspective through spatial stabilizations of existing national boundaries and by temporal naturalization of their historical legitimacy into linear, closed and evolutionistic story lines (Shapiro, 1996, p. 83). This kind of discursivization constructs for the endogenous and marginal people living within a state territory an identity that they do not easily identify as their own. Spatially the boundaries of their identity become defined as subordinated to national hegemonic culture, temporally their history of origin becomes overwritten by the dominant history and positionally their marginal ethnicities become positioned in a role of anti-subject or, at best, that of helpers who enrich the national culture. Therefore, critical political studies have aimed at shaking both the stabilized national identity boundaries and their legitimation in homogeneous and linear story lines, not solely by deconstructing and reconstructing the scientific texts that maintain modernistic illusions but also by critically reading various media texts (e.g. Ferguson and Turnbull, 1999). Because discourses tell who we are and what our relation to reality is, the researchers engaged in critical political studies see that their primary task is to undo subordinating subject positions and to promote their rearticulation into alternative categories, story lines and positionings.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SUBJECT POSITION IN A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ON ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

Usually one makes a distinction between textual analysis and conversation analysis and thinks that when we analyse how subject positions are constructed in cultural

texts, we should search for analytic support, for example, from rhetoric, narratology or text linguistics, whereas in the case of face-to-face communication we have a reason to turn to conversation analysis.

   With the help of the following example I would, however, like to demonstrate that the kind of analysis presented in this paper is also, besides being suitable for examining the construction of subject position in cultural texts, applicable to face-to-face verbal communication. In other words, I propose that the above-mentioned distinction between textual analysis and conversation analysis is not always meaningful, at least when one analyses the data as part of the social, political and economic processes of society and pays attention to how the subject positions are built in relation to counterarguments circulating around us as well as in relation to the themes under discussion. In this case the concepts one uses in the analysis should be formulated so that one can take into consideration the external contexts of the data, too.

   We would not understand the discussion going on in Example 1 and the character of the subject position constructed in it without the knowledge which exceeds the boundaries of the data, like knowledge on the history of Finnish alcohol policy, on the interpretative repertoires of alcohol policy circulating in our culture and on the alcohol political opinion climate of the spring 1995. The analysis which I present next will show this (Example 1 is from a focus-group discussion of the managers of a private company, which was carried out as part of the Baltica Study (Simpura and Tigestedt, 1992; Törrönen and Hanhinen, 1998) in spring 1995. The members of the focus group were asked to discuss, among other things, alcohol problems and alcohol policy).

Example 1. A passage from the focus-group discussion of managers of a private company

 1. **Sirpa** (F): [In Southern Europe] they start drinking at a later age, it's not
 2. something that schoolchildren do, because there's no restrictions you can
 3. just walk into any shop and buy a bottle of wine or whatever, that's why
 4. they're not interested because it's not forbidden
 5. **Irja** (F): families go out together to eat from early on
 6. **Sirpa** (F): and they let children have wine at meals
 7. **Irja** (F): so that they don't have to go around carrying it around in plastic
 8. bags, hiding in the alleyways with a few bottles of beer that someone has
 9. picked up for them, that I'm inclined to think that because it's perfectly
10. normal for them
11. **Pasi** (M): it's part of their upbringing
12. **Irja** (F): exactly
13. **Pasi** (M): children from a very young age know what it is
14. **Irja** (F): and they go out with their parents to restaurants, the whole family
15. goes and if we look at say Italy or Spain or Greece and I'm sure that this is

16. where the difference comes
17. **Elina** (F): in Nordic countries we have brought up independent children
18. but in Middle Europe, in Belgium, Luxemburg and also in Germany where
19. I have lived, people are much more family-oriented, that you just have to
20. come back home when it's dinner time, that there are so-called tradition
21. and such kinds of things which keep the control longer than here, that I am
22. of the same opinion that there people expose themselves to [heavier] drinking
23. later than here, not until one starts one's studies.

In Example 1 the managers take an interesting stand by positioning themselves outside the Finnish culture. They travel in their minds down to Southern and Middle Europe and evaluate and problematize Finnish drinking habits from this perspective. At the same time they identify with the points of view of family and parents. Through these positionings they make for themselves a critical space to oppose the until now dominant welfare state approach in alcohol policy.

The spatial territory (value basis) of the subject position is constructed on multiple distinctions and contrasts between Europe and Finland for the benefit of the liberal tradition of Europe: in Southern and Middle Europe one starts drinking later (1–2, 20–21), the drinking and the purchase of drinks is not prohibited (2–4), the families go out together for dinner (5–6), the children gain experiences with alcohol in the company of parents and kin as part of their normal upbringing (6, 13–15, 17–21), the drinking is open and natural (9–11), the traditions and control of "civil society" work well in the prevention of alcohol problems (17–21).

An examination of the construction of the subject position from the viewpoint of the temporal aspect reveals that these distinctions group themselves around the tension between the prohibited and permitted. In Finland, according to the interviewees, state-regulated prohibitions have directed our desire towards wrong object-values. As a consequence of the prohibitions there has developed an atmosphere of secrecy around drinking and our children's will has become perverted so that they get pleasure from the violation of the boundaries imposed by adults.

By contrast, in the permissive atmosphere of Southern and Middle Europe, alcohol is part of everyday life, making children's and young people's attitude to alcohol open and plain: the family and kin traditions and alcohol's visible presence in commonplace practices impress upon children the abilities and competencies they need in the civilized use of alcohol. In Finland, again, because of the prohibitions children start their drinking outside the society with the result that their abilities and competences in drinking remain underdeveloped and distorted.

An examination of the three aspects of the construction of subject position indicates that in Example 1 the speakers construct a subject position that persuades us Finns to adopt a liberal European identity. In the focus group discussion the European tradition of upbringing obtains a positive and obligating

role: we Finns should evolve towards their way of life. This would make our abilities and competences more mature and civilized as regards drinking as well as life.

The subject position is constructed as a counterargument to official alcohol policy by undoing and disputing its categorizations, story lines and positionings, as Michael Billig has stated "in arguing, one not only expresses one's own position, but seeks to criticize, and thereby to negate, the counterposition" (Billig, 1991, p. 72). In this case the interviewees dispute, more or less explicitly, so-called total consumption theory or availability theory that has derived its core argument from epidemiological research (mm. Bruun et al., 1975). In this argument it is proved that the increased availability of alcohol contributes to an increase of total consumption that, in turn, is accompanied by a growth in public health problems. In the argument the state is appointed the main responsibility to prevent and treat alcohol and public health problems by restricting the availability of alcohol. The interviewees try to undo the legitimacy of this argument by categorising, temporalising and repositioning alcohol in a liberal tradition. They disarticulate alcohol policy from the guidance of the state as part of everyday and personal politics. They do not utter their view out of nowhere. According to Matti Piispa (1981) the main Finnish journals from the south part of the country dealt with the knowledge produced by the temperance movement and Alko (= Finnish alcohol monopoly) already in the 1950s by extrapolating it to the slogan of "forbidden fruit" according to which intoxication-oriented drinking has been caused by the fact that the state has made access to alcohol difficult.

The simultaneous examination of the three aspects of subject position helps to elude reductionistic interpretations: the subject position is not reduced to the binary oppositions of the culture's deep structure (Lévi-Strauss, 1958), to the capability of the hero or heroine to act or to their transformation (Propp, 1975), to enunciative forms of address (cf. the camera's act of uttering: Screen theory), to the action going on in the interaction (conversation analysis), to the interpretative repertoire dealing with parental care (relativistic discourse analysis), not to mention efforts to reduce subject positions to biological or physiological determinants or to class structures. Instead, the analysis is focused on the mutual articulation of categories, story lines and positionings (cf. Slack, 1996) by asking how subject positions are situationally articulated in categorizations, story lines and positionings.

One should keep in mind that the subject position cannot reach complete fulfilment, fill up and "heal". Its attachment to the contexts of space, time and interaction are momentary, in a continual state of movement, which also guarantees that the subject position does not become petrified but, instead, stays more or less a flexible and living relational category by which to orientate and act in the world (Hall, 1999, pp. 233, 250). Therefore the subject position constructed in Example 1 also becomes differently articulated in terms of categories, story lines and viewpoints in the separate phases and contexts of the focus-group

discussion and also disarticulates or changes to another when the conversation turns new themes. Nothing would prevent the members of the focus group from later disputing the way they positioned themselves in relation to alcohol policy in Example 1 (cf. Langenhowe and Harré, 1995, p. 363). This does not, however, happen in this focus group.

<div align="center">CONCLUSIONS</div>

In this paper I have proposed that the definition of subject position as a positioning in relation to categories and story lines opens productive angles from which to analyse the evolvement of subject positions in communication. The definition observes, first of all, that subject positions do not exclusively take their shape from interactive positionings in relation to counterpositions but that they obtain their situational meaning also by being united in a specific way, through categorizations and story lines, as part of reality and experience. Secondly, the definition pays attention to the continuity of subject positions. According to it, we should not solely concentrate on examining how participants' interactional positions change in different contexts of speech but should, above all, ask what kind of continuity these shifts reconstruct for Our values (as boundary lines between Us and Them) and for Our capabilities to act (as story lines about a hero and anti-hero) and from which viewpoint this will happen (that of consumer, local culture, nation, the world etc.). A subject position's positioning in relation to categories and story lines exceeds the borders of "here and now" interaction and the social order constructed in it. Speakers' articulation and identification with particular viewpoints unite themselves and their audiences as part of specific imaginary communities that transcend the situation of speaking and hearing (in Example 1 the speakers articulate themselves as being part of Europe). The categorizations express how the situational communication comments on the surrounding norms and values of the culture (in Example 1 the speakers argue against welfare-state based responsibility and speak for the responsibility of the family and civil society). And the story lines, in turn, create guidelines for how one should—outside the here and now situation—act in the future (in Example 1 the speakers claim that the state-oriented alcohol policy should be suspended).

The definition of subject position as a positioning in relation to categories and to story lines rends possible a kind of analysis in which the articulation of microprocesses and macro processes into each other is opened up for exact empirical analyses.

Furthermore, because there do not exist any pregiven homologies between subject positions and categories, between subject positions and story lines and between subject positions and positionings, just as there do not exist any stable connections between different subject positions, between subject positions and

contexts and between subject positions and social formations, our task is to raise the articulations of these relations into each other in the foreground when we analyse the struggles for cultural and political hegemony in different settings and circumstances. For example, when we look at political theories and social policies as frames (cf. Goffman, 1974) or as subject positions that are formed of culturally available categories, story lines and positionings, we understand that they are not transcendent to action nor do they stand as pre-existing devices employed by people to express their political or social position. Rather, political theories and social policies as frames or as subject positions are reproduced moment by moment in interactions and carried through time, not as abstract schemata, but as current understandings of past, present and becoming interactions (Davies and Harré, 1990, p. 55). Thereby we cannot deduce their significance from above, without analysing their concrete use in communicative action. Instead, we have to ask how they are actually used and articulated in argumentation, like I demonstrated with the preceding example.

What matters are the articulations (Grossberg, 1997, pp. 129–132). Political theories and social policies do not naturally and intrinsically belong to any existing political positions, social formations or social identities. They must actively be articulated in them, which means that their meaning and value is in a constant state of disarticulation and rearticulation.

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