

**UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ**

**CONSTRUCTING BLIND IDENTITY**

**A Case Study of How Blind Identity Is Constructed in a Television Interview  
between a Blind Interviewee And a Sighted Interviewer**

**A Pro Gradu Thesis**

**by**

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on tarkastella sokean ihmisen identiteetin kielellistä ja diskursiivista rakentumisprosessia suomalaisessa mediakontekstissa sokean amerikkalaisen haastateltavan ja suomalaisen haastattelijan välillä. Tutkimuksen teoreettisen ja metodologisen taustan muodostavat kriittinen diskurssianalyysi sekä konstruktionistinen lähestymistapa identiteettien ja vammaisuuden tutkimiseen. Aineisto koostuu yhdestä Suomen televisiossa esitetystä englanninkielisestä haastattelusta. Tarkoituksena on keskittyä ennenkaikkea haastateltavan sokeusidentiteetin määrittely- ja merkityksenantoprosesseihin, mutta samalla pyrin huomioimaan myös yksilön identiteetin muut osa-alueet ja täten lopulta hahmottamaan sokean ihmisen identiteetin dynaamista kokonaisuutta.

Identiteetillä on tutkimuksessani neljä käsitteellistä tasoa: sosiaalisen, diskursiivisen, medioidun ja poliittisen konstruktion taso. Käsitykseni identiteetistä korostaa sen sopimuksenvaraista, inhimillisesti tuotettua, ajallisesti ja paikallisesti muuntelevaa sekä kielenkäytön prosesseissa rakentuvaa luonnetta, jolle nykypäivänä on yhä tunnusomaisempaa rakentuminen median julkisella arenalla, ja jossa haastateltavan vähemmistöidentiteetistä juontuen korostuvat kielellisiin merkitysneuvotteluihin liittyvät valta- ja kamppailusuhteet. Työssäni vammaan käsite viittaa yksilön fyysiseen tai henkiseen vammaan ja vammaisuus tälle vammalle annettuihin, diskursiivisesti rakennettuihin sosiaalisiin merkityksiin.

Tutkimuksen analyttisen viitekehyksen muodostaa Faircloughin kolmitasoinen jäsentely diskurssien sekä diskurssianalyysin luonteesta, jossa niiden katsotaan muodostuvan kolmesta hierarkkisesti limittyneestä tasosta. Tutkimuksessani *tekstin lingvistisen analyysin* muodostivat systeemifunktionaalinen transitiivisuusanalyysi sekä sokeuden nimeämisen keinojen analyysi. Transitiivisuuden kautta tutkin sitä, mihin tapahtumiin ja toimintoihin sokea ihminen liitetään ja mihin toimijaroleihin hänet positoidaan. Sokeuden nimeämisen keinojen analyysi puolestaan paljasti erilaiset tavat merkityksellistää sokeusidentiteetin perustana oleva fyysinen vamma. *Diskurssikäytänteiden* tasolla tutkimus puolestaan pureutui haastattelussa rakennettujen diskurssien, niiden interdiskursiivisen luonteen ja haastattelun narratiivisen makrorakenteen tarkasteluun. Aineistossa sokeutta ja sokeaa identiteettiä rakennettiin seitsemän eri diskurssin kautta, jotka lähestyivät sokeutta eri näkökulmista, tuottaen sokealle ihmiselle erilaisia subjektipositiota ja kantaen eri funktioita suhteessa haastattelun narratiiviseen rakenteeseen. Nämä diskurssit olivat medikaalinen, familistinen, psykologinen, emotionaalinen, taiteellinen, yhteiskunnallinen ja idealistinen. Haastattelu muodosti myös narratiivisen tarinan, joka sisälsi alun, lopun ja monipolkuisen juonirakenteen. Analyysin uloin, *sosiaalisten käytänteiden* taso koostui pohdiskelusta tiettyjen diskurssien hegemonisoituneesta asemasta vammaisuuden määrittelyssä, tämän määrittelyprosessin käynnissä olevasta sosiaalisesta muutoksesta, vammaisen ihmisen oman äänen merkityksestä hegemonisoituneiden diskurssien haastajana ja vammaisen identiteetin jäsentymisestä erilaisuus - samankaltaisuus -jatkumolla.

Tutkimuksen tulokset haastavat sekä aiemmat tutkimustulokset median tavoista representoida vammaisuutta sekä kaavamaisen arki ajattelun vammaisuudesta helposti määriteltynä, kategorisena ja pitkälti negatiivisena, yksilöä yksipuolisesti leimaavana identiteettinä. Aineistossa sokeus näyttäytyi moniulotteisena identiteettinä, joka oli dynaaminen, heterogeeninen ja jopa ristiriitainen. Sokeus rakennettiin sekä pelon, häpeän, salailun ja kompensoinnin kohteeksi että ilon, ylpeyden ja taiteellisen inspiraation lähteeksi. Paradoksaalisesti sokeus merkitsi näkemistä monin erin tavoin: niin fyysisesti kuin filosofisemminkin. Sokean ihmisen identiteettiä ei rajattu koskemaan vain vammaisuutta, vaan myös haastateltavan sukupuoli-, ammatti-, sairaus- ja perheenjäsenidentiteetit nousivat neuvottelun kohteeksi. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat sokeana olemisen moninaisen ja ristiriitaisenkin luonteen, joka on ennenkaikkea muunteleva, tilanteeseen sidottu ja siten jatkuvan määrittelykamppailun kenttä.

Asiasanat: critical discourse analysis. social constructionism. blindness. disability. identities. media

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The way society defines its social phenomena is an economic, political, cultural and academic matter. The definitions of social phenomena vary according to the temporal and spatial context in question, thus having a dynamic and continuously changing character. Disability is a social phenomenon that has been defined and characterized in uncountable and multiple ways over the history of human being. Disabled people have at times considered to be chosen by God, tortured by Devil, they have been at the centre of pity, ridicule and charity and they have been both segregated from the community and considered valued members of it. Evidently, the meanings of disability and consequently the disabled identities have varied on temporal and cultural lines. During the past few decades the official definition of disability in the Western world has labelled it as a medical and individual problem resulting from individual impairments and craving for medical interventions, cure and restoration of disabled people closer to the standards of normality. Gradually, alternative, unofficial definitions of disability have emerged and the issue of defining disability has changed into that of socially constructing disability. For instance, the social model of disability, a political and critical movement among active disabled academics, has defined disability as the outcome of social and physical barriers of society not being able to accommodate to people that are unable to meet the norms of society. It is society, not impairments, that disables people. Regardless of which definition of disability one promotes and complies to, it must be realized that these definitions are always context-dependent and changing, only providing new insights into the issue, not the final truth.

This study does not follow either the official medical definition of disability by World Health Organization or the unofficial political definition by the social model of disability outlined above, but disability is regarded as a social and discursive construct whose meanings are negotiated locally on a moment-to-moment level. In other words, it is acknowledged that besides the broad historical and cultural spectrum, the meanings of disability and disabled identities can and do change from one situation to the other, on a micro-level. To state that disability is socially constructed implies that there is not a fixed nor self-evident meaning of disability but its meanings are culturally and temporally determined. Disability is

constructed discursively as the social meanings of disability are constructed through linguistic and discursive practices. These various disability discourses shape and surround the disabled individual who is in a continuous process of negotiating one's identity. One cannot construct meanings nor identities freely since the physical conditions, social norms and cultural tendencies set up limits and constraints for local constructions of meanings (Vehkakoski 1998:90). Thus, the local discursive constructions of disabled identities are dependent on the prevailing discourses offered by society. To a great extent, these discourses are brought to people through the media. The media is also one of the many sites of the social and discursive worlds where the construction of disabled identities more and more often takes place.

### **1.1 The aims of the study**

The aim of this thesis is to study the locally situated and mediated construction of disabled identity, with a specific focus on blind identity. More specifically, the aim is to explore the linguistic and discursive ways in which blind identity becomes constructed and the discourses that are constructed when blindness is talked about in a mediated context between a blind and a sighted person. I intend to show how blind identity is constructed in a television interview between participants one of whom is a member of an impaired minority and the other one not. Theoretically, disabled identity is being approached from a constructionist and discursive viewpoint, meaning that disabled identity is considered to be dynamic, shifting and taking shape in linguistic, discursive and social practices. More specifically, the theoretical and methodological framework is provided by critical discourse analysis.

The data of this study consist of one 45-minute-interview between a Finnish female interviewer and an American male interviewee. The interview was a part of an interview series called *Yöleno - Night flight* - by a reporter and producer Maarit Tastula and it was aired on Finnish television in February 1998. The interviewee, Stephen Kuusisto, is an American poet and a writer who earlier that year had published a self-autobiography relating to his blindness. Thus, the topic of the interview was connected to the issue of blindness and the theme

dominated the contents of the interview as well. The data could be characterized as mediated institutional spoken discourse.

Instead of merely describing the various discourses and identities that are constructed, I intend to show how they are worked together, and what their functions and consequences are both on the levels of the immediate interaction, the context of public media and broader societal scale. Identities are mixtures of different aspects, all overlapping and relating to each other but my main focus is on blind identity, since blindness is the overriding topic of the interview and thus dominates the contents as well. Nevertheless, I will look into other aspects of identity as they appear in the data and see how and to what extent they are constructed in relation to blindness and explore the dynamic network that is constituted by the different aspects of identity.

## 1.2 Theoretical commitments

Theoretically, the discussion of identity in this study is mapped on four domains. I will explore blind identity as a social, discursive, mediated and political construct. The concept of identities as **social constructs** includes two levels: on one hand, identities are constructed within societal and structural practices and on the other hand, they are the products of local interaction, social relationships between people in daily encounters. The former includes the structural aspects: the institutions, experts, and social practices that, on a structural and global level, are constructing identities and subject positions for people. In the case of disabled identities this refers to the material conditions created by educational system, rehabilitation and hospital networks and the effects of the political and economic system of for instance capitalism in the process of excluding the disabled people. The global construction of identity is to a great extent structural but it is also constructed interactionally and in the discursive practices that the institutions and experts engage themselves.

The discussion of identities as local social constructs stems from social constructionist theorizing which emphasizes that like all meanings, also identities are locally constructed, face to face, moment to moment. Consequently, the way



identities are constructed in the social world does not originate in people's heads but in their social realm (Potter and Wetherell 1987:177-178, Kitzinger 1989: 82-83, 94, Jokinen et al. 1993:37, Wetherell 1996:224). This means that identities are joint constructions, always being constructed in relation to others and based on negotiation and shared meanings. These 'others' can be both other aspects of identities but also other people. (Burr 1995:8, Sampson quoted in Michael 1996:14) When constructing social phenomena people draw on their shared social knowledge and interpret things with respect to the ways offered them by society. The idea of identity as a social construct does not mean rejecting the biological, physical or material aspects of identities but placing emphasis on the social meanings of identities that grow out of joint social interaction, in this case analysing how blindness becomes constructed as a social phenomenon.

The idea of identities as social constructs incorporates the following premise, identities as **discursive constructs**. The social world and its meanings are to a great extent constructed through discursive processes engaged in by people. Identities are worked out in the detailed linguistic processes but in broader discursive practices as well. This means that people draw on the discourses available in society when constructing their identities locally. The concept of discourse in this study is mainly rooted in critical discourse analysis (CDA) which emphasizes that discourse is "a form of social practice [...] a mode of action [...] a mode of representation" (Fairclough 1992:63). Discourse as a social practice implies a dialectic relationship between discourse and the social structures: discourses are shaped by their contexts but at the same time discourses are socially constitutive reproducing the social structures. In terms of identities, discourse constructs subject positions and social identities for people. Discourse both reflects people's identities but is at the same time one major domain where identities are constructed.

One specific domain of discursive identity construction is the media, where the third domain, identities as **mediated**, originates. The media has its own journalistic practices that are due to affect the identity constructions taking place within that context. The institutional roles and agendas held by the participants

and their roles in the mediated actions set up a specific framework for the identity constructions (Fairclough 1995b). The power of the media in our society is a widely acknowledged fact, and it gives rise to a concern about its responsibility in influencing people's opinions and world views. Much of our experience and knowledge today is derived from television, newspapers, radio and the Internet, especially as concerns the margins of society, the groups of people we would otherwise not know about or at least have no contact with. Thus, the media serves as a potential source of both prejudice and tolerance. The media, as public discourse has its own specific ways of representing the world to us, presenting a certain picture of the reality which many people tend to regard as objective, true and abiding.

The fourth identity domain in this study is identities as **political**. This domain is more like an outcome than a premise of the three former premises. The political nature of identities is well revealed through critical analysis acknowledging the impact of social structures and hegemonized discursive practices on individual identities, for example the implications of capitalist economy on the ways disabled are treated and disability is understood. Power and hegemony are central concepts in critical research through which CDA aims at studying the processes through which society oppresses or marginalizes particular groups. Disabled identities have mainly been defined from the outside, by the dominant members of society who have imposed certain hegemonic ideas upon the disabled people who have falsely been treated as a rather homogenous group in society. It is the discourses created out of the needs of professionals, officials and policy makers and further carried on by them that have dominated the constructions of disability. Mainly the discourses have nourished the idea of disability as an individual and medical problem that ought to be treated one way or another (Oliver 1990, 1996, Barton 1996, Kitchin 1998). Consequently, many disabled people themselves have been socialized into these constructions and some of them have internalized these discourses as a part of their disabled identities (Lane 1995).

### 1.3 Methodological commitments

The approach of many studies on disability and disabled identities has been that of regarding disabled identity as a static and coherent entity, ignoring its dynamic and ambiguous aspects. Many studies have also considered their data as mirror-like reflections of reality and as routes to the informants' heads, rather than regarding data as socially constructed under certain circumstances in a particular situation. These studies have also systematically ignored the impact of linguistic and discursive practices in identity construction which, nevertheless, are crucial aspects if one wants to understand the nature of any dynamically constructed identity.

This study aims at filling in this gap and focus on the discursive construction of disabled identity through the methods of socially rooted discourse analysis. With socially oriented discourse analysis I wish to demarcate this study from the conventional discourse analysis which has been more concerned with textual structures and form of language than the social context, functions and consequences of language. The methodological framework of this study comes from critical discourse analysis and specifically from Fairclough's framework of discourse analysis. The analysis is three-dimensional, comprising the levels of textual, discursive and sociocultural analyses (see Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b). On the textual level my aim is to study the detailed linguistic construction of identity through two elements: transitivity and wording and rewording blindness. On the level of discursive practices the analysis will focus on the different discourses used to construct blindness and the interdiscursivity of these discourses and I will also touch upon the roles and agendas of the participants in a mediated institutional context. The sociocultural level consists of broader and more tentative discussion of issues relating to the construction of disabled identity, such as hegemonization of particular discourses and challenging these, the struggle between sameness and difference and finally, discussion of the changing conceptions of disability as a part of a social change. The aim of the three-dimensional analysis is to describe the linguistic construction of identity, to interpret the discursive processes involved in it and to try to explain the whole

matrix in terms of broad sociocultural context of identity construction.

#### **1.4 Personal commitments**

After explicating the theoretical and methodological commitments of this study, I will move on to the commitments that are more personal in nature and could also be referred as the ethics of research. Workman (1972:36), himself a blind man, has once written: "Most of us are experts at analyzing other people's problems." While being an amusing and even ironic remark on human nature in general, the quotation is also a culmination of one major issue concerning scientific studies: the ethics of doing human research. Ethics is a crucial issue in my thesis since I am concerned with the identity of a person belonging to a marginalized group that I am personally not a member of. Within disability studies there has been heated discussion whether non-disabled people are entitled to participate in disability research and there exist voices for and against (see e.g. Stone and Priestley 1996, Drake 1997, Branfield 1998, Duckett 1998).

As a non-disabled researcher my position may be that of an outsider but as a member of our shared social world involved in its continuous reproduction process, I am an insider. I believe that the social world of texts belongs to all of us, and no one's access to knowledge ought to be limited or denied. However, it is justifiable to be concerned whether this study is merely one more link in a chain of hegemonic studies by the majority members of society attempting to explain issues concerning minorities but I believe that it is false to assume that an oppressive and prejudiced attitude would be a quality automatically following an outsider role. Rather, with awareness of one's own position and reflexive research a non-disabled researcher can contribute a valid perspective to the disability studies.

For these reasons the concept of reflexivity of research becomes relevant. What this means is drawing attention to the truth claims of the researchers themselves and reflecting upon researchers' own positions in the process where they discursively construct their own claims about the data (Parker 1992:68). Any study is a social construct in itself where the researchers draw on his/her cultural

knowledge. Consequently, the social world becomes both the object and result of research establishing a constitutive relationship between the research, the researcher and the object of the study - the social world. Thus the three are inseparable. (Jokinen et al. 1993:23-24) It has often been said that especially discourse analytic studies reveal as much - or even more - of the researcher as of the research questions themselves. In other words, discourse analysis “depends upon the analyst’s experience of and sensitivity [...] as well as the analyst’s interpretative and strategic biases” (Fairclough 1995a:212).

The terms *emic* and *etic* stem from anthropological research tradition and they refer to the point of view strived for in research. *Emic* viewpoint refers to the ways in which ordinary people make sense of their everyday lives, and meanings they attach to them. *Emic* viewpoint equals the subject’s own interpretation (Silverman 1993:24) whereas *etic* refers to the interpretations and conclusions made by the researcher from the *emic* information. In other words, *etic* viewpoint refers to an imposed frame of reference (Silverman 1993:24). The point of view in this study is *etic*, as human experience is being reconstructed into the concepts of science, into the language of science. In addition to this, all the conclusions and interpretations drawn are those of a subjective researcher and they are dealt within an imposed frame of reference, that of discourse analysis. Regardless of the fact that the methods of this study do not aim at *emic* understanding about the blind man’s own conceptualizations and interpretations, his voice can be heard in a significant way as the main contributor of the data.

I hope to have been sensitive and respectful towards my data and especially towards the unique life of Stephen Kuusisto. I wish not to have reduced or forced one man’s whole life into a set of constructions and discourses. My aim is to provide one subjective account of his identity in the light of one interactional event. Still, the aim of the thesis is not to become a study of Stephen Kuusisto, but to study the way his identity is being constructed in relation to the media context and to a broader social context and the linguistic and discursive ways in which a marginal identity becomes constructed. The results are thus discussed more broadly in order to show their social relevance.

## **2. DISABILITY: FROM DEFINITION TO CONSTRUCTION**

At this point, it is necessary to provide a critical overview of the various ways in which disability has been defined in societies over the years. There are three main reasons for this. First of all, by taking a glimpse at the multiple ways in which disability has been defined in western countries - let alone in the rest of the world - the different definitions can be seen in their relevant temporal and spatial contexts and realized how shifting, conflicting and different the definitions have been.

Secondly, in order to understand the local construction of disabled identity, it is first necessary to outline the various attempts at defining disability on a broader global level. Disability is being defined at different 'sites', in other words on different levels and spheres of the social world. On one hand, disability is being defined on the broad societal and structural level with regard to institutions, experts and relations of power and dominance. These definitions are both structural and discursive and this is the level of definition that much of the disability research has been concerned with. On the other hand, disability is being defined on a local level as the meanings of disability are being reproduced in daily interaction between people. These definitions are discursive and to a great extent reflect the contents of the broader societal definitions of disability. The two sites of definitions are thus intermingled and the other cannot be understood without reference to the other. The focus of this study is on the latter, the local site, but in order to grasp its full meaning, the societal definitions must be thrown light upon.

Thirdly, the discussion of the official and the less official definitions of disability provides a backcloth or frame against which I will formulate my own position and elaborate the concepts of impairment and disability as used in this research. As my conceptualizations have not emerged out of thin air but reflect and criticize the other ways of defining disability it is necessary and fair to provide an overview of these as well.

The definitions of disability are shaped by the cultural and historical factors

of a particular society (Oliver and Barnes 1998). Consequently, disability is being defined in the temporal and local context and hence meanings of disability have varied and still vary across time and place. Here, I will limit the discussion to that of the relevant context: the definitions of disability in the Western world during the past few decades. The definitions of disability can be divided into two categories: the official definitions formulated by professionals and the unofficial definitions developed by disabled people themselves (Oliver and Barnes 1998:14). The first ones have been dominated by a medical and individual bias whereas the latter one stems from societal and social thinking. After the overview, I will explicate my own position in relation to these definitions criticizing and elaborating them from my point of view.

### **2.1 Medicalized and individualized definitions**

Disability has for long been defined as a medical and individual problem. This definition is also known as the individual model of disability or as a personal tragedy theory. (Oliver 1990, 1996, Barton 1996:299, Kitchin 1998:343) The World Health Organization (WHO) is the primary advocate of the medical definition of disability and it has been accused for privatising disability by placing the expertise on disability on the hands of professionals. (Lane 1995:184-186, Oliver and Barnes 1998:14-15) WHO rests on a three-fold typology of impairment, disability and handicap. With impairment, WHO refers to “any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function”, with disability to “any restriction or lack [...] of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being” and with handicap to “a disadvantage [...] resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal [...] for that individual”. (Wood, quoted in Oliver and Barnes 1998:15). These definitions carry several implications.

First of all, there is the issue of causal relations: according to the above definition, disability is caused by impairments (Oliver and Barnes 1998:15). The individual model of disability regards disability as the individual’s problem

resulting from limitations caused by one's impairment. This model ignores the role of society and its response in constructing disability and concentrates on the physiological or psychological deformation of a person (Oliver 1996:32-35, Oliver and Barnes 1998:15). Secondly, this definition implies the existence of normality from which impairment and disability are deviating (Oliver and Barnes 1998:15). This results in the idea that disability is something that ought to be treated and cured and to attempts to restore the disabled people closer to the preferred normality. The ideology of cure connected to the medical model implies alleged human perfectibility from which the disabled people are deviating from (Oliver and Barnes 1998:7). In other words, medical definitions promote the idea of improvement. The medical interventions resulting from this ideology may be considered both inappropriate and oppressive by the disabled people themselves who are not even asked whether medical cure is what they would prefer (Oliver and Barnes 1998:7). The individual and medical definition of disability thus locates the problem of disability within individuals and the control over them to the hands of a wide range of medical professionals. This fosters the idea of care instead of rights and control over choice. (Oliver 1996:32-35) Promoting cure and care means also promoting dependency.

The medical definition of disability maintains the wide range of medical professionals ready to intervene in the rehabilitation and treatment of disability and thus it in their interest to promote such a definition (Lane 1995:172-174). Albrecht (discussed in Oliver and Barnes 1998:54) argues that disability is in fact produced by 'the disability business', as he calls the health service. He suggests that one of the unspecified functions of the 'human service industries' or 'the disability business' is to create a category of dependent and seemingly invalued people in order to secure employment for others (Albrecht, discussed in Oliver and Barnes 1998:54). Also many organizations and advocacy groups of the disabled people themselves are to some extent involved in supporting the personal tragedy definitions. Even though new, social and societal, definitions of disability have gradually evolved in society, the roots of medical and individual models grow deep and still hold a somewhat hegemonized role.



## 2.2 Social definitions

During the past two decades a new model of disability has emerged to challenge the old one, one that has been created within the disabled community. Disability has become to be defined as a complex social and cultural construct that has to be considered also outside biomedical encounters, in its multiple cultural contexts (Barton 1996:299-300). Thus, the issue has more or less changed from defining disability to socially constructing it (Vehkakoski 1998).

According to Hevey (quoted in Lane 1993:172), the shift from the medical definition of disability to a social one has removed the focus from the individual disabled body to the interaction between people. The social model of disability has evolved out of rejection towards medicalization of disability and the idea that disability would be a personal tragedy (Oliver 1996:32-37). According to the social model, impairment refers to “lacking all or part of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body” but disability denotes “the disadvantage or restriction caused by contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities” (UPIAS, quoted in Oliver and Barnes 1998:17). The social model states that disability is something wrong with society concluding that disability is caused entirely by the barriers set up by society in failing to acknowledge the needs of disabled people. Consequently, society is held responsible for disabling people and thus society ought to be changed, not the disabled people. (Oliver 1996:32-37)

The social model of disability along with self-organized disability movements have provided disabled people with “alternative frames of reference within which to build their own identities” and redefine themselves (Swain and Cameron 1999:76). Disabled people are hence offered new tools with which to challenge the oppression and construct heterogenous, dynamic and alternative identities. Also the stereotypical cultural representations of disabled people have been challenged by alternative constructions within the practice of Disability Arts (Swain and Cameron 1999:76). Along with these changes disability can be celebrated as a positive and valid aspect of one’s identity. On a broader scale, as

the alternative self-definitions shift from medical to social, from dependency to pride on difference, the whole meaning of disability is gradually changing. (Swain and Cameron 1999:76-77)

### **2.3 Defining disability in this study**

After discussing the medical and social models and their definitions of impairment and disability, I will now offer my own response to them and redefine the relevant concepts from the perspective of my study. In order to justify and argue for the context-dependent and dynamic view of disability promoted in this study, which is heavily based on constructionist and discursive thinking, I will provide a short glimpse to the different meanings of disability and blindness in varying cultural and historical contexts. This will show concretely that disability obviously is socially constructed and that it is not an exclusively negative or positive concept but varying in sudden and surprising lines like any other social phenomenon.

#### **2.3.1 Disability as a social and discursive construct**

The way disability is defined within the scope of this study differs from both the above discussed definitions, but especially from the medical one. I prefer to define disability within the paradigm of social constructionism. Social constructionism is a research paradigm that originated within the sociology of knowledge around the 1960's, the classical work outlining its principles being '*The Social Construction of Reality*' (1966) by Berger and Luckman. The pivotal notion in social constructionism is the idea that social reality is not a pre-fixed entity but a product of continuous construction process by its members. What this means is that the world is produced and maintained by people and can only exist as such. The construction process of reality is based on the dialectical nature of language: the function of language as simultaneously reflecting reality but also constructing it, giving it shape and meaning. In other words, through language use in interactional settings and through social texts we gain shared meanings and our whole reality becomes interpreted. (Berger and Luckman 1966)

Social constructionism is an anti-essentialist paradigm, meaning that it rejects a view that there would exist some distinct human nature that could be explained through one omnipotent metanarrative. Rather, social constructionists see the social world as the product of a multitude of overlapping processes in a continuous change and thus it is impossible for them to be committed to the idea that the world or people would have a given, predetermined nature. (Burr 1995:5-6) In other words, “there are no ‘essences’ inside things or people that make them what they are” (Burr 1995:5). For a social constructionist the world is socially produced (Michael 1996:3-6). In this social world people are regarded as the active agents of the processes who construct the meanings in interaction (Jokinen et al. 1993:10, 31, Burr 1995:7). This remark means that social constructionism is a highly relativist approach, opposite to structuralist views (e.g. marxism). Thus constructionism emphasizes the plurality and situation dependency of social issues. Even though the emphasis of this study lies in the context-dependent and dynamic nature of identities, I still regard the social actors as constrained by various social practices: such as their social roles, economic, occupational or educational resources and also by their physical bodies. All these factors set up a framework within which the social actors can operate: they are not free from the material world.

As regards disability, a social constructionist view to disability means promoting the idea of disability as socially and discursively constructed. The meanings and definitions of disability are thus temporally and spatially context-dependent and hence there is no ultimate nature or meaning of disability as its meanings are constantly in flux. The meanings of disability do not only change on a large-scale dimension of different cultures or historical time-spans but its meanings are constructed on a small-scale, situational level as well.

To clarify the terminology that I am using in this study, I will briefly sketch the contents of the two main terms, impairment and disability, as I wish to use them. First of all, as to the definition of *impairment*, I completely agree with the way it is defined within the social model, as “lacking all or part of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body” (Oliver and Barnes

1998:17). Thus impairment refers to a physical and physiological condition. But with *disability* I wish to refer to the socially constructed manifestation of impairment. This means that disability refers to all socially constructed meanings and social dimensions of impairment. These meanings are constructed through language in social interaction. Consequently, disability does not exist as such, but it must always be actively constructed and formulated. Disability, then, consists of two aspects: a physical or mental impairment and of socially constructed meanings attached to it. Impairment and disability are thus not separate but intertwined. It is crucial to realize that the material and the social should not be dichotomously separated but that they are dependent on each other and reflect one another. The discursive construction of disability is always constrained by structural factors of society since social interaction is never free from such social constraints as social status, roles or the context of interaction. Disability is also constrained and influenced by impairment; the disabled body. Even though my focus in this study will be on exploring the discursively constructed meanings of disability, my aim is not to play down the important role that physical and mental impairments have on the ways in which disabilities become discursively signified. After all, the impaired body functions as the material or biological frame within which disability becomes negotiated, defining the limits and boundaries of disability.

*Disabled identity* refers to the identity of an impaired person that is socially constructed in an on-going process. With the term 'disabled identities', I do not imply any particular kind of identity as has been done in many disability studies. In other words, I do not refer to an identity that has been 'disabled' by society: a negative, inferior identity stemming from the medicalization of disability. I wish to keep the label free from such implications and use the term 'disabled identities' to refer to any kind of identities of disabled people. Secondly, I do not equal disability with a person's entire identity, but want to emphasize that disability is only one aspect of a disabled person's identity. Here I am using the shorter term, instead of using the term 'identities of disabled people', only for the purpose of convenience. I regard it both unfruitful and impossible to decide

beforehand what kind of an identity it is, whether it is a negative or a positive construction, or something else predetermined, as its meanings vary on a moment-to-moment basis. Disabled identity does not refer to a person's whole identity, but is one aspect or one identity of a person which may or may not emerge in particular context. Disabled identities are produced discursively, but they are also embodied since the impairments anchor the identities into the material reality defining the limits of disabled identities. However, my aim in this study is to explore the detailed linguistic and broader discursive construction of disabled identity and its social meanings in one interactional and mediated context.

Even though the social model of disability can be characterized as a model that is to a great extent based on constructionist notions (Vehkakoski 1998:91), I do not commit to their view of disability for various reasons. I do believe that the social model of disability has a significant role in highlighting the role of society in constructing disability and I also acknowledge the strong political potential of the model. But basically, I regard the model too deterministic and negatively biased. For my purposes, the social model of disability would provide a too deterministic and hence too narrow a view of disability as it claims that disability is always a negative and an unwanted condition even though some alternative voices have been raised appraising the difference. The social model of disability automatically assumes an oppressed role and identity of a disabled person but I do not prefer to settle that beforehand. This results from the fact that I believe that the meanings of disability emerge in local negotiation being multiple and changing and hence those meanings cannot be narrowed down beforehand but they must be explored inductively from the data. With such a position I am not ignoring or playing down the difficulties, oppression, pain, prejudice and barriers accounted by many disabled people in their daily lives which often make their lives a struggle. My claim is that this is certainly not always the case and the identities of disabled people can be and are also positive, cherished and valued. And most importantly, the nature of disabled identities should not presumptuously be determined or decided *for* disabled people beforehand but heterogeneous, ambivalent and inconsistent disabled identities should be allowed to be constructed.

Another important reason for not committing to the social model of disability despite its strong points, is the fact that it is an exclusively structuralist model claiming that disability is caused by the physical and material barriers set up by society but completely ignoring the role of language in disabling people and constructing meanings of disability. Since my aim is to study the linguistically and discursively constructed meanings of disability, the social model of disability is in this respect thus obviously inadequate. Shakespeare (1994:283) has also criticised the social model for neglecting “the questions of culture, representation and meaning” in the process of oppression of the disabled people. He goes on to say that these cultural representations are just as effective and powerful factors in influencing the disabling of people as are the physical barriers (Shakespeare 1994:296).

The reasons for rejecting the medical definitions of disability and not committing to them should be obvious. First of all, there is the issue of causation: the medical model suggests that disability is caused by impairment whereas I am promoting a view that disability arises and is constructed at a particular moment, socially and discursively. Impairment as such does not cause disability but disability is a complex phenomenon acquiring its meanings in interaction. Secondly, and more importantly, the medical model implies certain standards of normality of which the disabled people are regarded as deviating from. The idea of normality has been reified by the medical model of disability that both ignores the question of what normality is and also disregards “the situational and cultural relativity of normality” (Oliver 1990:4, referring to Nordenfelt). Personally, I strongly object to such a normative view of disability claiming that disabled people would be abnormal or deviant. Thirdly, I find the medical model problematic in the same sense as the social model of disability since they both view disability as an unwanted, negative state and thus imply a negative identity for disabled people. In contrast to this, I do not consider such a deterministic and pessimistic view helpful or fruitful for reasons discussed earlier in the chapter.

### 2.3.2 Cultural and temporal meanings of disability

The pivotal thesis in a constructionist view of disability is that the meanings of disability are “by no means universal” (Oliver and Barnes 1998:25). What this means is that the meanings of disability have varied and still vary cross-culturally and historically. Naturally, impairments have existed as long as the human being (Oliver and Barnes 1998:25). However, these impairments are not randomly distributed in the world but culturally produced depending on the particular environment and conditions (Oliver 1990:12), similarly to the processes of distribution of poverty or diseases. A more important insight from the constructionist perspective is, however, the fact that, in the words of Kleinman (1980:38):

beliefs about sickness [...] are all aspects of social reality. They [...] are cultural constructions, shaped distinctly in different societies and in different social structural settings within those societies

Oliver and Barnes (1998:27) argue that while social responses to impaired people cannot be explained through single autonomous factors, the way disability is understood is culturally produced through the complex dialogue between the mode of production and cultural value system. The organization of work in societies has evolved from small-rural based communities to the factory-based and later the fully industrialized mode of production. In accordance with this development, the involvement and inclusion of impaired people in the labour market has gradually diminished (Oliver 1990:26-28). Along with the mode of production, the cultural values systems influence the way disability is interpreted in society. Oliver (1990:29-30) paraphrases Comte in that the human intellectual process has evolved from religious to naturalistic and finally to scientific thinking. Accordingly, disability has been understood first as moral, then legal and nowadays a medical problem. Oliver points out that these three stages should not be considered mutually exclusive but existing simultaneously side by side but one model of thinking dominating the others. Still today all these interpretative frames can be simultaneously applied to understanding of disability. (Oliver 1990:30-31)

The way impairments have been understood in history has been strongly influenced by religious and moralistic undertones (Oliver 1990:20) and they have

also been subject to superstition and mysticism (Safilios-Rothschild 1970:6). Impairment was for long considered to be the compensation of sin and thus impaired people were regarded as living proofs “of Satans existence and of his power over humans” (Oliver and Barnes 1998:28). There has existed a strong folk belief in many cultures that especially “blindness was the punishment for sins committed” (Safilios-Rothschild 1970:5). In line with this thinking visually impaired people were called ‘changelings’, devils’ substitutes for children. The Bible and the church offered a “link between impairment, impurity and sin”. (Oliver and Barnes 1998:28)

As for non-western societies, there exist unfortunately little documented data on the status of disabled or deviant people in these cultures. However, it has been claimed that disabled people have occupied a somewhat problematic status in these societies but the societies’ responses to them have varied from those of preference and tolerance to harsh actions, such as killings of deviant people (Edgerton, discussed in Oliver 1990:15).

It has been suggested that the history of impaired people follows the development from inclusion to that of exclusion. In the earliest societies impaired people were included in the activities of the community (Oliver and Barnes 1998:26) thus having a role of full members of society. Still these people could be “subjected to controlling measures” such as bringing them into hospitals or under ridicule (Oliver and Barnes 1998:27). The exclusionary processes emerged fully along with the ideology of utilitarianism, progress and social Darwinism when weak or dependent people where regarded as a barrier to economic success of society. This lead to exclusion, abandonment and killing of impaired children, adults and elderly in societies where they were not regarded profitable to the economic production system. (Oliver and Barnes 1998:26, 29)

Still, not all times and societies have responded to impairments with such a negative bias. Nor do all societies exclude and place disabled people in the margins (Oliver 1990:20) and in many communities they have been considered valued members (Oliver and Barnes 1998:26). The fact that disability has been interpreted as the sign of being chosen or possessed by God has resulted in an



enhanced status of the disabled people in some societies (Oliver 1990:23). The rise of Christianity morality and consequent humanitarian values in the last century resulted in overly positive responses to disability, such as altruism and charity (Oliver and Barnes 1998:31). In a way, constructing disabled people as the objects of charity, pity and patronizing is just as prejudiced and oppressive as ridiculing or excluding them from society. Impaired people have also served as a source of amusement, ridicule and entertainment (Oliver and Barnes 1998:29). The obviously degrading and humiliating freak shows at the turn of this century that displayed human abnormalities or impaired people to the public's great amazement were a popular form of leisure time (Oliver and Barnes 1998:35).

It has been argued that the incline of industrialization was a major factor in the process of defining disabled people as an excluded group. The new industries and market economy rested upon waged labour which made a distinction between able-bodied and disabled-bodied workers. Since the disabled people were not considered profitable to the industrial society they were gradually excluded from it. (Oliver and Barnes 1998:30) Another factor in the course of history highlighting the significance of the category of disability resides in postmodern or post-Fordist society where the importance of social class divisions has declined and the social differentiation rests upon new criteria: sexuality, ethnicity or disability, for instance (Oliver and Barnes 1998:58). The rise of industrialism meant also the rise of institutionalism and consequently many disabled people were segregated into institutions (Oliver and Barnes 1998:30). Consequently, institutions served as a powerful tool for social control (Oliver 1990:28, 32) fostering isolated and segregated disabled identities. According to Oliver (1990:34), this is when disability "became a thing of shame", an object of stigmatization. Another obvious consequence of the utilitarian progressive ideas and institutionalization of disability was the medical intervention persistent ever since (Oliver 1990:48-49).

According to Oliver (1990:76), exploring the historical lines and development of historical process of disability is a necessary step in order to understand the cultural imagery of disabled people portrayed today and

consequently in order to grasp the formation of disabled identities. The above discussion has shown how disability and blindness are socially constructed: that there are no 'real' or 'true' meanings to them but they vary according to particular cultural and historical lines. Biological or mental impairments have been socially and discursively signified in various ways; in other words, impairments have been socially constructed as disabilities in multiple ways. As trivial as it may sound it is often forgotten that disabled people have occupied positions "as varied as any normal group. The gamut runs from ruler to outcast, from warrior to priest, from infant to aged" (Hanks and Hanks, quoted in Oliver 1990:18). But the meanings of disability do not only change at such a broad spectrum but similarly as the meanings of disability in ancient Greek may differ from and contradict with those of the 20th century so can disability be differently constructed and acquire even conflicting meanings on a moment-to-moment basis in varying contexts of our own time.

#### **2.4 Definitions of disability as political, economic and academic matters**

Above I have introduced some models and definitions of disability. These attempt to conceptualize disability, explaining its causes, consequences, solutions and even experiences of disabled people. In other words they define disability from a certain perspective at a particular time, in a given society.

It is crucial to realize that whichever definition of disability is accepted and promoted in society, it is not free from consequences. Adopting a particular model of disability several political implications follow as concerns the locus of control and expertise over disability, the causes and treatments of disability and its social meanings. Also my own position and own constructionist and discursive definition of disability is one viewpoint to the issue of disability stemming from my theoretical background and interests. Different definitions of disability justify a series of educational, legal, rehabilitational, medical and socio-political procedures concerning disabled people (Rioux, discussed in Vehkakoski 1998:88). Lane (1995:172) has phrased the same issue so that, "social problems, it seems, are partly what we make of them". The way a particular society at a particular time

understands disability, determines what the label 'disability' means and consequently how disabled people are treated, defined and perceived. It is no longer simply an academic matter as what construction of disability dominates since it has both political and economic consequences. (Lane 1995) It can be said that besides being an academic concern, adopting a particular discourse of disability is a political and economic act.

Probably the primary concern of defining disability has been the question of the locus of control. Many studies have addressed the issues of who has the right to define disability, whose voices are heard when disability is talked about and whose interests do the different constructions and definitions of disability serve. Even though civil rights movements have claimed that minorities ought to define themselves (Lane 1995:186), this ideal aim is still today far from reality. The right to define disability has unfortunately long located outside the disabled community, in the hands of outsiders. In the case of medical definitions, the locus of control is placed in the hands of medical professionals whereas the social definitions prioritize the definitions of disabled people themselves.

In the beginning of the chapter 2, I mentioned that the summary of different definitions of disability is necessary in order to understand the local meanings of disability and disabled identity. Now it is in order to elaborate this statement. Definitions of disability construct subject positions for disabled people, be they the passive victims of charity or active fighters for one's rights. Definitions also provide people with cultural resources they can resort to when they conceptualize disability. In other words, disability definitions provide people, both disabled and non-disabled, a frame of reference within which they understand disability.

Oliver and Barnes (1998:67) argue that "We come to know who we are and how we are perceived as individuals through our interaction with other people". Through socialization process we learn to perform the roles expected from us, the roles in line with other people's perceptions of us (Oliver and Barnes 1998:66). Consequently, the identities of disabled people reflect other people's definitions of them. These definitions in turn stem from the dominant definitions

of disability prevailing in society. The dominant disability definitions are reproduced on two levels: on a structural level by the medical institutions and physical environment and on a discursive level in numerous daily face-to-face interactions with parents, teachers, doctors, physiotherapists and others. Both these spheres are involved when disabled people construct their identities, structurally and discursively.

All the models and definitions of disability are socially constructed: they do not equal the truth, but are perspectives and representations of the issue at hand. But the prevailing disability definitions have reached a naturalized status in society and as such are no longer seen as social constructions at all but as the way things 'really are'. The constructions become hegemonized through the legitimization process led by doctors, welfare bureaucracy and special education and thus a disabled child easily becomes socialized into a role supporting the dominant constructions and internalizes this identity. (Lane 1995:174-177)

Now, after having introduced the definitions of disability and explicating my own position in relation to them, in order to proceed with the focus of the study, the discussion of disabled identities, it is necessary to define the concept of identity and explore the theoretical underpinnings of identity in this study.

### 3. FOUR DOMAINS OF IDENTITIES

Identity gives us a location in the world and presents the link between us and the society in which we live [...] identity gives us an idea of who we are and of how we relate to others and to the world in which we live. (Woodward1997:1)

Identity is an inherently social issue: identity refers to a position in the world and a relationship with others who live in this shared world. Thus, identity is in the very essence of being a human being, one of the most powerful but also problematic issues of social life. Identity can give us assurance and comfort of knowing one's place within society but it can also result in great anxiety, discomfort and hopelessness when one does not automatically find one's place in this world and when one is compelled to confront the essential question of: 'who am I?'

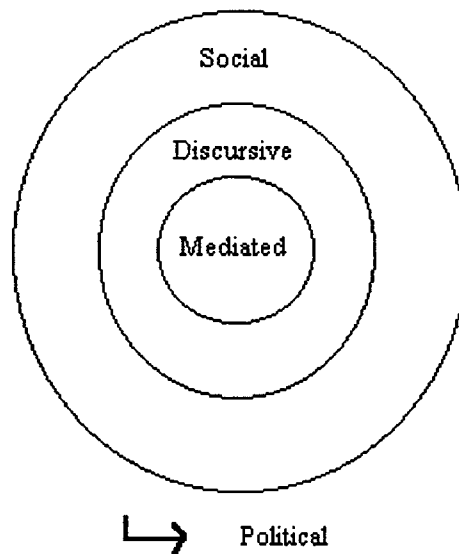
Identities can be approached from several different angles depending on the research paradigm in question. The study of identities has a rather contradictory history as the different approaches have conceptualized identity often in conflicting terms. Before explicating the premises of identity in this study, I will shortly explore the alternative ways of grasping the issue of 'identity'.

The traditional psychological view on identity sees self as a static entity. This entity is considered to have a true nature that can be described once and for all. (Potter and Wetherell 1987:95) In this traditional view identities and selves are considered to have certain permanent characteristics waiting to be discovered by the researcher. Opposite to this view is the constructionist approach which regards identities as inherently dynamic, changing and in the midst of a continuous construction process. Identities can on one hand be seen as the products of social structures, the material and political power structures and institutions or the outcomes of local interactional negotiation where the emphasis shifts from the global and structural sites to the local and discursive ones. Further, identities can also be divided into social and personal, where the former sees identities as a property of a social group and the latter one emphasises unique and individual identities.

The concept of identity in this research is mapped on four overlapping but

distinct domains whose theoretical underpinnings are discussed separately in the following. The four domains are identities as social, discursive, mediated and political constructs. These premises stem from the prerequisites of this particular study and all of them do not apply universally to the study of identities. I believe that identities are always social, discursive and political but not necessarily mediated. Even though a great deal of identity construction does occur through mediating channels (e.g. telephone, letters, TV, Internet) there still exists the strictly private conversations where identities are constructed face-to-face. The first three domains can be conceptualized as three concentric circles of which the outermost, or social, circle incorporates the other two, discursive and mediated. The last domain, identity as a political construct can more or less be considered as an outcome of the three other domains. Hence the fourth domain does not constitute a circle of its own in the configuration but it is inherently included in all the three circles.

Figure 1. Four domains of identities



This three-circled configuration of identity has been constructed for the purposes of this study, and it does not stem from any particular theory and it should not be confused with the Fairclough's three-dimensional methodological framework of this study explored in chapter 5.

### 3.1 Identities as social constructs

The most encompassing of the theoretical premises of identities is the first one. Identities as social constructs refers both to the institutional and structural construction of identity and the local, interactional negotiation of identity. The institutional construction of disabled identities has already been touched upon in the discussion of the different definitions of disability and here the exploration of the social proceeds on to the local level.

The idea of identities as social constructs stem from social constructionist theorizings of the nature of identity. The concept of identity as a social construct primarily means promoting a dynamic and an interactional view of identity. The overriding theoretical premise behind the idea of identities as local social constructs is that our shared social world is considered to be socially constructed, socially produced (Michael 1996:3-6). The social world comes into being when people negotiate its meanings in daily interaction and thus meanings and identities are considered shifting, dynamic, partial and inconsistent in nature. This view rejects the essentialist and entity-like conceptions of the world and identities and sees the social world rather as a product of multitude of overlapping processes in continuous change and thus it is impossible to be committed to the idea that there would exist a determined nature of the world. (Burr 1995:5-6) Consequently, instead of using the concept of 'self', constructionists prefer the concept of 'multitude of selves' that are continuously being constructed between people. (Potter and Wetherell 1987:102, Burr 1995:29, Wetherell 1996:224) In terms of identity this means objecting a view that sees identities as static and innate to people and promoting a *dynamic* view of them. Identities are regarded as shifting and only partially constructed, meaning that identities are considered changing, flexible and inconsistent rather than already present and determining. Consequently, identities are constantly struggled over. (Wetherell 1996:224-227) Since identities are regarded as inconsistent and being under a constant change, it becomes necessary to continuously define and redefine oneself within various sociocultural settings and in relation to various other people. This can also be referred to as the struggle over identity. More specifically, the struggle over

identity can also refer to a conscious - and often political - quest for identities, usually among oppressed and marginal groups in society. In this respect, I will discuss the issue of struggle more thoroughly in chapter 3.4.

Michael (1996:12-14) has discussed the same idea of multitude of selves under the label decentering self.

we can no longer assume that the self is some coherent, unitary, discrete entity. Rather, it is constituted through, and from, various linguistic resources that are mobilized according to the exigencies of particular times and places (Michael 1996:11)

In the quotation Michael draws attention to the context of constructing self which should be included in the research. The contexts of identity negotiations vary according to the participants, the settings, the goals in question and thus identity never looks the same. Identities as social constructs entail the idea of process-like nature of identities. Identities can never be fully explained or even discovered because no version of social reality is permanent and final but there is an on-going struggle over social meanings. (Jokinen et al. 1993:102) However, identity is also about stability. Even though identities are fragmented, plural and inconsistent, people still have a strong feeling of being 'the same time' (Woodward 1997:22). People have a tendency to create stability and continuity to their life narratives and identities and thus construct a rather stable sense of self. Furthermore, since identities are always constructed under certain social, material and discursive constraints and under discursive and sociocultural *practices* they are subject to stability.

Socially constructed identities or multitude of selves are not constructed in a vacuum but in the social world between people. In this social world people are regarded as the active agents of the processes who construct the meanings and identities in *interaction* (Jokinen et al. 1993:10, Burr 1995:7).

we are fundamentally many, never just one [...] because we are members of diverse conversational communities, [...] others with which to frame our experiences and render them (Sampson, quoted in Michael 1996:14)

we gain a self only in and through a process of social interaction, dialogue, and conversation with others in our social world; that the only knowledge we can have of ourselves appears in and through social forms - namely, others' responses (Sampson, quoted in Michael 1996:14)



What this interactional construction of identities means in terms of people in the margins of society, is that they mainly have to construct their identities in relation to the members of the majority in society and reflect those responses and attitudes back on their identities. Thus the situation is by no means equal but involves struggles over power and hegemony.

The idea that identities are interactionally and locally produced implies a *relativist* approach to identity, opposite to structuralist views (e.g. marxism). Structuralists claim that the prevailing social structures in society determine the shape of people's lives whereas relativists claim that people are rather free to construct their shared social worlds in joint interaction. Thus constructionism emphasizes the plurality and situation dependency of identities. Identities are not considered to be properties of individuals but those of social context because "group and individual identities emerge from the social context" (Wetherell 1996:224) or as Burr (1995:53) puts it "our identity [...] originates from the social realm". What this means is that there exist certain potential discourses in society that people can draw on when constructing identities and use in making sense of their own identities. The social context here refers to the social practices people engage in their daily lives, not social structures (Burr 1995:7-8). However, social constructionism acknowledges that social structures do have an impact on the shape of people's daily lives through dominant discourses and by establishing social institutions, such as law, marriage or divorce that offer people positions and statuses, e.g. that of a husband and wife.

Personally, I do not commit to the extreme relativist view of identities since I do consider the impact of social structures relevant in the process of identity negotiation. This is inherent in the approach by critical discourse analysis. However, the extreme structuralist views of social structures as *determinants* of identities is also problematic. There are no permanently dominating discourses in society and it is not even self-evident which discourses are dominant in society (Burr 1995:56). Furthermore, social constructionist researchers have showed that even the strong prevailing discourses of society are in constant change, even though a slow one, as has happened to in the case of gender discourses in the

1900's (Burr 1995:7-8, 54-56). In addition to this, the constructionist approach to identity does not mean rejecting the social structures altogether but abandoning the deterministic and essentialist approach. Since identities are produced in the social world and within social and discursive practices they do have a political aspect to them discussed in chapter 3.4.

### **3.2 Identities as discursive constructs**

Conceptualizing identities as social constructs means regarding identities as discursive since the social world is considered to be a product of discursive relations. Within theorisations about identity there has been a strong tendency for a turn-to-text approach, its aim being:

to displace attention from the self-as-entity and focus it on the methods of constructing the self [...] how is the self talked about, how is it theorized in discourse  
(Potter and Wetherell 1987:102)

As regards all meanings, also identities are mainly constructed through linguistic and discursive practices, within language. Thus, language is the central locus where identities are realized, constructed and also struggled for. (Potter and Wetherell 1987:102-108, Burr 1995:33, 43) In other words, "language is the site where subjectivity is constructed" (Grodin and Lindlof 1996:4). Representations of the social world - and identities - are "built out of a variety of pre-existing linguistic resources" (Potter and Wetherell 1987:33). Thus one representation is a matter of choosing and active selection of resources where some become included and others excluded (Potter and Wetherell 1987:33). The role of discourse in identity construction is highlighted in the following: "To talk at all is to construct an identity [...] Identity is accomplished as people speak." (Wetherell 1996:224). The quotation does not exclude other domains of constructing identities, such as the material and physical encounters; like for instance the body, but turns primary focus to language and claims - justifiably to my mind - that whenever we engage in discursive encounters we are adding to the never-ending chain of identity negotiations. Whenever we open our mouths to say something or put some words on a paper or on a computer screen we are constructing and conveying one version of us. People use language "to make salient a range of

identities through a given conversation or sequence of conversations, [...] these identities can be ratified or denied by particular conversational partners” (Hamilton 1996:84). Furthermore, language is a special domain for identity constructions: it is the medium through which we explicate and lexically dress up the meanings we assign to our embodied or materially constructed identities, for example.

Discourse can be understood as both constructing and reflecting people’s identities (Hamilton 1996:84). In other words, discourses bring up new identities but also refer to earlier ones, in the form of intertextuality. Hamilton suggests that “participants use what was constructed in one conversation as a resource in subsequent conversations”, hence creating a chain of intertextually connected forums for constructing identities (Hamilton 1996:81). Even though it is acknowledged that identities are changing and dynamic, the recurrent patterns of identity constructions explain the feelings of stability and recurrency of identities.

Different discourse types offer different identities and subject positions for people. Peräkylä (1990:20) defines identity as the rights, obligations and characteristics that the individual ascribes to oneself and to other people and what other people in turn ascribe to the individual. The way a person is defined within a particular discourse and what his/her potentials are is more or less restricted but still, one can appear in multiple, even conflicting discourses and thus construct oneself in conflicting terms (Jokinen et al. 1993:39).

### **3.3 Identities as mediated constructs**

The mediated domain of identities is subordinate to the discursive domain of identities as the media is one specific instance of discursive constructions of identities. In this study the mediated domain of identities constitutes the innermost circle of identity configuration described on pages 28 and 29.

Postmodern societies have been claimed “to accord a higher value to televisual images than to offscreen, lived realities” (Priest 1996:69). Whether or not one is willing to agree with such a strong statement, the fact that the media holds an immense power upon people in today’s society is unescapable. The media is more and more often becoming the setting and context of modern identity

constructions and as an institutional and public context the media is due to have an impact on identity constructions taking place within its context. In this study the media sets up the frame within which the construction of identity takes place and thus it is necessary to establish the mediated nature of identity as one of the four premises of identity.

Mediated communication has a dual impact on identity constructions affecting both the identities of audiences and those appearing within the media setting. On one hand, the media enables the audience to encounter “diverse people representing different social enclaves” (Grodin and Lindlof 1996:4), thus bringing the audience into contact with people from varied socio-cultural backgrounds and consequently representing more varied and heterogenous discourses. Via the media people have access to multiplicity of discourses and variety of conversations (McNamee 1996:149). These discourses are drawn upon when people construct their social worlds and identities. But on the other hand, the media also affects the identity constructions of the people within the context: the participants in the talk-shows, radio call-ins and dating programmes. The construction of identity is dependent on the language used in a particular setting which in turn is dependent on the patterns of interaction, discursive traditions and discursive communities of that setting (McNamee 1996:150). When identity negotiation takes place within the media setting, the discursive practices of the media, with their typical and conventionalized ways of production and consumption come into being and cannot be ignored either by the participants nor the audience (Fairclough 1992).

The discourse of the media has extensively been discussed by Fairclough (1992, 1995b, in press). He has concluded that the media is a sphere combining elements of both the private and public domains of life which evidently has resulted in growing tensions between them (Fairclough 1995b:10). As any social practice, also the media has its own specific ways of recontextualizing other discourses within its own conventions, also those of the lifeworld (Fairclough 1992, in press). The practices of the media in relation to the construction of disabled identities will be discussed further in chapter 4.1.

### 3.4 Identities as political constructs

As was mentioned already, the political nature of identities is an outcome or an inevitable consequence of the theoretical premises that commitment to the three previous domains of identity imply. In case identities are conceived as originating in the social realm, being dependent on the hegemonized discourses and influenced by the biased representations of the media, identities are nothing but political.

In this study also the political underpinnings of identities are acknowledged and their discussion mainly reflects theorizings of critical research but also some constructionist voices. As regards identity construction, CDA is a very beneficial approach in that it aims at showing how discursive practices, such as identity constructions are inherently influenced by social structures and conditions. This means locating the construction of disabled identities within the conventions of the media, to the ongoing social change as regards defining disability and disabled identities and considering the influence of the hegemony of certain discourses, such as the medical discourse, in the case of disability.

In her study of lesbian identities Johnston (discussed in Kitzinger 1989:94) concludes that identities are inherently political since they are social constructions created within ideological frames. Particular constructions are promoted or suppressed according to the interests of the dominant social order, to maintain their own interests and promote hegemony. These processes locate the origins of identities in their sociocultural and political contexts, and thus the patterns of contemporary ideologies should be attempted to explain as they become the resource of identity constructions. (Kitzinger 1989:82-83, 94, Wetherell 1996:221) Burr (1995:140) uses the term positioning when referring to the processes “by which our identities as persons come to be produced by socially and culturally available discourses”. Hence, “models of the self are inevitably culturally and historically contingent” (Potter and Wetherell 1987:102). People can only try to make sense of themselves in the words of existing discourses but it depends on them how these discourses are locally managed and realized in daily interaction. It is in this context - both interactional and sociocultural - that for different ends

and under various conditions people's self-presentations are realized (Potter and Wetherell 1987:37).

As discussed above, the dominant discourses of the social order are the ones available for people in constructing their identities. For marginal groups social identity construction may thus turn out to be problematic (Harré, discussed in Murray 1989:180). All the people are constantly involved in the struggles over meanings and claiming themselves identities within discourses available to them but it is not until we look at the margins of society that the struggle over identities appear in its full meaning (Kitzinger 1989, Burr 1995:76). Discourses mainly reflect the needs and nature of majority people and those discourses that are actually supported and fostered in society are those legitimizing the morals and ideology of the dominant social order (Kitzinger 1989). Thus, the members of minorities have to negotiate their identities in relation to these discourses that take little or no account of their lived realities, discourses which can hence be rather homogenous and poor in contents. Priestley (1999:93) points out that the discourses that disabled people are usually subject to are those of tragedy, medicalization and otherness. It is evident that these discourses of disability and cultural representations nourished especially by the media tend to be one-dimensional and stereotypical. These frames provide overly simplistic resources for disabled people to define themselves. (Swain and Cameron 1999:71)

Identity is an inherently relational notion. Identities are always constructed in terms of oppositions, such as man/woman, black/white, disabled/non-disabled (Woodward 1997:2). Basically, the construction of identities circulate between being the same and being different, a process of signification that always involves relations of power. The opposition between sameness and difference is maintained both through symbolic and social means. The first refers to the symbolic representations of these identities in various cultural contexts and the latter to more structural ways of exclusion and inclusion of particular social groups. These processes are distinctive and different but they are both needed in the processes of marking out difference. (Woodward 1997:4-15) In this study, the focus is obviously on the symbolic aspect of identity.

Perhaps most emphatically this issue of sameness and difference of identities is promoted in the social and political movements of usually marginal or stigmatized groups in society. For them, identities basically come down to the question of marking of 'us' and 'them'. (Woodward 1997:1-12) The so called 'new social movements', such as the social model of disability, claim that this marking out takes place through established systems of classification and binary oppositions which result in problematic definitions and classifications of social groups and individuals (Woodward 1997:24-36). For these groups, identities are often "distinguished by what it is not", in other words identities are marked out by how these groups are different from the majority (Woodward 1997:9). Thus they have risen to oppose these traditional institutional certainties questioning why and how certain people come to be subjected to these identity positions and why they themselves grow to accept them. This process of rejecting the old certainties and naturalisations of identity positions and the claiming of new alternative identity positions have been called the 'crisis of identity'. (Woodward 1997:1-12)

For the new social movements identity has become a major asset in their political mobilization. Claiming an identity of a marginalized and stigmatized group of society is considered to be the point of departure in the political campaigning for new and alternative identities. This kind of an 'identity politics', as Woodward calls it, includes cherishing the uniqueness of one's previously oppressed identity and rejection of the specific forms of oppression. The new social movements claim that societal oppression and discrimination has moved away from class-based oppression to new social domains where such class-transcending factors as gender, race, religion or disability may come to play a crucial role. (Woodward 1997:24-26) One way of challenging the traditional certainties is through new symbolic systems and representations of disability, for instance. As Benson (1997:125) puts it, "the physically impaired cannot change their physical bodies but may seek to rewrite the impaired body as represented in culture".

To conclude this eclectic view identity outlined in this study, my primary focus as concerns identities is in their discursively constructed character. First and

foremost, I consider identities produced, maintained and negotiated through language. Secondly, I regard identities to be inherently fragmented, plural, heterogenous and changing since they are continuously being defined and redefined - socially constructed. However, these discursively constructed identities are socially constrained. In other words, people cannot freely position themselves since on one hand, the discursive practices are constrained by the body and human physicality and on the other hand, they are constrained by the social structures, such as the institutions, roles and norms of society. These social practices also bring stability to identities. As concerns disabled identities in specific, my interest lies in the exploration of the linguistically and discursively constructed meanings of disability but I will take the discursive practices of the media and the sociocultural practices of the relevant social context (e.g. hegemonized discourses, closure, social change of disability definitions) into account. In addition to this, I regard disability - similarly to identity in general - to be an embodied identity since the physical or mental impairment provides a frame within which the meanings of disability are negotiated.

An illustrative metaphor could serve to summarize the premises of identities discussed above. As Burr (1995:51-52) has eloquently described, identity is like a fabric woven together by different threads. The different threads could stand for different aspects of identity, like gender, occupation, status, age, nationality and so on. As these threads are woven together at a particular instance, one construction of identity is produced. This construction is situation-dependent and it is a process, not a fixed final stage in defining identity. For each different thread we have a certain amount of socially limited discourses that can be drawn upon and thus the social practices always influence the realizations of identities. In this study, I regard blindness theoretically as one thread in the fabric of the interviewee's identity standing in equal relationship to all other potential, multiple identities in the interaction. Methodologically, though, I have chosen blind identity as the focus of my study and will study the other aspects of identities specifically in relation to blind identity. All aspects of identity are mutually co-constructed as they all interact and influence each other, one of them being foregrounded and the



other backgrounded depending on the particular context and occasion. Now, after having explored the theoretical underpinnings of identity configuration in this study, I will restrict the discussion to one particular aspect of human identities, that of disabled identities.

#### **4. DISABLED IDENTITIES AND THE MEDIA**

Disabled identities have received a fair amount of attention among academics within various disciplines and more and more often among disabled researchers, and therefore studies on disabled identities are rather heterogenous varying in their theoretical approaches, methodology and data. The research paradigms behind the various studies are extremely heterogenous stretching from social policy and sociology to special education and pedagogics and consequently there does not even exist consensus on the way 'disability' is defined. Since I am committed to the constructionist and discursive view of disability and rest on the specific definitions of impairment and disability outlined earlier, I will not provide any overview of the findings of previous research on disabled identities as they stem from such strikingly different backgrounds. Instead, I will bring together the main arguments of the previous two chapters and discuss the premises of the study of disabled identities in the mediated context. Firstly, I will briefly discuss the issue of constructing disabled identities in the media which refers to the mediated conditions of identity negotiations of disabled people taking place within the media context. In addition to this, I will provide a short overview of the studies concentrating on the representations of disability and disabled identities in the media, in other words representations of disabled identities from the outside. At the end of the chapter I will point out some of the inadequacies in studies in the area of disabled identities and lay ground and motivate my own position within the field differing from the earlier research.

##### **4.1 Constructing disabled identities in the media**

Disability has come to stand for various issues in different temporal and spatial contexts and disabled identities are being defined in multiple ways in numerous sites. Woodward (1997:14-15) argues that one very influential site of identity negotiations is the area of symbolic representations through which contested identities are given meanings and signified in various ways. One symbolic site of defining and especially constructing disabled identities that has

gained more and more influence in society is the media. Within the media, the construction of social phenomena is carried out through language and other symbolic systems of meanings, such as the moving image. As a form of public sphere, the media has power invested in it which makes it an active and valid social actor in society (Fairclough 1995b). The media maintains, fosters but also creates particular societal meanings of disability by giving them space and participating in their legitimation process. For example, the ideologies of individualism and independence are discursive constructions that are first and foremost maintained by the media and would otherwise die out.

Even though the media is a powerful tool in the political hegemonization process of disability discourses it is also the site where alternative voices can be heard and where the normative definitions can be challenged. The media is more and more often a channel for disabled people to speak for themselves and construct their identities themselves. Thus the media enables societal change and transformation of meanings. Despite this positive side of allowing change and struggle over meanings within its context, the media has always its conventionalized discursive practices and in the media the social groups, such as the disabled people have to operate under these constraints, such as being positioned in particular institutional roles, being subjected to the journalistic agendas of the reporters and being physically situated in a certain context. So even though the voice of the disabled people can be heard in the media, this voice has always been subjected to a set of constraints which it must obey and follow.

As a setting for constructing identities the media is one that operates on a fast tempo, is usually based on the interaction between the participants and is inherently dynamic and procedural. Such a context has the potential of allowing multiplicity of meanings, constant negotiation and struggle over identities within its range and the fluid and continuously changing borders and contents of definitions of social issues. As regards constructing disabled identities, this means not settling for only one meaning of disability or static disabled identities but the media functions as a context which can bring even conflicting meanings together, allowing multiplicity of identities and voices to emerge. Having the power of

bringing several participants together representing various social strata of community, the media supports mutual negotiations of identities and attempts at fitting together even quite conflicting ideas and meanings. For disabled people this means the possibility to negotiate their identities with the non-disabled majority in public.

On the whole, the media enables the study of meanings of disability with a shift of focus from the traditional field of medicine to the multiplicity of modern contexts. As such, the media forms a significant cultural context in society where such issues as health, illness and disability have since long been brought out from the strictly medical contexts to the broader level of public discussion. The media can bring even the marginalized social issues close, into the living rooms of its audiences thus it has the ability of raising awareness of social issues such as disability and making them heard in public.

#### **4.2 Representing disabled identities in the media**

According to Oliver (1990:61-62, 76), in order to understand the identity formation of disabled people it is necessary to explore the cultural images and representations of disabled people in the media for they are crucial constraints in the experience of disability. This refers to studies exploring the ways in which disabled people have been portrayed in different forms of the media: literature, newspapers and films, for example. Representations refer to “the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced and which position us as subjects” (Woodward 1997:14) In the extreme, the cultural representations of disability create the possibilities for disabled people to be and to become. They offer disabled people the subject positions from which to speak and to construct identities. However, people do have the power to reconstruct or reposition them in relation to these representations, they are not passively at the mercy of them (Woodward 1997:14).

The media reflects the values of the social world by reconstructing the ‘truths’ or beliefs of the society. In the case of disability, the media is a major factor maintaining and promoting the constructions of disability dominant in

society. Thus it is not surprising that the negative cultural stereotypes of disability also flourish in all forms of the media. According to Oliver and Barnes (1998:64), “much of the responsibility for the public image of disability lies with the media”. The way the media reconstructs social phenomena is a significant factor in influencing the public opinion but also identity formations of disabled people (Elliott and Byrd 1982:348, Oliver and Barnes 1998:63-64). Lane (1995:184) concludes that social problems are favourite themes in the media and they are “always presented as private troubles”. In case the media decides that disability sells better and is more entertaining as a private trouble it can heavily promote such a view and have a strong influence on the audiences.

The mediated imagery of disabled people is dominantly negative (Oliver and Barnes 1998:65), and mainly disabled people are occupying secondary roles (Hafferty and Foster 1994:188). Disabled people have been depicted in narrow, stereotypical and homogenous ways that reinforce false negative images on disabled people (Elliott and Byrd 1982:353, Wertlieb 1985:1054). Disabled people are often constructed as abnormal, deviating from normality (Shakespeare 1999:165). Shakespeare (1999:165) concludes that the depictions of disability in the media fall on three categories: the tragic but brave invalid (e.g. Tiny Tim), the sinister cripple (e.g. Dr No) and the supercrip (e.g. Helen Keller). In all of these, the impairment is highlighted as the most important aspect of a person, one that calls either for pity, evilness or supernatural accomplishments. It has also been claimed in the case of children’s literature that disability is being represented as a fixed and static state which dominates all aspects of the person’s identity thus promoting a homogenous and unambivalent picture of disability and disabled identities (Davidson et al. 1994:42). Disabled characters appear often in crime and thriller films either as the evil criminals or the passive, pitiful victims (Oliver and Barnes 1998:65).

According to Kitchin (1998:351), the understanding of disability in society has been heavily influenced by cultural representations and myths that have constructed disabled people as deviant, as the Other. Deviance from normality has included abnormality, antisociality, inferiority and danger. Some writers have even

gone so far as to say that disabled people have been regarded as non-human, burdens of charity or diseased organisms with monster images. (Kitchin 1998:351) According to Wertlieb (1985:1054), disabled people are depicted in a stereotypical way by connecting them to violence and fear.

When disabled people are not represented in an overly negative light, the imagery is turned upside down and disabled people become “better than average, as overly good” (Thurer 1980:13) as the category of the supercrip in Shakespeare’s (1999:165) threefold classification suggests. According to Hafferty and Foster (1994:187), due to the commercial nature of the media in the United States the physical impairments are usually portrayed in “highly ‘positive’ [...] or idealized manner” to avoid controversy. In this case impaired people are often endowed with extra talents and compensating characteristics (Hafferty and Foster 1994:192). So, mediated representations are almost always biased and according to Thurer (1980:12), “There are almost no average or ordinary and ‘by the way’ physically aberrant characters.”.

One of the most damaging aspect of cultural imagery of disability has been the use of disability as “a symbol or embodiment of psychological insight” (Elliott and Byrd 1982:349). In other words, disability has been interpreted as a sign of inner defect or demoralized nature of a disabled person. The use of disability as a mark of any inner defect has grown into a convention rather than curiosity (Thurer 1980:12). The physical or mental impairment has come to equal a moralistic metaphor in many cultural representations of disabled people in which the impairment stands for punishment or compensation of sin, monstrous character or evil nature. These kinds of famous literary characters include Melville’s Captain Ahab, Oedipus and Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s lover. (Thurer 1980:12-14)

These cultural representations enforce and legitimize the passive and dependent role of a disabled person also promoted by the welfare policy. The idea that disabled people are faced with a medical problem is being underlined and their active contribution in society is considered impossible and unvalued (Oliver and Barnes 1998:65). According to Oliver (1990:62), they also enhance the ideology of individualism and thus turn disability into an individual dilemma. Even though

some of these stereotypes are extreme ones and often created and existing only within film industry, they are bound to have an impact on individual disabled identities. According to Thurer (1980:14), such stereotyping “adds the unnecessary pain of negative stigma” for disabled people. Since these are the discourses and cultural representations in relation to which disabled people are to claim their identities, the situation is seriously limiting and oppressive. According to Oliver (1990:62), these cultural images of disabled people both distort the actual experiences of disability and provide unhelpful role models for disabled people.

However, Shakespeare (1999:170) shows how disability discourses in films and other media are more complex and multiple than often claimed. He points out that many films about disability become automatically and quickly rejected and labelled as stereotypical even though a deeper reading could prove some of these interpretations false. He also acknowledges the realistic and multi-faceted accounts of disability that do not fall on one-sided and stereotypical depictions, such as the recent British film *Breaking the Waves*. (Shakespeare 1999)

Obviously, the studies on representations of disability aim at showing how disabled people and their identities are represented in the media from the outside whereas the purpose of this study is to explore how disabled identity is being constructed within the media context, from the inside, by an impaired person himself. Thus they are not applicable as such for the purposes of this study but still clearly mark the relationship between the media and disability in the 20th century. But when these studies arrive at grim conclusions summarizing that “television does stigmatize people with disabilities” (Elliott and Byrd 1982:350) one must not be satisfied with this but ask whether it is possible to seek alternative imagery of disabled people in the media. I believe that the alternative, challenging and heterogenous imagery of disabled identities could be also be found in the media when the ones constructing these images are disabled people themselves.

### **4.3 The limits of previous studies on disabled identities**

Until quite recently there has been a serious lack of discursive and linguistic research on disability and disabled identities but in the past year or two disability researchers have been beginning to contribute to the exploration of the discursive field of disability as well (e.g. Corker and French 1999). It is only now that the researchers are starting to call for scholarly, theoretically and methodologically challenging discussion on discursive construction of disability but there is also need for empirical studies exploring the issue.

The few studies that have been carried out from a linguistic or discursive viewpoint, have concentrated on medical and institutional discourses and interactional practices especially concentrating on the theme of power (Barton 1996:300-301). Still, linguistic analysis is essential if we want to understand “the ways that language surrounds and shapes the experience of disability” (Barton 1996:301). In case we acknowledge that disability is a social construct we are faced with studying “the role of language in establishing, maintaining, and reflecting [disability’s] social nature” (Barton 1996:300). Stemming from constructionist background, language plays a crucial and critical role in constructing identities (Hamilton 1996:61-62) and thus should become the focus of study.

Secondly, the data of previous studies on disabled identities have consisted of life biographies and histories, interviews, ethnographic observation and conversations. In most of these studies, the data have been regarded as a reflection of reality, as a mirror of the real world. This study stems from a different tradition in which the status of construction ought to be applied to all kinds of data. What this means is that interviews, conversations and biographies are considered to be representations or versions of reality constructed in terms of a particular context, with particular goals and from a particular perspective. Thus the question shifts from the “What really happened?” to “How and with what consequences the experiences become constructed in this context?”

Also the approach to identity in previous research on disabled identities has been somewhat contradictory. Most studies on disabled identity have



considered identity as a relatively stable entity characteristic to a person. It has been acknowledged that identities change and transform, for example in the case of an injury when the person must integrate the new disabled identity into the old non-disabled identity (Yoshida 1993). Here identity is not seen as dynamic on a moment-to-moment level but changing on the scale of broader phases of life and as such resembling the traditional view of identity within developmental psychology. Within constructionist and discursive approach to identity, it is impossible to speak about 'the former self' and 'the new self' as if identity could be divided into such neat categories. Rather, identities change and evolve gradually and constantly, tragedies, such as injuries being only single factors among others affecting the processes of identity constructions. Thus, I believe that a study in which identities are regarded as dynamic, not only diachronically but also synchronically becomes relevant.

But constructionist disability research has its critics too. Gabel (1999:38-39) argues that many studies on disability conducted from a constructionist framework have promoted the idea of "the social construction of disability as *happening to* the disabled people rather than *controlled by* them". In other words, the critics are claiming that constructionist research pays more attention to the social construction process of disability in general, rather than emphasizing the active contribution of disabled people in this process. Consequently, Gabel (1999:38) calls for research that does not construct disabled people as passive victims but as active social actors challenging oppression and negotiating their identities. Also Oliver and Barnes (1998:xv) criticize postmodernist and constructionist research on disability which regard the world as discursively constructed and hence - according to them - plays down the importance of material aspects of disability. To respond to the first point of criticism, in this research the identity of the disabled person is being constructed in interaction with the non-disabled interviewer. Still, the disabled person is a pivotal character: he is the one who is the active and central figure in constructing his own identity, composing his story in his own words. As regards the second point, constructionists and discourse analysts do not necessarily ignore the material

aspects of social phenomena but they claim that the social world acquires its *meanings* through language and this is the aspect they focus on. Also Oliver and Barnes (1998:xv) admit that discursive analysis is valid, but for them it is only a limited part of the truth.

The focus of this study is on the discursive construction of disabled identity but I do not in any way intend to ignore that blindness is a very much physical and physiological experience. Physicality; the impaired bodies obviously set up constraints and thus influence the discursive meanings attributed to disabled identities. Thus, I believe that it is important to combine aspects from structuralist and constructionist approaches and hence build a broader and more profound understanding of the complex compound of disabled identity. Kitchin (1998:343) points out that both political and constructionist approaches are needed in order to explain how wide-reaching the process of exclusion and marginalization of disabled people is in society. With political approaches he refers to models that emphasize the role of society in determining disabled identities, such as the social model of disability by Oliver (see Oliver 1990, 1996) which states that disability is a social construct maintained to promote capitalist concerns established through the ideology of individualization and medicalization. On the other hand, he calls for social constructionist theorizings which emphasize that all people are unique and thus categories and labels like disability are merely misnomers and learned categorizations that protect the ideology of sameness instead of accepting difference. To understand disability and its relationship with society both political and constructionist approaches must be combined. (Kitchin 1998:344-345, 354) There is a reciprocal relationship between discursive or sociocultural experience of disability and the material circumstances of disability in society (Corker and French 1999:7). This combined approach is able to explain how disabled people are given the exclusive role in society both through capitalist structures and the socio-cultural processes in the form of stereotypical cultural representations and myths about disability fostered in daily interaction. (Kitchin 1998) These two approaches should not be seen as opposite or mutually exclusive but seen on a continuum with the possibility of completing each other. And it must be

remembered that the dichotomy between political and constructionist research is not clear-cut. For instance critical discourse analysis is both a constructionist and a politically motivated approach. As Kitchin (1998:354) has concluded:

It has been contended that disability is best understood through an approach that combines a spatialised political economy with social constructivism. This approach recognises the centrality of power; the multifaceted ways and reasons for the socio-spatial exclusion of disabled people; and the complexity of strategies of domination and resistance. Disability is not only a function of capital relations but is also tempered by stigma and fear of the unknown.

In this study disability is regarded as a social construct negotiated in interaction but the influence of the social structures on these negotiations is acknowledged and the relevant theoretical background for this is provided by critical discourse analysis which takes the discursive and sociocultural practices into account. Besides considering the effects of social structures on local constructions of meaning, the physical and thus material side of disability is acknowledged through defining impairment as purely physical or mental condition and disability as the socially constructed meanings attached to impairment and finally acknowledging that impairment does influence and constrain the potential meanings of disability.

#### **4.4 A new direction for the study of constructing disabled identities?**

The different discourses circulating disability have constructed disabled people in many ways, depending on the temporal and cultural context. Disabled people have for long been constructed as passive victims, individual tragedies, supercripples, evil villains and many more. The social and societal discourses of disability stemming from the definitions by the disabled people themselves have implied a new direction. Disabled people are now re-creating their stories, phrasing them in their own words. According to the social model, acknowledging the fact that disability is socially constructed implies that on the level of individual identity, personal becomes political (Oliver 1996:11-17, Oliver and Barnes 1998:63). The disabled identity is being re-evaluated in a political context by challenging the traditional constructions. Further, the political disabled identity is being cherished as a collective social identity with shared political aims, e.g. full

participation, employment and education. (Oliver and Barnes 1998:71-72)  
Disabled people are now beginning to redefine themselves in these terms.

Since disability is no longer merely regarded as a matter of definition, but that of construction, also new methods and approaches are needed for studying disability. At the time, there is both a lack and a need for discursively focused research on the ways disabled identities become constructed. Partly, the construction of disabled identity takes place within language, within interaction between people who construct identities and partly outside language, with regard to body or material environment. These identities hold implications as concerns the evident characteristics, rights and obligations considered to be inherent in disabled people (Vehkakoski 1998:93). In other words, language use is never without consequences and the fact that meanings are constructed through linguistic practices, an immense power is invested in language use. One way of tackling the discursively constructed disabled identities will be introduced in the following chapter.

## 5. TOWARDS DISCURSIVELY CONSTRUCTED DISABLED IDENTITIES - METHODS OF ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will introduce an alternative way of studying disabled identities, one that takes a linguistic and discursive point of view. I will discuss both the broad theoretical and methodological frameworks behind this kind of an approach and the specific linguistic tools that I will apply in my own analysis of linguistic and discursive constructions of disabled identities.

### 5.1 Critical discourse analysis as a theory and methodology

Nowadays discourse and discourse analysis seem to be somewhat fashionable concepts within academic research and they have been used to represent quite a wide collection of ideas. The theoretical and methodological orientation to language and discourse in this study comes specifically from within critical discourse analysis and consequently the concept of discourse used is also being defined within that field.

Discourse analysis is a broad field consisting of various approaches differing in their methods, goals and premises. The origins of discourse analytic research as we know it today can be traced back to the 1970's. Since those times discourse analysis has evolved and expanded and especially during the past decade discourse analysis has gained more socially rooted and framed approaches. The basic aim of all discourse analysis is not to study intentions of people but the ways in which they produce meanings discursively. Discourse analysis studies the ways in which the social world is produced and constructed through language. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987:160), within discourse analysis, discourses and texts “are be approached in *their own right*, not as a secondary route to things ‘beyond’ the text [...] not a transparent information channel”.

One of the socially oriented approaches of discourse analysis is called critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is an umbrella term encompassing several different approaches varying in their origins, biases and goals (see e.g. van Dijk 1997a, 1997b, Fairclough 1992). However, there are a few basic premises and

ideas that unite all these approaches and to which also this study is committed. One of the basic ideas stems from the constructionist premises of discourse analysis, namely that all **meanings** are regarded **social**. Whereas the original relativist view of social constructionism implied that meanings are social as they are negotiated through interaction, CDA prefers a more abstract definition of the term. In CDA meanings are regarded social in a sense that meanings are dependent on the social structures of society, hence they are embracing a more structuralist and a heavily political view (Fairclough 1992). What this means is that social subjects are not considered to be free from the structural constraints impinged on them by society (Fairclough 1992). On the contrary, the fact that all discursive practices take place within “a material reality, with preconstituted ‘objects’ and preconstituted social subjects” is acknowledged (Fairclough 1992:60). Social subjects are ideologically positioned and have to operate within the limits of this materially constituted world but still they are considered to be able to negotiate and reconstruct their own positions within them. Social subjects are thus not seen as the passive victims of structures but active social agents who are operating within certain frames and conditions. (Fairclough 1992:91)

Within CDA the relationship between language and society is regarded to be **dialectic**. In more theoretical terms, CDA claims that language use both reflects the social context in which it is situated but also at the same time participates in constructing this social reality (Fairclough 1992:64). Thus, the relationship between language use and social practices is seen as dialectic and language is regarded as one social practice in itself (Fairclough 1992:63-65). This view is a rejection of earlier formalist theories about language in which language was seen merely as a tool or a mediator of meanings, not an active component itself.

Finally, as the heading suggests, CDA is a collection of *critical* theories. According to Fairclough (1992:12), the most essential criterion distinguishing the critical approaches from the non-critical approaches to discourse is in their concern for the effects that “relations of power and ideologies” have on discourses. In other words, the different approaches of CDA all consider language

to hold a significant ideological role in society and as such being a powerful tool in the processes of hegemonization and legitimation of discourses in society. Thus all approaches within CDA can be considered politically motivated and the research within the field usually have emancipatory interests. In the least this means attempting to raise people's awareness of the ways in which language is used as a mechanism of power in the processes of defining and positioning people and social groups and in the legitimation of discourses that serve the interests of those on the top of the social order. Emancipatoriness also refers to pointing out the tendency of language to include naturalisations; meanings that hold a status of god-given facts even though in reality being only man-made social constructions. In addition to revealing the hegemonized and normative discursive practices, an emancipatory approach can also mean highlighting the alternative, the more heterogenous and less institutionalized meanings and discourses around social issues, such as alternative ways of defining disability, motherhood, family or race. Consequently, critical discourse analysis has been used to explore such politically underpinned issues as ethnicity and racism, national identity, sexism and the position of women, sexual identity and sexual minorities and the discourses of various institutions, such as the law, school or medicine.

The most pivotal notion within all discourse analysis is naturally the concept of **discourse** itself. Within the social constructionist paradigm discourse can basically be defined as "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events [...] a particular picture that is painted of an event" (Burr 1995:48). Thus discourse is considered to be a set of options that support a particular view wanted to be created.

A more critical view to discourse is offered by Fairclough (1992:63), a critical discourse analyst, who defines discourse as a form of social practice. For him this means firstly defining discourse both as "a mode of action" and as "a mode of representation" (1992:63). The former premise refers to the fact that discourse is an act, something that people do and act upon. The latter refers to the idea that discourse is a way of constructing and signifying social issues, giving

them meanings.

Secondly, Fairclough concludes that discourse has three different kinds of effects. Discourse is involved in the construction of 'social identities', 'social relationships between people' and 'systems of knowledge and belief'. According to Fairclough, these effects correspond to the three functions of language interacting in all discourse he respectively labels 'identity', 'relational' and 'ideational' functions. The first function refers to the ways in which social identities and subject positions are constructed within language, the second to the negotiations of interpersonal relationships between participants within discourse and the last to the processes through which the world is given meanings, signified within discourse. These are the dimensions of meaning that are in constant dialogue with each other in discourse. (Fairclough 1992:64-65) Halliday (1973) has grouped the first two of these functions together and labelled them the 'interpersonal' function of language and added another function, the 'textual' one in his systemic-functional approach to language discussed later in this chapter.

Finally, Fairclough emphasizes that discourse is always dialectic: it simultaneously both reflects and constitutes social structures. Discourse is influenced by social structures and institutions, such as class, status or religion but the different discourses also signify the world in different manners, ie. give meanings to it and thus form a part in the constitution process of those structures. (Fairclough 1992:63, 65) This idea of a dialectic relationship between discourse and the social world stems from the view of language underlying discourse analysis. Namely, the idea of language being constructive in nature (Potter and Wetherell 1987:35, Fairclough 1992:64, Jokinen et al. 1993:18). Language is not a reflection of reality but something that constructs it and thus one cannot regard language as transparent nor reflective of reality (Jokinen et al. 1993:20). For these reasons then, language ought to be studied in its sociocultural context (Wetherell 1996:219). Jokinen et al. (1993:29-32) point out that discourses are always produced, reproduced and transformed within social practices, within multifaceted contexts and thus the interpretations of meanings should always be reflected upon the particular time and place.



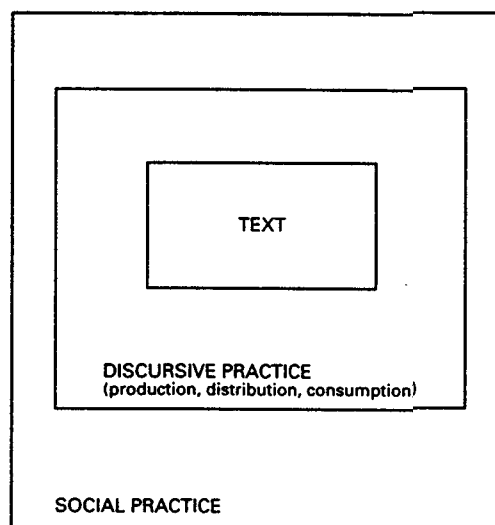
This is an issue that has provoked much discussion among linguists and discourse analysis. Namely, due to the above described idea, discourse analysis have been accused for not studying the real world 'out there', the reality but instead its discursive constructions (Potter and Wetherell 1987:180). These accusations have grown out of ignorance of the fact that according to discourse analysts one cannot separate the 'world out there' and the world constructed in language. This kind of dichotomy is not natural and it is rejected since the view of 'the world out there' promotes an idea of a ready made static world and thus clashes with the idea of the multifaced, dynamic and process-like nature of the world. In fact, in studying the endless meaning making negotiations between people, discourse analysts study the ways in which the social world out there is constituted. (Potter and Wetherell 1987:180-181)

In this study discourse is understood as a way of constructing social meanings, as a social practice in a dialectic relationship with the social world and inherently political in nature, ie. loaded with consequences. Discourse refers to language use as a social practice, a mode of acting and doing and a mode of signifying. Discourse is a constitutive system of language use that constructs social objects but these objects are also firmly rooted in the material world. Also people, as social agents, have to take these material conditions into consideration and operate within these frames.

Within the field of critical discourse analysis my study is based on Norman Fairclough's work. His emphasis within CDA lies in the theoretical analysis of power, social change and hegemonization processes (see Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995a, in press). He has also studied the discourses of the media and other social institutions (Fairclough 1992, 1995b). For this study, Fairclough's approach was the most relevant choice in at least three aspects. Firstly, his materialist position allows me to conceptualize disability as more than just a discursive concept; one that is firmly rooted into the material reality of a disabled person, namely the physical and material nature of his impairment. In chapter 2.3.1 I made a distinction between the physical or mental impairment and disability, the socially constructed cluster of meanings of this impairment. The

nature of the impairment constraints and influences the meanings of disability and thus these two should not be separated. However, in my analysis I will not explore the physical materiality of disability but merely concentrate on its discursive meanings. Thus, in this study the materialist position functions rather as a principle than a tool on an analytic level. Secondly, Fairclough's approach is also useful in that it includes a very developed theory of ideology and power and has rich political potential. Even though in this study I do not focus on the issue of ideology, I consider this study to be politically motivated and having emancipatory potential which results from this political orientation. Thirdly, and most concretely, Fairclough offers the analytic framework for this study. He has created a three-dimensional framework to meet both the theoretical and analytic needs of critical analysis. The framework aims at demonstrating how texts, discursive practices and social (or sociocultural) practices all influence and reflect each other. The most problematic drawback in Fairclough's approach is the lack of concrete and systematic linguistic analysis. He does not carry out systematic linguistic analyses but focuses on the theoretical aspects and thus does not provide any specific tools for analysis. Thus in this study these tools have been adopted from elsewhere, mainly from systemic-functional linguistics, an approach that also underlies Fairclough's work.

Figure 2. The three-dimensional framework of discourse (Fairclough 1992:73)



The framework aims at showing the connections between language, discursive practices and social practices and how all the three levels overlap, interact and finally, how language is a part of the broader social processes of society. The first of these, the level of text, refers to the close and detailed linguistic analysis of any piece of written or spoken discourse, the middle level of discursive practices includes microsociological analysis of processes of text production and consumption and the outermost level of sociocultural practices refers to a macrosociological analysis of social structures of society. The function of the analysis of the three levels are respectively, description, interpretation and explanation. All these levels of any piece of discourse are always in operation interactionally and simultaneously. Thus all the three levels should also be considered within analysis of discourse. (Fairclough 1992) That is, however, an ideal situation. In reality, since such an analysis would be practically impossible in its extensiveness, the researcher has to focus on one particular level and view the other levels through this perspective. Even though one study cannot cover the analysis of all the levels extensively and in detail, the basic view of the three simultaneous domains of discourse and discourse analysis overrides the whole study.

In my analysis I will attempt to operationalize this three-dimensional analytic framework of discourse. The discussion of disabled identities in this study has so far been circulating within the sociocultural level of the framework but the analysis will start off from the innermost level of Fairclough's framework, namely the textual level which will constitute the basis and backbone of my analysis. The linguistic elements that I will analyse on the textual level are transitivity and wording and rewording of blindness. I will also consider the semantic fields of the data but I will not analyse them per se but only as they are a part of constructing the discourses. In the analysis of discursive practices I will discuss the various discourses that come into being when blindness is talked about and also the role of interdiscursivity and intertextuality, ie. the hybridity of the data. The level of discursive practices will also include a restricted analysis of the institutional setting of the data: the roles and agendas of the participants and the constraints of the

media setting on the forms and contents of interaction. The broadest and outermost level of the three-dimensional framework is the analysis of sociocultural practices. The discussion of sociocultural practices will be more tentative and the analysis more restricted. In this study, the findings of the textual and discursive level will be brought together and discussed in more general terms, as they reflect different social and cultural themes. This discussion is more or less tentative and its aim is to locate the findings of the previous two levels in their sociocultural context and show the links between the three levels of analysis. The themes I will explore here are the blind person's struggle between difference and sameness: how these notions are constructed in relation to one another, the issues of norms, normality and deviance and finally I intend to explore whether the construction of identities in my data aims at closure, fixation and hegemonization or whether multiple, heterogenous and even conflicting identities are allowed in the data. All these social themes have emerged from the data and are thus discussed closely connected with it.

The linguistically and discursively focused approach to disabled identity, offered by critical discourse analysis is strongly motivated in my study in which I try to look for the ways in which identities are constructed in and through language. Even though many constructionists and even discourse analysts emphasize the importance of linguistic resources in constructing meanings and call for analysis of language their own studies systematically fall short on detailed linguistic analysis. This is thus the gap that I aim to, at least partially, fill with this study: to conduct a linguistically based study of identity construction that would still hold social credibility; in other words a linguistically and discursively focused study that would also take the social domain into consideration.

The application of the analytical framework will be a circular process in which the theoretical concepts, the research questions, the data and the researcher will constitute a continuous dialogue. The analysis will take off by a detailed linguistic analysis and then proceed onto the levels of discursive and sociocultural practices. As Fairclough's framework suggests, not only the issues to be studied are three-dimensional but so is also the process of analysis. Thus, I will constantly

be moving between the different levels of my analytic framework striving for a multi-layered understanding of the data.

## **5.2 Systemic-functional linguistics - the concrete tools of analysis**

Critical discourse analysis does not provide any concrete tools for analysis as such but is rather a theoretical backcloth of study. However, the view of language in critical discourse analysis and the level of textual analysis in Fairclough's framework are based on systemic-functional linguistics (Fairclough 1995a:210). I have applied tools from this approach in the analysis of transitivity. The tools for analysing lexicon; wording blindness and semantic fields are not specific to any analytical framework but combinations of relevant linguistic tools.

The systemic-functional approach to language originates in the 1970's in the work of M.A.K Halliday, the pioneer in the field. This approach was a counter-reaction to formalist views of language, where language was separated from its context and where artificial clauses and sentences were analysed as representatives of idealized homogenous language system. The premises of systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) are quite the opposite and in the following I will briefly discuss the principles of this kind of an analysis. Systemic-functional linguistics has often been applied within critical discourse analysis since it is a linguistic approach that is based on the same premises that CDA, namely the functionality, constitutiveness and contextuality of language and the fact that language use has consequences.

It must be remembered though, that this study is not a thorough systemic-functional analysis of the data. Rather, I will select some useful and relevant tools from this approach and apply them to the data. Since I am committed to the basic view of language in systemic-functional linguistics, I will choose a few linguistic tools through which I will systematically be able to reveal such necessary and important aspects of constructing blind identity that I would not be able to do within some other framework.

Systemic functional approach to language has been designed to account for the real, authentic and varied language use in relation to its context. In order

to be able to answer the questions that SFL regards relevant, one must turn to naturally occurring language use, be that written or spoken. Thus instead of studying isolated sentences, the focus of analysis is on texts that are authentic products of social interaction. (Halliday 1973)

There are four main theoretical principles inherent in the systemic-functional approach. First of all, language use is considered to be **functional**. Hence SFL poses two questions: how do people use language and how is language structured for use? Secondly, the function of language is regarded to be that of making **meanings**; people do not interact in order to exchange sounds, words or sentences for their own ends, but to convey and construct meanings. Thirdly, these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural **context** in which they are constructed and exchanged. And fourthly, language is conceptualized as a **semiotic system** in a sense that the process of making meanings is a matter of choosing. What this means is that language enables people to formulate their meanings in different ways and it is always a matter of choosing some formulation over the other. Each choice is then being interpreted against the background of the potential choices that could have been made. In other words, language has meaning-making potential. (Halliday 1973) All in all, according to SFL language use is functional, semantic, contextual and semiotic and the approach committed to this view of language can be referred to as functional-semantic approach. (Eggings 1994:1-3) Basically, it is concerned in the ways in which social structure is encoded in language (Halliday 1973:69).

SFL tries to answer the questions of how many different kinds of meanings people use language to make and consequently, how is language organized to make these meanings. Systemic-functional approach argues that language is structured to make three kinds of meanings simultaneously. These three are ideational, interpersonal and textual. (Halliday 1973:22-46) The ideational meanings are means of representing experience of the inner and outer world in language. This is why it is also referred to as experiential function. In interpersonal meanings language has the role of a mediator as it expresses both people's personalities and attitudes and relationships between people in social interaction.

The textual meanings create texts, organize them as pieces of writing or speech. Textual meanings enable people to organize meanings in particular ways. (Halliday 1973:66)

As regards the context of language use, SFL aims at sorting out what are the exact dimensions that have impact on language use since it is obvious that not all contextual features get 'into the text' (e.g. the height of the interlocutors may be irrelevant). Secondly, SFL attempts to analyse which aspects of language use are influenced by the context, ie. in what forms of language does the context show. Within SFL, the concept of the context is divided into two levels: that of the situation and of the culture. The analysis of the situational context includes the exploration of the impacts of the immediate context on the use of language, and it is also referred to as register analysis. The analysis of the context of culture, also referred to as genre analysis, explores the ways in which people achieve goals through culturally institutionalized, staged and structured ways of language use. (Halliday 1978:22-35, 65-69, Eggings 1994:9-10) Systemic functional approach takes also notice of ideology, a higher level of context. SFL poses a question of how language use is affected by the positions the participants ascribe to, such as values, biases and perspectives. (Eggings 1994:7-11) According to Eggings (1994:11), "to use language at all is to use it to encode particular positions". This refers to the constitutive nature of language: the fact that while language reflects its context it simultaneously constructs it. This is why systemic functional approach is often applied within CDA: they both acknowledge the ideological and constitutive nature of language.

Language as a semiotic system implies that making meanings is a matter of choice. Semantic choices are encoded or realized in words. These choices are both lexical and grammatical. The lexical and grammatical forms that encode meanings are the expression of the content. By choosing particular words, the speaker is involved in a meaning-making process in which s/he must make decisions as to what aspect he/she wants to emphasize or contrast and what not by selecting the particular lexical and grammatical expression. Further, there is a distinction between actual choices and potential choices. The former concept

refers to the things people choose to say or do on a particular occasion whereas the latter one refers to all the potential choices that people could have made. The actual choices are always interpreted in relation to or against the potential choices and the other participants also recognize this choice. (Halliday 1973:51-62, Eggings 1994:14-18) For example, they know that when a speaker uses the term 'visually impaired' instead of for example 'blind' a speaker is using a politically correct form to avoid negative connotations of the word 'blind'. Even though people are capable of recognizing the choices they are not necessarily aware of these.

In this study the systemic-functional approach will be most thoroughly applied in the transitivity analysis where I am following Halliday's framework of the process types and the participant roles. Also in the analysis of vocabulary the idea of language as a semiotic system will be discussed as I will explore wording and rewording blindness. The point will be to show how wording blindness, for example, is a matter of choosing one expression over many potential others. Each of the analytic tools and the motivations for studying them will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

### **5.3 Analytic framework**

The main body of the analysis consists of the discussion of the different discourses through which blindness and also other topics are talked about in the interview. The specific tools for tackling the construction of disabled identity in this study are Halliday's transitivity analysis and the analysis of lexicon focusing on semantic fields and wording and rewording blindness. These tools that on one hand derive from SFL, and on the other hand have been applied to meet the purposes of this study, will be discussed more thoroughly in the following.

#### **5.3.1 Discourses**

The definition of discourse as an analytic tool in the analysis is based on Fairclough's (1992:62-63) claim that discourse is "language use" and a "social practice". Analytically, the term discourse used in this study refers to a particular



ways of conceptualizing and constructing blindness that is based on similar topics, contents and terminology. In other words, the different discourses constitute the particular viewpoints to blindness that were found in the data. Each discourse is characterized by similar terminology and vocabulary, topics and the point of view in relation to blindness and the discourses are thus more or less mutually exclusive.

With the help of the analysis of different discourses in the data I will be able to explore the multiple and varying meanings of blindness and provide the answer to the most pivotal research question of this study of the different ways in which blind identity becomes constructed in the interview. The different discourses construct different kind of identities to the interviewee and reveal a different perspective and viewpoint to the relationship between the interviewee and his blindness. Thus each discourse constructs blindness and blind identity in a particular way but also construct other identities to the interviewee, depending on the nature of the discourse. So exploring the different discourses also enables me to study which discourses are also drawn upon also in the construction of other aspects of identity besides blindness and how these different identities are mutually co-constructed.

### 5.3.2 Transitivity

As discussed earlier in the short overview of systemic-functional approach, one of the three functions that language has is ideational; representing experiences in the inner and outer world. One of the most central aspects that encodes the ideational meanings of language is transitivity. Transitivity is a way of expressing ideas (Simpson1993:88) and representing the patterns of experience and ‘goings-on’ of the world (Halliday 1994:106). According to Halliday (1994:106):

Our most powerful impression of experience is that it consists of ‘goings-on’ - happening, doing, sensing, meaning, and being and becoming. All these goings-on are sorted out in the grammar of the clause.

When making sense of the world, people construct pictures of reality that are based on “the principle that reality is made up of processes” (Halliday 1994:106). In other words, the goings-on of the world are encoded as different kinds of process types. There are three basic process types: *material*, *mental* and *relational*

and three additional ones: *behavioural*, *verbal*, and *existential*. Some of these process types include further subcategories discussed in the following. All of the process types include three elements: the *process* itself, expressed by a verb phrase, the *participants*, expressed by a nominal phrase and the *circumstances*, expressed by prepositional or adverbial phrases. (Halliday 1994:107-109)

Figure 3. Process types, their meanings, and key participants (Halliday 1994:143)

Process type	Category meaning	Participants
material: action event	'doing' 'doing' 'happening'	Actor, Goal
behavioural	'behaving'	Behaver
mental: perception affection cognition	'sensing' 'seeing' 'feeling' 'thinking'	Senser, Phenomenon
verbal	'saying'	Sayer, Target
relational: attribution identification	'being' 'attributing' 'identifying'	Carrier, Attribute Identified, Identifier; Token, Value
existential	'existing'	Existent

Material processes express happenings in the concrete, outer world that are either *actions* or *events*. Action processes include both the role of the actor and goal (e.g. Ann kicked the ball.) whereas events only include the actor (e.g. Ann is playing). Mental processes codify happenings of the inner world, 'inside people's head' and they are divided into three subcategories: *perception* (e.g. Did you see that?), *cognition* (e.g. He never understands me.) and *affection* (e.g. Tom loves chocolate.). The participants in mental processes are the senser and the phenomenon. Relational processes establish a relationship between two things, they relate fragments to others. Relational processes can either be attributive or identifying. The former merely describe a carrier via an attribute (e.g. I have two brothers.) while the latter establishes a definite identity of a token via value (e.g. Who is the tallest girl in your class?). Behavioural processes are on the borderline of mental and relational processes and they express the outer realizations or manifestations of inner workings (e.g. She is always dreaming). Verbal processes

obviously codify speaking and meaning and include the sayer - who says - and the verbiage - what is said (e.g. I told the man that he had better go.). Existential processes are processes of being, existing and happening and include one participant role, that of the existent (e.g. There were no potatoes in the shop.). In this study the behavioural category is left out due to its vague character and only the other five categories are applied.

In other words, transitivity is a way of expressing and representing experiences and events in the world. With the help of transitivity analysis one is able to answer the questions: What events and phenomena of the world become represented and what not? What are these events and phenomena? Who are the ones making things happen or sensing phenomena and who on the other hand are the goals of action? Transitivity analysis is a useful tool in analysing identities since it allows the researcher to grasp the ways in which the world and the roles of people within it are represented and positioned.

In this study, transitivity is analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, the focus being on the latter one. The quantitative analysis of the process types shows how the participants use the different processes in the interview, whether they construct phenomena as concrete actions, inner workings or concentrate on describing people and things, for example. With the help of the qualitative analysis of the process types, on the other hand, I am able to contextualize the findings of the quantitative results and discuss them in more detail on the local textual level. This kind of an analysis enables me to answer questions such as: what are the processes that the interviewee is attached to and what are the phenomena that he is associated with, in other words in what kind of behavioural contexts he becomes represented. The quantitative analysis of the interviewee's participant roles reveals in what role the interviewee is positioned within the different processes, ie. whether he becomes constructed as an actor, a goal, a senser, a phenomenon, a carrier and so forth in the processes. This analysis also shows whether the interviewee and the interviewer construct different participant roles for the interviewee or whether the distribution of the participant roles used by the interactants are similar. The qualitative analysis on the other hand, enables me to

discuss the interviewee's participant roles through textual examples and show their specific content and nature. On the whole, the quantitative analysis provides summarized and tabulated information about the transitivity in the data whereas the qualitative analysis contextualizes these findings, reveals the ambiguous, procedural and interactive nature of transitivity; in other words breaths life into the tabulated figures and percentages.

### **5.3.3 Semantic fields**

Besides transitivity, on the textual level of analysis I intend to look at vocabulary. Vocabulary is not an independent category apart from transitivity as transitivity becomes constructed through lexical choices. Also within the systemic-functional approach grammar and lexicon are seen as an inseparable system. For these reasons vocabulary will also be discussed in relation to the other textual features but I will first highlight some issues concerning vocabulary independently.

Vocabulary can be conceptualized as constructing different fields or fluid categories according to the semantic meanings. In other words, vocabulary can be divided into semantic fields. These fields reveal whether some categories or groups exist in a particular text and what their proportion vis-a-vis other groups is. Thus it is possible to outline field hierarchies along semantic and quantitative criteria, ie. hierarchies according to similarities in meanings and according to the sizes of the fields.

In this study, the semantic aspects of the vocabulary of the data will be analysed by grouping all nouns into semantic fields. Only the nouns are chosen since they are the content words in language - and thus semantically rich and easier to cluster - and verb analysis will be provided in the form of transitivity analysis. The semantic fields will not be discussed independently because they are used as tools in constructing the different discourses of blindness by serving me as the starting point in the process of identifying different discourses. Besides partly being able to identify the discourses, semantic fields can also show what categories and areas become constructed as blindness and blind identity is being discussed. In other words, it becomes possible to see what are the domains and

areas to which blindness becomes attached and mapped onto. Thus semantic fields are not discussed separately in the analysis but they are explored as the major factors in constructing the different discourses through which blindness is being talked about.

#### **5.3.4 Wording and rewording blindness**

Besides analysing the semantic fields, another feature of vocabulary I intend to cover is the way in which different phenomena and people are worded and reworded, in other words how phenomena are lexically formulated or 'dressed up'. According to Zola (1993:167), the issue of naming is not only a personal matter but political as well as it is a mechanism for dominant groups to keep the inferior people in their place. Thus labels and names have served as political battlefields of power (Zola 1993:167).

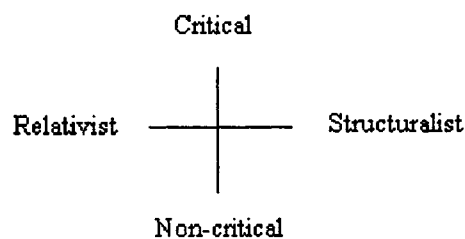
Primarily, I will concentrate on the wording of blindness as it inherently links to blind identity. The view of language as a semiotic system allows one to analyse how particular words are chosen to represent the phenomena and how others are ignored. This is a useful tool in the analysis of identity since it allows one to look at what aspects of e.g.. blindness become highlighted and what are backgrounded. It is relevant to know, whether blindness is worded as for instance 'a visual impairment', 'a condition' or 'poetry' as all these labels carry different connotations and they bring out even conflicting aspects of blindness and blind identity. According to Zola (1993:168), one of the most powerful implications of labelling arises from this associational nature of language. Labelling also shows how the participants label the same issue in a different way, in other words, they choose to represent it differently. My aim is to analyse how blindness is worded, how both participants label it in their own ways and whether they reach, or even aim at, a consensus; whether some label acquires a hegemonic status during the course of the interview. It can be argued that the labels are the culmination of one's identity: It is significant whether one calls himself or wants to be called 'blind', 'visually impaired', 'disabled' or all of them, as all these labels give the person a different kind of identity, being heavily context-dependent.

In the analysis, I will first provide a summary of all the ways of referring to blindness throughout the interview and discuss the wordings through examples. I will also point out to the negotiable nature of the wordings and show how choosing one term to refer to 'blindness' is not straightforward but a result of a fine-grained negotiation between the participants. The wording of blindness will also be discussed under the different discourses. Even though the way blindness becomes worded within a particular discourse is not necessarily distinctive to it, there occur wordings of blindness in the interview that are restricted to a specific discourse. Consequently, I will explore which wordings cut across discourse borders and which are distinctive to a particular discourse type.

#### 5.4 Theoretical and methodological position of this study

Before moving on to the analysis, it is necessary to clarify and explicate the position of this study with respect to the theoretical background and pull together the various theoretical and methodological threads introduced in the study. This study can be located on a four dimensional continuum in terms of its premises that follow from its theoretical underpinnings. The first two opposite ends of the continuum are Critical - Non-critical and the others are Structuralist - Relativist. This four dimensional continuum is illustrated below:

Figure 4. Four dimensional continuum of this study



In the Figure (4) CDA could be placed in the upper right corner since it obviously is an emancipatory and critical approach and also one that considers the effects of social structures upon individuals and their identities (Structuralist). But as my discussion of disabled identity has shown, it is essential that identities are

acknowledged for their shifting and dynamic nature and according to constructionist principles the local construction of identities should be emphasized (Relativist).

It is also important to notice the great variety of study conducted within CDA and discourse analysis in general. There do exist extreme constructionist approaches that deny the effects of structures upon interaction but there have also emerged more structurally oriented approaches (e.g. see Parker 1992). CDA lays importance on social structures (drawing on Marxism) but it also acknowledges the ambivalence of social situations and acknowledge people's own contribution in constructing meanings and identities (Fairclough 1992:91). The intensity and the degree that the different approaches within CDA commit themselves to being critical is a continuum. At the far end of this continuum are the extensively emancipatory approaches that aim at revealing conventionalized language use and changing the racist, colonialist or capitalist practices that has resulted in this. At the other end there are the moderate approaches which are satisfied when being able to raise people's awareness of language and discourse through revealing the taken-for-granted knowledge in linguistic conventions around us.

I believe that meanings are first and foremost fragmented and plural and in a continuous process of definement. This process is conducted daily by people but it is evident that social practices do have an effect on this: people are not totally free to adopt any role they want in interaction nor do they have equal access to knowledge. When discussing disabled identity I believe that both structuralist and relativist perspectives are needed and can successfully be combined. The social structures, such as the media, evidently disable many people by restricting their full participation by stigmatization and marginalization, but the meanings of disability and the outlook of a person's identity is a more complex construct involving local negotiation in a variety of cultural contexts. As regards the amount of emancipation in the study I regard my topic to be politically and socially underpinned but I set out from the text and can only reflect on the sociocultural level in a tentative manner. To conclude, I would place this study quite in the middle of the figure, towards the relativist and critical ends.

## 6. DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The data of this study can be characterised as spoken interaction taking place in a public and institutional setting of the media. The data consist of one 45-minute-interview in English between a blind American man, a writer and a poet, Stephen Kuusisto, and a Finnish interviewer, Maarit Tastula. The programme was part of an interview series called *Yöleno (Nightflight)*. *Yöleno* can be characterized as a serious interview programme which aims at creating an intimate setting for open and personal discussions between the interviewer and the interviewee. This interview was aired in February 1998 on Finnish television and the topic of the interview was "*Stephen Kuusisto – Sokeain planeetta*" ("*Stephen Kuusisto - The Planet of the Blind*").

The interview was mainly concerned with issues implicitly or explicitly dealing with blindness and it flowed rather chronologically from the interviewee's childhood to adolescence and to adulthood. The interview was accompanied by several video inserts that included home video material from the interviewee's childhood and also short depictions of the social settings of the 60's and the 70's, the decades of his adolescence and early adulthood.

The programme was both video and audio taped and then carefully transcribed. Since the programme is a part of a larger research project, it had already been transcribed earlier. The initial transcription was made by H.Koskela. Despite the fact that transcription process is a thorough way of familiarizing oneself with the data I do not see myself disadvantaged in this respect. I examined the transcription several times carefully adding my own remarks and changing the points where I disagreed with the original transcript. Hence my subjective interpretations are included in the transcript and hence I can take full responsibility over the final version. This by no means undermines the scrutinized and careful work done by the original transcriber for whom the credit and my gratitude for the basic work goes.

At first, choosing blindness as the primary focus of my study might seem deterministic. However, Kuusisto appears in public first and foremost due to the



fact that he is blind. He has published an autobiography called "*The Planet of the Blind*" in the spring 1998 in which he writes about his life and concentrates especially on his blindness, as the title suggests. Also the title of the programme - *Stephen Kuusisto - the Planet of the Blind* - is a direct reference to his book and lays a strong emphasis on blindness. It is the producers of the programme who by adopting this title have produced a viewpoint and thus they have set up a certain frame of expectations for the viewer of what to anticipate from the programme. In the interview, the participants predominantly talk about blindness and thus my research question is further motivated. As for my study, the only premise I set about with is that some kind of identities will appear, including some kind of versions of blind identity in the data. I do not set about with any anticipations or hypothesis of *how* these identities could be constructed or how blindness in particular is constructed. The analysis aims at being productive in a sense that it allows different, even conflicting constructions of blind identity to emerge and also other aspects of identity to become relevant. It is to be emphasized that I do not intend to reduce the whole data into various constructions of blind identity but allow space for other aspects of identity if and when they appear. Choosing blind identity as my primary concern is merely a matter of methodological focus resulting from the contents of interview and my theoretical background.

I do not include Kuusisto's autobiographical book in my data for various reasons. First of all, my primary interest is to study the linguistic and discursive construction of identity in one interactional setting. Secondly, analysing a work of fiction requires quite a different set of theoretical and methodological choices than outlined in this study and thus the book falls out of my focus. Nevertheless, this does not mean ignoring the book completely. Even though the book is not included into my data I recognize its role in two ways. First, the recently published and translated book seems to have been the major reason for inviting Kuusisto for the interview and thus it contributes greatly to the contents of the interview: talking about blindness. The interviewer has probably familiarised herself with the book and thus it serves as one resource for organising the interview, one part in

constructing her agenda. The participants refer also explicitly to the book a couple of times during the interview and in addition to this especially for the interviewee the book seems to be one major resource through which he organizes his experience and constructs it in the course of the interview. In other words I will discuss the role of the book as the major determinant of the title and contents of the study and as one intertextual resource for participants in organising the interaction.

## **7. ANALYSIS**

The analysis is structured so that first there is an overview and a rough description of the structure and contents of the interview. Then I will discuss all the different ways in which blindness is worded; lexically dressed up in the interview. This is followed by the results of transitivity analysis in terms of exploring the quantitative distribution of verb processes and the participant roles of the interviewee in the whole data. The main body of the chapter consists of qualitative analysis exploring the construction of blind identity in terms of seven different discourses.

### **7.1 The structure and contents of the interview**

Before moving into the linguistic micro-analysis of the textual level, I will briefly characterize the structure and contents of the interview. As mentioned earlier, the content of the interview focuses on different aspects of blindness, mainly in the light of the interviewee's life. The Table (1) is a summary of the structure and summarized contents of the interview. The different sections and subsections are distinguished in the left column and their contents are described and profiled in the right column.

Table 1. The structure and contents of the interview

<b>The structure and contents of the interview</b>	
<b>Section</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>Introduction: the medical basis</b> Birth <i>Video insert</i>	Provides a starting base: participants talk about SK's birth, the cause of his blindness explained in medical terms. Black and white video of pregnant mother at hospital and premature babies in incubators.
<b>Parents and Family</b> Parents Mother Father <i>Video insert</i> Mother <i>Video insert</i> Expectations	The parents' reactions to blindness at first and also later in their family life, emphasis on childhood, descriptions of the parents' personalities and attitude towards SK' blindness in general - and SK's feelings and reactions to them. The first video insert is a black and white family portrait of SK, his father and mother. The second insert includes color footage of SK's family at home, playing, laughing and smiling.
<b>Blindness as a sensation</b> To ride a bicycle Sensing the world Dreams <i>Video insert</i>	Blindness described and discussed as a matter of physical sensation and visual sense, what it is like to ride a bike when one cannot see, how does SK see the world, his dreams. The video insert portrays the Monet painting 'The Water Lilies'.
<b>Other people</b> Schoolmates 'Saints'	The role of people other than family members in SK's life, talk about mocking at school and saints that encouraged him to survive
<b>Growing up</b> <i>Video insert</i> Substance abuse Eating disorder	Discussion concentrates on SK's teenage years, his substance abuse and anorexia. The video insert includes black and white footage from the 60's of young people in their twenties, partying and drinking beer on the beach and in a rock concert.
<b>Blindness as an emotional experience</b> Emotions, inner world Poetry Music <i>Video insert</i>	In contrast to section 3, here the participants talk about blindness as a mental and emotional experience: how it feels to be blind, the importance of poetry and music to SK. The black and white video insert portrays the opera singer Enrico Caruso singing at a theatre and people dancing.
<b>Influential people</b> Helen Keller (Enrico Caruso) <i>Video insert</i>	Discussion about SK's idol, Helen Keller who helped to raise the status of the blind. Video insert shows Helen Keller, smiling and happy-faced, signing and reading from the lips with her fingers.
<b>Accepting blindness</b> Freedom, self-sufficiency The white cane Corky (guide dog)	The life after SK accepted his blindness discussed in this section: feeling of freedom, liberation, independence, things that have made his life easier
<b>Conclusion, lesson</b> Reflecting on human nature <i>Video insert</i>	Conclusion that draws on a more general level: the blind people, nature of human beings, meaning of suffering and adversity. The color home video includes SK sitting in his mother's lap and waving at the camera.

The function of Table (1) is to help the reader to get an overall impression of the interview. The divisions are by no means clear-cut, the topics and sections naturally overlap but the main structure can still be outlined as such. These sections correspond to a certain extent to the discourses that were found in the data and which will be discussed in detail in chapters 7.4 to 7.4.9. In these chapters I intent to reflect the findings of the wording blindness and transitivity analysis onto the different discourse types and the overall structure of the interview. This enables me to see whether one type of wording is typical for some section of the interview and missing in another, for example.

Since the contents of the interview are heavily focused on blindness it influences the structure of the interview as well. The divisions between the nine sections are basically divisions between different ways of dealing with blindness. The interview follows a chronological order from the interviewee's birth to his adolescence and finally to his adult years. The structure of the interview forms a macro-narrative for the whole interview. The interview is a sort of a 'Story of a Blind Man', a story with a clear beginning, plot of a survival story and a happy end.

## **7.2 Condition, deprivation or poetry? - Wording and rewording blindness**

In this chapter I will summarize the different ways of wording and rewording blindness in the interview. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the various ways of wording blindness in the data, in the same way as the following chapter 7.3 on transitivity will provide an overview of the process types and participant roles throughout the whole interview. Later, within the analysis of the different discourses I will explore wording and rewording blindness on a closer textual level and focus on the contextual analysis of the processes of wording. The analysis of the wordings of blindness in the data is a useful way of exploring the different meanings that the participants give to blindness.

Below I will provide a summary in which I have gathered all linguistic variables used to refer to blindness throughout the interview by either of the participants, the discourse type within which it was used and also the immediate

context of the reference. The whole interview is in one way or another connected to blindness but I have listed only the explicit references where one can without hesitation claim that the participants are referring to blindness, also including its metaphorical wordings.

Table 2. The ways of wording and rewording blindness in the interview

The ways of wording and rewording blindness in the interview		
TERM	DISCOURSE	CONTEXT
blindness (11) SK 9 MT 2	Familistic Familistic Familistic Familistic  Familistic  Familistic Fam.+Psyc.  Art  Emotional  Emotional	1) SK <b>blindness</b> is (1.2) was a <b>limiting thing</b> . 2) MT was <b>it</b> (refers to 'blindness')some kind of a <b>stigma</b> .= 3) SK =there [was a <b>stigma</b> . yeah,] sure, you know 4) SK my mother ( . ) understood that my <b>blindness</b> was <b>painful</b> 5) SK a lot of depression and a lot of physical pain of her own u:h and I think it kept her from really being able to focus you know on my <b>blindness</b> on my childhood 6) SK some not long ago who was asking you know about <b>blindness</b> and you know what <b>it's</b> like 7) SK <b>blindness</b> is <b>not for wimpy people</b> . 8) SK I really did try very hard to seem as though <b>I had no blindness at all</b> 9) SK he sang for her he sang with his full voice and all that passion about <b>blindness</b> 10) MT how many years did it take until you started to accept your <b>blindness</b> (3. 3) 11) SK I think it wasn't until I was in my my thirties that I began to understand how <b>painful and difficult this</b> (refers to 'blindness') really was for me
the word (5) SK 4 MT 1	Familistic  Familistic  Familistic Familistic	1) SK we never even used <b>the word</b> you know, u:h MT [blindness= SK [(uh-) 2) SK =ye:ah the [ <b>word</b> ] was u:h relegated to the same category as cancer 3) SK <b>it</b> (refers to the 'word') never entered into our conversations 4) SK we never talked about <b>it</b> (refers to the 'word') 5) MT why was <b>the word</b> blindness uh s-such a dangerous <b>word</b> in your family very scarcely spoken.=
a sensation (5) SK 5	Art Art Art Art Art	1) SK <b>it's</b> a just a <b>tremendous sensation</b> 2) SK but <b>it's</b> (refers to 'sensation') <b>not clear</b> . you know 3) SK <b>it's</b> (refers to 'sensation') really quite <b>lovely</b> 4)SK <b>it</b> (refers to 'sensation') can be <b>terrifying</b> ,very <b>scary</b> 5) SK so ( . ) <b>it changes</b> a thousand times a day.

a world (3) SK 3	Art  Art Art	1) SK [ye::ah it's a <b>world</b> ] of colors and shapes and moving shadows 2) SK <b>it</b> (refers to 'world') can be very <b>beautiful</b> 3) SK in some instances <b>it's</b> (refers to 'world') <b>glorious gold, rose and silver</b>
the condition (2) SK 2	Medical  Medical	1) SK the <b>condition</b> is known in- in medical terminology as the <b>retinopathy of prematurity</b> . 2) SK so that a person who has this kind of <b>condition</b> has a very incomplete visual sense of the world
poetry (2) SK 2	Art  Art	1) SK and the sorrow and the struggle you know the <b>poetry</b> of <b>that</b> was coming out 2) SK and that is um that has made forth some very powerful <b>poetry</b> in my life and that really does come from the dog=
state of helplessness (2) SK 2	Art Art	1) SK you are in a <b>state of helplessness</b> 2) SK and <b>that</b> (refers to 'state of helplessness') can be quite quite <b>frightening</b> .
color and turmoil SK 1	Art	1) SK I'm even finding some beauty in all of that <b>color and turmoil</b>
complete blackness SK 1	Art	1) SK you're in the complete <b>blackness</b> and then
deprivation SK 1	Societal	1) SK I was in some sense able to <b>compensate for my deprivation</b> by being very much alive.=
the thing SK 1	Emotional	1) SK but they were symbols of the very <b>thing</b> I most <b>detested</b> about myself.
a diagnosis SK 1	Familistic	1) SK it was a severe and terrible <b>diagnosis</b>

(Bold font highlights the exact wordings)

Altogether there were twelve different ways of wording and rewording blindness in the interview and the wordings included both metaphorical and non-metaphorical expressions. The most common way of wording was with the term 'blindness' which obviously is a very commonly used term in general and also semantically rather a neutral expression. The second most frequent wordings were the terms 'word' and 'sensation'. The former nominalises blindness and represents it as an abstract concept, a notion instead of a physiological condition, for example. The latter constructs blindness as something experienced through the visual sense. The term 'world' was the next common wording of blindness and this

term constructs blindness as an abstract phenomenon, a very broad context beyond the limits of immediate experience. The terms 'condition', 'poetry' and 'a state of helplessness' all occurred two times. The first term is a distinctively medicalized wording of blindness, equalling blindness with an illness or disease and the two latter ones are very metaphorical wordings of blindness. The rest of the wordings, 'color and turmoil', 'complete blackness', 'deprivation', 'thing' and 'diagnosis' all occurred only once. The first two of these are again metaphorical expressions, the third is a pessimistic reference to the social domain, the fourth is a typical example of an euphemism and the last one is again a medical wording. The interviewee used all of the different wordings while the interviewee only used two of the wordings, namely 'blindness' and 'word'.

In the following, I will briefly discuss all the different wordings of blindness through textual examples. The different wordings will be explored through the different discourses of the data as I will discuss how blindness becomes lexically dressed up in each discourse and whether these wordings are exclusive to the particular discourse type or not. The distinguishing process of the discourses and their detailed character will be extensively discussed in chapter 7.4 but since I will be contrasting the different ways of wording blindness to the different discourses I will shortly introduce them here as well for the reader to be able to follow my line of analysis in this chapter.

The term discourse refers to the different ways of approaching blindness that are united by similar *terminology*, *contents* and *point of view*. This means that the discourses were distinguished by similar terminology and vocabulary, contents and topics and a particular perspective, a viewpoint to the issue of blindness. There were altogether seven different discourses distinguishable in the data and thus the interview provided seven different perspectives to blindness. These discourses were medical, familistic, emotional, psychological, art, societal and idealistic. To a certain degree they had their distinctive ways of wording blindness (i.e. a wording only occurred within one particular discourse type) even though some ways of wording blindness seemed to cut across the discourse borders and were used within various discourse types. It must be remembered that the ways



in which blindness was worded and reworded in the data was not used as a criterion to distinguish a discourse type since the discourses were distinguished by their terminology on a general level. In the analysis, the discourse types were first distinguished by the three main criteria mentioned above and the listing of the ways of wording blindness within each discourse type followed this.

Most often blindness was referred to and worded within the art discourse as there occurred altogether fifteen references to blindness and seven different ways of wording it within its course. Within the art discourse blindness is represented as an analogy to an artistic experience: something experienced through senses, bringing mental enjoyment and pleasure. The most common wording of blindness within the art discourse was with the term 'sensation'. This term represents blindness as an artistic conduct, experiences through the visual sense. Paradoxically, blindness is not represented as a lack of sensation but as one particular form of sensation.

01 SK it's a just a tremendous sensation but it's not clear. you know

The wordings which were distinctive to the art discourse, i.e. did not occur within any other discourse, included the terms 'sensation', 'world', 'poetry', 'state of helplessness', 'complete blackness' and 'state of helplessness'. These wordings are united by the fact that they are all abstract and metaphorical ways of wording blindness, something that is in line with the overall way of constructing issues within art discourse: through abstract, artistic and vivid expressions that can be far from the concrete world. In the following I will only point out to two of them, since the contexts of the wordings are all listed in the above table and they will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.4.5 within the discussion of the art discourse. Blindness is symbolically compared to a 'world' residing in the interviewee's head and experienced through visual sense:

01 SK yeah it's a world of colors and shapes and moving shadows

The interviewee himself is a poet and thus the metaphor of 'poetry' as referring to his blindness becomes understandable. In the following example he talks about the opera singer Enrico Caruso singing for Helen Keller, a world famous blind and deaf woman, and compares here blindness of Caruso's singing

with 'poetry'.

01 SK he sang for her he sang with his full voice and all that passion about blindness and  
02 the sorrow and the struggle you know the poetry of that was coming out

Also the term 'blindness' occurred within the art discourse, but only once. As it was concluded earlier, blindness is a way of wording blindness that is not exclusively distinctive to any one discourse type but is rather discourse-transcending.

Blindness was also referred to and worded several times within the familistic discourse. The familistic discourse places blindness within the family context and represents it from the familistic perspective: as something experienced in relation to the other family members. Within the familistic discourse blindness is not represented as an individual experience but a quality more or less shared by a community. Within this discourse there occurred three different ways of wording blindness. The first and most common of these is through the term 'blindness'. This term was not however distinctive only to this discourse type since it also occurred within three other discourse types. In the example below, the active participant is one of the family members, the mother and blindness becomes represented in a rather harsh and negative context:

01 SK my mother ( . ) understood that my blindness was painful

Also the term 'word' was used many times within the familistic discourse to refer to blindness. In fact, this wording occurred only within this discourse and thus it can be concluded that the term 'word' is a discourse specific reference to blindness. The term 'word' shifts the focus from blindness as a concrete, real physiological experience to blindness as a semantic category, a concept thus detaching blindness from the immediate context of experience.

01 MT why was the word blindness uh s-such a dangerous word in your family very  
02 scarcely spoken

The third way of wording blindness within the familistic discourse was with the term 'diagnosis'. This term is actually a heavily medical one and since it occurred right in the beginning of the familistic discourse which was preceded by medical discourse one can argue that this medical term within the familistic

discourse echoes the previous medical discourse to which it semantically belongs to. This phenomenon demonstrates that the discourse types are not homogenous but interdiscursive and hybrid drawing on the other discourse types.

Within the emotional discourse type blindness was worded both as 'blindness' and as a 'thing'. The emotional discourse approaches blindness from the perspective of feelings and emotions: how does it feel to be blind and what kind of thoughts does being blind arise? The first wording occurs in the following context:

01 MT how many years did it take until you started to accept your blindness

Here the term 'blindness' is used by the interviewer and it is used on a personal level to refer particularly to the interviewee's blindness. The other term, 'thing', is used within the emotional discourse in the following way:

01 SK but they were symbols of the very thing I most detested about myself.

The term 'thing' is a typical euphemism used when one does not want to explicate a particular word or an expression. Here the 'thing' obviously refers to blindness because the 'symbols' that the interviewee refers to are the guide dog and the white cane. The 'thing' is characterized as something that the interviewee 'most detested' about himself, in other words in a very negative and cruel context.

The medical discourse evidently constructs blindness first and foremost as a physical defect, an impairment that is an object of cure and other medical procedures. Within the medical discourse blindness was worded as 'a condition'. Obviously, this fits well within the terminology of medical field and this wording was actually distinctive only to the medical discourse. The condition is also being characterized through another medical term:

01 SK the condition is known in- in medical terminology as the retinopathy of prematurity

The interviewee represents himself as suffering from a specifically diagnosed medical condition that has caused his blindness. In this context, blindness is constructed as an impairment, nothing more, nothing less.

The societal discourse emphasizes the relationship between blind identity and society, especially societal institutions, such as the school. Blindness is represented as relational identity that becomes constructed in interactional

processes with the other members of a larger community. Within the societal discourse blindness became worded only once. The term used to refer to it was 'deprivation' and it occurred in the following context:

01 SK I was in some sense able to compensate for my deprivation by being very  
02 much alive

The psychological discourse is a specific way of approaching blindness and blind identity through the scientific field of psychology. Within this discourse the personal experiences of the interviewee are contrasted to and explained through recent psychological studies or thoughts by famous psychologists. Blindness became worded only once within this discourse and the piece where the wording occurred was actually a mixture of the familistic and psychological discourses:

01 SK I really did try very hard to seem as though I had no blindness at all

In the above example the interviewee talks about the way he tried in his childhood to act out as if was not blind since his parents could not accept his impairment. The term 'blindness' is also here used on a personal level, to refer to his own impairment.

There was only one discourse type in the data within which blindness was not referred to at all and that is the idealistic discourse. The reason for this lack of references to blindness seem to result from the fact that this discourse deals with very general topics on the level of collective human experience and thus such a particular social issue as blindness is not relevant within the idealistic discourse.

Besides exploring how blindness was worded, it is at least equally relevant to discuss how it was not worded in the data. As Eggings (1994:16-22) argues, the actual choices by speakers (e.g. how a speaker decides to lexicalize blindness) are always interpreted and contrasted against the potential choices that the speaker had but did not opt for. There are at least two commonly used terms referring to 'blindness' that were not used once, namely, the terms 'disability' and 'visual impairment'. Both these terms are more general terms to refer to blindness than the term 'blindness' itself which is a very specific and accurate wording of the impairment. Both participants preferred to use the more specific wording when referring to blindness either on a general level or on a personal level referring to

the interviewee. In other words, the participants constructed the interviewee as belonging to the specific category of blind people but ignored the more general categories. The terms 'impairment' and 'disability' also have such connotations that 'blindness' does not carry as they both refer to a defect in person. In addition to this, 'impairment' is a politically correct term and consequently 'visual impairment' seems to be the preferred wording of blindness within the public domains. Regardless of this, both participants did not follow the politically correct wording but used the specific and direct term. Also the term 'disability' carries connotations that do not apply to term 'blindness'. 'Disability' obviously has a more social side to it as disability is not merely a physical impairment but 'disability' also carries a more pejorative label in society than 'blindness'.

The way blindness became worded in the interview was not always straightforward and self-evident. On the contrary, wordings are negotiable, often achieved through negotiation between the participants in order to establish the mutually agreed term. In the following I will discuss extensively one example of such negotiation on the wording of blindness.

The most frequent way of referring to blindness by both participants in the interview was with the word 'blindness' but the use of this term was not self-evident but a result of mutual negotiation and agreement. For the first time it came up within the familistic discourse. This does mean that the term 'blindness' would be distinctive to this discourse, actually it seems that the this discourse just happens to be the one where the word first came up. The decision to use that word was the result of fine grained negotiation right in the beginning of the interview which I will discuss more thoroughly as it is an important section affecting the rest of the interview.

## Example 1. Negotiating on the term 'blindness'

- 01 MT =can you imagine ( . ) your **parents'** reaction when they heard the news that their  
 02 son is ( . ) almost (a) blind  
 03 SK yes it was a uh ( . ) a <severe> and terrible diagnosis. >we never< even use ( . )  
 04 the word ( . ) you know, u:h  
 05 MT [blindness=  
 06 SK [(uh-)  
 07 SK =ye:ah the [word] was u:h ( . ) relegated to the same category as cancer ( . )  
 08 MT [mm  
 09 SK >you know< ( . ) a:nd it never entered into our conversations we never talked about  
 10 it u:h ( . ) you know I was just u:h ( . ) a normal child in their view and ( . ) it was  
 11 very very difficult.  
 12 MT °hh but if you ( . ) think ( . ) more psychologically perhaps so ( . ) why was ( . )  
 13 the word blindness uh:: s-such a dangerous ( . ) word in your family. very scarcely  
 14 spoken.=  
 15 SK =°mm° (0.9) well I think that ( . ) has as much to do ( . ) wi:th ( . ) the: ( . ) **fear**  
 16 ( . ) that blindness ( . ) is (1.2) **was** a limiting thing.  
 17 MT was it some kind of a stigma.=  
 18 SK =there [was a stigma. yeah,] sure, you know, ( . )

Here the participants are obviously negotiating what label to use when referring to blindness, what is the agreed term and consequently the agreed issue that they are to talk about. The aim of this negotiation is to set up a norm and agreement on a common ground during the forthcoming interaction. Up till this section, the interviewee has referred to blindness as a condition and that is followed by another characteristically medical term, 'a diagnosis', on line 3. This term echoes the medical discourse that precedes this extract and is a reflection of wording blindness within that kind of context and shows how the different discourses can overlap. After using this medical term the interviewee moves on to use the term 'word' hence nominalising blindness. Instead of talking about a biological and physiological state, he constructs blindness as an abstract concept. The interviewee describes 'the word' as being 'relegated to the same category as cancer and the interviewer as 'a dangerous word' and 'very scarcely spoken'. Passivisation is also used on line 7 where the word blindness is compared to the category of cancer. Here the nominalisation is evident and strong since the word is represented as standing for a nominal category of mortal illnesses. These descriptions represent 'the word' as having taboo elements and is being constructed by both participants as a pejorative label.

The term 'blindness' is introduced to the interview by the interviewer on line 5 as she finishes the sentence that the interviewee seems to leave open-ended:

'the word you know, u:h'. Here the interviewee hesitates a bit whether to explicate what he means with 'the word' or not. He makes a pause and says 'you know', as if assuming that both participants and maybe also the audience know what is meant by it, without having to say it aloud. But the interviewer does not want to leave this in the air but aims at a closure or at least at an explicated term of what the participants are to discuss further and hence ends the interviewee's turn with her own interpretation of what this word is, namely 'blindness'. Still, the interviewee does not agree to use the term 'blindness' introduced by the interviewer but first hesitates on line 6 and then on line 7 goes back to using the term 'word' as he did earlier: 'ye:ah the word was relegated to the same category as cancer'. This suggests that the interviewee would prefer another term instead of 'blindness'.

From line 7 to 18 blindness is represented as heavily stigmatized in the interviewee's family where a lot of emotional weight was laid on simply on the term as his family never used the word 'blindness'. Here blindness is again nominalised and rather than speaking of the biological or social phenomena behind the term, the participants focus on discussing the term itself. On lines 12 and 13, the interviewer insists on using the word 'blindness': 'why was the word blindness uh s-such a dangerous word in your family'. This seems to fit her agenda and on his next turn, on line 16 the interviewee agrees to this and uses the term 'blindness' for the first time. And when he does this, he refers to blindness on a generic level. Nevertheless, from this point on a common ground has been laid.

The actor here is a collective 'we' referring to the family members or specifically to the parents. On line 2 the interviewer labels the interviewee as 'almost a blind'. In this connection he is also given the identity of a family member, 'a son'. On lines 3 and 4 the interviewee answers the question about his parents assumed reactions to the news and here he turns to use the medical term 'a diagnosis' but he does not explicate whose opinion this was as he says that 'it was a severe and terrible diagnosis' where all actors are omitted. From there on, he uses a collective 'we', rather than talking about his parents' reactions, as if he agreed to this terrible nature of his blindness in childhood. It is the family that

'never even used the word' and 'never talked about it'. But then on line 10, the actor changes from the collective 'we' to 'their view' which seems to suggest that it was first and foremost the parents that decided that blindness was a terrible thing and thus avoided discussing it. Here the blind boy is described as 'just a normal child in their view' which suggests that this is not what the interviewee himself agreed to. Here the interviewee establishes a norm or a standard demarcating blindness and normality.

On lines 12 and 13, the interviewer invites the interviewee to reflect on the reasons for blindness being 'such a dangerous word'. She explicitly draws on the psychological discourse into this familistic discourse by her question: 'if you think more psychologically perhaps'. She invites the interviewee to combine the discourses and reflect blindness in the familistic context through another discourse. The interviewee suggests that blindness was associated with fear of being 'a limiting thing'. Once again, he omits all the actors and chooses not to say whose opinion this was. The expression is rather categorical and a fact-like it is not being modified at all. What is interesting is that first the interviewee is going to say that blindness is limiting, in present tense that is, but instead he says: 'blindness is (1.2) was a limiting thing'. After a long pause he chooses to change the tense of the verb as if to show that things have changed since then. The interviewer agrees to the past tense in her next question. Here she seems to be giving her own answer or opinion to her question on lines 12 and 13 as she wonder whether blindness was 'some kind of a stigma'. This is a rather strong expression which the interviewee accepts and agrees on: 'there was a stigma. yeah sure'. So in the interviewee's childhood blindness has meant at least two things: being different than others but not being acknowledged for it in the family and instead considering blindness a taboo topic and dangerous as a word but also something that sets up limits.

So the interesting negotiation within the familistic discourse is on the agreed term to refer to blindness in the interview. After a long and fine-grained change of opinions, the participants seem to settle with the term 'blindness', even though the interviewee first seems to object to the use of the term, at least on a



personal level. As has already been pointed out, another frequently used term is 'the word' highlighting the nominalisation of blindness: focus on the concept itself rather than the social and biological reality behind it.

The analysis of wording and rewording blindness in the data reveals that there are many ways of lexically 'dressing up' blindness. The most common way of wording blindness is through the term 'blindness' itself but, interestingly, most of the wordings in the data are metaphorical. Wording blindness in a metaphorical way through vivid expressions is a way of constructing the interviewee's blind identity as a rich and many-sided phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the physical and biological reality. To a great extent, through these wordings, the interviewee's blindness and blind identity is represented as including a strong mental aspect of emotions and feelings. Thus his blindness is represented as residing at least as much in the interviewee's head and heart as in his eyes. In this respect then, blind identity is represented as acquiring even philosophical aspects: even though the interviewee cannot see in the conventional way, he does 'see' metaphorically, through art, in his heart and in his dream world.

The wordings of blindness are not self-evident and given but the result of mutual agreement and negotiation. This strongly supports the fact that identities are always dynamic and interactional and that they are basically constructed on a moment-to-moment level. The interviewee does not possess any static way of being blind or signifying his blindness but these meanings are negotiated over and over again, including both stable and dynamic elements. However, since the methods of analysis used in this study do not enable me to study the situation based negotiation of identities and meanings in more detail and as the micro-analytic study of conversation sequences is not the purpose of the study, I will only point out to this phenomenon on a more general level.

The art discourse has the most distinct ways of wording blindness and these are mainly metaphorical expressions stemming from the field of arts, especially poetry and visual arts. Also within the medical discourse blindness is worded in a distinct manner, as an exclusively medical condition. Furthermore, the societal discourse is the only one where the wording 'deprivation' occurs and as

it refers to a lack of social contacts and relationships the term is characteristic to the societal discourse. Otherwise, the different ways of wording blindness do not seem to be specific to any discourse type but are discourse-transcending. The interviewee used much more varied wordings of blindness whereas the interviewer only referred to blindness through three different terms. This suggests that the interviewee represented his blindness and also blindness in general as a more many-sided and ambiguous phenomenon than the interviewer who reduced blindness only to the terms 'blindness' and 'word'. On the other hand, due to the format of the interview the interviewer did speak a lot less than the interviewee and that on one part explains the small repertoire of the wordings of blindness that the interviewer used. Besides this, it must be remembered that whereas the interviewee is a native English speaker, the interviewer is speaking a foreign language and thus obviously had a more limited vocabulary.

### **7.3 Transitivity - expressing the goings-on**

In this chapter I will provide the quantitative analysis of transitivity. Firstly, I will provide an overview of the distribution of all the process types in the data and, secondly, the distribution of the participant roles of the interviewee in the light of the whole data. It was not considered relevant to systematically list other people's participant roles since the focus of the study is on the interviewee's identity and the ways in which he becomes positioned in the data is especially important. I will also provide some examples of the process types and the participant roles in the data to demonstrate the results concretely but the proper textual analysis will be provided in chapters 7.4 to 7.4.8 as the different discourses of the data are explored. Circumstantial elements of transitivity were not either analysed systematically, but referred to only through some textual examples. Transitivity is not discussed in relation to the different discourse types like the wording and rewording blindness was explored in the previous chapter. The discourses are very heterogenous and have very fuzzy borders so it would be impossible and also in sharp contradiction to the ambivalent nature of the discourses to try to cut the text into neat discourse categories in order to be able

to count the process types and the participant roles within them. Thus, in this chapter transitivity is discussed in its own right and demonstrated through textual examples and is connected to the different discourse types later, in chapters 7.4 to 7.4.8

### **7.3.1 Analysis of the process types**

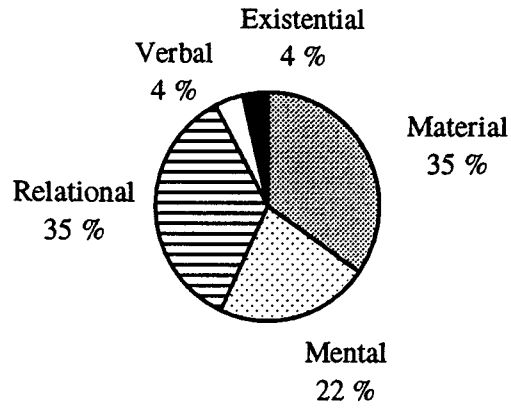
In this study the transitivity analysis comprised five process types and their subcategories: material, mental, relational, verbal and existential (see p.64 to 66 for discussion of the process types). The analysis was done systematically and according to specific principles explicated in the following. If there was a contradictory case of a verb wavering between two possible process types, the decision was made firstly on semantic rather than grammatical basis and also the immediate context of the verb was taken into consideration. My emphasis on the semantic aspect of transitivity is not the conventional way in systemic-functional linguistics as it is first and foremost a grammatical system and thus many researchers put emphasis on the grammatical side. But considering the nature of critical discourse analysis and its concern with meanings, I regarded the semantic aspect to be more relevant in this study. Following from this ambiguity between grammar and semantics and the fact that the verbs are not clear-cut but wavering on the borderline of several process-types, the analysis is always a matter of choices.

Due to the spoken nature of the data, some further decisions were made. First of all, spoken data include a lot of hesitation and repetition. If that was the case, the verb was only counted once even though it were repeated several times. For example when the interviewee says that: “these people now do do they do this in Finland...” the first ‘do’ was not taken into consideration since it can be accounted for stuttering or repetition and as such does not yet represent any goings-on of the world. Spoken data also include many discourse conjuncts, such as ‘you know’ or ‘I mean’. These were not analysed either since they do not codify any events or experiences but serve quite different purposes in talk. In other words, discourse conjuncts are not meaningless or empty codes but since their

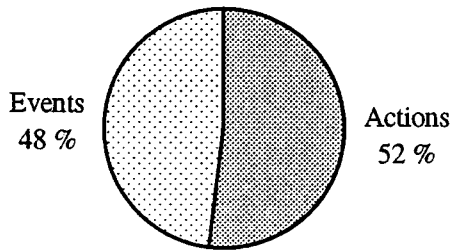
function is not to codify transitivity they were excluded. And one final technical choice: in the transitivity analysis also the embedded clauses were analysed. To give an example, the following sentence by the interviewee: “I talk in the book about climbing to the attic in our house and living up there in the attic and listening to records...” Some systemicists would here analyse only the first clause (I talk....) as a verbal process and categorize all the three subsequent clauses (climbing...living up there...listening...) as the three verbiages of that first verbal process. But since this kind of approach would ignore a great amount of data, I considered it better to analyse all the clauses both as part of the main clause and as independent processes as well. So instead of analysing the above sentence as one process I analysed it as comprising four processes, of which the three latter ones were simultaneously the verbiages of the first verbal process. To my mind this kind of an approach gives a more accurate description of transitivity in the data. Finally, in the conventional systemic-functional study of transitivity, the different process types, participant roles and the circumstances are usually codified beneath the examples of the data. However, I have decided to leave these taggings out from all the textual examples in the analysis for two reasons. Firstly, I did not consider the taggings necessary since I will discuss the examples in detail and explain their process types and participant roles within the main body of the text. Secondly, especially within the qualitative analysis the examples are very long, extending up to a half of a page and the taggings would have made the examples at least three times longer. As such the examples would have been impossible to follow and due to their length I would have had to place the tagged versions in appendices anyway.

First, I will discuss the distribution of process types in the whole data summarized in Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8.

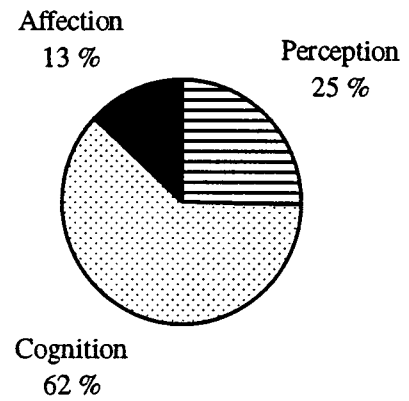
**Figure 5. The distribution of the process types in the whole data**



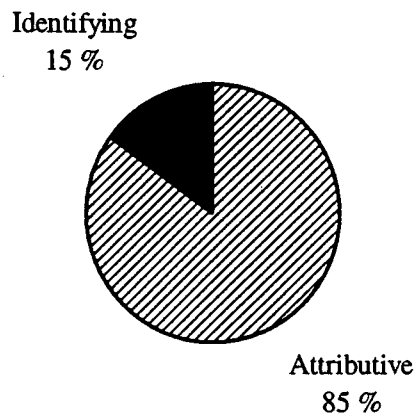
**Figure 6. Material processes**



**Figure 7. Mental processes**



**Figure 8. Relational processes**



The total number of processes was 740. The most frequent process types were relational and material processes, both accounting for 35 per cent of the total number of processes. Mental processes accounted for approximately one fifth of processes with 22 per cent. Verbal and existential processes were both rare, both comprising 4 per cent of processes. A closer look at the distribution of processes into subcategories shows that the most frequent individual process was the attributive comprising as much as 85 per cent of all the relational processes and 30 per cent of the total number of processes. Material processes were rather evenly distributed into actions and events, actions being slightly more frequent with 52 per cent. The most frequent mental process was cognition, as it accounted for 62 per cent of all mental processes and the mental process with the lowest frequency was affection comprising 13 per cent of mental processes.

In the whole data, events and phenomena discussed were thus mostly represented as relational and material. This means that the relationships between different issues and fragments became important, the nature and characteristics of people, phenomena and experiences were described and they were given an identification. A typical example of relational processes could be the following comment by the interviewee: 'it was a severe and terrible diagnosis'. Here the interviewee describes his blindness in an attributive process, where the carrier 'it' is characterized through an attribute, 'a severe and terrible diagnosis'. The large share of relational processes is not surprising considering the genre of interview. The important goal of such a programme is to elicit information, describe people and phenomena and these functions are in this interview most often carried out through relational processes.

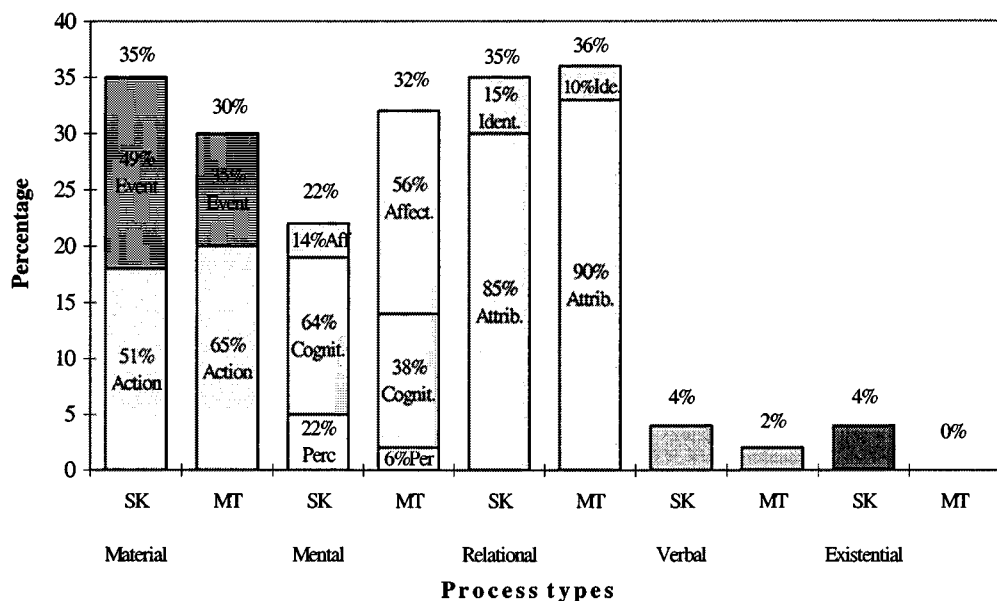
Experiences and events were also constructed as actions and events in the outer world, as more or less concrete happenings in the physical world. The following comment by the interviewee includes both action and event processes: 'she would take the prescription medications you know the pain relievers and she would sleep a lot'. The first part of the utterance in which the interviewee talks about his mother is an action process, where 'she' is an actor and 'prescription medications' the goal and the latter clause is an event process with the same actor

as in the former clause.

Rather than analysing the distribution of processes in the whole data, it is more useful to take a look at the distribution of process types between the participants. Of the total number of processes (740) of the data, 92 per cent were produced by the interviewee, SK and only 8 per cent by the interviewer, MT. This is rather unsurprising considering the institutional role of the interviewer as the initiator and convener of the interaction whose role is to get the other person speaking. On the other hand, these figures do not tell anything about the number and distribution of turns in the interview as there is a difference between the amount of speech and the number of turns. The large number of processes by the interviewee can be explained by looking at the composition of his turns: mostly they were amazingly long monologues which the interviewer did not interrupt but merely offered minimal responses.

Since the interviewee produced as much as 92 per cent of all processes in the data, it is obvious that the figures of the whole data and his individual figures are almost identical. The interviewer produced so few processes that they do not affect the total distribution of processes and this is why it is useful to look at both interlocutors independently.

**Figure 9. The distribution of the process types between the participants**



The most frequent process types used by the interviewee were relational and material, both accounting for 35 per cent of the total number of his processes. The third most frequent process type used by the interviewee was mental with 22 per cent and both verbal and existential processes each reached the share of 4 per cent. The interviewer used only four process types altogether as she did not once use existential processes at all. The most frequent process type used by the interviewer was relational, as over every third, 36 per cent of all her processes belonged to this process type. In her case, material processes accounted for 30 per cent and mental for 32 per cent. Verbal processes accounted only for 2 per cent as she used such a process only once: ‘you write also in your book that to be alive is to be in adversity’. This example shows that also such a verb as ‘write’ accounts as a verbal process because according to Halliday (1994:140) the ‘saying’ of verbal processes must be interpreted broadly to include “any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning”.

In the interview the interviewer was most concerned with describing, classifying and identifying things that were discussed. In other words, she was establishing relationships between two things or phenomena. Since most of her turns were naturally questions, her aim through these questions seems to have been to elicit information from the interviewee that is first and foremost concerned with characterising things, giving them descriptions, or identities. The following example by the interviewer will clarify this:

01 MT she seems to be u-uh very special person at some uh time she started even to see  
 02 ghosts around and reading Dracula at the middle of of night for you in the bed so  
 03 uh uh how was that

This question came out quite early in the interview as the participants were talking about the interviewee’s parents and their reactions to his blindness. The question includes two parts: first there is a statement and then a question. This way the interviewer sets up a scene, which in this case is about describing the interviewee’s mother and then elicits the interviewees opinion on this. It is obvious that the interviewer already has some knowledge of the interviewee’s mother, probably based on the autobiography, and rather than making a direct question, she decides to formulate her knowledge as a statement which gives her turn the



status of a fact which the interviewee is then welcome to respond. The statement begins with an attributive process, where 'she' is the carrier and 'a very special person' the attribute and also her question is formulated as an attributive process 'how was that'.

The interviewee was also classifying and identifying things, which may have been the result of responding to the 'relational questions' of the interviewer with 'relational answers'. But as much as the interviewee was doing this, he was also representing things that came up in the interview as actions and events that happened or someone made happen in the outer world. Thus for the interviewee representing the happenings of the concrete world were as important as describing and characterizing things. The following example will illustrate the material process type so commonly used:

01 SK there I was rolling my marihuana cigarettes and- and my reefers and uh I took a little  
02 LSD and- you know

Above the interviewee describes his drug abuse during his teenage years which he in this example constructs as concrete actions of 'rolling my marihuana cigarettes' and by taking 'a little LSD'. He represents himself as the actor with the different intoxicants 'marihuana cigarettes' and 'reefers' being the goals of his action.

It is interesting to note that the interviewer represented things as mental processes, as things happening in the inner world, clearly more often than the interviewee. An example of the mental process used by the interviewer includes the following question: 'what kind of dreams do you see'. The mental process here is more specifically a perception process which is the most typical mental processes used by the interviewer. The process here is 'see' and the senser is 'you', referring to the interviewee.

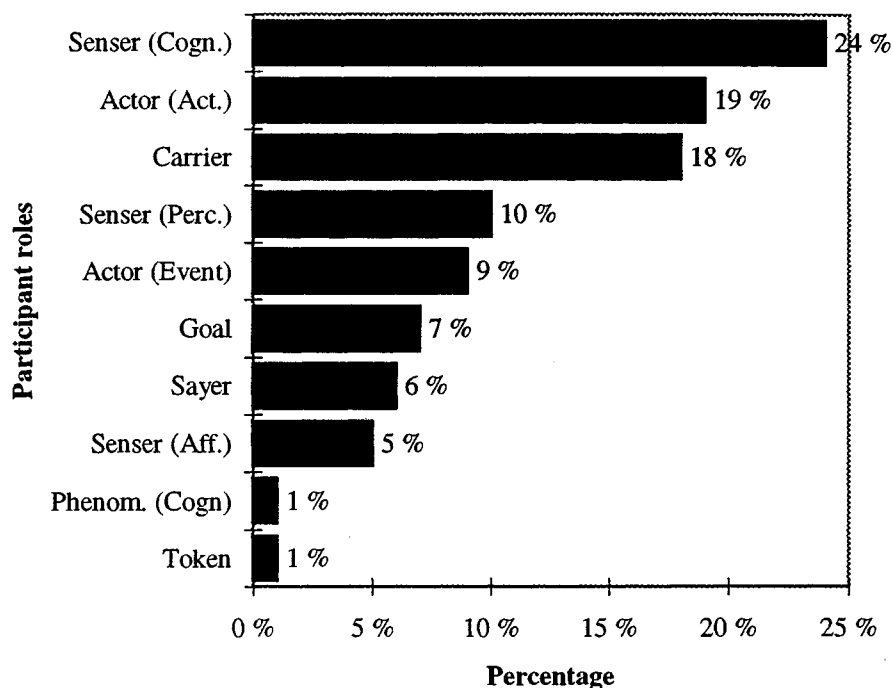
Neither participant used affection processes that much, in fact the interviewer used an affection process only once. Still, this does not mean that they did not talk about affections and feelings at all since they were often encoded as relational process, as in the following case, for example: 'I was sad about everything'. Rather, the mental happenings that the interviewer mostly talked about were perceptual, processes of seeing, hearing and noticing. On his part, the

interviewee produced mostly cognition processes: processes of knowing, understanding, believing and so forth. An example of a cognition process by the interviewer includes the following comment on his schoolmates: 'they thought of me as a martian'. Here the interviewee constructs the schoolmates, 'they', as the senser in the cognition process whereas 'me', in other words the interviewee himself, is the phenomenon.

### **7.3.2 Analysis of the participant roles of the interviewee**

Besides giving an overview of the distribution of the process types throughout the data I will also provide a similar account for the distribution of the participant roles of the interviewee in the data. I will cover thoroughly only his roles and then highlight some roles of other people in connection with the detailed textual analysis, since the interviewee's roles are the most relevant to the issue of his identity. By positioning the interviewee in different roles the participants were constructing identities and subject positions to him that greatly influenced the way his identity became constructed on the whole, for example whether the interviewee became constructed as the actor or the goal of actions. The term participant role does not refer to the institutional discourse roles of the participants in this context, for example those of the interviewee and the interviewer, but it is a grammatical term in systemic-functional approach which explores how people become positioned in relation to the process types; in relation to actions and happenings (see p. 64 to 66 for discussion of the participant roles).

**Figure 10. The distribution of the participant roles of the interviewee in the whole data**



Clearly the most frequent participant role of the interviewee was the senser in cognition processes, a role that accounted for 24 per cent of all his participant roles. This means that he was most often positioned as the one who knows, thinks or understands something. In the following example, the interviewee talks about the point in his life when he started accepting his blindness: 'I was in my thirties that I began to understand how painful and difficult this really was for me'. The first clause is a relational one but the second one is a cognitive mental process in which the interviewee represents himself, 'I' as the senser and 'this' as the phenomenon which obviously refers to his blindness and all the difficulties resulting from his impairment.

The second two most frequent roles were the actor in action processes with 19 per cent and carrier in attributive processes with 18 per cent. Thus nearly every fifth participant role of the interviewee positioned him as the active doer and agent in concrete happenings in the outer world, like in this example: 'you even rode a bicycle'. This is a comment by the interviewer in which she wonders how it could be possible for a blind boy to learn how to ride a bike. The great number

of actor roles constructed for the interviewee is quite surprising. One might expect a large share of carrier or sener roles to be constructed for the interviewee, the former becoming explained by the genre of interview and the latter by the nature of the interviewee's impairment that concerns first and foremost senses. However, just like being there to describe his life, himself and other significant people in his life, the interviewee is there to talk about the things he has done and will do in his life. So in this respect, the actor role is in line with the genre. One can claim that the active role constructed for the interviewee is exceptional. It contradicts the prevailing image of disabled people in the media where they are often represented in negative contexts and as passive victims. The analysis of the participant roles seems to suggest that when a disabled person himself can tell his own story in his own words, the picture can be quite the opposite to the way disabled identities are represented by outsiders. But in this case the active role is maintained by both the interactants since also the non-disabled participant, the interviewer constructs the disabled interviewee in an actor role even more frequently by the interviewer.

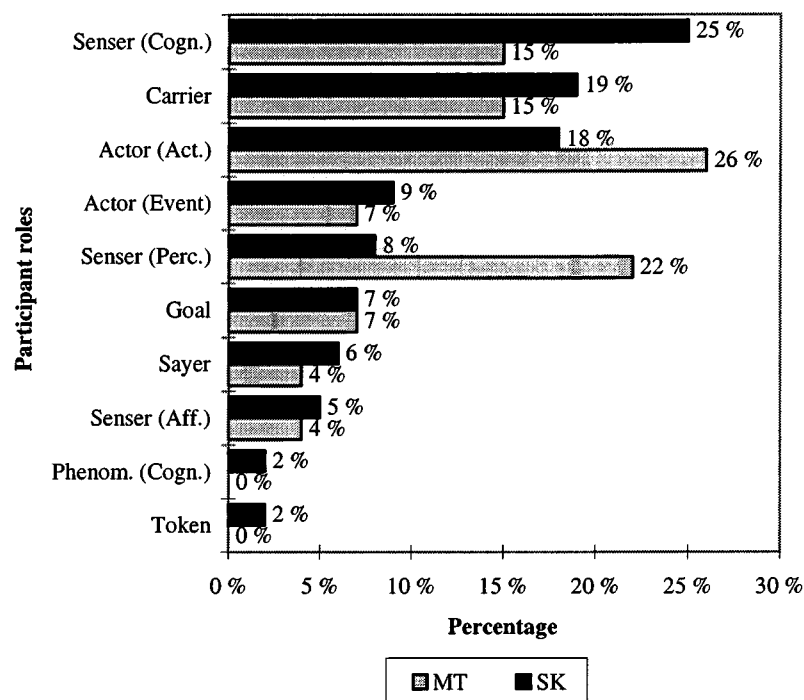
The interviewee was positioned as the carrier - the one being described and characterized in some way - in 18 per cent of all his participant roles. In the following example, the interviewee describes himself through many attributive processes positioning himself as the carrier: 'I was very fast, I was very athletic I have a tremendous memory'. As it was already mentioned the large proportion of relational processes is hardly surprising considering the goals and conventions of interview programme and thus it is to be expected that also the interviewee becomes often constructed in the role of the carrier.

The participant roles never attributed to the interviewee during the interview include the phenomenon in both perception and affection processes, the attribute in attributive processes, the value in identifying processes, the verbiage in verbal processes and the existent in existential processes. All these roles are rather passive in nature, representing either the goals of happenings or processes of existing. Also a few of these participant roles cannot even be attributed to a human, like the verbiage so in that respect, the lack of this participant role is to be expected. Nevertheless, the interviewee was constructed through all the active

process types but not in that many passive ones. Again, this seems to disprove the widely supported view that disability is synonymous with such qualities as being passive or being an object or even more radically, being a victim.

As discussed earlier, the interviewee produced altogether 92 per cent of the processes and the interviewer 8 per cent of the processes in the whole interview. Of these, the interviewee constructed himself as some kind of a participant in 35 per cent processes and the interviewer represented the interviewee as a participant in 47 per cent of the processes. In the rest of the processes, the participant was somebody else or it was lacking altogether. Evidently, the interviewer represented the interviewee as a participant more often than he did himself which shows that the interviewee was talking more about other people than himself.

**Figure 11. The distribution of the participant roles of the interviewee as constructed by each participant**



When one turns to look at how the interviewee was differently positioned in participant roles between the participants, one notices much more striking differences than in the rather even distribution of process types between the

interactants. The interviewee constructed himself most frequently as the senser in cognition processes, as these roles accounted for 25 per cent of all participant roles constructed by him for himself, for example like this: 'I hoped to be able to live up to her expectations'. Here the interviewee constructs himself as the cognitive senser who 'hoped' to fulfill his mother's 'expectations'. In her turn, the interviewer constructed the interviewee as the cognitive senser only in 15 per cent of the total number of roles used by her to construct him, typically with questions like : 'what do you mean by that'. She positioned the interviewee most often as the active agent in action processes with the share of 26 per cent. The interviewee constructed himself in this role in 18 per cent of the total number of participant roles he used. An example of the way the interviewee himself constructed himself as an actor includes the following comment for instance: 'I began to start nurturing myself' where, due to the reflexive verb, interestingly also the goal of action is the interviewee himself.

In other words, the interviewee represented himself most often as the senser in cognition processes, processes of knowing, thinking, understanding, believing and so on whereas the interviewer constructed the interviewee most frequently as the main active participant in the action processes in the concrete world: the one who does and makes things happen.

The second most frequent participant role constructed by the interviewee himself was the carrier in attributive process type, making up 19 per cent of the total number of participant roles that he constructed for himself. The corresponding percentage for the interviewer was 15 per cent. In the following, the interviewer describes the interviewee saying that: 'you had a lot of problems in everyday life'. The carrier is here 'you' and the attribute 'a lot of problems'. So the interviewee was slightly more often describing himself than was the interviewer, which is a typical feature of an interview programme where the interviewee is sharing his life and experiences with the interviewer and the audience as well. There was also a clear difference between the participants in the way that the interviewee was constructed as the senser in perception processes, processes of seeing, hearing, smelling and so on. The interviewer represented the

interviewee in this role as often as in 22 per cent of the total number of participant roles that she constructed for him whereas the interviewee's corresponding percentage stayed at only 8 per cent.

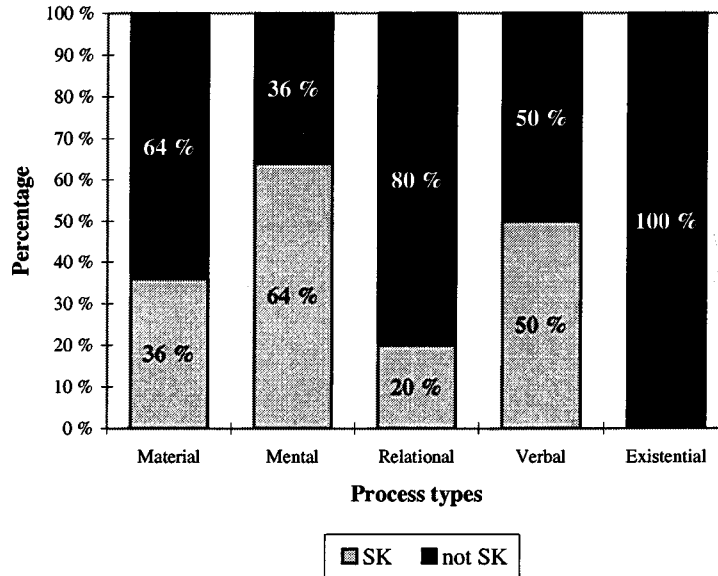
Some participant roles were used almost as frequently by both the interactants. For example, they both constructed the interviewee as the goal of action processes in 7 per cent of the participant roles they assigned for the interviewee. They were almost as identical (in frequency) in their use of the senser role in affection processes, in which the interviewee represented himself as such in 5 per cent of the cases and the interviewer in 4 per cent. For instance in the following example, the interviewee represents himself as the senser in two strong affection processes: 'I love Gandhi you know I love Abraham Lincoln'. The example is also interesting in a sense that even though such affection processes occur very rarely in the data, when they do, the goals of such strong personal feelings can still be so distant and unknown people as in the example above.

There were also several participant roles lacking altogether, in other words roles that were not once attributed to the interviewee. These are the role of phenomenon in both perception and affection processes, the attribute in attributive processes, the value in identifying processes, the verbiage in verbal processes and the existent in existential processes. In addition to these, the interviewer never constructed the interviewee as the token of identifying processes but the interviewee himself used the role to apply to himself in 2 per cent of his total usage. One rare example of the role of the token includes the following comment by the interviewee: 'I can be this person' where he represents himself as the token, the one being identified and 'this person' as the value, the identifier.

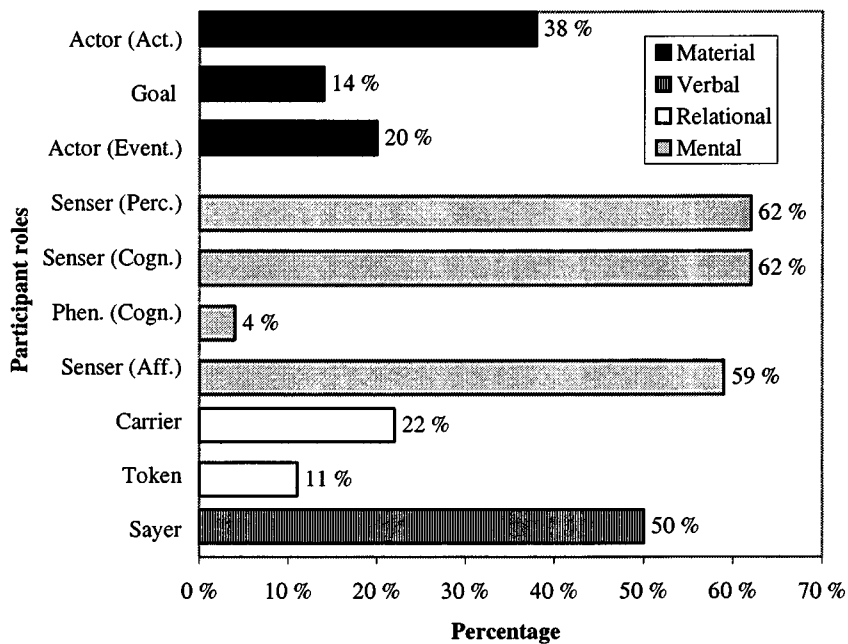
Finally, I want to contrast the distribution of the participant roles of the interviewee with the distribution of the process types in the interview. This means contrasting the number of participant roles of the interviewee in each process type with the total number of processes in the respective process type. Through this I can explore how often the interviewee is constructed as the participant in different verb processes. The Figure (12) illustrates the distribution of the participant roles of the interviewee in relation to the distribution of the five main process types in

the whole data whereas the Figure (13) will contrast the interviewee's participant roles to all the individual process types.

**Figure 12. The distribution of the participant roles of the interviewee in relation to the distribution of the process types in the whole data**



**Figure 13. The distribution of the participant roles of the interviewee in relation to the distribution of the individual process types in the whole data**





The Figure (12) shows that of all the mental processes in the data, the interviewee was constructed as a participant; as the sener or the phenomenon, in as many as 64 per cent of the cases. In other words, approximately every third participant in mental processes was someone else than the interviewee or the participant was unspecified. The Figure (13) shows that of all the perception and cognition processes he was represented as the sener in 62 per cent of both of these processes and he was constructed as the sener in 59 per cent of the affection processes. In other words, mainly the participant role of the sener was occupied by the interviewee throughout the interview thus leaving not that much space for other people to become constructed in this role.

The second most frequent occurrence of the interviewee as a participant was in verbal processes in which every second sayer was the interviewee and consequently every second sayer was someone else or lacking completely.

In material processes the interviewee was represented as a participant in 36 per cent of all the material processes. He was constructed as the actor in 38 per cent of the action processes and as the goal in 14 per cent of the same process type. As the actor of the event processes he was constructed less frequently than in action processes, namely in 20 per cent of all the event processes. So mainly, the actor in material processes in the data was somebody else than the interviewee but still he was represented as the actor in approximately every third material process. Also the goal of the material processes was mostly someone else than the interviewee since he was the goal in only every seventh material process. This shows that he becomes constructed as a rather active participant but one that does not dominate the whole picture as there obviously is room for other actors as well.

On the whole, relatively to the distribution of the processes in the whole data, illustrated in Figure (12), the interviewee was the mental sener, one that perceives, thinks or feels, more often than other people discussed in the interview. He was also constructed as the sayer in verbal processes as often as all the other people together. But in the roles of material processes he was in minority occupying fewer roles than others together. Within the process types in which the interviewee was constructed as a participant, in relation to the distribution of the

all the processes in the data, he was least frequently constructed as the participant in relational processes. In 80 per cent of relational process the person or object described was somebody other than the interviewee. This is rather interesting considering that the interview is about Stephen Kuusisto, the interviewee, and thus one might expect that it is most often he that occupies the role of the carrier. This result indicates that both the interviewee and the interviewer regard also other people, such as family members, teachers and friends as significant actors in the interviewee's life and especially in terms of his blindness. Thus it becomes relevant to describe also other people in order to show their response and relationship to the interviewee's blindness. In addition to this, the discussion of various people occupying a central role in the interviewee's life also functions as a way to structure the interview contentwise: at birth these people were medical personnel and family, later his teachers, peers and friends and in adult life they seem to be famous poets and artists: some kind of idols or role models.

### **7.3.3 Conclusions about the transitivity analysis**

The transitivity analysis provides many insights into the ways in which the interviewee's identity becomes constructed in the interview. First of all, the interviewee is a very active participant in the interview as he produced 92 per cent of all the processes leaving 8 per cent to the interviewer. This distribution reflects the institutional roles of both participants: the duty of the interviewer is to ask questions and function as a convener whereas the duty of the interviewee is to talk as extensively as possible on the agreed topics. The interviewee represented the things he talked about dominantly through relational and material processes and the interviewer used mostly relational, mental and material processes. So they were both mostly describing and identifying things and also constructing concrete actions in the outer world whereas the interviewer was also representing things through processes of the inner world, mainly through perception and cognition processes. The relational processes are also characteristic of the format of the interview programme and hence their large proportion once again reflects the specific mediated institutional context of the interview.

The participant roles of the interviewee were those of the senser and the actor. This combination produces ambivalence and multiplicity to the interviewee's identity as he was constructed both as the mental senser in happenings of the inner world and as the active doer in concrete processes of the outer world. Such a contradiction between the senser and actor roles can at least partially be explained by the nature of the interview. On one hand, it explores the interviewee's life, his decisions, actions and doings which are constructed through material processes and on the other hand it is built on reminiscing, on the interviewee's memories of his life that are commonly represented through mental processes. Both participants constructed the interviewee as the mental senser, but the interviewee constructed himself most often as the senser of cognition processes whereas the interviewer constructed him as the senser of perception processes. Thus the interviewee saw himself as a participant in cognitive processes: a rational person thinking, understanding or knowing whereas the interviewer constructed him through his senses, and dominantly through the visual sense. This seems to suggest that the interviewer tends to reduce the interviewee's identity to simply that of a blind person. Such simplification could result from the limited time for the interview but also the tendency in the media to provide clear-cut, unambivalent identities to audiences. On the other hand, the quantitative analysis does not reveal what the actual verbs used in these processes were, so one must be careful not to jump into any rash conclusions but to explore the nature of these perceptual processes and senser roles of the interviewee in the qualitative analysis.

On the whole, the participant roles ascribed to the interviewee most often are rather active: that of the actor in event and action processes and as the senser in perception and cognition processes. Only the role of the carrier is a more passive one.

The quantitative analysis is an effective way of summarizing and providing an overview of the results of the transitivity analysis. It provides a framework against which it is easy to compare the similarities and differences between the ways in which the two interactants represent and construct the interviewee's

identity. The quantitative analysis is also useful in providing percentual information of the most and least frequent process types and participant roles and thus outlining the way that the interviewee is generally constructed in the interview. The limitation of this kind of a quantitative analysis is the fact that it decontextualizes language from its original local context and thus gives a more homogenous and straightforward picture of linguistic phenomena which really are always ambiguous, heterogenous and context-dependent. Even though I have provided some examples to enrichen the quantitative analysis, it does not do enough justice to the context-dependent nature of linguistic data. Thus, in the following chapter I will discuss transitivity on textual level, in its varied and multiple contexts and show specifically how it used in the data and how the interview consists of constant interaction and negotiation of meanings.

#### **7.4 Constructing blind identity through the different discourses**

The qualitative analysis that will provide the main body of the analysis focuses on the different discourses drawn on in the interview. These discourses represent blindness from different angles and thus construct different subject positions for the interviewee. These discourses are not ready made, 'something out there' but they are constructed and used by the participants as they go along. The discourses do reflect societal discourses of medicine for example, but mainly they are constructed at this particular moment for this particular use.

The discourse types used in the analysis are inductive in nature: they have been formulated based on the data in the course of the analysis, not determined beforehand. Distinguishing and constructing the different discourses was a complex and circular process. There were three basic criteria on the basis of which the discourse types were distinguished: *the vocabulary*, *the contents* and *point of view*. In the following I will illustrate the application of these criteria in the analysis.

The terminology and vocabulary of the data were analysed through dividing the data into semantic fields. These fields that included only nouns were the basis of distinguishing the different discourses by their lexicon. The number of

semantic fields discovered was sixteen (see Appendix 2.) and since there were finally only seven discourses, there was obviously not a corresponding discourse to every semantic field as more than a unified vocabulary was required for a discourse. What was then needed in addition to the analysis of the semantic fields, was mapping out the different topics and contents of the interview. This analysis was carried out by close-reading the data several times and its results can be seen in a simplified and tabulated form in Table (1) on page 75. At this point, the number of the discourses was cut down as there were some semantic fields that were scattered throughout the interview under various topics and did not as such construct a distinctive discourse. These semantic fields were after this point ignored. But to a great extent, the different topics and the different semantic fields were convergent. After analysing the semantic fields and the topics of the interview, I had a list of categories that were characterized by similar terminology and topics but their point of view was still to be explored. After looking at the ways in which the interview consisted of different angles and viewpoints to the issue of blindness and blind identity and comparing these to the categories I had constructed on the basis of vocabulary and topical contents, I was able to distinguish pieces of the text that were similar in these three aspects - some more distinctively, others more loosely - and finally ended up with seven different and mutually exclusive discourses. In the analysis of the discourse types I will briefly discuss the criteria for distinguishing the particular discourse type in the light of the three criteria explored above.

In the reconstruction process of the discourse types my aim was to construct mutually exclusive discourse types that would be rather distinct and distinguishable ways of constructing blindness and thus in the qualitative analysis I will discuss these discourse types in their respective chapters. Despite the fact that the discourses aim at mutual exclusiveness, it must be emphasized that this categorization and separation of the discourse types was made for analytic purposes only, in order for me to be able to provide the reader with a coherent and understandable picture of each discourse type. The discussion of the discourse types under separate chapters may give the reader the false impression of neatly

categorizable and totally separate discourses when in reality the discourses are by no means homogenous but extremely heterogenous with blurred and wavering boundaries including bits and pieces of each other and thus becoming intermingled. I will point out to this interdiscursivity as it comes up in my analysis and in addition to this, in order to properly illustrate the heterogeneity of the data, I will define and discuss the concept of interdiscursivity and analyse a short piece of data merely from the point of view of interdiscursivity in chapter 7.4.8.

The discourses construct a plot of a kind for the interview from the beginning to the end as the different viewpoints emerge and disappear to reemerge again later. Altogether, there are seven discourses distinguishable in the data: medical, familistic, psychological, emotional, art, societal, and idealistic. In the following table I will provide the chronological order in which the participants draw on the different discourses and the person initiating the discourse throughout the interview.

Table 3. The initiators and the sequential order of the discourses throughout the interview

The initiator of the discourse	The sequential order of discourses throughout the interview
MT	Medical
MT/SK	Familistic (Medical)
SK	Familistic + <i>Psychological</i>
MT	ART
SK (SK)	<b>Societal</b> (Medical)
MT	<u>Idealistic</u>
SK	<b>Societal</b>
SK	<i>Psychological</i>
SK/MT	ART + <u>Emotional</u>
SK	<b>Societal</b>
SK	ART
SK	<u>Idealistic</u>
MT	<u>Emotional</u>
SK	<i>Psychological</i>
MT	<u>Emotional</u>
SK	ART
SK	<b>Societal</b>
MT	<u>Idealistic</u>

All of the discourses were used more than once by the participants in the course of the interview. Some discourses reemerged in their full potential, others were drawn on briefly within some other discourse and disappeared again after a few lines. When two discourses in the same row are joined by + -sign in the above table, it means that in that phase of the interview these two discourses are used inseparately overlapping each other. When the discourse in the table is followed by another discourse in brackets it means that the latter discourse was drawn on within the former one very briefly but the two discourses were not mixed as in the

previous case. When analysing the discourses and encoding their sequential order in the data, it was rather difficult to decide when a new discourse was introduced whether to encode it as a new separate discourse or as a mere interdiscursive emergence within the first discourse (which would be codified in the table by the brackets). In this study, I decided rather to encode these discourses as new in case the discourse did not immediately after the new discourse change back to the first one. On one hand, this kind of encoding makes the changing of the discourses look neat and easily categorizable which obviously is not the case as the discourses are heterogenous and shifting. On the other hand, this system is easier to follow because within one discourse there may be faint echoes of other discourses several times and in case all of these were encoded the table would be impossible to follow. And finally, I preferred to provide a general outline of the sequential order of the discourses in the interview and focus on their interdiscursive elements only when they emerged in the extracts discussed closely as an example of each discourse. This way the reader can follow the broad order of discourses and the plot of the interview bearing in mind that the table is simplified for the sake of convenience and the complexity and interdiscursivity of discourses will be discussed as they come up during the close textual analysis.

So the participants constructed seven different discourses which were used 22 times altogether. Of these, the interviewee initiated thirteen discourses and the interviewer eight. The interviewee initiated five different discourses at least once: medical, psychological, art, societal and idealistic whereas he never initiated neither familistic nor emotional discourse. In her turn, the interviewer initiated also five different discourses: medical, familistic, art, idealistic and emotional whereas she did not once initiated psychological or societal discourse. So even though the interviewee initiated a new discourse more often than the interviewer, they both initiated as many different discourses. The way the different discourses were introduced and initiated and whether they were accepted and followed by the other participant in the interview will be discussed in the light of the examples in the case of each discourse.

In the following, I will discuss each discourse separately. Each discourse



type is first characterized on a general level, focusing on the three criteria of distinguishing it, its typical characteristics, its respective size and the person(s) initiating it and drawing on it. Then each discourse type will be intensively discussed in the light of a longer textual example that will be analysed through two different linguistic elements: transitivity and wording and rewording blindness. These extracts were chosen so that they would be especially typical or interesting examples of the particular discourse. This kind of a qualitative analysis enables me to discuss the two different linguistic elements in a detailed manner, in their local and textualized contexts and study the discourses carefully from this viewpoint. At the end of each chapter, I will briefly conclude the insights that the analysis of the particular discourse type offers to the analysis of the discursive construction of blind identity and other aspects of identity. In the analysis, I will discuss the discourse types roughly in the same order as they were introduced in the interview by the participants. Thus, the order of the chapters is quite similar to the macro-narrative plot of the data as well. This enables the reader to follow the narrative development of the discussion of blind identity and see how it changes and develops step by step, discourse by discourse.

#### **7.4.1 Blindness within the medical discourse**

The medical discourse is only marginal in its relative size but its significance becomes highlighted as it constitutes the very beginning of the interview. It persists for a rather short period and is not used in such an extent again in the interview but the very first minutes of the interview are heavily medical in emphasis and thus the medical discourse is influential. The medical discourse is also rather homogenous; the participants do not mix other discourses with it that much. So, regardless of its short duration, the medical discourse is very distinct, dominating the first moments and thus having an influential status.

The medical discourse was introduced by the interviewer with her initial questions which was then accepted and followed by the interviewee. This discourse type was very easily distinguishable by all the three criteria. The use of medical jargon and terminology is distinct and differs greatly from the vocabulary

of the rest of the interview. The semantic field that was the most significant in distinguishing the medical discourse type was medicine (see Appendix 2). Obviously, the topic and contents are clearly medical as well. The point of view was a more complex criterion to distinguish a discourse type as it allowed much more space for interpretation. However, the medical discourse is characterized by positioning the interviewee as the object of medical personnel and procedures carried out by them, emphasizing the biological aspect of impairment and detaching the personal.

The example of the medical discourse in fact covers the whole discourse from beginning to the end and the example was included in the analysis in whole because it forms a rather distinctive piece of the interview.

#### Example 2. Blindness within the medical discourse

- 01 MT so your story begins in- in march nineteen fifty five ( . ) in a delivery room of a hospital  
 02 ( . ) that's where you were born  
 03 SK I was born ( . ) prematurely ( . ) and I had a twin brother, ( . ) uh together, we weighed only  
 04 five pounds. that was our combined weight ( . ) u:h my brother died after only day, (0.4)  
 05 a:nd uh ( . ) I: was placed in an incubator† (0.6) in nineteen fifty-fi:ve ( . ) the ( . ) art ( . )  
 06 of incubation ( . )for premature infants ( . ) was still very new (0.5) a:nd ( . ) they utilized  
 07 a lot of oxygen. they would put pressurized oxygen ( . ) in (an) incubator ( . ) uh believing  
 08 that this would help u:m ( . ) an infant ( . ) u:hm who's struggling ( . ) °and° that the extra  
 09 oxygen would ( . ) provide a ( . )°you know° ( . ) a **lift** ( . ) h if you will h ( . ) u:h (0.4)  
 10 ironically (0.8) if you're born prematurely, ( . ) uh >you know< the **eyes** continue to de-the  
 11 **eyes** develop in the last trimester of pregnancy. so: if you're born prematurely your eyes are  
 12 undeveloped ( . ) a:nd ( . ) the oxygen ( . ) actually kills the process ( . ) so ( . ) incubated  
 13 with oxygen on the one hand ( . ) the oxygen helped me live ( . ) but: it uh destroyed my eyes  
 Video  
 14 SK the condition ( . ) is known in- in medical ( . ) terminology as the ( . ) retinopathy ( . ) of  
 15 prematurity. and what this means is that the ( . ) retinas on the **back** of the eye ( . ) are ( . )  
 16 very severely damaged there's- they have <**scars**> ( . ) they ( . ) do not form completely °hh  
 17 so that a person who has this kind of ( . ) condition ( . ) has a very incomplete ( . ) visual  
 18 ( . ) sense of the world. ( . ) so from the **very** beginning ( . ) in early childhood ( . ) I saw  
 19 only: tiny fragments ( . ) of the world.=

The above extract is the very beginning of the interview. The topic is the birth of the interviewee and the causes of his blindness. The first statement by the interviewer, 'so your story begins in- in march nineteen fifty five in a delivery room of a hospital that's where you were born', sets up the scene for the whole interview: the aim is to discuss something significant that happened when the interviewee was born that came to affect the rest of his life, namely the fact that

he was blinded at birth. The interviewer situates the cause of blindness at birth and especially in medical setting. This is followed by the interviewee's response in which he adopts the medical framework set up by the interviewer and describes how he was born prematurely and how due to being placed in an incubator became blind. In other words, the example blindness is constructed from a medical point of view: a way of representing blindness as a biological and physiological impairment discussed through strong medical jargon and terminology. The medical discourse is introduced by the interviewer but used by both.

### **Wording and rewording blindness**

In this context, blindness is worded as 'a condition' by the interviewee, on lines 14 and 17. The condition is identified as 'retinopathy of prematurity' and a further clinical and precise medical definition follows. In the beginning of his turn, the interviewee talks about a condition on a generic level, as an abstract concept and detaches the term from himself by referring to an indefinite 'person who has this kind of condition'. Then, he shifts to a personal level, interpreting the meaning of this condition in his own life: 'so from the very beginning in early childhood I saw only tiny fragments of the world'. The medical term 'condition' implies that blindness is a biological and physiological state diagnosed by an expert and that blindness is somehow equivalent to a disease or an illness. Here, and also throughout the interview, the medical terms are used only by the interviewee, the interviewer never uses such medical terms about blindness.

The wordings of blindness within the medical discourse as 'a condition' and 'retinopathy of prematurity' are distinctive to this discourse as they do not occur elsewhere in the data and they are obviously included in medical terminology. In other words, it is by no means a coincidence that these terms come to be used within medical discourse but the terms are rather a distinguishing marker for the medical discourse.

### **Transitivity**

Looking at the extract from the point of view of transitivity, it becomes

obvious that the medical discourse is characterized by material, e.g. 'I was placed in an incubator' and relational processes, e.g. 'your eyes are undeveloped' and nearly all mental processes are lacking. The extract is more homogenous than the interview as a whole since there occur only material, mental and relational processes and all verbal and existential processes are missing. The percentage of material and relational processes is also higher in this extract than in the whole interview.

Mostly, blindness is here represented through material processes: as concrete happenings in the outer world which almost always engage an actor but not so often a goal. There are four main actors in the extract: 'they', 'oxygen', 'eyes' and then the interviewee referred to as 'I' by himself and as 'you' by the interviewer. The first two actors occur only in sentences with a goal, ie. in action sentences and the two latter ones in sentences that lack a goal, ie. in events. 'They' refers to the medical personnel even though this is never explicated. So 'they' are an unidentified collection of doctors and experts that had an active role when the interviewee was born. The actions that 'they' are associated with are all kinds of medical procedures, for example: 'they utilized a lot of oxygen' and 'they would put pressurized oxygen in an incubator'. 'Oxygen' is another frequently occurring actor in the sequence with quite a conflicting character. On one hand, it is the oxygen that 'kills the process' of development of the infant's eyes and consequently 'it destroyed my eyes' but on the other hand 'oxygen helped me live'. 'Oxygen' is thus represented both as the cause of the impairment but as the saviour that kept the interviewee alive. The interviewee explicates this paradox on line 10 by the adverb 'ironically'. Based on this episode it can thus be concluded that blindness becomes constructed as the price the interviewee has had to pay for being alive.

The interviewee is also presented as an actor by both participants, but not in the sense of 'doing' but in the sense of 'happening'. The interviewee represents the interviewee as an actor on line 2 with the clause 'you were born'. The event that the interviewee associates himself is also premature birth. Another actor, implicitly referring to the interviewee, is generic 'you' on lines 10 and 11. Here the

event is also that of being born prematurely. Being born is not actually something that one actively does, it is rather something ‘happening’ in which the actor has the most central role but not as a goal. Another central actor is also the ‘eyes’ that ‘continue to develop in the last trimester of pregnancy’ and ‘do not form completely’. These events attach eyes to a biological or medical discourse where eyes form a part of a physiological body and its functioning and that are yet in a developmental state. In other words, eyes are not associated here with the usual connotation of ‘seeing’ but they are an organism of human body that is taking shape.

When we turn to look at the goals of actions in the example, it becomes evident that the main goals are the interviewee and oxygen. The interviewee is the goal of medical procedures by the hospital personnel, on line 5: ‘I was placed in an incubator’ and on line 13: ‘the oxygen helped me live’. ‘Oxygen’ is also constructed as the goal of the procedures by the medical personnel, it is something that ‘they utilized’. So the interviewee and oxygen are represented both as the actors and the goals of action in the example, thus occupying versatile roles.

There is also a great number of classifying and identifying clauses that aim at characterising medical procedures, eyes, generic ‘you’ and the interviewee himself. The interviewee is being described as having ‘had a twin brother’ and the interviewee’s and his brother’s weight being the carrier in the following: ‘that was our combined weight’. The interviewee is also being described as ‘incubated with oxygen’ on lines 12 and 13. So the interviewee is one hand being described by medical attributes and on the other through his family relations. The medical procedure ‘the art of incubation’ is being described as ‘very new’. The eyes are described as ‘undeveloped’ and the retinas of the eyes as ‘very severely damaged’ and having scars. The developmental state of the eyes is being described as somewhat ‘insufficient’ having defects and malformations. Only one identifying clause is being used, in other words a clause that aims at a precise identification of an object rather than a mere description of it. This identified element is ‘the condition’ and it is being identified by the interviewee as ‘the retinopathy of prematurity’ on lines 14 and 15. So the only element being precisely identified is

a term referring to blindness and it is given a precise identity through medical terminology. Immediately after this identification, on lines 17 and 18, the medical term is also being translated into the everyday language by the attributive clauses: 'so that a person who has this kind of condition has a very incomplete visual sense of the world'.

There occur only two mental processes in this extract, the first referring to the cognition of the doctors: 'believing that this would help' and perception of the interviewee: 'I saw only tiny fragments of the world'. The mental process where 'they' are the sensors puts the medical personnel in a suspicious light since a rather uncategorical word 'believe' is used, instead of for example 'know'. This brings an aspect of insecurity or hesitation to the representation of the medical personnel. The mental process in which the interviewee is represented as the sensor and the 'tiny fragments of the world' the phenomenon, serves as an explanation of the consequences of the incubation and loss of sight for the interviewee. None of the happenings is being represented through affection processes.

The medical discourse is reinforced through another, nonverbal and visual medium of communication as well. The video-insert after line 13 contains harsh black and white footage of new born babies in incubators at hospital and a close-up shot of a pregnant mother's stomach. The picture is accompanied by an anguished humming female voice at the background. The video-insert becomes equated with the interviewee's life and the above description of the hospital context. The message and atmosphere of the insert is in line with the spoken medical discourse: the insert represents the face of the medical discourse of blindness; it gives the medical construction a visual form.

In addition to this example, the medical discourse was constructed within the familistic and societal discourses later in the interview. The former, the interdiscursive usage of the medical discourse within the familistic discourse, will be referred to in chapter 7.4.2 in the discussion of the familistic discourse whereas the latter will be discussed briefly here. The medical discourse was drawn on by the interviewee within the societal discourse around the middle of the interview:

01 SK (.) u:m (.) they didn't help very much (.) because my eyes also have a muscle condition  
 02 the eyes move very quickly (.) so it's very hard to (.) focus and see (.) with the  
 03 telescopes (.) bu:t a doctor thought that this might be helpful (.) so I wore these glasses  
 04 with the (.) telescopes (.) a:nd of course the other children were (.) **horrible**.

Here, the interviewee is talking about his school experiences in later childhood, specifically about the time he got 'glasses with telescopes'. In the middle of his turn, within this societal discourse he draws on the medical discourse: 'because my eyes also have a muscle condition...'. The lines from 1 to the end of the line 3 are obviously constructed within the medical discourse, with a medical topic, terminology and a doctor as a participant. On line 4 he then shifts back to the societal discourse by describing his school mate's reaction to his glasses. Here, the interdiscursive construction of the medical discourse within the societal discourse functions as a way to conceptualize his impairment in a biological and physiological sense. One could also argue that here the medical condition, the impairment is used to explain the other people's behaviour: they were 'horrible' because of the physical deficiency of the interviewee. The way the children behaved is then described within the societal discourse.

### **Concluding remarks**

The preceding analysis is not only an analysis of one example of the medical discourse but it pretty much covers the whole medical discourse in the interview since besides the example discussed above, the medical discourse was drawn only two times, very briefly, later in the interview. Thus the conclusions made here do not only concern one example, but one discourse as a whole.

The medical discourse of constructing blindness is characterized by rather homogenous verb processes, with material and relational processes being the most frequent ones. Within this discourse things are represented as either actions and events in the material world or different people and other objects are being described and classified. The interviewee is mainly constructed as an object of medical procedures with the medical personnel or such medical actors as 'oxygen' occupying the active role of making things happen. Blindness is constructed as a physical impairment caused by developmental disruptions. Blind identity becomes

constructed through medical terminology and medical setting which on one hand reveals the interviewee's own expertise in the field. Blind identity is on the other hand something represented as controlled by others and with little positive contents. Identity is here being constructed through objectification of the blind individual and medicalization of blindness. Some strong words are used in metaphorical and non-metaphorical sense, e.g. 'kill', 'destroy' implying a deterministic character of the process of becoming blind. The text also reveals a juxtaposition between two groups of actors: the doctors and experts in hospital and the infants and the prematurely born babies in the delivery rooms. Still, the picture painted of blindness is not clear-cut but includes ambivalent shades as it becomes constructed as the inevitable price the interviewee had to pay during the first days of his life to be able to continue his life. Consequently, it seems that blindness is represented as an ambiguous issue the interviewee does not know whether to praise or blame. The medical discourse is also characterized by being concerned with the birth of the interviewee.

The fact that both the participants of the interview draw on the medical discourse in signifying and constructing blindness, clearly demonstrates the power that this hegemonized way of defining and representing disability still holds in society. In the light of these data, the medicalized way of defining disability and the medical discourse that circulate in society seems to have strong influence on the way that disabled identities are negotiated on a local, personal level. Thus the medical discourse of society becomes recontextualized on a local level as a cultural resource of signifying experiences of disability. Further, within this discourse impairment is seen as the factor that causes disability; blindness is seen as nothing more or less than a biological impairment. All social aspects of impairment are lacking.

The medical discourse is the one that puts more emphasis on the impaired body than any other discourse in the interview. Within the medical discourse the physiological origin or cause of the interviewee's blindness plays a significant role in the construction of his blind identity. It has been concluded that the experience of one's own body is important in identity construction. In the words of Gabel



(1999:41) the body can be used “as a site of my imagination, as a means of constructing images of my self”. Thus identity can be physically experienced and physically constructed. Metaphorically, the disabled body becomes the site where the different discourses of disability collide and are produced (Corker and French 1999:2). According to Giddens (1991:66), “shame often focuses on that ‘visible’ aspect of self, the body”. Body may also become a channel of power, “a site upon which this power is exercised” (Hogan 1999:81). In this case, these discourses seem to consist of the medical ones but this seems to be the case only within this particular discourse. Furthermore, power seems to be laid on the hands of the medical personnel and the impaired person is given the status of a passive object. Later on, the construction of blind identity grows to be a much more complex issue.

#### **7.4.2 Blindness within the familistic discourse**

The next discourse introduced in the interview is the familistic one which is one of the most pervasive and dominant ways of constructing blindness in the interview. This results from the fact that approximately half of the interview was concerned with themes and topics relating to childhood. The first time familistic discourse became constructed in the interview was also by far the longest piece of a continuous discourse. After this, the discourse changed to that of a mixture of familistic and psychological discourses initiated by the interviewee. This combined discourse was not a very long one and when it changed again to art discourse, the familistic discourse was not drawn on again in the interview, except for in a few words or expressions within other discourses. Thus the familistic discourse dominated the first half of the interview logically resulting from the chronological order of the interview and the consequent discussion of childhood in the beginning of the interview.

As goes for the three criteria of distinguishing the discourse types, the contents was the most obvious criterion to detect the familistic discourse. The familistic discourse is characterized by the topics of childhood and family with the main actors being the family members. Consequently, the vocabulary circulates

around family and as such provides the second criterion. The terminology is not as heavily marked and distinct as within the medical discourse since the vocabulary of the familistic discourse is much closer to everyday language and commonplace issues than the medical one. However, the familistic discourse was mainly distinguished by the semantic fields of family and life phases (see Appendix 2). The third criterion, the point of view, refers in the familistic discourse to the way in which the issue of blindness is placed in a family setting and accordingly the relational nature of blindness is highlighted: from quite early on, the blind identity of the interviewee has been constructed in relation to other people reflecting their views on meanings of blindness. Thus the familistic discourse constructs a communal viewpoint to blindness.

The familistic discourse was not constructed only through spoken language but through visual discourse as well. Namely, there were two video inserts shown within the familistic discourse. Both of these seem to be authentic home video material, probably from the interviewee's personal archives. The first of these includes a family portrait of the interviewee's family: a close-up of a black and white picture with the interviewee's father and mother at the sides and little Stephen in between them. The family members stare seriously and rather facelessly at the camera. The portrait is a very typical one, the kind of a picture that most people of the interviewee's age probably have at home reminding them of the solemn moment of taking the official family portrait at the photographer's. The picture seems to underline normality; the interviewee's family is represented as any American family at the fifties or sixties, seemingly they were not any different from the others. And seemingly, their son was not blind either, he merely had thick glasses. The other video insert includes moving color footage of the interviewee's family. The insert depicts smiling and happy faces of the interviewee's mother and father, the interviewee waving at the camera at the age of two and later, around the age of four or five jumping and running around outside with his mother. The video insert also portrays the whole family on a summer holiday on a boat, swimming and laughing. This second insert also enforces the picture of any 'normal' and common family engaged in the most typical familistic activities:

spending quality time, enjoying themselves on a holiday.

Whereas within the medical discourse, the visual discourse seems to be in line with the spoken discourse, there is a sharp contrast between the visual and the spoken discourse within the familistic discourse. Whereas the spoken discourse emphasizes the conflicts, shame and pretending in the family in which the son was blind and the mother mentally ill, the visual discourse represents a normal, happy American family in which everybody seems to be healthy, happy and normal.

The fact that the careless and happy atmosphere of the inserts did not become reflected or referred to in the spoken interview by either of the participants may have been the result of the fact that the video material was probably edited after the interview was made and was thus constructed for the audience: the participants did not see the videos during their interview and thus would not comment on them. But the audience is provided with a rather contradictory and ambiguous picture through these two mediums: the visual discourse constructs a happy and carefree average American family whereas the spoken discourse represents a confused family trying to hide and deny the son's impairment. However, in one respect these two mediums are alike: they both present a family trying to conceal their difficulties, a family who is desperate in keeping up appearances.

The familistic discourse was introduced to the interview by the interviewer. Her question in the beginning of the interview: 'can you imagine your parents reaction when they heard that their son is almost a blind' shifted the focus from the medical discourse discussed earlier to that of the familistic discourse. The interviewee accepted and adopted this point of view moving on to discuss his blindness within the family context.

## Example 3. Blindness within the familistic discourse

- 01 MT didn't your mother ever **notice** what was happening ( . ) to you ( . ) that you  
 02 ( . ) really couldn't see ( . ) well that you had a lot of problems in everyday life.  
 03 SK my mother ( . ) understood ( . ) that my blindness was painful. but her response  
 04 to that was uh uh complicated ( . ) by: ( . ) the fact that she had **many** different  
 05 kinds of physical ailments and ( . ) depression ( . ) of her own. so she would take  
 06 the prescription medications >you know< the pain relievers °hh and she would  
 07 sleep a lot and so she had a lot of denial and a lot of depression and a lot of  
 08 physical pain of her own ( . ) u:h ( . ) and I think it kept her from really ( . )  
 09 being able to focus ( . ) u:h ( . ) >you know< ( . ) on **my** blindness on my  
 10 childhood ( . ) on what was going on around her I think she was very much l-  
 11 locked in her own ( . ) uh ( . ) inner ( . ) inner place  
 12 MT so: she didn't have energy to take care of **you** i[n that sense=  
 13 SK [n::o.  
 14 SK =I think th[at's true], you know ( . ) I had to learn how to do that for myself  
 15 MT [mm ]  
 16 MT mm-h  
 17 SK yeah.  
 18 MT so you had to be very independent ( . ) a- at very ( . ) early age  
 19 SK ye:ah **well** ((in a higher pitch)) ( . ) I think uh (0.6) I became very tough. ( . ) you  
 20 know I- I said to someone not long ago ( . ) who was asking you know about  
 21 blindness and- you know what it's like I said ( . ) blindness is not for wimpy  
 22 people.  
 23 MT ° hh mh °  
 24 SK you know, ( . ) you can't be weak and be blind  
 25 MT mm.  
 (0.4)  
 26 SK and I think mother ((swallows)) who was ( . ) very >you know< very optimistic  
 27 in a- in one way( . )u:hm felt that if I could see a tiny bit.( . )>a little bit.< ( . )  
 28 that that( . ) in her mind **must** mean ( . ) tha:t ( . ) u:hm ( . ) I'm not blind at all.  
 29 °you know°°hh it became ( . ) a ( . ) complex ( . ) game in which ( . ) she  
 30 imagined I was seeing°**far more**° than I really could. and **I**, in **my** turn, ( . )  
 31 hoped to be ( . ) uh able ( . ) to: live up to her expectations s[o I ]  
 32 MT [mm]  
 33 SK would °**try so hard**° to ( . ) appear as though ( . ) I could really see ( . ) far  
 34 more than I could.

The above extract is one example of constructing blindness within the familistic discourse where the participants talk about the relationship between the interviewee and his mother and the way his mother responded to his son's blindness. The interviewee's blindness in his childhood becomes constructed as a difficult and contradictory issue, especially in the family context since his parents had difficulties in accepting their son's impairment.

The initial question by the interviewee on line 1, 'didn't your mother ever notice what was happening to you', puts the interviewee's mother in a rather suspicious light, suggesting that she may not have even noticed his son's impairment. As a response to the interviewer's question, the interviewee gives his

explanation for his mother behaving the way she did. He explicates the causal relationship between his mother's own physical ailments and the fact that she did not pay that much attention to his son's blindness on lines 8 and 9 by saying 'I think it kept her from really being able to focus on my blindness'. In this way, the interviewee is rationalizing his mother's behaviour in a way that he can understand it and account for it. He lifts the burden of guilt out of her mother's shoulders and does not blame her in any way. Then he goes on to describe the relationship between him and his mother that turned into a 'game' in which the mother imagined her son could see more than he could and the interviewee in his turn tried to live up to his mother's expectations by pretending to see more than he actually did.

Within the familistic discourse also other discourses are drawn on. On lines 4 to 8 there the medical discourse is drawn on again. The interviewee uses a lot of medical terminology when accounting for his mother's 'physical ailments'. Here the medical discourse does not construct blindness as such but is used for describing the interviewee's mother. This shows how the different discourses are not homogenous nor separate from each other but intertwined and interdiscursive: they are used inseparately.

### **Wording and rewording blindness**

Here the interviewer represents the interviewee's blindness first on lines 1 and 2 through a perception process which is very categorical and non-modified: 'you really couldn't see'. This way she constructs the interviewee's blindness as a very absolute condition with no variation; one either can or cannot see. The most frequent way of referring to blindness in the example is with the term 'blindness' which is used both on personal and generic levels. The interviewee uses the word 'blindness' first within the familistic discourse and talks about it on a very personal level as he refers to it as 'my blindness' two times on lines 3 and 9.

Besides wording blindness as a personal experience the interviewee uses the word on a generic level as well detached from himself. This takes place twice

in the form of sayings, almost reminding aphorisms, 'blindness is not for wimpy people' and 'you can't be weak and be blind'. What is striking in both of these clauses is that they are strictly categorical allowing for no hesitation or modality and also being very broad generalizations. They are both also rather harsh and pessimistic expressions revealing a crude and negative side of being blind. Here, being wimpy and weak is contrasted to being blind: these oppositions do not match, they cannot go together. But these expressions do not only refer to blindness on a generic level since they have grown out of the interviewee's own experience. This comes out first on line 12 as the interviewer offers her own interpretation of the interviewee's previous turn: 'so she didn't have energy to take care of you' and later again on line 18: 'so you had to be very independent'. These ideas are introduced by the interviewer and the interviewee agrees to them but also elaborates both by saying first that due to his mother's distractions 'I had to learn how to do that for myself' on line 14 and that in consequence to this 'I became very tough' on line 19. So he attributes being tough to himself and through this wants to show that he is not weak and could not afford to be. In other words, blindness is here constructed as the cause, something that forced him into becoming independent and tough.

The way blindness becomes worded in this example does not seem to be distinct to only this discourse but the term blindness becomes used within other discourses as well, which is not surprising since the term 'blindness' is the general way of referring to blindness in everyday language. What is distinctive to the familistic discourse, however, is the way blindness becomes characterized and described. Blindness stands for independence and toughness and becomes described in many negative contexts. And actually it seems that especially within the familistic discourse (and later also within the societal discourse) the negative shades of being blind become constructed and highlighted. Here blindness is also linked with personality traits stemming from the interviewee's childhood experiences.

### **Transitivity**

The extract is strikingly different in terms of transitivity than the example on the medical discourse. In this discourse mental and relational processes are the most frequent ones whereas material processes are in a small minority. The first example of a mental process is the interviewee's first question: 'didn't your mother ever notice what was happening' in which the mother as the senser in a perception process and the phenomenon, ie. the object of her perception is 'what was happening to you'. A typical relational process describes the interviewee's mother, for example in: 'she had many different kinds of physical ailments and depression of her own'. Also compared to the distribution of the verb processes in the whole data, there is respectively a much more higher number of mental and also relational processes and much smaller number of material processes in the example. There also occur two verbal processes in this example, which is almost equivalent to the proportion of verbal processes in the whole data. The two verbal processes are: 'I said to someone not long ago who was asking you know about blindness and- you know what it's like' and the immediately following clause: 'I said blindness is not for wimpy people'. In this example, all existential processes are lacking.

The most frequent process type in the example is the relational one - similarly to the first example of the medical discourse also here the participants are both describing people and phenomena. In the example all the relational processes are attributive, processes of describing and classifying and there are no identifying processes which would give the carrier a definite identity. There are two main carriers that are being described, the interviewee and his mother. The interviewee describes his mother as follows 'she had many different kinds of physical ailments and depression', 'she had a lot of denial and a lot of depression and a lot of physical pain' and 'she was very much locked in her own inner place'. Thus the mother is represented through medical jargon and she is constructed only through her mental and physical illnesses, in other words, she is given the identity of a sick person. Later, on lines 26 and 27 the interviewee describes his mother as being 'very optimistic in a- on one way' which is a rather paradoxical comment. The

interviewee represents his mother as 'optimistic' because she believed that the fact that her son did see a little meant that he was not blind at all but sighted. This kind of behaviour by a blind child's parent might just as well be labelled as prejudiced or intolerant as it represents not accepting a blind person for who he is but rather rejecting the impairment. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as a very human way of coping with difficulties in life: clinging onto the slightest shred of hope as long as you can. Labelling his mother's behaviour as 'optimistic' the interviewee is once again rationalizing her behaviour later on and explaining it in an acceptable way to himself. And perhaps it is even more important to rationalize and justify the mother's behaviour to the interviewer and to the audience than to the interviewee himself. The interviewee does not openly criticise his mother but softens his opinions and interprets the mother's behaviour in a positive light. The interviewee gives his mother credit before the eyes of the audience by rationalizing her behaviour. Now the audience can 'understand' and sympathize with her instead of judging her. The clause also implies a normative pressure: by giving her son the identity of a sighted rather than a blind person she equals him with normal rather than different or deviant.

The interviewer describes the mother as 'she didn't have energy to take care of you in that sense' on line 12, which is her own conclusion or interpretation based on the interviewee's preceding description. Thus the interviewer sets up a causal link between the interviewee's mother's poor health and her inability to take care of her son which could be interpreted as criticism of being an unfit parent, a bad mother. However, the interviewee agrees with at least the first interpretation on line 14 by acknowledging that 'I think that's true'. But his response to the interviewer's second interpretation is more ambivalent as he says that: 'yeah well I think I became very tough'. So in his own opinion he was not necessarily independent but tough, two qualities which he obviously demarcates here.

The interviewee describes himself as becoming 'tough' and the interviewer describes him as 'you had a lot of problems' on line 2 and as 'you had to be very independent a- at very early age' on line 18. Both these constructions are to be



understood in relation to the description of the interviewee's mother explored earlier in a way that it is implied that her behaviour and character made her son 'tough' and 'independent'. Hence the adult is constructed as the weak and self-occupied and the child as mature and responsible due to the circumstances.

In the above example, the proportion of mental processes is almost as high as that of the relational processes. In other words, the participants represent people through happenings in the inner world, inside people's heads. The most frequent mental process is cognition: understanding and knowing. Cognitive processes are only used by the interviewee and he mainly represents himself as the senser in these processes. The most frequent way of the interviewee representing himself as senser is in several 'I think' -clauses. It was rather difficult to decide whether to codify these utterances as discourse conjuncts or actual verb processes but as for this example I decided that all of them have a more complex function of encoding the interviewee's mental process than being merely discourse conjuncts (cf. 'you know' on line 14) which are typical in spoken discourse. For example by saying on line 14: 'I think that's true', the interviewee does not choose to say 'that's true' but instead formulates his opinion explicitly within a mental process: he *thought* it was true and hence acknowledging subjectivity of his account. There are also other cognitive processes in which the interviewee is represented as the senser. On lines 30 to 31 the interviewee represents himself as hoping to be able to please his mother: 'I, in my turn, hoped to be able to live up to her expectations' and on lines 31 to 34 trying to act as if he was not blind: 'so I would try so hard to appear as though I could really see far more than I could'. In the first clause, the senser is 'I' and the cognition process is 'hoped to be able'. In the second clause the senser is also 'I' and the cognition process is 'try so hard to appear'. In both of these clauses the phenomenon (the 'goal of the cognitive verb) is connected with the interviewee compensating for his blindness and acting up as if he could see.

The other person, much less frequently though, represented as the senser in cognition processes is the interviewee's mother. The cognitive process she is associated with are understanding and imagining: 'my mother understood that my

blindness was painful' on line 3 and 'she imagined I was seeing far more than I could' on lines 29 to 30. In the first case, the interviewee represents his mother as thinking that his blindness was 'painful' but it does not become explicated whose opinion it was. It remains unclear whether his mother understood that blindness was painful in his son's opinion or whether she herself thought so. In the second case the mother is represented as imagining that his son's condition was better than it actually was. The interviewee here constructs his mother as someone who for some reason denied the truth and whose expectations and reality thus did not meet.

The other mental processes, the perception processes are all, except for the interviewer's first question on line 1 already discussed earlier, processes that encode seeing. It is rather unsurprising that it is the visual perception that becomes relevant when the experiences of a blind person are discussed. The sener in these clauses is the interviewee who is constructed by the interviewer as someone 'who couldn't see' on line 2. When we turn to look at the ways in which the interviewee represents himself, it becomes obvious that he constructs himself as actually seeing something. He says on lines 29 to 30 about her mother that: 'she imagined I was seeing far more than I really could' implying that he did not see much but still he did see something. This example includes two clauses, the first of which is a cognition clause and the second one is a perception process with 'I' as the sener.

In the Example (3), blindness becomes constructed in conflicting ways. The interviewer's first question on lines 1 and 2 suggests that the interviewee did not see at all whereas the interviewee represents himself as being able to see a little. Also the way in which the interviewee represents his mother's opinions about his blindness is contradictory to the way in which the interviewee constructs his own opinion about blindness. This becomes clear on lines 26 to 28 where the interviewee refers to the situation between his ability to see and his mother's expectations by a metaphor of a 'game' which he describes in the following way: 'I think mother who was very you know very optimistic in a- in one way felt that if I could see a tiny bit a little bit that that in her mind must mean that I'm not blind at all'. So the interviewee constructs his mother's view on blindness as an

either-or situation in which case a person can either be sighted or blind but nothing in between. And since the interviewee could see 'a tiny bit' this meant to his mother that he could not be blind at all- all variation and shades of sightedness and blindness disappear, blindness is constructed as a very categorical notion: you either belong to his category or not. The only affection process in the example occurs also in this connection where the mother is constructed as feeling that her son could not be blind. She is not constructed as thinking or knowing that but as feeling it which undermines the accountability or the truth value of her opinion. By using the word 'feel' instead of some cognitive verb, for instance, the clause represents the mother's opinion in a very subjective light rather than as a fact that is based on knowledge.

There occur only a few material processes, in other words happenings constructed as actions and events in the concrete, outer world. The material processes associated with the mother where she is actor are the action process on lines 5 to 6: 'she would take the prescription medications' and the event on lines 6 to 7: 'she would sleep a lot'. Again, the interviewee constructs his mother by focusing on her illnesses and mental and physical difficulties. The interviewee is associated with two material processes. On line 1 the interviewer asks whether the interviewee's mother notices 'what was happening to you' which is a material process where the interviewee is represented as the goal of unidentified action. With this clause the interviewer is referring to the interviewee's blindness and all the every day problems resulting from this which she represents as happening to the interviewee, him not being able to control or regulate the happenings. This way of representing blindness locates the impairment outside the person in question as an 'outer force' happening *to him* rather than as an inherent character *in him*. The interviewee represents himself as the actor in the other material process: 'I had to learn how to do that for myself', referring to the ways and strategies of coping with his blindness alone. This also enforces the adult-like, independent character of the blind child that the interviewee wants to convey of himself at this point.

### **Concluding remarks**

In the example blindness becomes constructed as a heavily relational notion. The interviewee represents his blindness as something he in his childhood constructed in relation to his family members, especially to his mother. Consequently, a lot of time and space is dedicated for describing the interviewee's mother and thus she occupies a significant role within the familistic discourse. In the example, the behaviour of the interviewee and his mother are contrasted: the interviewee adjusted his behaviour to his mother's wishes and expectations and thus the other people's opinions about blindness came to affect the interviewee's life significantly.

Within the familistic discourse blindness is discussed from a child's perspective and it can be said that here the interviewee is represented also through another aspect of his identity besides his blindness: the identity of a family member, a son. This identity is constructed in relation to his blind identity the two being inseparable: the interviewee's childhood is not approached from any other angle and its exploration is relevant only with respect to blindness. The identity of a blind child that becomes constructed now, as an adult, is an adult-like, responsible and tough in nature. Blindness as such and then the mother's reaction to it become constructed as the causes for the interviewee becoming self-sufficient and independent. Blindness is represented as something that requires a strong personality or at least causes it. The roles of family members turn upside down: the typical responsibilities of a parent fall on a child whereas the parent lives in her own world, self-centred and self-occupied.

The interviewee represents his mother's view on blindness as an either - or situation whereas he represents his view as that of a continuum: there are a lot of variation between being sighted or completely blind. The mother is constructed as imagining and hoping that her son would belong to the category of the sighted and thus implying that being sighted is more preferable and even though one does have an impairment it is better to appear as if it did not exist. Thus the interviewee represents his mother's view on blindness as something one should be ashamed of and trying to hide it in order to appear sighted, normal that is.

Even though the interviewee's mother is discussed much more than his other family members, there occurs a short sequence within the familistic discourse where the participants talk about the interviewee's father. This is initiated by the interviewer's question: 'what about your father'. The interviewee goes on to describe first his father's roots in Finland and then describing his work and also the father's response to his son's blindness. The interviewee describes his father as follows:

01SK I think my father has a very stoical very strong reserved quiet steady Finnish  
02 quality to him. and so he was (0.4) he was in his own way nonverbal about these  
03 things

The interviewee constructs his father's response to his son's blindness somewhat differently from the mother's response. The mother is represented as the one who was denying and ashamed of the interviewee's blindness but the father is described as being 'nonverbal about these things'. In other words, through a very euphemistic expression, the father is represented as not talking about blindness, withdrawing from discussion and hence being in a way in denial as well. After this point, the father is not mentioned again in the interview.

As regards other family member's, the interviewee's twin brother is not mentioned within the familistic discourse but he is briefly referred to in the very beginning, within the medical discourse. This may be due to the fact that the twin brother died 'after only one day' and was not physically present at later stages of the interviewee's life. Thus the twin brother seems to be relevant only in the medical setting. Then again, the interviewee's sister (that appears in his autobiographical book) is not mentioned once throughout the interview. This seems to suggest that the interviewee does not consider his sister relevant or necessary to bring up in the discussion of his blindness. Mostly, he concentrates on his mother who takes the floor from the other family members.

At this point, it seems that the different discourses are used to construct different life phases of the interviewee. In contrast to the medical discourse which is used to construct the interviewee's birth, the familistic discourse is used to represent issues relating to the interviewee's childhood. Also already at this point, one can conclude that constructing blindness goes far beyond the hegemonized

discourse of medicine, which is here followed by the familistic discourse. Obviously, blind identity includes multiple aspects and the discourses that are used to construct them are constantly changing.

#### **7.4.3 Blindness within the psychological discourse**

The psychological discourse is a very specific and easily distinguishable way of constructing blindness in the data. It refers to the interviewee's way of representing blindness in the light of psychological studies drawing on their results as a way for explaining his own behaviour. The psychological discourse was also distinguished by three criteria. The topics within this discourse are scientific studies and their results. This results in the use of scientific language and vocabulary which characterizes the discourse. The semantic field that was used in distinguishing the terminology of the psychological discourse was mental, even though the vocabulary of this discourse type was not restricted to this particular semantic field (see Appendix 2). The point of view of the psychological discourse is that of science and psychology: blindness is approached on a general level and it is explained through the results of research or thoughts of famous psychologists. Thus it provides a rational viewpoint to blindness.

This discourse was drawn on exclusively by the interviewee as he introduced the discourse and also initiated it two times later. Interestingly, the interviewee initiated the discourse twice in the middle of his turn moving from the previous discourse onto this one during one turn. In the third case there was a short overlapping sequence with the interviewer after which the interviewee adopted the psychological discourse and in this case the shift was almost as seamless as in the two other cases. This seems to suggest that the interviewee could draw on the psychological discourse momentarily in order to rationalize or explain his past behaviour. He did not use it on a broader basis, to discuss his blindness generally or extensively.

The psychological discourse was drawn on three times during the interview. For the first time, the discourse was used in the middle of the familistic discourse and the piece is a mixture of these two discourses. In this case, the

interviewee explained his desperate way of trying to please his parents in childhood by referring to psychological studies that have shown how the children of 'dysfunctional parents', through their own exemplary behaviour, turn into heroic figures trying to teach and save their sick parents. Here the setting and topic arose from the familistic discourse but the point of view or the angle was provided by the psychological discourse. Later, the psychological discourse was constructed after the societal discourse when the participants were talking about the interviewee's eating disorder in his adolescence. Here he again referred to the psychological studies that have explored people with 'self-destructive tendencies' claiming that their only chance of survival is in the belief that there is meaning and point in life. For him, this provided an accurate explanation for his behaviour. He even explicated this by saying: 'I think that's what was going on with me' suggesting that the psychological explanation provides him a way of understanding his own behaviour.

In both of these two pieces of the psychological discourse, the interviewee began by offering results of and insights from scientific studies concerning his problem and after this moved onto a personal level, explicitly saying that this also explains his own behaviour. He used nearly identical utterances when starting the discourse: 'well we know from contemporary studies in psychology that...' and 'we know from psychological studies that...' These utterances are interesting in many ways. First of all, by using the pronoun 'we' instead of 'I' the claim is represented in a more abiding and truthful manner. Instead of providing only his subjective opinion, he suggests that this is what we all know, in other words something commonly agreed and hence true-abiding. Secondly, he constructs the interviewee and the audience in a high status as his proposition implies that surely 'we' are so sophisticated and learned that 'we' are familiar with the latest studies in science. The fact that the utterances are very similar to each other suggests that this is a very routinized and fixed way for him to represent these incidents to other people. It suggests that the interviewee has internalized a way of psychologizing his experience in order to give it more validity and abidance.

Finally, the psychological discourse was constructed after the emotional

discourse when the topic dealt with acceptance of blindness and the consequent liberation and growing independence of the interviewee. This example will be discussed in more detail in the following.

#### Example 4. Blindness within the psychological discourse

01 SK there was more going on for me ( . ) you know ( . ) uh I was able to pay greater attention  
 02 ( . ) uh in a more ( . ) humane and open way to much that was going on around me ( . ) the-  
 03 the great ( . ) u:h ( . ) Swiss ( . ) psychoanalyst Carl Jung (0.4) uh said in one of his uh( . )  
 04 essays that only only the dreamer ( . ) can change the dream. ( . )you know °hh if you're  
 05 having a nightmare ( . ) maybe you have a recurring nightmare ( . ) the only way that you  
 06 can change that is to enter into a partnership with the thing that scares you. you know you  
 07 transform- let's say there's a monster ( . ) you know ( . ) chasing you in your dream ( . ) the  
 08 only way you can ( . ) defeat the monster, you can't defeat it by running (0.8) °hh the only  
 09 way to defeat is by turning around and embracing it ( . ) you know you make friends with  
 10 it ( . ) you get to know it ( . ) you talk to it ( . ) you learn what its language is all about you  
 11 know, u:hm and in a sense, that's what I needed to do. (1.7) and uh you know I think ( . )  
 12 without that ( . ) without that embrace ( . ) I would still be ( . ) °you know° trying to starve  
 13 myself ( . ) uh or drinking too much or ( . ) doing something self-destructive ( . ) °you  
 14 know°

#### Wording and rewording blindness

In the example, the interviewee is not explicitly referring to blindness. One could still argue that the 'monster' the interviewee is referring to on lines 7 and 8, is his blindness since it was something he was running away all his life. On the hand, the metaphor or 'monster' could be a more abstract reference to his difficulties and adversities in life, of which many were caused by his blindness, or rather caused by his and other's responses to his blindness. He explicates here two of these difficulties, or illnesses rather, his substance abuse on line 13 and eating disorder on lines 12 and 13. At this point, also the identity of a sick person emerges again. In the example, the interviewee speculates that the consequences of him not accepting his blindness as a part of his identity would have been starving himself or substance abuse. Besides his blind identity, the interviewee is thus maintaining the identity of a sick person. Or in this case, the potential identity resulting from the regression to the addictions of his adolescence. So whereas the impairment functions as a permanent trait in his identity, the sick role is represented relevant only at some phases of his life or, as here, as a potential identity wavering on the borderline of the interviewee's awareness.



### **Transitivity**

Compared to the distribution of the process types in the whole data, this example differs greatly from those figures. In this example, the proportion of material processes, especially actions, is much higher than in the whole data whereas the share of mental and especially relational processes is smaller than in the whole data. The proportion of verbal and existential processes is also slightly higher in the example than in the whole data. Still, this does not allow one to draw any conclusions concerning the psychological discourse as a whole, as it seems that the two other occurrences of the discourse have a more even distribution of the process types. Even though the above example is not a typical example of the psychological discourse as concerns transitivity, the transitivity analysis of the piece still offers many interesting insights.

The most frequent process type in the example, the material process, is mostly represented through action processes and only a few times through event processes. In other words, most of the material processes include both an actor and a goal. In the example, there are altogether four different actors in the action processes: 'dreamer', 'you', 'monster', and 'I'. The first of these occurs in the quotation by Carl Jung on line 4: 'only the dreamer can change the dream'. This intertextual piece forms the very essence of the psychological discourse as it functions as a scientific, psychological frame, a quote by a famous psychoanalyst, against which the interviewee's own experiences become compared and equated. With this comment the interviewee shifts from the preceding emotional discourse to the psychological discourse.

The clearly most frequent actor in the example is 'you' which is used in generic sense as the interviewee reconstructs Jung's thoughts on a general level. The generic use of 'you' is clear in for example on lines 5 and 6: 'the only way you can change that' and on line 8: 'you can't defeat it by running'. The goal of the actions carried out by the generic 'you' is the 'monster' of Jung's quotation which in this context obviously refers to the interviewee's blindness. The interviewee constructs 'you' as 'changing', 'transforming', 'defeating', 'talking' and finally 'embracing' this monster. So, most of the action processes construct

'you' as the actor and 'monster' as the goal of these actions. In one clause these roles are however turned upside down, with 'monster' being the actor and 'you' being the goal, on line 7: 'there's a monster chasing you in your dream'. On the whole, then, it is the 'monster' of the interviewee's life, ie. his blindness that is being the object of actions, concrete happenings carried out by the generic 'you'.

After the interviewee has described Jung's metaphor on a generic level, he shifts to a personal level. This change takes place on line 11 as he explicitly says that 'that's what I needed to do'. In this action process, the actor is 'I' and the goal is 'that'. After this, the actor is the personal 'I'. The actor has changed from 'you' of the metaphor to 'I' of the concrete life of the interviewee as he is personally constructed as the one taking the actions concerning the 'monster' of his life. The actions that 'I' is associated with include 'trying to starve myself', on lines 12 and 13 and 'doing something self-destructive' on line 13. Both these actions are constructed as the obvious consequences unless the interviewee had not followed Jung and 'embraced' his blindness. So the potential consequences of not conforming to Jung's aphorism are represented as very harsh and dramatic, even life-threatening. Thus the interviewee constructs this crucial turn in his life as something that possibly saved him to life.

The event processes of the example also include the generic 'you' and the personal 'I' as the actors. What is different here compared to the action processes, is that the actors are not explicated but implied. On lines 5 and 6 there is first an action process followed by an event process with an implied generic 'you' as the actor: 'the only way you can change that is to enter into a partnership'. Later, on lines 8 and 9, there is a similar example: 'the only way to defeat it is by turning around'. The event processes in these two examples are respectively 'enter' and 'turning around'. The event process with the personal 'I' as the implied actor occurs on lines 12 to 13 where there is also first an action process and then the event process: 'I would still be you know trying to starve myself or drinking too much'. Also here the consequence of not following Jung's ideology is constructed as potentially dangerous and life-threatening: 'drinking too much'.

Through the material processes accepting blindness becomes constructed

as a process of actions that change the relationship between blindness and the one being blind from one of being oppressed to that of being in control. Blindness is constructed as something that instead of controlling the blind person can itself become controlled and managed, and in this way it can become something to be 'embraced', to be accepted. The interviewee constructs here the process of accepting his blindness first within a metaphoric frame on a generic level and finally shifts to a personal level suggesting that taking control over blindness was the only way of 'making friends with it' and on the very bottom, surviving with it.

There are not many mental processes in the example and since all perception processes are lacking, the mental processes consist of only cognition and affection processes. The sener of these mental processes is the generic 'you', similarly to the actors of material processes. There are three cognition processes, on line 10: 'you get to know it', on line 10: 'you learn what its language is all about' and on lines 11 and 12: 'I think without that embrace [...]'. In the first two cognition processes the sener, generic 'you', is constructed as learning about and familiarizing himself with 'it', which here refers to the 'monster'. In the first process, the phenomenon is 'it' and in the second one, it is 'what it's language is all about'. In the last process the sener is 'I'. There are also two affection processes. The first, on line 6: 'the thing that scares you' again constructs the generic 'you' as the sener and 'the thing' as the phenomenon. The other one, on lines 9 and 10: 'you make friends with it' also represents 'you' as the sener and 'it', referring to the 'monster' as the phenomenon. Thus, all the mental processes are concerned with the relationship between generic 'you' and the metaphoric 'monster'. What this means in the specific context is that through this piece of the psychological discourse and though these mental processes the interviewee is representing how 'you', implicitly also including himself, relates to the monster or nightmare of one's life, here to his blindness. Blindness is represented as something one ought to get to know, familiarize with, and finally make friends with, in other words accepting blindness and including it into ones life.

The number of relational processes in the example is the same as that of

mental processes. The relational processes are no exception to the material and mental processes in that also within these processes, the central participant roles are occupied with the generic 'you' and the 'monster'. The first attributive processes, on lines 4 and 5: 'if you're having a nightmare maybe you have a recurring nightmare' describes the carrier, the generic 'you' as having a nightmare, which actually is a rewording of the term 'dream' in the quotation of Carl Jung, and thus becomes represented in the context of dream world, and a terrifying one. The third attributive process is a rhetorical question, on line 10: 'what it's language is all about', in other words, asking what is this monster all about. There are two quite complex identifying processes in the example, first on lines 5 and 6: 'the only way that you can change that is to enter into a partnership' and the other on line 8 and 9: 'the only way to defeat is by turning around and embracing it'. Both these clauses have the same structure: the first clause is constructed as the token and the latter clause as the value, the participant that establishes an identity to the token. What this means is that both these clauses are quite categorical: entering into a partnership is constructed as exclusively the only way that one can change the 'nightmare', in a similar way that 'embracing' is constructed as by far the only way of defeating the 'monster'. These processes are followed by the interviewee's conclusion, also an identifying process, on line 11: 'that's what I needed to do'. He represents the first two clauses thus as the only choice he had to survive with his blindness.

Verbal processes occur only two times, on lines 3 and 4: 'the great Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung said [...] that only the dreamer can change the dream' and on line 7: 'let's say there's a monster'. In the first example, the sayer is Carl Jung and in the second the sayer is a generic 'us' included and implied in the common expression, 'let's'. The second example of the verbal processes also includes the only existential process in the data, in which 'a monster' is represented as the existent.

### **Concluding remarks**

In the interview, the psychological discourse is exclusively used by the

interviewee for explaining and accounting for his behaviour through the results of psychological studies or thoughts of a famous psychoanalyst. For the interviewee the psychological discourse is a way of dealing with and constructing his life through scientific language which provides order and understandability for his own behaviour. Within this discourse his blindness is represented as a psychological dimension, his identity becomes constructed within scientific language and in relation to scientific models of explanation. The discourse is also used for constructing another identity for him, namely that of an anorexic, a sick person. The identity of a blind and the identity of a sick person become intertwined as the emotional difficulties following his blindness are constructed as the cause of his eating disorder. The identity of a sick person is not separate from the identity of being blind and within the psychological discourse these are mutually co-constructed, both affecting the other.

The psychological discourse is used to a great extent on a generic level, detached from personal commitment, as was demonstrated through the transitivity analysis of one particular example of the discourse. The use of the generic 'you' is in line with the scientific tone of the discourse, discourse that offers general explanations or models for some particular behaviour. The generic level is then followed by a clear shift to the personal level as the results of psychological studies or the effects of ideas by scientists are applied to everyday life; that of the interviewee's. The strategy of framing and explaining his personal experiences with scientific studies and Jung's psychoanalytic theory and resulting psychological discourse gives credibility to his own experiences, explaining his struggle with his blindness to himself and to the audience.

Within the psychological frame blindness has strong psychological dimensions, and it is also worded in a metaphorical way. Blindness is not only a physical and social phenomenon, it is also mental having psychological consequences and traits. In the first piece of this discourse the interviewee comments that: 'we've seen studies about the psychological costs to children who grow up with parents who are in some kind of pain'. So, the interviewee becomes constructed as the sufferer of psychological pain both due to his blindness but also

due to his parents' pain. Still, blindness is constructed as something the interviewee has come to embrace and value through a long and painstaking process and actually this process of embrace and acceptance is constructed as a necessity, the only way to cope with the monsters of life.

#### **7.4.4 Blindness within the emotional discourse**

The next discourse introduced in the interview was the emotional discourse. It is the most unspecific and heterogenous of all the discourses in the data. It is concerned with the emotional world and responses of the interviewee towards his blindness with special emphasis being on the experiences and emotions resulting from him accepting his blindness. The discourse was drawn on towards the end of the interview when the participants discussed the interviewee's adult years and the point in his life that he finally came to terms with his blindness. This discourse was basically distinguished by its topics and contents: the feelings, emotions and experiences attached to blindness. Since the emotional discourse is concerned with commonplace and everyday phenomena such as feelings it does not include very distinct or specific vocabulary. Naturally, it includes more references to the mental world of the interviewee, to his feelings and thoughts but it does not consist of any distinct 'emotional terminology'. However, the semantic field of emotions was used as a basis to distinguish the emotional discourse through vocabulary (see Appendix 2). The point of view constructed within the emotional discourse is a mental one: blindness is represented as a source of mixed feelings and whirl of emotions.

The emotional discourse was drawn on three times during the interview. The first of these, initiated by the interviewee, was a reflective account of the interviewee's solitary childhood and his survival strategies. It was a mixture of the art discourse and the emotional discourse where the two overlapped and mixed with each other, a piece in which the interviewee was represented also through another aspect of his identity besides blindness, namely through his occupational identity of a poet. That piece will be discussed in chapter 7.4.5 within the art

discourse.

The second time that the emotional discourse was drawn on, it was used in the discussion of the adult years of the interviewee especially concentrating of the phase in his life when he came to accept his blindness. In this case, the discourse was initiated by the interviewer. This example will be discussed in more detail in this chapter. The last bit of the emotional discourse was drawn on in the discussion of the consequences resulting from the interviewee accepting his blindness. In this piece that was situated at the end of the interview and which was initiated again by the interviewer, the interviewee described his emotional responses and reactions to his new freedom that to a great extent resulted from him taking up the guide dog. The following is an example of this:

01 SK in New York City we have the crazy bicycle messengers you know and people on  
 02 skateboards and you know she's watching all of those things and making effective  
 03 decisions and yet we're moving at wonderful speed and I'm free to relax as I walk  
 04 and I say in the book that when I got Corky I suddenly grew about two inches you  
 05 know I was standing up straight and I was relaxing and the world became more  
 06 interesting you know I began to enjoy moving through all of that color and fog

As the above example illustrates, the emotional discourse provides a rather optimistic and positive perspective to blindness. Here the pivotal actor is Corky, the interviewee's guide dog, who is constructed as the very concrete reason for the interviewee's new independence, freedom and the resulting emotions and feelings of competence and enjoyment. Accepting one's blindness is constructed as the compulsory condition that must be fulfilled in order for an impaired person to be happy and self-contained. In other words, acceptance is represented as a decisive process in the formation of a coherent blind identity.

## Example 5. Blindness within the emotional discourse

- 01 MT how many years did it take until you started to accept your ( . ) blindness  
 02 (3.3)
- 03 SK I think u:h it wasn't until I was in my my thirties (0.5) that I began to understand (0.4)  
 04 <how> ( . ) painful and difficult this really was ( . ) for me ( . ) I: didn't have a sense of  
 05 freedom. a sense that I could go places. so:: ( . ) one thing that happened was that I began  
 06 to have this ( . ) desire to go places on my own.
- 07 MT mm†
- 08 SK a:nd uh so there was a desire to grow ( . ) a desire to be more independent to be more self-  
 09 sufficient. u:h you know I got **tired** of being in these little towns in in you know, New Yor-  
 10 in rural upstate New York or ( . ) °hh u:h you know living in these enclosed environments  
 11 u:h ( . ) >you know< I wanted to go to ( . ) Rome ( . ) or ( . ) New York City: or ( . ) San  
 12 Francisco ( . ) wanted to go places and and experience things.=
- 13 MT =why didn't you start to use ( . ) the white cane. because it had ( . ) perhaps ( . ) made your  
 14 life much more easier.  
 (1.6)
- 15 SK we:ll you know, the old song says if I: knew then ( . ) what I know now [( . ) (right) ( . )]  
 16 MT [hh huh huh huh]
- 17 SK u:m (0.4) yes it would've made my life easier (0.4) u:h and the dog would've made my life  
 18 easier=  
 19 MT =so ( . ) but they were [( . ) some ]  
 20 SK [you know]  
 21 MT kind of symbols [(for you)]  
 22 SK [but they were symbols of the very thing I most detested **about** myself.  
 23 MT mm
- 24 SK you know ( . ) so:: uh I couldn't **get** there. you know, u:hm ( . ) you know it's like the story  
 25 of someone ( . ) you know ( . ) who ( . ) drowns in just a: ( . ) you know ( . ) teaspoon of  
 26 water. ( . ) you know ( . ) uh ( . ) help was so near at hand ( . ) bu:t it was so far from my  
 27 imagin(ing) ( . ) i-it took me a long time ( . ) my first trip ( . ) into the streets of the city with  
 28 the cane ( . ) this **thing** I've been **fearing** all my life >right this was< an enormous moment  
 29 for me. (0.5) a:nd >I mean I-< I think I expected huge crowds to stop and point and **laugh**  
 30 you know °hh like u::h, you know, the emperor walking in his underwear you know I- but  
 31 ( . ) they **didn't** ( . ) you know, and not only that ((in a higher pitch)) ( . ) the cars slowed  
 32 down ( . ) you know ( . ) u:hm ( . ) I discovered that there were real ( . ) **benefits** to this.  
 33 ( . ) u:hm (0.4) so ( . ) it was a it was a tremendous moment in my life I realized ( . ) I can  
 34 I can be this person ( . ) I ( . ) I have there are opportunities here. ( . ) u:h ( . ) maybe I don't  
 35 have to be so ( . ) **frightened** and shallow and nervous and ( . ) pretending all the time ( . )  
 36 you know if you really put in enormous amounts of mental ( . ) you know energy: ( . ) into  
 37 ( . ) pretending to be something you're **not** ( . ) you're **wasting** a lot of your **brain** power.  
 38 ( . ) you know so I certainly became more (0.6) energetic ( . ) there was more going on for  
 39 me ( . ) you know ( . ) uh I was able to pay greater attention ( . ) uh in a more ( . ) humane  
 40 and open way to much that was going on around me

## Wording and rewording blindness

In the above example, blindness becomes worded in two ways. First, in the interviewer's very first question as 'your blindness' and later, on line 22 by the interviewee as 'the thing'. In fact, these wordings are the only ones that occur within the whole emotional discourse referring to blindness so in this respect this example is a representative example of the emotional discourse as concerns the



ways in which blindness is worded. The term 'blindness' is used on a personal level to refer to the interviewee's condition and it is not described in any way. The term 'thing' is a very euphemistic way of wording blindness, it is described by the interviewee as something 'I most detested about myself'. So 'blindness' is in the above example used in a more neutral context whereas the 'thing' refers to a negative state that is even associated with powerful negative feelings. However, it cannot be said that either of these wordings would be distinctive to the emotional discourse: the term 'blindness' is used across different discourses and the term 'thing' just seems to come up to within this discourse and at least semantically it is not in line with the nature of emotional discourse that concentrates on the mental side of blindness: the feelings and emotional responses towards it.

### **Transitivity**

Within the emotional discourse the most frequent process type is the relational one. Then follows the mental process type and thirdly the material one. The fourth most frequent process type is the existential process type while verbal processes come last. The distribution of the process types in the above example differs from the overall distribution of the process types in the whole data in that the numbers of material and relational processes are somewhat smaller in this example than in the whole data while the number of mental processes is notably higher in the example as compared to the overall figures. So in this example the participants are mostly describing and characterising issues and people but also constructing phenomena through mental processes, as workings of the inner world clearly more often than in the interview as a whole. Representing things and happenings through cognitive and affection processes is in line with the nature of the emotional discourse: emotions and feelings are also grammatically dressed up as mental processes.

The most frequent process type in the example, the relational one, is most concerned with describing and identifying the interviewee himself, as he is represented as the carrier in attributive processes and token in identifying

processes more often than any other person or thing. All the processes in which the interviewee is described are produced by the interviewee himself. He describes himself in two rather opposite contexts: first as he was before accepting his blindness and then after this process of acceptance. He constructs himself as the carrier in the following: 'I was in my thirties' and 'I didn't have a sense of freedom' and in the following the carrier is 'this', referring to the situation in which he was: 'how painful and difficult this really was for me'. In other words, the interviewee constructs himself before accepting his blindness as a grown-up who was not free but dependent and deprived and in a painful situation. The gradual shift towards the phase of acceptance is constructed through an identifying process on lines 5 and 6: 'I began to have this desire to go places' in which 'I' is constructed as the token and 'this desire' as the value. After this, the interviewee represents himself as the carrier, realizing that 'maybe I don't have to be so frightened and shallow and nervous' and instead he 'became more energetic', 'I got tired of being in these little towns' finally realizing that 'I can be this person'. So the point of accepting blindness as an integral part of his identity is constructed as a turning point in the interviewee's life that not only broadened his living environment and opportunities but also changed himself as a person, towards independence and self-assurance. The interviewee's statement 'I can be this person' is the very culmination of the process of acceptance that marks a heavy contrast between his former and new self: he represents himself as becoming a person, something that he represents himself not being before.

The interviewee describes going to the streets with his guide dog as the very concrete act resulting from him coming to terms with his impairment. He represents this moment through attributive processes in the following way: 'this was an enormous moment for me' and 'it was a tremendous moment in my life'. In the former process 'this' is constructed as the carrier and 'an enormous moment' as the attribute whereas in the latter one the carrier is 'it' and 'a tremendous moment' is the attribute. Thus he anchors his 'new' identity to a very concrete situation; accepting his blindness was not only a mental process but it also lead to new concrete opportunities and situations. And this concrete incident

is constructed as a very positive and powerful turning point.

The relational processes are also used to characterize and identify other carriers besides the interviewee and the moment of culmination. Both the participants also describe the situation in which the interviewee was before accepting his blindness. This happens first in the interviewer's first question, on line 1: 'how many years did it take'. The interviewee himself describes the situation for example through an attributive process on line 27: 'it took me a long time' and through an identifying process on lines 24 to 26: 'it's like the story of someone you know who drowns in just a you know teaspoon of water'. Here accepting blindness is constructed as a process, a gradual shift from one life phase to another. In other words, the new blind identity is represented as taking shape in a long and gradual process. In the latter example by the interviewee, he describes his situation through an intertextual metaphor or an allegory which symbolizes the way in which the interviewee was submitted to a small problem that might have easily been resolved but which in his imagination blew out of proportions. The interviewee himself goes on to interpret this metaphor through attributive processes on lines 26 and 27: 'help was so near at hand but it was so far from my imagining'. In the former one, the carrier is 'help' and 'near at hand' is the attribute whereas in the latter process the carrier is 'it' and 'so far from my imagining' is the attribute. Here the interviewee represents his imaginary thoughts and exaggerations as the barrier that prevented him from asking for help that did exist.

There is one final carrier in the relational process, namely 'they'. This refers to the white cane and the guide dog which the interviewer describes on lines 19 and 21 as: 'but they were some kind of symbols for you' to which the interviewee replies with 'they were the symbols of the very thing I most detested about myself'. The interviewer offers her own interpretation of the meaning of the guide dog and the white cane with her comment which the interviewee accepts. Hence the interviewee agrees to follow the interviewer's agenda and agrees to lexicalize the dog and the cane the way introduced by the interviewer, as 'symbols'. This way, the both interactants represent the dog and the cane as

carrying more weight and meaning than just being concrete objects; they come to stand for something else, in this case symbolizing 'the thing', in other words blindness, that the interviewee 'detested most'. Here the blind identity becomes anchored to concrete symbols carrying abstract meanings; the meanings of blind identity are carried through symbolic entities.

The second most frequent process type in the example, almost as frequent as the relational process, is the mental process. Within mental processes, there are no perception processes and only one affection process; all the rest are cognition processes. So mainly the mental processes of the example of the emotional discourse are those of rationalizing; believing, thinking and understanding. This seems to suggest that the interviewee is taking an analytic and rational perspective towards his emotions and feelings and inspecting them carefully, without any strong expressions of affections. He somehow detaches himself from the immediate context of emotions and constructs them through cognitive processes.

There are only two sensors constructed in the mental processes, 'I', referring to the interviewee, and generic 'you'. The interviewer produces only one mental process, on line 1: 'you started to accept your blindness'. She represents the interviewee as the sensor and 'your blindness' as the phenomenon of the cognitive process of 'accept'. The interviewee, in his part, represents himself as a sensor in four different types of cognitive processes. The first of these are the rational processes of thinking, understanding and discovering, such as: 'I think it wasn't until...', 'I began to understand', 'I discovered that there were real benefits to this', 'I realized I can I can be this person'. These processes all represent the shift from not accepting his blindness to coming to terms with it; through them the interviewee represents himself as finally seeing the truth, understanding his own best and this is represented through rational processes.

The second way of representing the interviewee as the sensor is through cognitive process of wanting; 'I wanted to go to Rome' on line 11 and 'I wanted to go to places and experience things', on line 12. 'Wanting' does not emphasize rationality but strength of will, determination and goal-orientedness. The interviewee is constructed as being determined to change the direction of his life

and thus being an active constructor of his identity.

The third group of cognitive processes are constructed through the verb 'know'; 'if I knew then what I know now' on line 15. Here, the issue of knowledge steps in: the interviewee represents his lack of insight or lack of knowledge as the barrier that prevented him from taking a turn in his life already earlier. Furthermore, knowledge is represented as an answer and possessing it as a necessary asset for the interviewee to accept his blindness and consequently leading more 'independent' and 'self-sufficient' life.

The fourth group of cognitive processes are more general and also abstract mental process by which I refer to such examples as: 'pretending all the time', 'if you really put enormous amounts of mental energy into pretending to be something you're not' and 'you're wasting a lot of your brain power'. Here the cognitive process are 'pretending', 'putting mental energy' and 'wasting brain power' and in all of these the senser is a generic 'you'. So through these processes, the experience of blindness is lifted to a more general level that does not only apply to the interviewee's case but is a broader phenomenon. So not accepting one's blindness is constructed through these processes as a generally problematic and negative way of responding to this impairment.

The only affection process in the example is produced by the interviewee, on line 28: 'this thing I've been fearing all my life' referring to the act of going out to the streets among other people. So the interviewee constructs such a usual and everyday action as walking on the streets as an object of fear, loaded with strong emotions. In this way he represents his blindness as a thing that limited his repertoire of actions and prevented him from engaging in normal life which all lead to a particular emotional state, fear.

The material processes of the example are divided so that there are somewhat more event processes than action process, in other words there are more material process which do not include a goal of action, simply events. The actors in these processes are various and there are only a few that occur more than once. One obvious actor is again the interviewee himself. The only action processes in which he is represented as the actor is the question by the interviewer

on line 13: 'why didn't you start using the white cane' where the goal of his action is using the 'white cane'. The event processes where the interviewee is represented as the actor are more multiple, for example on line 5: 'I could go places', 'I couldn't get there' on line 24, and 'living in these enclosed environments', on line 10. All these events represent going and getting somewhere; motion and moving or living somewhere: staying put. The former events are connected to his 'new life' and the latter to his old life, his old way of being blind. Thus, accepting his blindness is represented as a change in the material conditions of the interviewee's life by physically expanding the living environment of the interviewee.

The credit for enabling the physical expansion of the interviewee's living contexts is given to the guide dog and the white cane. These are represented as actors, on lines 13 and 14: 'it (white cane) had perhaps made your life much more easier', on line 17: 'yes it (white cane) would have made my life easier' and on lines 17 and 18: 'the dog would have made my life easier'. In all of these processes either the dog or the cane is represented as the actor acting upon a goal; the interviewee's life. This way the interviewee represents his life as subjected to these things, the other being animate and the other one not and their role as really active participants having concrete influence on the interviewee's life is emphasized. The verb 'help' is not material in the conventional sense of referring to concrete actions in the concrete, outer world but could rather be interpreted as a behavioural process. However, since I did not apply this process type in my analysis, the verb 'help' was classified as a material process since it has also many of the characteristics of that process type.

Another group that is constructed as actors in event processes are other people, crowds, cars and people on the streets. This is connected to the interviewee's much feared experience of going out on his own among other people. Thus the social nature of blindness comes up again. These processes include: 'I expected huge crowds to stop and point and laugh' on lines 29 to 30, 'but they didn't' on line 31, 'cars slowed down' on lines 31 and 32 and 'much that was going around me' on line 40. The other people are constructed as performing

such acts that the interviewee feared which shows how the interviewee is reflecting his identity not only in relation to the expected opinions of other people but in relation to their very concrete behaviour towards him. Constructing blind identity thus reminds a mirror: it reflects images, issues and people it meets and takes shape through the dialogue between the inner and the outer. This idea came up within the familistic discourse and will also be discussed within the societal discourse as in all of these the idea of reflective identity comes up. Thus one way of perceiving blindness is not necessarily restrained to only one discourse type but it can transcend through them; each discourse just has its own way of bringing up and lexicalizing the same theme.

There are four different existential processes in the example. On lines 8 and 9, the interviewee says that: 'there was a desire to grow, a desire to be more independent to be more self-sufficient'. Here, the interviewee constructs the 'desire' as an outer force, as a given fact that had a will of its own to direct the interviewee's life. This way of constructing the outer desire as the motor of the change is conflicting to the way in which the interviewee constructed himself through relational processes as the active doer that changed the course of his life. On one hand, the interviewee represents himself as the actor that took control of his life but on the other hand he contributes this change to an abstract, outer 'force' having a will of its own. This is a significant factor since it highlights the contradiction between whether the interviewee actively changed his attitude towards blindness and constructed his own identity or whether it was something that happened to him, him being the object. The other existential processes include the following processes by the interviewee: 'there were real benefits to this', 'there are opportunities here', 'there was more going on for me'. Also through these processes the interviewee constructs the existents; 'benefits', 'opportunities' and 'more going on' in a fact-like manner, something whose existence is given and does not require explaining.

Finally, there is only one verbal process in the whole example. This is the interviewee's intertextual reference on line 15: 'the old song says...' in which the 'song' is constructed as the sayer in the process. Here he uses the words of an old

song as a resource for explaining his own behaviour which is another example of the versatile intertextual references used by him to conceptualize and deal with his personal dilemmas.

### **Concluding remarks**

The emotional discourse was constructed towards the end of the interview when the participants were talking about the way in which the interviewee's life changed in his late thirties as he finally started to accept his blindness. Due to this, the tone of this discourse is rather positive and optimistic; it constructs blindness from the perspective of hope and belief in the future. The blind identity that becomes constructed within the emotional discourse falls into two almost opposite contexts: life before accepting blindness and after this. The interviewee's life before this turning point is constructed as dependent, deprived and stressful time when blindness was perceived rather as a barrier and a problem than an integral part of the interviewee's life. Accepting blindness is constructed as something that turned the interviewee's life upside down: the consequences are represented both as physical expansion of his living environment but also as changes in his personality and character. After accepting his impairment the interviewee is represented as independent, self-sufficient and on the whole, more happy and able. Obviously then, independence and the right to control one's own life is a central theme circulating the issue of a blind identity: only through self-control one can feel fulfilled and autonomous and 'become a person'.

The shift from the one life phase to the other is not represented as happening over night but in a gradual process and thus the two life phases rather form a continuum than two opposite sides. Within the discourse there are constructed both barriers that prevented and contributors that enabled the interviewee's life change. The barriers on the way to this new confirmed identity are the interviewee's lack of knowledge, the deeper meanings of the symbols of blindness and fear. The contributors that are given credit for the life change are the interviewee's strong will and his own actions, the guide dog and the white cane, and a powerful outer force. So for example, the guide dog is represented both as



a hindrance and as a contributor depending on the fact whether it is perceived as a symbol of blindness or as a practical aid for moving around. The interviewee's own contribution is constructed in a conflicting manner: on one hand he attributes rationality, strong will and his own actions as the steps towards the new identity, on the other hand he constructs an outer force that made all this happen to him. In a way then, the change is a mixture of these two domains; the interviewee is represented both as the actor and as the goal of the change.

Through the emotional discourse the interviewee is represented in a very individualistic light: blindness is first and foremost constructed through him as a person, in the light of his ideas, emotions and feelings. He is also constructed as the participant in the various process types clearly more often than all the other groups together. He is represented as the senser, carrier and actor: the whole discourse thus circulates almost exclusively around him.

Within the emotional discourse, the blind identity becomes anchored on three domains: onto the symbols that represent blindness (the dog and the cane), concrete incidents and events that the interviewee took control over and finally, other people's behaviour towards the blind person. All these domains are represented both as preventing and enabling the interviewee to accept his blindness, depending on the meanings and emotions attached to them. On one hand, these issues are constructed as a source of fear and helplessness but on the other hand as sources of power and feeling of independence.

#### **7.4.5 Blindness within the art discourse**

A very distinct and specific way of representing blindness in the data seems to be within the art discourse. This refers to the ways of conceptualizing experiences of blindness through art, poetry and music and representing blindness and blind identity through the art world using its terminology. Thus the vocabulary was the clearest criterion for distinguishing it. The semantic field of art was the most obvious criterion to distinguish the art discourse through the vocabulary and in addition to this, the semantic field of communication was also used in distinguishing this discourse type (see Appendix 2). Naturally, also the topics

touch upon the art world: poetry and visual arts. The point of view of this discourse refers to the unique way of comparing and contrasting blindness to artistic experiences and a works of art.

The art discourse was drawn upon at four different stages during the interview. The first of these was initiated by the interviewer with her question after the mixed discourse of the familistic and the psychological discourse and followed by the interviewee who agrees to adopt the art discourse. This section will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. After that, the art discourse became interdiscursively mixed with the emotional discourse. This section deals with the emotions that the interviewee used to have in his childhood, his experiences of solitary childhood that he compares to those of other artists, such as Wordsworth or Sibelius and his first encounters with music and poetry. I will not discuss this example in terms of wording and rewording blindness and transitivity but I will point out the way in which another identity in relation to blindness is being established for the interviewee.

#### Example 6. Blindness and poetry

- 01 MT do you ( . ) remember the em- emotions that you used to have in your childhood  
 02 SK well, you know (0.5) a Finnish poet Jarkko Laine says in one his poems *miten su:rullista*  
 03 ( . ) *kaik:i. hih* ( . ) I was *sa:d* about everything ( . ) and so I was very lonely. I I lived a  
 04 ( . ) very much an interior life ---  
 ---  
 05 MT =so you tried to create a ( . ) w-world of your own.  
 06 SK I **had** to create a world of my own. you know it's interest:ng that ( . ) many poets will tell  
 07 you ( . ) that they had lonely childhoods ( . ) u:h ( . ) and they are not necessarily disabled  
 08 people. u:hm ( . ) you know the American poet Robert Frost ( . ) u:h lived a very solitary  
 09 childhood and it comes out in his poems where he talks about being alone in the woods  
 10 ( . ) u:h ( . ) earlier today I was uh ( . ) talking on the BBC ( . ) a:nd uh ( . ) we weretalking  
 11 about Sibelius ( . ) and I described how he used to go to the woods( . ) with his violin ( . )  
 12 and play his uh ( . ) violin alone. u:hm ( . ) you know the great British poet Wordsworth uh  
 13 ( . ) writes ( . ) beautifully about having a very solitary boyhood °hh in the lakes and the  
 14 woods ( . ) so, I think this is not uncommon. °hh ( . ) what **is** different in **my** case is that  
 15 because I was deprived and I lived in that attic ( . ) I had to ( . ) u:hm I had to use all of that  
 16 language, all of those **sounds**, all of those **words**, °hh to build a ( . ) the universe. u:h to  
 17 build a microcosm for myself where I felt ( . ) u:h alive and full and ( . ) and **rich** ( . ) u:h  
 18 so ( . ) that was my: that was my refuge to go to that lonely attic ( . ) and then ( . ) make  
 19 something happen °hh the American poet ( . ) Thoreau ( . ) says ( . ) that the poet ( . ) **not**  
 20 having anything to do ( . ) makes ( . ) something. a:nd ( . ) that's ( . ) really what my attic  
 21 was, it was my workshop ( . ) you know

(The extract has been edited in the middle, marked by the symbol --)

The section is initiated by the interviewer who draws on the emotional

discourse with her question: 'do you remember the emotions you used to have in your childhood'. Interestingly, the interviewee replies to this by resorting to the art discourse, beginning with: 'well, you know a Finnish poet Jarkko Laine says in one of his poems *miten surullista kaikki*'. From this point on, the two discourses overlap and mix with each other.

This mixed piece of the art and emotional discourse is very important in the sense that within its course another identity besides being blind is established for the interviewee, namely that of an artist, or a poet to be specific. The piece is highly intertextual as the interviewee quotes many poets which functions as a way of comparing himself to these great artists. He represents himself as fitting into this chain of lonely poets. Thus through the art discourse the interviewee constructs a more socially acceptable identity for himself: there is at least one category where he does fit it and does equal the norms, that of an artist. In a way then, the identity of a poet is represented as something that compensates him not meeting the norms in other areas of life.

But there is ambivalence to this identity of a poet and shared artistic identity. On lines 7 and 8 the interviewee demarcates him and the other artists he is discussing by saying that 'and they are not necessarily disabled people'. Also later, on lines 14 and 15, the interviewee, even more explicitly draws attention to his specialness as compared to the other poets: 'what is different in my case is that because I was deprived [...]'. First, the interviewee seems to represent himself as belonging to this group of poets and musicians but then later, he constructs himself different also among this group. What he represents as differentiating him and the others is him being disabled and deprived. He constructs being disabled and deprived as something that despite the other similarities between the artists marks a border between them making the interviewee, once again, different. This is a vivid example of the interviewee's constant struggle between sameness and difference, between belonging and not fitting in. What is also interesting here is to compare the two qualities that the interviewee is represented as having: that of being disabled and that of being deprived. The first one obviously refers to his impairment but being deprived is a social matter and a much more ambiguous

issue. Specifically, here deprivation seems to be connected to being deprived of human contacts, being lonely. It can be concluded that besides constructing himself as a disabled person the interviewee represents himself as deprived which certainly extends much further than being disabled.

Later, the art discourse is drawn on twice but only very briefly. The first time it was drawn on in the middle of the interviewee's description of Helen Keller and her influence on his life. The second time the art discourse was used as the interviewee was telling about his new freedom and independence he has gained after accepting his blindness and taking up a guide dog:

01 SK this book opens with a very: uh memorable ( . ) section about ( . ) going into Grand  
 02 Central ( . ) railway ( . ) station ( . ) with Corky ( . ) and I describe the beautiful  
 03 colors and shapes and so forth as we're moving through this ( . ) this: big crowd  
 04 ( . ) and u:h you know and I say that I ( . ) you know I'm not nervous I'm not afraid  
 05 ( . ) I'm even: finding some beauty ( . ) in all of that ( . ) °you know° ( . ) color and  
 06 turmoil( . ) and that is um ( . ) that has made (forth) some very powerful ( . ) poetry  
 07 ( . ) in my life ( . ) and that really does come from the dog=

In the above piece of the data, the interviewee recontextualizes a section of his book: by retelling one story in the book now in the interview. Here the interviewee describes his experience of walking in the crowd with his guide dog. He words this state as 'color and turmoil' and uses the metaphor of 'poetry' in referring to his blindness and the consequences of accepting it as a part of his identity. As can be seen later in the discussion of the other example of the art discourse, also here the discourse is characterized by the description of sense experiences through the world of art.

Another significant point here is that blindness becomes constructed as the source of the interviewee's artistic achievements and inspiration. On lines 5 to 7 he says that all that 'color and turmoil [...] has made some powerful poetry in my life'. In a way, then, blindness becomes constructed as a blessing, something that has enabled the career of a poet for the interviewee. Ironically, the two identities become intertwined: one is dependent on the other and the otherwise rather negatively constructed blindness becomes represented in a new light: a weakness turns out as a strength.

The art discourse also includes one video insert. This insert contains old black and white footage of the opera singer Enrico Caruso, singing at a theatre.

The insert has been placed in between the art discourse and it is preceded by the interviewee's reminiscences of the very first times he heard this man's records 'on the old Victrola' and how 'electrifying moment it was' for him. Thus the video insert constructs the art discourse through a visual and even auditive medium as the picture is accompanied with Caruso's singing. It also functions as a way to enrich and stimulate the audience who can more easily relate to the interviewee's story as it becomes literally laid down before their eyes and ears.

#### Example 7. Blindness within the art discourse

- 01 MT =you write in your book that it was like uh living inside an abstract painting. did  
 02 you see all those colors [and shapes °(x)° ]  
 03 SK [ye::ah it's a world] of colors and shapes and ( . ) moving  
 04 shadows ( . ) it can be **very** beautiful ( . ) in some instances it's **glo:rious** ( . ) uh  
 05 go:ld, uh ro:se and silver ( . ) it's a ( . ) just a **tremendous** sensation °hh fo:r  
 06 instance have you ever gone ( . ) and put your head in the water. opened your eyes  
 07 under the water ( . ) and you see **all** those wonderful colors but it's not clear. °you  
 08 know° but it's really quite lovely ( . ) u:h that ( . ) that **can** be how I see the world  
 09 ( . ) um in othe:r ( . ) instances it can be ( . ) **terrifying** ((in a higher pitch)) ( . )  
 10 very scary ( . ) you know because ( . ) u:hm ( . ) su:ddenly, you don't see anything  
 11 at all. uh:: there **are** no colors, there **are** no shapes you're **in** the complete  
 12 blackness. a:nd uh then: °you know° you are ( . ) in a ( . ) state of helplessness a:nd  
 13 that can be quite ( . ) quite frightening. so ( . ) it °changes° a °thousand° times  
 14 a day.  
 15 MT mm-h=  
 16 SK =you know  
 17 MT what kind of **dreams** ( . ) do you see (0.4) do you have ( . ) um figures ( . ) and  
 18 shapes and ( . ) colors in your dreams  
 19 SK u:h ( . ) yes. uh but ( . ) my dreams are ( . ) quite ( . ) impressionistic.u:hm y-you  
 20 know if you think of ( . ) uh the great Monet painting of the water lilies ( . ) you  
 21 know ( . ) my dreams tend to be ( . ) very much uh (1.3) soft colors ( . ) °u:h° ( . )  
 22 faces and people: ( . ) appear and disappear ( . ) uh much as they do when I'm  
 23 awake.  
 24 MT mm[-h ]  
 25 SK [so] I don't have clear dreams you know

The above example of the art discourse is a very fruitful from the analytical point of view as the whole piece is concerned with defining the limits and ways of seeing and not seeing, describing the sensational world of a blind person and especially focusing on visual senses. In the extract blindness is constructed as a sensational phenomenon, as the interviewee gives a rich and vivid account of his way of seeing the world and dreaming dreams. Here blindness is something experienced through senses, almost as an artistic experience with intertextual references to the art world and through art terminology. This extract is followed

by a video insert that depicts the painting by Monet called 'Water Lilies'. The picture is accompanied with soft piano music at the background. The painting is obviously shown because the interviewee refers to it on line 20 where he compares his dreams to this impressionistic painting: this way the audience can easily visualize the scene. In this way, the visual discourse adds to the rich intertextuality of the art discourse: the close-up of the painting is a very explicit way of referring to and responding to previous texts. It also shows that interdiscursivity can be realized through multiple mediums: besides verbal discourse intertextuality can be constructed through picture and visual discourse and what more convenient discourse type to do this in than the art discourse.

### **Wording and rewording blindness**

In the above example, blindness does not become explicitly worded. Rather, blindness or actually seeing, becomes vividly described and its nature characterized. Implicitly then, blindness is worded in a very metaphorical way by both participants. First, on line 1 the interviewer describes blindness as 'living inside an abstract painting'. This is not her own description, though, but an intertextual reference to the interviewee's book. So it is originally the interviewee who has described his blindness in this way and the interviewer recontextualizes the expression here. This obviously shows how the interviewee's autobiography functions as a resource for both participants in constructing blindness. In his turn, the interviewee starts describing this 'painting'. He rewords blindness as 'a world of colours and shapes and moving shadows'. This 'world' is being further described as both a positive and negative thing. The interviewee describes his world as 'beautiful' and 'glorious', 'gold, rose and silver' and 'lovely' but also as 'terrifying', 'very scary', 'complete blackness' and finally as being in 'a state helplessness'. The world is beautiful and glorious when there are those sensational experiences, on days when he does see. But the world changes upside down at moments when 'you don't see anything at all'. So it is the absolute darkness that is represented as a negative and frightening thing, and the fortunate days of seeing the precious and highly valued.

The same kind of discourse continues as the interviewee describes his dreams as an artistic experience, as 'impressionistic' and with an intertextual reference to 'the great Monet painting', on line 20. Both blindness and the dreams of a blind man are constructed through metaphorical expressions and vivid language. It becomes obvious that being blind is not an either-or-situation but forms a continuum where even one person can shift from moment to moment. So also the blind person can see in various and rich ways and it is not blindness as such that is either negative or positive but there are many sides to being blind and it seems to be highly context-dependent which side flourishes and wins and how it becomes experienced. It must also be emphasized that neither of the participants reduces the experience of blindness to any strict, black and white categorical expression, such as 'positive' or 'negative', but refers to it in much more heterogenous and ambiguous ways that allow multiple interpretations and even conflicting contents. An interesting feature in the example is the conflict that on one hand the interviewee describes his personal sensations and experiences but still he does much of this on a generic level, by detaching the description from himself.

The description and wording of blindness in the extract is exclusively characteristic to the art discourse because such wordings as 'world' or 'painting' only occur within the art discourse and also very clearly reflect terminology specific to art contexts.

### **Transitivity**

Turning to look at the distribution of the process types in the example, one accounts figures that clearly deviate from the distribution of the process types of the whole data. The most frequent process type in the example is relational and their share is much higher than in the whole data. Also the number of material processes is clearly higher and the number of mental processes approximately the same as in the whole data. There are no verbal processes in the example and the distribution of existential processes is somewhat smaller than in the whole data.

Over half of the processes in the example are relational which thus make up the most frequent process type in the example. This is hardly surprising as one

turns to look at the contents of the example: it is first and foremost concerned with describing the 'world' of seeing. Consequently, this visual world is constructed as the carrier, the object of the description, in the majority of the attributive processes. The attributes of this carrier can be divided into two categories, to positive and pleasant images and to negative and gloomy images. The positive side of the 'world' is described in the following ways: 'it can be beautiful', 'it's glorious', 'it's a tremendous sensation' and 'it's quite lovely'. So the 'world' becomes constructed through positive adjectives highlighting the enjoyment of this artistic experience. But then, the interviewee constructs the 'world' also in quite the opposite terms: 'it can be terrifying' and 'that can be frightening'. The gloomy side of this 'world' is also evident in two relational processes where the carrier is generic 'you': 'you're in the complete blackness' and 'you are in a state of helplessness'. The first of these is identifying process and the latter an attributive process. What is here constructed as a 'terrifying' state, is the days when one cannot see anything, when the darkness dominates. So in a way, then, being able to see a little and have these visual images is constructed as a preferred state of affairs as compared to being completely blind, with no visual sense.

But there are also more neutral or ambiguous ways of describing the 'world' as: 'it was like living inside painting', 'it's a world of colors and shapes and moving shadows' and 'it's not clear'. The first of these examples is the interviewer's comment on how the interviewee described the 'world' in his book, so the metaphor is not actually her own. In these descriptions the art world reappears, in wordings such as 'painting', 'colors' and 'shapes'.

In addition to this 'world', another central carrier being described in the example is 'dreams'. The topic and issue of dreams is initiated by the interviewer on lines 17 and 18: 'do you have figures and shapes and colors in your dreams'. Actually, here the carrier is 'you', not dreams. This is followed by the interviewee's description of his dreams on line 19: 'my dreams are quite impressionistic', on line 21: 'my dreams tend to be very much soft colors' and on line 25: 'I don't have clear dreams'. In the first two of these attributive processes,



the carrier, 'dream' is being described through exclusively or, as in the latter case, at least typically artistic qualities. In the similar way as the interviewee constructs the real world he sees 'when I'm awake' in artistic context, he represents his dream world as a piece of art, as an artistic experience.

The second most frequent process type in the example is the material process of which only two are action processes and the rest event processes. So in this example of the art frame concrete actions upon objects do not become significant but events, concrete happenings seem to be. Both action processes occur on lines 6 and 7 as the interviewee asks rhetorically: 'have you ever gone and put your head in the water and opened your eyes under the water'. The first clause here is an event process but the two latter ones are an action process. In both, the actor is 'you' and the goal of the action process is 'your head' and 'your eyes'. Here the action process is used in the description through which the interviewee tries to demonstrate his way of seeing to a sighted interviewer and audience as well.

In event processes, there are five different actors: 'you' referring to the interviewee, generic 'you', 'it' and 'faces and people'. The 'you' referring to the interviewee occurs in the interviewer's very first comment on line 1: 'you write in your book'. This is a very obvious way of leading the interviewee into the preferred way of the interviewer as it is not formulated as an open question. The comment also, once again, shows how the interviewee's autobiographical book is used as a resource in constructing the interview. The actor 'it' occurs on lines 13 and 14: 'so it changes a thousand times a day'. Here the actor refers to the 'world' of seeing that the interviewee has been describing. Otherwise the 'world' has been described through relational processes but here it is constructed as an actor of an event highlighting the procedural and dynamic nature of the 'world' that is in the interviewee's head. Through this process, blindness is most clearly represented as a dynamic and shifting phenomenon, not static or either-or-situation where one either can see or cannot see but as an unpredictable series of flashes, phases and states. The actors 'faces and people' occur on line 22 as the interviewee describes his dreams. Interestingly, the interviewee describes his

dreams otherwise through relational processes as having something or being like something but in this case he represents actions in his dreams; 'faces and people appear and disappear as much as they do when I'm awake'. So he constructs his dreams containing not only pictures and images but also movement and change.

The example contains also some mental processes and all of these, except for one cognitive process, are perception processes. What is even more striking is that all of these perception processes are constructed with the verb 'see' and the sener in all of these processes is either the interviewee as 'I' or as 'you' or generic 'you'. The interviewer produces two of these processes in the form of questions, first on line 1 and 2: 'did you see all those colors and shapes' and then on line 17: 'what kind of dreams do you see'. So the sener in these processes is 'you' and the phenomena are 'colors and shapes' and 'dreams'. The two questions differ in that the first is more of an open question enquiring what the interviewee can see and the second one already includes a presupposition that the interviewee can see dreams and it is the exact nature of these dreams that is being asked about. All in all, the interviewee becomes constructed as seeing different things which at first may seem a rather paradoxical situation for a blind person. But when one turns to look at the perception processes of the interviewee the possibility of this becomes evident.

There are two sensors in the perception processes constructed by the interviewee, a generic 'you' and 'I'. The first of these occurs on lines 7: 'you see all those wonderful colors' and the second on lines 10 and 11: 'suddenly you don't see anything at all'. The sener of the first process could also refer to the interviewer in case the rhetorical question was directed at her. Anyway, the phenomena of these processes are quite conflicting. First, the interviewee describes seeing 'wonderful colors' but then the phenomena changes into '(not) anything at all'. This juxtaposition highlights the way blindness becomes constructed in this piece of the art discourse. It is a world of two oppositions: pleasant visual sensations and scary black emptiness. And the unexpected wavering between these two ends is in this example constructed as the ambiguity of seeing and not seeing. The one process in which the interviewee constructs

himself as the senser occurs on line 8: 'that can be how I see the world'. Here, after the interviewee has described a fuzzy way of seeing the world, which he compares to opening one's eyes under the water, he concludes that this might be the world through his eyes. Again, he shifts from a general level of description to the personal level, his own experiences. This way his blindness and way of seeing becomes framed in a broader context.

There is only one cognitive process in the example, on 20: 'if you think of the great Monet painting of the water lilies' in which 'you' perhaps referring to the interviewer is constructed as the senser and the 'Monet painting' as the phenomenon. Here the interviewee is asking the interviewer to contemplate on the world famous painting to which he compares his dreams. In other words, the interviewee constructs his dreams also as pieces of art. This is a clear indication of the art discourse and its intertextual character.

Finally, there are two existential processes in the example that are also a part of the description of the visual 'world' of the interviewee, on line 11: 'there are no colors there are no shapes'. 'Colors' and 'shapes' are constructed as the existents, which in this case actually are represented as not existing. Here the interviewee describes the terrifying phase of his visual world, the instances and days when he does not see the colors nor the shapes.

### **Concluding remarks**

Within the art discourse blindness becomes constructed as a phenomenon of the visual world, a series of sensations that is being represented as an artistic experience. The art discourse is distinctive in the way blindness is worded within it; through metaphorical expressions stemming from the world of arts.

Within the art discourse the interviewee becomes represented as an artist, a poet. In other words, another identity besides being blind becomes constructed: the occupational identity. The interviewee represents him being a poet as an ambivalence between being the same and being different. He is united with the other poets by their shared occupation and consequent social identity but he represents himself as deviating from this social group due to his blindness. Thus the relationship between these two identities is a complex one: the blind identity

marks a difference among poets, being blind means being a different kind of a poet than everybody else. The complexity of this relationship between blind and occupational identities becomes also evident in that the interviewee constructs his blindness as an inspiration, a source of his poetry. So at least to some extent, the blind identity is constructed as maintaining and nurturing the identity of a poet. The latter is dependent on the former.

The art discourse wavers on the borders of the real world and the dream world. On one hand, it is used to construct blindness as a physical, sensational phenomenon but on the other hand, the discourse circulates in the dream world as if blindness had an unconscious side to it stretching out into dreams and creating a dreamlike world in the eyes of the blind person even though he would be awake.

The art discourse reflects the personality and uniqueness of the interviewee as it certainly is a very specific way of constructing blindness that in this case seems to stem from the interviewee's occupation. Being a poet and belonging to this occupational and experiential world of poets and arts functions as a resource for the interviewee to deal with his blindness in a very personal way. The world of poems and art provides him access to eloquent language, vivid expressions, metaphorical wordings and rich ways of dressing up his blindness, something that a blind person not having access to this world might not be able to do. His poet identity thus provides him a unique frame of reference within which to conceptualize and construct his blind identity which, I could argue, would not probably come up within the speech of any blind person. Being a poet thus seems to imply being a different, special and a unique kind of a blind person.

#### **7.4.6 Blindness within the societal discourse**

The societal discourse situates blindness within an institutional setting such as the school or otherwise explicates the relationship between blindness, or any other issue discussed, and society especially commenting on the normative pressures and the existence of preferred behaviour and life-style in society. Thus the societal discourse constructs blindness in a rather harsh and devastating light

representing a society, in this case American, whose norms by no means extend to include an impaired person within its range, a situation which is reflected on its members' behaviour towards this impaired or rather, different person. All this is included in the societal contents and topics of this discourse. Again, the contents are reflected on the vocabulary used but in the same way as within the emotional discourse, there does not exist a distinct 'societal terminology' that would be the basis of distinguishing this discourse since this vocabulary is very similar to the ordinary and everyday use of language. The semantic fields that were most clearly societal were those of society and school (see Appendix 2). The point of view constructed within the societal discourse and the third criteria of distinguishing a discourse type, is also a communal one, like within the familistic discourse. Only within the societal discourse the perspective is much broader extending the society and the community as whole; as a society consisting of institutions and citizens. The societal viewpoint also includes political undertones.

The societal discourse was drawn on four times during the interview. The societal discourse was every time initiated by the interviewer. Besides being the initiator of the discourse, the interviewee was also the active participant drawing on this discourse and maintaining it whereas the interviewer drew on this discourse only in the middle of the interviewee's turns in the form of a few questions. The first two pieces of the societal discourse were rather long while the two latter ones were shorter, lasting only for a few lines. The first time the societal discourse was constructed, the participants were discussing the interviewee's school experiences and influential people in that context. This piece will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter. Then the societal discourse was drawn upon as the participants were talking about the interviewee's adolescent years, his substance abuse and eating disorder. This piece will be discussed from the viewpoint of the interviewee's multiple identities. For the third time the societal discourse was drawn on by the interviewee in his discussion about Helen Keller. Here, the societal discourse was used as the interviewee focuses on Helen Keller as an influential, even political figure in the world, constructed as a powerful societal actor who 'helped to raise the consciousness of the world about

what blind people can do'. Here the societal discourse brought out the public figure of Helen Keller, not the private person. The last time the societal discourse became constructed at the end of the interview. In this piece the interviewee took a very strong attitude towards the American welfare system criticising it for taking 'apart all of the social services' which he extended to include such groups as blind people, the poor and single mothers. In other words, the interviewee constructed the blind as belonging to the marginal and unfortunate stratum of American society. He positioned himself clearly in political terms as he directed his criticism at 'republican politicians'. In fact, this was the only piece in the interview in which the interviewee took a stance towards the American social services and the way blind people as a social group have been treated by the state. The societal discourse was in this way used for expressing political opinions and criticizing the system and through this process the blind people become constructed as a social interest group that is a part of active party politics and social policy.

The societal discourse is an especially interesting discourse since within its course the interviewee becomes constructed as much more than an impaired person but one that has many identities, only one of them being the identity of a blind person. In the following extract, the interviewee is talking about his adolescent years during which he suffered from substance abuse and later from eating disorder. The extract is preceded by a video insert that includes black and white footage from around the 60's and 70's depicting young people dancing, partying and drinking beer on a beach and in a rock concert. The video is a nostalgic flashback to the age of peace, love, hippies, convertibles and drugs. The music playing at the background is the legendary 'Born to be wild' by Steppenwolf. Before the video insert, the interviewee is drawing on the idealistic discourse and hence the video is a way of shifting towards a new topic, that of the interviewee's adolescence and teenage culture of the time. In fact, it can be argued that the visual discourse of the video initiates the societal discourse by offering a vivid, even though stereotypic, image of the culture of one social group of that day, the youth. The video insert is an editorial tool in providing a certain visual image to the audience to get tuned onto and setting the scene which is then

enforced by the spoken societal discourse following it:

### Example 8. Blindness, gender and illness

01 SK uh (0.4) my teenage years happened to coincide ( . ) with the: **extraordinary** ( . ) uh  
 02 experiment ( . ) in drug use ( . ) by american teenagers ( . ) and so: by nineteen seventy  
 03 ( . ) when I was fifteen years old, uh you know I mean I was like everyone else listening to  
 04 the Beatles you know, I mean ♪turn off your mind, relax and float downstream♪ you know,  
 05 so: there I was rolling my ( . ) marihuana cigarettes and- and my reefers and uh ( . ) I took  
 06 a little LSD and- you know, it uh  
 07 MT to see more colors.=  
 08 SK =eh he he [to see more colors] (yeah) but I figured out that there was  
 09 MT [(laughs) ]  
 10 SK no difference between the LSD and what I saw anyway so=  
 11 MT =(laughs)=  
 12 SK =u:h ( . ) it wasn't so interesting but ( . ) u:h ( . ) **yeah** ((in a higher pitch)) it was very:uh  
 13 easy to get uh ( . ) depressed and ( . ) and **stay** that way ( . ) for a long time ( . ) in the United  
 14 States there're very narrow ( . ) definitions for what passes as a successful teenager, right  
 15 ( . ) u:h ( . ) you know we've all heard the rock'n roll songs, right, you know  
 16 MT mm=  
 17 SK =uh you know masculinity is defined by (uh) the sporting life right so you can't do that: right  
 18 uh ( . ) u:h you know I had these big thick glasses and uh >what am I gonna do< walk up  
 19 to some ( . ) girl and say @hey you wanna ( . ) see my poems@ you know=  
 20 MT =(laugh[hs])  
 21 SK [so ] ( . ) uh that was a difficult **thing**,((in a higher pitch)) yeah there was no place  
 22 to fit in.=  
 23 MT =mm.=  
 24 SK =I developed an eating disorder. uh I stopped eating. I developed anorexia ( . ) u:h typically  
 25 teenage **girls** get anorexia boys don't so often get this condition but ( . ) it is **possible** in  
 26 boys and I felt very very ( . ) **sa:d** about who I was you know I didn't fit in anywhere I ( . )  
 27 I felt ugly I felt that I didn't belong in the world °you know° ( . ) and I stopped eating. I  
 28 became °**very**° depressed u:h  
 29 MT did you start admiring ( . ) John Lennon, [his ]  
 30 SK [(yeah)]  
 31 MT skeletal [figure]  
 32 SK [well ] yeah I wanted to look (x) - I wanted to look like all those <rock boys> who  
 33 were really skinny. you know ( . ) that's how it **started**.

In the above example within the societal discourse the interviewee becomes represented as possessing multiple identities. In this example, there occurs the only reference in the whole interview to the gender identity of the interviewee. The gender identity becomes strongly constructed in relation to his disabled identity which becomes obvious from his sarcastic comment on lines 13 and 14. He explicitly refers to the societal norms of masculinity by saying that : 'masculinity is defined by the sporting life' and then contrasts his own appearance with 'these big thick glasses' and his supposed insufficient 'sporting life' with this ideal, normative athletic man. In other words, he represents himself as less of a

man due to his blindness and as an insufficient or inadequate man in the normative light. Besides this, the interviewee refers to his poet identity by saying on lines 18 and 19: 'what am I gonna do walk up to some girl and say hey you wanna see my poems'. In other words, besides constructing his gender identity in relation to his blindness he also contrasts it with his poet identity. Writing poems is constructed as his speciality but at the same time being a demasculine ability. One should have been athletic, not poetic to raise interest and acceptance in the opposite sex. All in all, the interviewee constructs himself demasculine in two respects: by being blind and by being poetic, as both of these characteristics are represented as overshadowing and weakening the masculine identity of the interviewee. Besides blind identity also his gender identity is constructed as difference or deviance from the explicated norms. Once again, the interviewee represents himself as lacking something, standing out, not fitting in.

However, the issue of the interviewee not being athletic becomes contradictory as the interview is explored more thoroughly. Namely, earlier within the societal discourse, the interviewee describes his way of compensating his blindness in the following manner: 'I was very fast, I was very athletic I have a tremendous memory'. Strikingly, here the interviewee constructs himself as a 'very athletic' person which stands in strong opposition to the way he describes his relationship to sporting life in the Example (8). Obviously then, the interview includes contradiction and ambiguity as goes for the interviewee's masculinity and supposed weakness in the field of sports. This is a good example of the situational and inconsistent nature of identities: even within the same discourse the same person can represent his identity even in such a conflicting manner. It is not a matter of truth but a matter of context-dependency and situational fluidity of identities.

Oliver and Barnes (1998:56) have paid attention to the gender identities of disabled people and claimed that disabled men are more advantaged than disabled women as goes for constructing successful gender roles, since the cultural value system "encourages disabled men to oppose the stigma associated with impairment and enables them to aspire to typical male roles". In the light of these



data, the situation of the interviewee is quite the opposite; since he is male he is expected to conform to a strictly defined normative definition of a man but due to the nature of his impairment, he is unable to do this successfully. He represents himself as inadequate and less of a man due to his impairment. Low (1996:241-243), on the other hand, has argued that visibility of disability usually affects the sexual identities of disabled people in increasing insecurity in terms of anticipated opportunities for romantic relationships and she does not make a distinction between the genders.

Also the sickness identity - that was earlier constructed within the psychological discourse and discussed in chapter 7.4.3 - is strongly promoted in the above example. First of all, the interviewee is represented as abusing drugs, being depressed and finally getting anorexia. The interviewee himself does not construct the first two phenomena, the substance abuse and mental depression explicitly as illnesses but later, already within psychological discourse following this example he says that: 'anorexia is a disease of psychological dimensions'. So the interviewee represents himself explicitly as sick as regards his eating disorder but he does not specify what he considers these two other adversities to be. Even though he does not explicate whether he himself thinks substance abuse and mental depression are actually illnesses one can still conclude that as all these three conditions are at least partly mental in origin and hence the interviewee becomes constructed as being under great emotional distress and suffering on a mental level, and even being mentally ill; anorexic. Also the sickness identity of the interviewee becomes to represent difference as the interviewee says on lines 24 and 25 that 'typically teenage girls get anorexia, boys don't so often get this condition'. The interviewee is categorized as belonging to the group of anorexic teenagers but even within this small minority he is not a typical member; he is standing out, being different because of his male gender.

In a similar way as within the art discourse, the interviewee is again wavering between constructing his identity between the domains of sameness and difference. The interviewee constructs himself in a rather conflicting manner; in contrast to describing himself being 'like everyone else' on line 3, he comments

on line 26 that 'I didn't fit in anywhere'. Thus the interviewee represents himself as living in a constant struggle between standing out from the crowd and in some aspects fitting in with the others. He constructs his life as balancing between sameness and difference not possessing a permanent membership in either category. In this case, he represents the drug use as the thing that united him with the others of his age. He frames this in an explicitly societal way by saying on lines 1 to 3 that:

01 SK my teenage years happened to coincide with the extraordinary experiment in drug  
 02 use by american teenagers and so by nineteen seventy when I was fifteen years old,  
 03 uh you know I mean I was like everyone else listening to the Beatles

Here the interviewee constructs his personal drug addiction as a common societal phenomenon shared by his peers in the 70's. Drug use is in other words represented as something that everybody did and thus engaging in this kind of behaviour made the interviewee similar to his peer group.

The first time that the societal discourse was introduced to the interview the participants were talking about the time that the interviewee got his first glasses which obviously marks a significant point to a blind person as he still could see some figures and shapes. The interviewer asked about the glasses and in his answer the interviewee shifted to the societal discourse telling how these glasses were welcomed at school by his schoolmates. Then, right in the beginning of this discourse the interviewee drew on the medical discourse explaining the physiological reason for him having had to take such thick glasses. This piece was already discussed within the medical discourse on pages 117 and 118. After the short piece of medical discourse the interviewee shifted back to the societal discourse, within the same turn and the participants continue discussing his school experiences:

### Example 9. Blindness within the societal discourse

- 01SK of course the other children were ( . ) **horrible**((in a higher pitch)) you know they called  
 02 me all kinds of terrible names and ( . ) u::h ( . ) they thought of me as a **martian**, you know  
 03 someone from the planet ma:rs you know some- >you know< space invador ( . ) you know  
 04 °hh a:nd u:h so the telescopes ( . ) further compounded my sense of **deep** ((in a higher  
 05 pitch)) shame=  
 06 MT =how did you survi:ve at school among °uh° these so called normal children  
 07 (0.7)  
 08 SK u:h ( . ) I survived by ( . ) powerful ( . ) u:h ( . ) memory† ( . ) °uh° I would listen† to what  
 09 was going on in the classroom and remember and retain ( . ) almost everything, ( . ) uh:m  
 10 ( . ) I could be very funny. °hh uh I know how to tell stories and tell jokes and sing songs  
 11 and I could get other children laughing ( . ) u:h so that uh ( . ) I was ( . ) in some sense ( . )  
 12 u:hm ( . ) able to: ( . ) **compensate** for my deprivation by being uh ( . ) very much alive.=  
 13 MT = I I just wonder how did you ( . ) learn to read for example because you had to ( . ) press  
 14 your nose against the page of a book [( . ) to be]  
 15 SK [yeah ]  
 16 MT able to see the letters.=  
 17 SK =yeah learning to read was very very difficult for me ( . ) ye[ah]  
 18 MT [ o]ne of your teachers, mrs  
 19 Edinger became ( . ) some kind of saint of your life ( . ) in which way  
 (1)  
 20 SK well she took the time ( . ) to: help me ( . ) to read. °you know° she made the words **v:ery**  
 21 large ( . ) a:nd we would meet after school ( . ) and we would meet during the recess times  
 22 when other children were outside having exercise ( . ) and ( . ) she ( . ) **passionately**  
 23 believed that I would be ( . ) uh not just a: a person who ( . ) could **read** ( . ) but that I would  
 24 be a great reader. you know one who could get great benefit from it. I think she understood  
 25 that ( . ) there was vitality and energy in me.=  
 26 MT =mm-[h ]  
 27 SK [a:]nd she helped to bring that out just like the conductor ( . ) who brings  
 28 from the( . ) the c- the players ( . ) in the orchestra ( . ) °u::h° the wonderful sounds that  
 29 they're capable of producing. you know

### Wording and rewording blindness

In the above example, blindness is explicitly referred to only once, with the term 'deprivation'. In fact, this is the only way of wording blindness within the societal discourse and the term 'deprivation' does not either occur in any other discourse type. The context of the wording is the following: 'I was able to compensate for my deprivation by being very much alive' on line 12. Even though the interviewee does not explicate that he is actually referring to blindness it becomes obvious from the preceding context in which he describes his glasses and the way the other children were badmouthing him. Here the term 'deprivation' evidently carries social connotations as the interviewee tried to 'compensate' for it through social acts: amusing others and 'by being very much alive'. Blind identity is thus constructed as acquiring its meanings through social contacts, as a reflection and response to other people's behaviour.

What is taken as given in the interviewee's speech is that he actually had to compensate for being blind. This kind of an idea is a typical frame of thinking for the medical model of disability according to which the impaired people should be cured and restored closer to normality, as if one could simply not accept being impaired and live with it. In the above example blindness becomes constructed as a source of shame and the object of concealment. The issue of compensation has also been discovered to be a common theme in the representations of disability in the media; disabled people are attributed special skills or they are depicted as possessing god-given abilities. Even though the compensation becomes constructed at a more moderate level in this context, the basic logic is the same: if you are lacking something, you ought to compensate for it in some other area.

### **Transitivity**

The distribution of the process types in the example differs greatly from that of the whole data. The most frequent process types in the whole data are material and relational processes whereas in this example it is the material process type forming nearly half of all the processes in the example. The second most frequent process type in the example is the mental one which makes up over a third of the processes. The relational processes come next with clearly smaller distribution than in the whole data and then the existential process type with only one process. All the verbal processes are lacking in the example.

The example is distinctively characterized by material processes, both actions and events. There are two actors constructed within the action processes: the interviewee and his teacher. The interviewee constructs himself as the actor in such processes as 'tell stories', 'tell jokes', 'sing songs' and 'getting other children laughing'. None of these processes is a material one in a traditional sense as they do not represent consequential action but remind more behavioural and verbal processes. However, they position the interviewee in an active participant role, as the one taking the actions and in the last example acting upon and influencing his schoolmates. The interviewer, on her turn positions the interviewee as having 'had to press your nose against the page of a book' on lines 13 and 14.

This process is concerned with the interviewee's ability to read, or more specifically, the process of him learning to read.

The other actor of action processes, the interviewee's teacher, is represented by the interviewee as taking 'the time to help me', 'she made the words very large' and 'she helped to bring that out like the conductor who brings from the players in the orchestra the wonderful sounds'. The teacher is constructed as the decisive actor that made things happen, helped the interviewee to read and so on. In the first example, the interviewee is constructed as the goal of her action; 'helping' which could be argued to be the stereotypical passive role of a disabled people: the object of other's concern and help. In this case, the situation is not that straightforward as the interviewee constructs also himself as the actor engaged in this process. Thus the learning process becomes constructed as a party of two in which the active contribution of both the interviewee and the teacher was needed.

The event processes basically include three different actors: the school mates, the interviewee and 'we' as referring to the interviewee and his teacher. The first group, 'they' are represented only once; 'they called me all kinds of names' on lines 1 and 2. In this example, the interviewee is constructed as the goal of the school mates' name calling as the one who was given 'all kinds of names' and labels deriving from his impairment. As such, the interviewee is not represented as suffering from concrete but more mental and verbal kind of violence as a result of him being blind. The interviewee is represented as being categorized from the outside; given a particular identity which in this case was that of an outsider, a freak even; 'a martian'.

The interviewee is positioned by the interviewer as the actor in the following question on line 6: 'how did you survive at school' and by the interviewee himself on line 8 as 'I survived by powerful memory'. In both of these event processes the verb is 'survive', a term that is first introduced by the interviewer and then immediately adopted by the interviewee. The verb itself is a very strong one, evoking connotations of one version of a social Darwinism located in a specific social context, the school, where the weaker ones actually

have to struggle to 'survive' among the stronger and the fitter ones. By choosing to use such a verb the interactants construct being blind as something that forces or at least engages the blind person in a fight for survival. Being blind is not simply about living, it is about surviving.

The collective 'we', referring to the interviewee and his teacher, is represented as the actor by the interviewee in the following way on line 21: 'we would meet after school' and 'we would meet during the recess times'. Obviously, these examples are in line with the image conveyed also through the action processes discussed earlier of these two people engaging themselves in a shared project of the interviewee learning to read.

The second most frequent process type in the example is the mental process type which makes up over third of the processes of the example. Within the mental processes there only occur perception and cognition processes, affection processes do not come up once in the example. There are again two main sensors represented within the cognition processes, namely the interviewee himself and his teacher. The interviewee positions himself as the sensor in the following contexts on lines 9 to 12: 'I [...] remember and retain almost everything', 'I know how to tell...', 'I was able to compensate for my deprivation', and '(I would be) one who could get great benefit from it'. Through these processes the interviewee constructs himself as a rational person using his cognitive abilities to compensate for the poor visual sense. His abilities in mental domain are thus contrasted with his insufficiency in another domain, that of the visual sense. The teacher is represented by the interviewee as the sensor as follows on lines 22 and 24: 'she passionately believed that...' and 'she understood that...'. She becomes represented as the person who 'believed' and 'understood' the interviewee's situation, being the one who was invested in him both emotionally but also rationally concluded that there was potential in the interviewee.

The interviewer represents the interviewee as the sensor in the following cognition process, formulated as a question on line 13: 'how did you learn to read'. The interviewee is constructed as active in a very surprising context: he is represented as the blind boy that learned to read. The interviewee is represented

as engaged in the most usual and normal learning process of children that age, reading, but something that inherently belongs to the domain of visual perception and is thus a rather surprising action to be connected to a visually impaired person. Hence, the interviewee is not positioned in the stereotypical; passive and delimiting role of a disabled person but rather as one challenging this image.

In addition to these two sensors, there are also two other sensors represented, on line 2: 'they thought of me as a martian' and on line 4: 'telescopes further compounded my sense of deep shame'. The first sensor, 'they' refers to the interviewee's school mates. Here they are constructed as 'thinking' that the interviewee was 'a martian', a term that obviously represents the interviewee as an outsider, someone clearly standing out, not even fitting in with the norms of this planet. Through material processes the school mates were also represented as concretely saying this outloud. The second example is a complex one; grammatically it positions the 'telescopes' as the sensor but semantically these special glasses are rather the cause of the interviewee's shame. However, the 'telescopes' are represented as one more thing that added to the 'deep shame' experienced by the interviewee. Once again, a symbol of visual impairment; glasses are attributed a significant role in the interview: they become constructed as both the objects but also as the actors loaded with deeper meanings of blindness and blind identity.

There are two perception processes in the example, the first on lines 8 and 9: 'I would listen to what was going on in the classroom' and the second on lines 13 and 14 at the end of the interviewer's question: 'you had to press your nose against the page of a book to be able to see'. In the first perception process, with 'I' as the sensor, 'listen' again refers to the way the interviewee was trying to compensate for the insufficiency of his visual sense by enhancing another sense, in this case concentrating on receiving information in the classroom through the auditory sense. The second example, in which the implied sensor is 'you' is connected to the discussion of how the interviewee learned to read and it actually explains what was needed from the interviewee 'to be able to see'. Learning to read and being able to see are constructed as major efforts demanding work and

struggle but what is not commented by the interviewer is the paradoxical situation laid before her eyes: a blind boy actually trying to learn to read, trying to overcome his physiological limitations. It is taken for granted that this is what an impaired person ought to do: accommodate to the impairment the best possible way, not for example demanding this change to take place from the other side: by adjusting the circumstances and surroundings to meet his needs.

The third frequent process type in the example is the relational process which only consists of attributive processes, in other words processes of describing and characterizing people and things, and all identifying processes are lacking. There are two groups that are constructed as carriers in attributive processes more than once: 'the other children' and 'I', referring to the interviewee. The former group becomes positioned by the interviewee as follows: 'the other children were horrible', on line 1 and 'while other children were outside having exercise', on line 22. The first example represents the cruel world in which the impaired boy lived during his first school years focusing on the way he felt about other's responses towards him. In contrast to this gloomy image, the interviewee is described as 'being very much alive' and 'I would be not just a person who could read but I would be a great reader'. So the interviewee constructs himself in a positive manner: full of life and as 'a great reader'. This piece flourishes with self-esteem which conflicts with the image of low self-esteem, dependence and deprivation constructed through a large part of the data. Besides these examples there come also a few other attributive processes, for example on lines 18 and 19 by the interviewer. 'Mrs Edinger became some kind of saint of your life' and the interviewee's comment on line 17: 'learning to read was very very difficult for me'. So the interviewer represents the interviewee's teacher in a heroic position, using a religious metaphor and comparing her to a saintly figure. This positions the teacher above the interviewee; they are not anymore constructed as a team working together on the interviewee's reading but the teacher is constructed by the interviewer as the saintly hand that guided and enabled the interviewee to learn to read. The latter example is merely another indication of the hard effort and struggle included in the interviewee's reading



process.

There are no verbal processes in this example of the societal discourse and only one existential process, on line 25: 'there was vitality and energy in me'. This existential process is constructed by the interviewee and it is a very positive and thus quite an exceptional comment in the data. Actually, he frames this process originally coming from his teacher and represents this as her opinion. Thus he is reflecting on other people's behaviour and opinions and using them as building blocks as he is here constructing his identity. In this particular case, the interviewee becomes represented as powerful, vigorous and full of life; as a strong personality as opposed to the earlier incidents of depicting him in a more passive, weak and even apathetic light. So the existential process does not only make a statement about the interviewee's existence but it constructs a particular way of existing and being, one that is a very strong and active one.

### **Concluding remarks**

Within the societal discourse blindness becomes constructed both in relation to societal institutions and their members. What this means is that blindness becomes reflected on the official norms of difference; those of school and of society at large. These norms are carried by the members of society who with their responses to an impaired person are constructed as having a crucial role in the construction of a blind identity. Within the societal discourse these other people fall into two categories: the 'good' ones who are supporting and encouraging and the 'bad' ones who reject the impaired person and treat him with prejudice. In a way then, two opposite sides become constructed: ours and theirs, two groups who are approaching the issue of blindness from quite the conflicting angles. The interviewee himself then stands in the middle, representing his blind identity as ambiguous and inconsistent.

The societal discourse is one of the discourses that most clearly stands in opposition to the hegemonized way of defining disability in society: the medical discourse that is also drawn on within these data. Within the societal discourse blindness is constructed as a relational notion; blind identity is something that

takes shapes in social interaction between the impaired person and his surroundings. In this case I would not go so far as to claim that within the societal discourse in these data, disability would equal the definition by the social model of disability that claims that it is society that disables people, but I can certainly argue that within this discourse the role of society is constructed as crucial and influential and that it is certainly not the impairment that causes the disability. In these data, the reactions and responses of the family members, schoolmates and other peers towards blindness is represented as a major factor that influences the construction of blind identity. Badmouthing, disparaging and labelling a blind person as a 'martian', for example, are symbolic, maybe also material, ways of exclusion and oppression.

Within the societal discourse type the interviewee becomes constructed as standing for much more than his blindness; he is also represented through his gender identity, his sickness identity and also the poet identity becomes touched upon. All these identities are constructed together, one reflecting the other. The gender identity of the interviewee becomes constructed as weak and demasculine due to his blindness; he is represented in opposition to the ideal, normative man due to his impairment. The sickness identity becomes constructed both a something that united him with the others but also made him different. He represents himself as fitting in and being like everybody else due to his substance abuse: that is what everybody did and him engaging in such an activity made him a valid member of his peer group. Then again, he is represented as being different from others due to his eating disorder. He constructs himself as deviating from other anorexic adolescents since he is male and hence not a typical anorexic. The sickness identity is not dwelt on extensively however, it becomes backgrounded and suffocated by the interviewee who seems to prefer discussing his blindness rather than his anorexia or substance abuse. Obviously then, the societal discourse balances between sameness and difference, the two concepts that seem to organize and outline the interviewee's struggle for identity.

The analysis of the societal discourse shows how constructing identities within a particular discourse does mean that these identities would necessarily be

in line and in harmony with each other but that the person can use the same discourse to construct different, even contradictory identities for oneself. Within the societal discourse, the interviewee becomes constructed both as an athletic person and as unmasculine with no strengths in the field of sporting life. The interviewee also constructs him through the discourse of sameness; as belonging to a social group, being like everybody else but also through the discourse of difference: as standing out and not fitting in.

The issue of compensation is also a pivotal one within the societal discourse. The interviewee represents himself as suffering from 'a deprivation' which he has been trying to compensate both through cognitive abilities and enhanced auditory sense. Compensating an impairment has been a popular theme in the mediated representations of disabled people in movies and on television: it is taken for granted that disabled people both want and should want to be especially competent within some other domain of life since they are lacking a sense or a limb for instance. Another issue taken for granted within the societal discourse is the paradoxical situation that a blind person should try to learn to read. On one hand, this could be interpreted as intolerance; taking the compensation for granted and implying that such a thing as blindness is no excuse for one not learning to read. On the other hand, this could be interpreted as challenging the passive image of disabled people and instead arguing that an impairment is not an obstacle to engage in everyday activities and being like everybody else. However, it is the impaired person, not his circumstances that are demanded to change and this is a very typical line of thinking to the hegemonized medical discourse of disability in society.

Finally, the societal discourse is about categorization. This takes place from within and from the outside. The interviewee is positioning himself in relation to other people seeking for self-esteem and positive self-image through struggle to survive. Furthermore, other people are also represented as categorizing him: through labelling him, placing him in particular categories, be that a potential reader or a space invader from Mars, and hence attributing a given identity to him. These two processes are not that far from each other: the interviewee represents

himself as internalizing the outsider role given to him by his peers but also challenging this subject position by himself and with the help of those people who believe in his potential.

#### **7.4.7 Blindness within the idealistic discourse**

The idealistic discourse is a significant way of constructing blindness as it is the discourse that ends the interview, the one that the viewer is left pondering about and whose words metaphorically stay echoing as the closing texts run on the screen. The idealistic discourse could also be labelled as the universal or humanistic discourse as it is a way of constructing issues within a larger-than-life context with regard to the universal nature of human beings, the share and role of human beings in the world. The term idealistic was chosen because it gives emphasis to the optimistic and positive tone of the discourse: that despite all differences and disputes, all men are equal. Hence, this discourse is most clearly biased of all the discourses: it does not only concern topics, vocabulary and point of view but also the tone and nuance of issues talked about. Of the three distinguishing criteria, the idealistic discourse was above all distinguished by a distinct topic and a point of view. The idealistic topics include pondering about the shared nature of human kind, the adversities of life and the lesson people have to learn in their lives. The point of view refers to the philosophical and moral emphasis of the discourse towards blindness and all adversities in life in general: adversities are to be overcome not to be taken down by. The vocabulary of the idealistic discourse could have actually been used within any other discourse type as well and hence none of the semantic fields was used to distinguish this discourse type.

The idealistic discourse was drawn on three times altogether during the interview. Twice the discourse was initiated by the interviewer and once by the interviewee. The interviewer initiated the discourse by her questions whereas the interviewee adopted the discourse in the middle of his turn. For the first time, the interviewer introduced the discourse around the middle of the interview as the participants were talking about the interviewee's school experiences. The

interviewer's comment 'you had also some other guardian angels in your life that took care of you at some- certain moments of you life' that despite its syntax functions as a question, shifted the discourse from the preceding societal discourse to the idealistic one. The idealistic discourse was continued by the interviewee who talked about these 'remarkable people' who have 'crossed his path' that the interviewer was referring to and at the end of his turn moved onto a general idea of how every one is dependent on other people and how man, rather than being an independent and autonomous, belongs to a shared world and is dependent on others.

- 01 SK I think that's true for all of us.[all ]  
 02 MT [mm]  
 03 SK of our lives ( . ) you know, u:h ( . ) we all have this u:h ( . ) naive idea that we're  
 04 self-made people. you know ( . ) but we really are ( . ) part of a: very intricate  
 05 culture ( . ) and uh ( . ) so many people influence us in ( . ) in rich ways

Here, the interviewee refers to a collective 'us', in which he also includes himself. Here the interviewee constructs himself as belonging to somewhere with someone rather than being an outsider, not fitting in with everyone else. So, despite all the superficial differences between people, such as impairments and deficiencies, human beings are the same and the nature of human being is universal throughout the world. So the interviewee's identity is represented as someone who belongs to and confirms to the norms rather than one who would differ and deviate from them.

For the second time, the idealistic discourse was drawn upon as the interviewee, in the middle of his turn talking about his 'favorite character' Helen Keller shifted from the art discourse to the idealistic one. He represented Helen Keller, who despite being blind, deaf and dumb could still fully sense and feel music as an example of the way 'how rich and intelligent and intuitive we are as human beings there're many ways to live and to feel and to think and to be fully alive'. Here, even though the idealistic discourse underline some of the shared qualities of human nature, more importantly it emphasizes the differences between people. Here the discourse provides a new point of view: that of tolerance and acceptance claiming that difference is richness and difference is something genuinely human. In the whole interview, this is the first piece where the issue of

difference becomes constructed in a positive light as something to be proud of. As such, it also provides the interviewee with an alternative frame of reference with which to relate his own identity.

As it was mentioned earlier, the idealistic discourse was the one that ended the interview giving this humane and optimistic discourse prominence over the other discourses similarly to the medical discourse as the discourse that begins the interview.

#### Example 10. Blindness within the idealistic discourse

01 MT =°hh so you write also in your book that to be alive ( . ) is to be in adversity. what do you  
 02 mean by that:  
 (2.7)  
 03 SK uh well the world is a hard place ( . ) for all of us ( . ) a:nd uh ( . ) there have been moments  
 04 ( . ) when I have (0.4) spent time alone ( . ) thinking ( . ) wh- what is the meaning to  
 05 adversity. u:h if the world was so hard ( . ) u:h if our lives are so steep and difficult ( . ) if  
 06 we are ( . ) confronted at all points ( . ) by pain (0.4) u:h ( . ) i:s there in fact ( . ) a ( . ) an  
 07 ultimate reason ( . ) for enduring ( . ) for growing (0.5) I: ( . ) spend a lot of time thinking  
 08 about ( . ) pain ( . ) I counsel the blind in the United States ( . ) and many of them have very  
 09 difficult lives and we ask ourselves these questions °you know° what- what is the meaning  
 10 o:f ( . ) growing ( . ) through suffering ( . ) °you know° ( . ) a:nd uh ( . ) I think it's  
 11 important to admit right up front that life is full of adversity. ( . ) a:nd that uh ( . ) **working**  
 12 with it and **making** something out of it ( . ) doing something triumphant that will help not  
 13 only ( . ) yourself ( . ) but help other people ( . ) that:t is uh ( . ) that is the important task  
 14 ( . )that is the- that is the **major** task that we have as human beings

#### Wording and rewording blindness

In the above example, blindness does not become explicitly worded. Actually, within the whole idealistic discourse blindness is not referred to once. This seems to result from the very nature of idealistic discourse: the topics discussed with its scope are very general, moving on the level of collective human experience. Thus the wording of blindness does not become relevant. Consequently, it can be said that distinctive to the idealistic discourse is that blindness does not become worded in any way.

The only reference to blindness occurs on line 8: 'I counsel the blind in the United States', in the reference to blind people collectively. The term 'the blind' is a rather impersonalized way of referring to people who are blind.

### **Transitivity**

The distribution of the process types in the above example does not much deviate from the distribution of the process types in the whole data. The distribution of material and verbal processes is approximately the same in the example as in the whole data, the numbers of relational and existential processes are somewhat higher than in the whole but the number of mental processes is clearly smaller in this example than in the whole data. The most frequent process type in the example is relational process and then material process. Then come mental, existential and verbal processes.

So the most frequent process type in the example is the relational process. The carriers that are being described are numerous but they are still two carriers that occur twice. Firstly, 'the world' is being constructed as the carrier in two attributive processes by the interviewee. On line 3: 'the world' is characterized as 'a hard place for all of us' and on line 5: 'the world was so hard'. So the interviewee gives a rather pessimistic and negative picture of the world. He refers to the world in general terms and suggests categorically that this world is equally hard for everyone. He refers to the collective human kind with 'us', in other words he is constructing shared experiences and unity between people to whom also he belongs to. This is a significant point in the interview: finally, the interviewee represents himself through sameness, as fitting in rather than standing out from the crowd. The thing that is finally constructed as the source of this sameness is the shared human experience, 'adversity' that is constructed as so essential to life and something that all of 'us' are due to encounter.

Life is another carrier that is being described more than once by the interviewee, on line 11: 'life is full of adversity' and on line 5: 'if our lives are so steep and difficult'. In one attributive sentence 'life' is constructed as the attribute of the carrier 'many of them': 'many of them have difficult lives'. In the first example 'our lives' the interviewee again refers to the human kind as a collective and suggests that all people have difficult lives. Also the second example is a generalized statement, an aphorism regarding the nature of life in general. The carrier of the last example refers to 'the blind' that was introduced in the

preceding clause on line 8. So in addition to characterising the world and life in general, the interviewee picks out one group among humankind, the blind people and highlights their experience. But in this case he comments that 'many of them' have had it difficult in life, he does not generalize the statement categorically to apply to all of them. This is the first and last time in the interview when the interviewee refers to a community of the blind people, to shared social identity of which he is also a part of. Until this point, his blindness was constructed as a unique, individual experience and phenomenon but here at the end the boundaries of this experience open up to apply also others in his position.

It must be noted, however, that it was the interviewer who brought up the issue of painful and difficult life to the interview. On line 1: she says that 'to be alive is to be in adversity'. This is also an attributive process where 'to be alive' is constructed as the carrier. Her comment is preceded by the verbal process: 'you write also in your book' where the sayer is 'you' referring to the interviewee. In other words the interviewer's comment is another intertextual reference to the interviewee's book and the aphorism-like saying on line 1 may be a direct quotation from the interviewee. Even though the idea itself is the interviewee's, it is the interviewer who brings it up. With her comment the interviewer shifts the discussion to a more general level towards the end of the interview.

There are also a few identifying processes in the example. Two of these are rhetorical questions by the interviewee, on lines 9 and 10: 'what is the meaning of adversity' and on lines 9 and 10: 'what is the meaning of growing through suffering'. The token in both of the clauses is 'what' and the value in the first process is 'the meaning of adversity' and 'the meaning of growing through suffering' in the second one. These are questions contemplating the meaning of all the pain, suffering and adversity discussed in the previous paragraph. He gives his own answer to these questions which will be discussed in the following paragraph in the case of material processes. The interview ends with two consecutive identifying processes: 'that is the important task that is the major task that we have as human beings'. The token that is here being identified is 'that' referring to his preceding comments of the meaning of life and the value is 'the



major task'. In other words the interview ends with an identifying process establishing *the task* that 'we as human beings' have.

There is also a large number of material processes in the example of which only one is an event process all the rest being action processes, concrete happenings that have both an actor and a goal. There are three central actors in material processes, 'I', 'we' and then an implied actor 'one'. The interviewee is represented as the actor in the following action processes: 'I have spent time alone thinking' on line 4, 'I spend a lot of time thinking about pain' on lines 7 and 8, and 'I counsel the blind in the United States' on line 8. In the first two clauses the process of action is 'spending time' and in the last clause 'counselling'. 'We' is represented as the actor in the example: 'we ask ourselves these questions', where 'we' refers to the collective humankind, not to any specific group of people which is constructed through a process of 'asking questions' that the interviewee represents himself as answering. There are also other material processes in which there is no explicated actor, for example: 'making something out of it', 'doing something triumphant, 'help not only yourself but help other people'. In all of these, the implied actor is 'one' or 'you' as these clauses are directed as an advice to all people. These clauses are the essence of the interviewee's message to the audience, his answer to the rhetorical question he posed to himself earlier: 'what is the meaning of adversity'. According to him, the meaning of suffering is to learn from the painful experiences and then help others with similar difficulties to get through them.

There are only a few mental processes in the example and they are all cognition processes. Perception and affection processes are lacking altogether. The first of the cognition processes is produced by the interviewer on lines 1 and 2: 'what do you mean by that' in which she asks the interviewee to elaborate his thoughts that the interviewer has quoted out of his book. The other three cognition processes occur on line 4: 'I have spent time alone thinking', on line 7: 'I spend a lot of time thinking about pain' and on lines 10 and 11: 'I think it's important'. In all of these processes the interviewee represents himself as the cognitive senser who has been 'thinking' and contemplating the meaning of life.

The interviewee represents himself as a rational, almost as a philosophical person who has been pondering about the collective humankind, the meaning of suffering and has come to conclude that his impairment and deprivation is not a unique experience, something that would separate him from everybody else. On the contrary, it is something that unites him with the rest of the humankind. The collective human kind is also constructed as the senser in the following: 'if we are confronted at all points by pain' on lines 5 to 6.

There are two existential processes in the example, the first on line 3: 'there have been moments' and the second on lines 6 and 7: 'is there in fact an ultimate reason'. The existent in the first process is 'moments' and in the second 'reason'. The latter example is a rhetorical question that the interviewee sets up for himself and sets out to answer. There is only one verbal process in the example, the comment by the interviewer on line 1: 'you write in your book' that is already discussed earlier in this chapter.

### **Concluding remarks**

The main function of the idealistic discourse is to provide a 'happy end' to the interview. As such it fits into the narrative structure of the interview which started off within the medical discourse and through chronological stages developed into this humanistic, even cliché-like climax. The idealistic discourse and the happy ending was invited and initiated by the interviewer and it was her agenda that formulated the macro narrative in the interview.

The idealistic discourse detaches blindness from the immediate context as it flows onto a more general level, that of collective human experience of adversities in life. As such, blind identity is not relevant as a specific, unique identity but it becomes something that first of all unites the interviewee with other blind people in his community but finally with the whole humankind as 'we' all have our own 'adversities' in life. At the end of the interview the struggle and tension between sameness and difference finally collapses: the interviewee represents all people deep down the same. Finally, he is represented as the same as others, belonging to the community, fitting into the world. Thus within the

idealistic discourse the interviewee is constructing a valid position for him in the world, his place and his duty as a human being becoming the pivotal issues.

The interview then ends with an optimistic tone, echoing hope. Against this framework living with blindness can be understood as a crusade that the interviewee has had to go through in order to seek the answer to the most basic question in human life. Blindness becomes constructed as the thing that made the interviewee to stop and think about where he was heading at and finally, change this direction.

However, after the closing words by the interviewee, there follows still another, very short, video insert. Strikingly, this insert is not in line with the preceding idealistic discourse as it includes a short clip of the interviewee as a child, sitting on his mother's lap, the mother smiling and little Stephen waving at the camera. In fact, this insert is very similar to the one shown within the familistic discourse. As such, the insert provides an intertextual reference to the earlier parts of the interviewee and brings these two discourses: the familistic and the idealistic interdiscursively together. The use of the video insert is obviously an editorial choice and implying that the reporter and the producer want to refer back to the role of the family and especially that of the mother as the very final conclusion. In a way then, this could be interpreted as the reporter's own interpretation of the interviewee's life and adversities; his hardship and problems are represented as culminating into his complex relationship with his mother. The insert also indicates the conventions of the media and specifically underlines the power of the editors and reporters: the final choice of the way the interview turns out to 'look like' is at their hands.

#### **7.4.8 The interdiscursivity of the discourses**

In the analysis above, I have explored the construction of blind identity through seven different discourses by analysing each discourse type in its separate chapter. However, this does not mean that the boundaries of the discourse types would be that clear cut and easily distinguishable in the data. I have pointed out the interdiscursivity of the discourses as it has come up in the examples but in

order to properly demonstrate the interdiscursive nature of the data, I will analyse one example of the data particularly from the point of view of interdiscursivity in the following.

Interdiscursivity is a concept closely connected to intertextuality. The concept of intertextuality was coined by Kristeva in the 1960's but the idea originates in Bakhtin and his work among linguistics (Fairclough 1992:101). Fairclough (1992:84) defines intertextuality as “the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the texts may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth”. He makes a distinction between manifest intertextuality and constitutive intertextuality. The former refers to the explicit references to other texts while the latter means the more subtle and implicit ways of texts echoing other texts, genres and discourses. This concept of constitutive intertextuality is also referred to as interdiscursivity. (Fairclough 1992: 84-85) Intertextuality and interdiscursivity enable the study of historicity of texts: the fact that texts always consist “of prior texts to which they respond” (Fairclough 1992:84). Consequently, these concepts also put emphasis on heterogeneity and ambivalence of texts: they allow the study of contradiction, conflict and ambiguity (Fairclough 1992:104-105) and underline that language use is never clear cut and naturally categorizable but inherently includes inconsistency, hybridity and dynamism.

In my following analysis I will analyse the way in which the different discourse types are used intertwined and how they become mixed, one echoing the other. In other words, I will be analysing the implicit interdiscursivity of this example.

## Example 11. The interdiscursivity of the discourses

- 01 SK my favorite ( . ) character ( . ) it-it's it's uh actually Helen Keller.  
 02 MT mm-h  
 03 SK who ( . ) was not only blind but deaf as well. and ( . ) constructed a ( . ) you know a life of  
 04 interna:tional ( . ) proportions ( . ) uh if you go and ( . ) look at the Helen Keller archives  
 05 at the American Foundation for the Blind in New York City ( . ) there are photographs of  
 06 her with maori ( . ) tribesmen ( . ) inNew Zealand ( . ) you know, and there she is in France  
 07 and there she is in ( . ) >Scandinavia:<, >you know< there she is with Caruso (and) ( . ) she  
 08 led this very ( . ) outgoing, vigorous: u:h ( . ) intellectual life she graduated from Harvard  
 09 University. ( . ) u:hm ( . ) forget being blind ( . ) and deaf ( . ) and graduating from Harvard  
 10 University >I mean (in-) Harvard University is a hard place for fully **sighted** people<  
 11 MT mm.=  
 12 SK =to graduate from ( . ) uh so ( . ) she was u:h a **tremendous** uh force ( . ) u:h and helped to  
 13 raise the consciousness of ( . ) the **world** ( . ) about what blind people can do. so I admire  
 14 her a great deal. °u:h° you know we think of singing ( . ) a:s uh ( . ) being ( . ) something  
 15 we only hear with the ears. (0.4) a:nd ( . ) you know, it's possible ( . ) that there're other  
 16 kinds of ( . ) sensation ( . ) tha:t u:m ( . ) you know for- for Helen Keller ( . ) touching  
 17 Caruso's vocal cords ( . ) she could **feel** his passion ( . ) his depth of feeling ( . ) >you  
 18 know< this was the greatest opera singer ( . ) of them all ( . ) and when he **sang** for her he  
 19 sang with his full voice ( . ) and all that passion ( . ) about blindness ( . ) and the sorrow and  
 20 the struggle ( . ) you know the **poetry** ( . ) of that was coming out ( . ) and she could **feel** that  
 21 ( . ) you know coming through his vocal cords I happen to think that's just a ( . ) very  
 22 powerful and beautiful ( . ) sense of how ( . ) rich and intelligent and intuitive we are as  
 23 human beings ( . ) there're many ways to ( . ) live and to feel and to think ( . ) and to be fully  
 24 alive. so that story is **very** inspiring to me

The above example is one of the interviewee's long monologues which is accompanied by only two minimal responses by the interviewer. In this piece the interviewee is describing Helen Keller who he characterizes as his 'favourite character'. Obviously, she is some kind of a role model for the interviewee, one that has set an alternative example of being disabled by being very much active, independent and even a political figure.

Within this turn, the interviewee draws on many discourse types and he shifts to them, back and forth, very smoothly and seamlessly. The beginning lines obviously reflect the societal discourse as the perspective to Helen Keller is that of a community; her accomplishments are placed on a societal level. The most explicit example of this discourse type comes up on lines 12 to 13: 'she was a tremendous force and helped to raise the consciousness of the world about what blind people can do'. The societal discourse enables Helen Keller to be constructed as a political actor on a global level, through this discourse type her achievements as a political figure, international life and accomplishments in awareness raising can be emphasized. The societal discourse is reflected on the

vocabulary but mainly the societal discourse concerns the communal point of view described above.

After this the interviewee begins to shift towards the art discourse. He says on lines 14 to 16 that: 'we think of singing as being something we only hear with the ears and you know it's possible that there're other kinds of sensation'. Here he is starting to draw on the art discourse by changing the topic rather abruptly and using vocabulary connected to senses and music. He goes on for a few lines describing Helen Keller meeting Enrico Caruso, an opera singer who the interviewee also admires a great deal, and how the blind and deaf woman could 'feel his passion his depth of feeling' as Caruso sang for Keller.

The art discourse is manifested through vocabulary, topic and also point of view. In this case singing becomes constructed as the force that brought 'all that passion about blindness and the sorrow and the struggle you know the poetry of that was coming out'. Earlier within the art discourse, the interviewee worded blindness as 'poetry' and this term comes up here again within the art discourse. Thus it can firstly be concluded that this wording is distinctive to the art discourse. Secondly, the interviewee is obviously reflecting on the earlier phases of the interview, recontextualizing bits and pieces from the earlier parts. Through the art discourse the emphasis shifts more to Helen Keller as a person and mainly to blindness as an artistic experience. In this case blindness is not compared to visual arts as earlier, but to music.

Towards the end of his turn, the interviewee gradually and smoothly shifts to draw on another discourse type, namely the idealistic one. His last comments on lines 21 to 24 include an idealistic point of view, namely that of the collective nature of human being. The idealistic discourse is echoing clearly in the following sentence on lines 22 and 23: 'how rich and intelligent and intuitive we are as human beings'. Interestingly, along with the change to the idealistic discourse also the focus changes from Helen Keller as a person to a more abstract level where the actor is a collective 'we'. Blindness is not an issue anymore, nor any specific individuals as the perspective changes onto a much more general level. Through the idealistic discourse the interviewee represents human beings as different on a

superficial level but being deep down the same, a thought which is in line with the message he is conveying through this discourse type also at the very end of the interview.

However, there is more to the interdiscursivity than the spoken language discussed above. Namely, the interviewee's turn was followed by a video insert. This insert depicts Helen Keller, happy-faced and smiling, signing and reading from the lips of another person with her fingers. There is Enrico Caruso singing at the background. This insert could be placed on the borders of the societal and the art discourse. Firstly, it represents Keller as a public figure, communicating with the world and setting an example by her habitus and secondly, it draws on the art discourse by framing the visual societal discourse with music and auditive discourse. So the video insert does not draw on the idealistic discourse that immediately precedes it but refers to the beginning sections of the example. Thus the hybridity of the example is increased: the different discourses change back and forth, become assimilated and are constructed through multiple mediums; through spoken, visual and auditive discourse.

The interdiscursivity of the example allows ambiguity or heterogeneity rather, to the way the interviewee represents Helen Keller. Since the different discourse types construct different perspectives towards blindness and in this case also different subject positions for Helen Keller, she becomes represented in multiple ways. The interdiscursivity refers to mixing and blending of discourses: it cannot be clearly pointed out where one ends and the other one takes over. Within only one turn, the interviewee draws on at least three different types of discourses and consequently constructs Helen Keller as a societal actor, as a blind person very sensitive to feeling the world through her other senses and finally on a very general, humanistic level as an example for the rest of us the humankind. On one hand then, the discourses bring out different aspects of the issue constructed through them but on the other hand, the discourses overlap, mix and echo each other, making it at times impossible to separate them. In addition to this, the hybridity of the discourses does not only concern spoken language but is constructed both through verbal and visual mediums. On one hand, the video

insert in itself mixes different discourses and on the other hand it is a piece of visual discourse adding to the interdiscursivity of the text example.

#### **7.4.9 Different discourses, different identities, different functions**

The different discourses each represent first and foremost a different **perspective**, a new angle from which to construct blind identity. I distinguished altogether seven different discourses in the data and hence it can be argued that in the interview, blind identity became constructed as a very heterogenous and many-sided issue. Furthermore, the discourses became mixed with each other, intertwined and the consequent interdiscursivity even added to the ambiguous and fluid nature of blind identity in the data. In addition to providing a perspective to blind identity, the different discourses construct different kinds of **subject positions** for the blind individual, varying from being the object of actions taken by the medical personnel to one that takes a critical political stance towards American welfare system. The discourses also positioned and constructed the interviewee in other identities besides his blindness. He became constructed as a family member, a poet, a man and a sick person. These identities were not separate but intertwined and reflecting one another. Finally, the different discourses appear to carry different **functions** in the interview: each discourse seemed to be drawn on for a particular purpose. With this, I do not refer to the intentions or purposes of the interactants but on one hand to the discursive functions that the different discourses seem to have as culturally rooted ways of constructing blindness and on the other hand as parts of the macro-narrative of the interview. In other words, the discourses constructed a plot for the interview, each discourse having a different role in this chain. In the following, I will summarize and discuss the seven different discourses of the data from these three different aspects.

The medical discourse was the one that began the interview. Through the medical discourse the participants construct a medical perspective towards blind identity, concentrating on explaining the physiological causes of the interviewee's blindness, circulating around his birth and locating blindness within hospital



context. Within the medical discourse blind identity is most clearly constructed as a bodily-based issue, blindness becomes to equal a physical impairment. The subject position constructed for the interviewee is that of an impaired patient, the goal of medical procedures carried out by the medical personnel. The medical discourse was small in its respective size but its significance grew due to the fact that it laid the ground for the whole interview. In other words, it functioned as the narrative beginning for the interviewee's story. The medical discourse explains the origins of the interviewee's blind identity situating it within biological domain and ignoring the active role of the interviewee himself. The medical discourse also functions as a strongly culturally rooted way for the interactants to discuss blindness as the medicalization is a widely accepted and hegemonized way of representing impairment and disability in western societies. This way the hegemonized discourse of society becomes recontextualized and drawn on a local level: it forms an integral part of the identity negotiation of an individual.

The familistic discourse constructs blindness from the family's point of view. It does not only represent blindness within family context, reflecting on the family members' reactions towards blindness but it also prioritizes the authority of the family. What this means is that the needs and expectations of the family are represented as more important, having the priority over the individual needs of the interviewee. The interviewee is represented in a position of pleasing his parents, adjusting to their wishes and even acting out as if he was not blind at all in order to be accepted by his parents. Thus blind identity becomes constructed as a dispreferred condition, a source of shame and the object of concealment. Blindness is also constructed as the cause for the interviewee's strength of character and persistent personality. The actors within this discourse are the family members, especially the interviewee and his mother. Due to this, the interviewee identity of a son becomes highlighted: he becomes represented through his position in his family. The function of the familistic discourse is to discuss a particular life phase of the interviewee and explain the interviewee's complicated relationship towards his blindness originating in childhood and following him through his adult years. As a part of the narrative structure it

provided a link from the medical and technocratic beginning towards a more social and everyday construction of blindness.

The psychological discourse is a very specific way of constructing blind identity in the data and it is only used by the interviewee. It provides scientific explanations for human behaviour in difficult circumstances and hence explains the interviewee's reactions and behaviour in the language of science. Thus one of its functions is to give credibility to the interviewee's personal account but also show his knowledgeable ability in the field of psychology. The interviewee is positioned as a rational, sophisticated person analysing his personal dilemmas from a distance. He becomes represented as detached from blindness on a personal level. The interviewee's eating disorder is also discussed within the psychological discourse and thus another aspect of his identity; that of an anorexic person becomes constructed. Blindness is represented as something that at first brings pain and causes mental suffering but that can through acceptance and mental growth be changed into something valuable. The interviewee is positioned as the one accepting and embracing his difference in order to come into terms with it. The psychological discourse provides explanations for the interviewee's behaviour and reactions to his blindness. It shows that rejection, low self-esteem and shame are not unusual experiences among sick people and thus brings scientific value and status to explanations of the interviewee's behaviour. The psychological discourse brings order and understandability to the experiences of blind identity. From a narrative point of view, it was a rather separate step in the plot; it was drawn on a few times and was also mixed with the familistic discourse but it did not as such develop the macro-narrative of the interview to any direction but functioned rather as a bypath of the plot.

The emotional discourse is the most heterogenous and inconsistent discourse type in the data. It constructs blindness as an emotional experience, something that is felt mentally. It was drawn on by the participants towards the end of the interview thus functioning as a turning point in the macro-narrative of the interview because it divided the interviewee's life to the phase before and after accepting his blindness. This discourse brings hope and optimism to the way

blind identity is constructed. Since the emotional discourse is a very individualistic one, foregrounding the interviewee's own opinions and feelings, the interviewee becomes positioned in a pivotal role within it. He is the central participant who is represented as feeling, reacting to, believing in and thinking about his blindness. The emotional discourse circulates around the themes of self-integrity, self-esteem, independence, acceptance and control. All these issues are constructed as something that the interviewee lacked before accepting his blindness and which came to occupy a crucial role after that. A full, positive blind identity is represented as a process that demands accepting one for who he is. Especially independence and control over one's own life are constructed as the most relevant concepts on the way to the acceptance of blind identity.

The art discourse provides a unique perspective to blind identity that on one hand conceptualizes blindness in the language of arts, eloquent language and vivid expressions but on the other hand compares blindness as a sensation to that of artistic experience: colors, shapes and shadows. The art discourse is highly intertextual as it includes references to famous artists and their work and even their quotations. Blindness is represented as including different grades and nuances of sight; in other words, blindness does not mean *not* seeing, it means seeing through endlessly different ways. This seeing refers to both physiological and metaphorical seeing. Physiologically, he does see. He sees dreams, he has the good days of seeing the colors and shapes and figures. But there is also a more philosophical aspect to his seeing. Stephen Kuusisto is represented as seeing with his heart and mind. Paradoxically, he can see because he does not see; his blindness has shown him the drawbacks of life, the cruelties of people but also the beauty in life, and the meaning of living. The art discourse functions as a mirror to the unique world of the interviewee. It is a special and distinctive way by the interviewee to construct his personal blind identity, him having access to the world of arts in the role of a poet. The interviewee's occupational identity is the crucial resource which enables the use of the art discourse. Within the art discourse the issue of sameness and difference becomes intertwined to the construction of the identities of a blind and a poet. The interviewee positions

himself on one hand as belonging to the group of poets but on the other hand he is constructing himself as differing from them due to his blindness. The interviewee is constantly balancing between fitting in and not belonging to. Furthermore, the art discourse moves on the border of the real world and the dream world and thus it also enables the inclusion of the unconscious level of mind. Consequently, blind identity is represented as including the person as a whole with his consciousness and unconsciousness thus embracing a holistic view of human being. From a narrative point of view, the art discourse was a clear step in the discursive plot towards the idealistic end. The art discourse shifted the focus from the immediate social context to a more philosophical level thus foregrounding and anticipating the denouement.

The societal discourse is a discourse type that was only used by the interviewee. It constructs blindness through societal norms, institutional practices and even politics. It represents a rather harsh and negative, even cruel image of being blind in the world where normality is preferred and deviance sanctioned. Being blind is represented as a hard struggle for survival. Within the societal discourse blindness becomes constructed as a relational concept: blind identity takes shape in social interaction through negotiation. As such it challenges the medical definition of disability and conflicts with the medical discourse of blindness also drawn on in these data. The interviewee becomes positioned in more various roles than in any other discourse. He is represented through multiple identities; that of a man, a sick person and a poet. These three aspects of his identity become mixed as they are constructed in relation to one another. The gender identity is represented as weakened and demasculinized by the blind identity and poet identity whereas sickness identity is represented as a unity between the interviewee and his peers, on the contrary to blindness that separates him from others. The different identities are not straightforward but ambiguous, the interviewee for instance calls himself both a very athletic and as not being able to succeed in sporting life. Categorization is also a central theme. The interviewee is categorized from the inside, by himself that is, and from the outside, by his schoolmates, peers and teachers. In both processes, like within the

art discourse, the struggle between sameness and difference comes up again; the interviewee is constructed as balancing between these two categories not being able to settle for either of them. The societal discourse functions as a way of representing the multiple identities of the interviewee and a way of bringing in other significant actors in the construction of blind identity. The discourse also enables the interviewee to criticise the American welfare system and thus take a political position.

The final discourse type, the idealistic one, is located on a very general level. It circulates around the themes of universal human nature, sharing, learning and teaching. Within this discourse, the interviewee is positioned as 'one of us' and consequently his blindness is not equalled with difference but with sameness: all people have their crosses to bear and blindness is the interviewee's cross, his personal crusade and lesson to learn in life. In other words, the idealistic discourse includes moralistic undertones embracing the basic Christian morality of enduring through suffering. Consequently, pride becomes attached to blind identity. This pride is not attached to blindness as such but pride is taken over the process of accepting blindness as a necessary step towards a process of growing as a human being. The interviewee is represented as tackling his enemy and overcoming it. The idealistic discourse had a clear function as constituting the happy end to the interview and thus providing a conclusion to the interview's macro-narrative. The end stood in sharp contrast with the beginning of the interview in which the medical discourse was dominating. The story of a blind took off in the medical context, in the biological and technocratic realm moving a step by step towards the climax; the idealistic discourse of the universal suffering of man. Through this discourse the interviewee can show that he has learnt a lesson and now he wants to pass it on, to teach it to the audience as well.

As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the discourses were highly interdiscursive, drawing on each other. Only the psychological and the idealistic discourses seemed to be that homogenous that they did not, at least very clearly, draw on other discourses. Otherwise, the discourses became intertwined. For analytic purposes I have had to separate them under different chapters and

discuss them each separately in the light of textual examples but already in this discussion the heterogeneity of the discourses came up. The familistic discourse echoes the medical one that precedes it, thus combining two rather different perspectives to blindness. The familistic discourse also mixes with the psychological discourse resulting into a scientific explanation of the behaviour of mentally distressed children in family contexts. The two strikingly different discourses, the societal and the medical one also become intertwined as the interviewee within his discussion of his school experiences draws on the medical discourse in explaining the biological reason for him having such thick glasses. The art and the emotional discourses form a long interdiscursive piece in which the interviewee describes the feelings and emotions of a lonely poet comparing himself to the endless chain of great solitary poets of the world.

Does then the interview aim at closure or does it allow inconsistent heterogeneity through drawing on multiple discourses and mixing them together? I would argue that despite the multiplicity of perspectives, subject positions, identities and functions of discourses constructed in the interview, the end of the interview shows tendency towards closure. At the end, the interview is characterized by the idealistic discourse putting emphasis on the universal and shared nature of the humankind and teaching the audience a lesson about the adversities of life. This piece aims at closure in two respects. First of all, it provides the interview with a happy end. It fits to the format of the interview and the agenda of the interviewee to provide a closure, pulling all the threads together and ending the interview neatly. The audience is not left puzzled with question marks on their lips: they are provided with The Denouement. Secondly, the end provides a happy end to the macro-narrative of the Story of a Blind Man that has just been told. It shows how the interviewee has learned a lesson in his life and how he is now passing the lesson on and teaching it to others in similar situations. This is the necessary happy end to the American survival story: how the lonely wolf, a disparaged blind poet with low prospects of life struggled, took his life in his own hands and survived at the end to serve a greater purpose: passing this lesson on to the rest of the humankind. The heyday of American individualism.

## **8. BRINGING TOGETHER THE TEXT, THE DISCOURSE AND THE SOCIAL**

The theoretical and methodological framework of this study was threefold, mapping onto critical discourse analysis, constructionist approach to identities and studying disability. In this chapter, my aim is to bring these domains together by reflecting the findings of this study to the three-dimensional framework of discourse by Fairclough (see p. 57 to 59 for discussion of the framework) and by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of critical language study.

The pivotal idea in critical discourse analysis is the study of texts as parts of their discursive and sociocultural contexts. According to Fairclough (1992:80-81, 1995a:9), texts always operate under the constraints of discursive and social conditions and thus the analysis of texts should not be artificially separated from the original context. In other words, texts are regarded more than just pieces of language: they are regarded as inherent parts of the surrounding discursive and social world. My aim in this study was to explore the discursive construction of blind identity within mediated interaction by applying critical tools and adopting a critical perspective in my analysis. This means linking the findings of the textual level to those of the discursive level and finally explaining these by reflecting on the social level. On the level of discursive practices this means considering the conventions of the media in shaping the construction of blind identity and on the level of sociocultural practices connecting the discussion of blind identity to the hegemonized discourses of disability in society and their role in the ongoing social change in the definitions of disability.

Analytically, my starting point was the innermost level of Fairclough's framework: that of the text analysis. Through textual analysis of the data I was able to show systematically how blind identity becomes constructed on the very micro level of language. In this study, two linguistic tools were applied; transitivity and wording and rewording blindness. Through transitivity analysis I was able to explore the different kinds of actions that the blind person was

attached to and the particular participant roles he was assigned to. The study of the ways in which blindness became worded and reworded in the interview revealed the ways in which blindness was categorized and labelled, what areas and domains it was attached to. The conventions of the media extend their influence on even the micro level of texts, to phenomena such as transitivity. For instance the format of the interview partly explains the large number of relational processes in the data. This seems to result from the fact that one of the functions of the interview is to describe and characterize different people and issues and this often carried out through attributive and identifying process types.

Fairclough (1989:140-141) has called the analysis of the textual level description, the analysis of discursive practices interpretation and the analysis of the social practices explanation. This classification seems to be valid to a certain extent but as I see it, interpretation should not be detached from the text analysis. In the process of the textual analysis I was constantly making interpretations, starting from deciding which process type to classify a certain verb to, and moving on to interpreting the difference between labelling blindness as 'a condition' or as 'poetry'. Thus I would argue that the interpretative aspect of analysis is present at every stage of critical discourse analysis and hence its outcomes are always dependent on the analyst and his/her choices and interpretations.

The qualitative analysis of this study was carried out by analysing seven different discourse types constructed in the data which were analysed through the two linguistic tools, transitivity and wording of blindness. Thus the two levels of Fairclough's framework, the textual and the discursive, were brought together and carried out inseparately throughout the main body of analysis.

With respect to the discursive level of analysis, the construction of blind identity turned out to be very heterogenous and many-sided. This results from the fact that firstly, a great number of different discourse types were constructed in the course of the interview and secondly, these discourses were rather heterogenous echoing and reflecting on each other adding to the interdiscursivity of the construction of blind identity. Besides the number of the discourse types,



also their multi-semiotic nature further increased the interdiscursivity of the data. Fairclough (1995a:4) has concluded that “texts in contemporary society are increasingly multi-semiotic” referring to the combinations of spoken, visual and auditive discourses within contemporary texts. In the data, the discourses were mainly constructed through spoken language but the influence of the visual discourse was also considerable. The visual discourse functioned both as enforcing the messages and the contents of the spoken discourse but also as contesting them, setting the two mediums in sharp contrast. The interview also included auditive material which accompanied the visual discourse in the video inserts. Thus it can be concluded that in the interview the blind identity was constructed through three different semiotic systems which did not operate separately but were inherently combined.

The conventions of the media also include the institutional role of the participants: that of the interviewer and the interviewee. These roles constrain the interaction, its turn taking system and macro structure, for example. The institutional role of the interviewer assigns her with a lot of discursive power to determine the course of the interview and direct it according to her agenda. The interviewer’s institutional role in the data could be detected from her rather leading questions, her way of insisting on certain topics to be discussed and her organization of the narrative macro structure and narrative of the interview. However, the interviewee also adopted a strong role many times taking the floor from the interviewer. Thus the interview was open to negotiation and joint construction of meanings. I did not pay systematic attention to the institutional roles of the participants since it was not one of my research interests but I did point out to the above issues occasionally, as they emerged in the data. In addition to this, the editorial choices such as inserting the video clips or possibly cutting off certain pieces of the interview or reorganizing the order of the interview also underline the influence of the processes discourse production. In the end, the way the final product that is aired turns out to look like, is at the hands of the reporter, the editor and the producer.

Finally, I intend to reflect the findings of the textual and discursive level

on the most general level of Fairclough's framework, that of the sociocultural practices. The findings of this study stand in an obvious contrast with the findings of the previous studies on disabled identities in the media. Partly, this results from the fact that the earlier studies have mostly been concerned with the representations of disabled identities in the media from the outside, not with how disabled identities are constructed by disabled people speaking for themselves. It has been concluded that the representations of disabled people in the media are homogenous, stereotypical and dominantly negative. Disabled people are represented in narrow and secondary roles and their disabilities are highlighted as the most important aspects of them. Furthermore, disability becomes equalled with deviance. If this is not the case, then disabled people are represented as overly good, possessing special talents that compensate for their impairments. (for representations of disability in the media see eg. Thurer 1980, Elliott and Byrd 1982, Wertlieb 1985, Hafferty and Foster 1994, Lane 1995, Kitchin 1998, Oliver and Barnes 1998, Shakespeare 1999) In contrast to these findings, in my data disability was constructed as a very heterogenous identity. Blindness was not represented as either good or bad but ambiguous, including multiple, even conflicting meanings. The blind person was constructed in the pivotal role, at the centre of his identity construction and he was represented in multiple subject positions. However, some of the stereotypical views about disability were also constructed within the data, as the blind person was constructed as having had to compensate for his impairment in other areas of life or by focusing on the disabled aspect of the interviewee's identity. The fact that the interviewee's identity was to a certain extent reduced to that of being blind and the interviewee's blindness was highlighted at the cost of other aspects of his identity, obviously results from the conventions of the genre. Interviews usually have an agreed topic that is to be explored and it is a part of the interviewer's institutional role to ensure that the contents of the interview stay within these boundaries. Thus, at the risk of reducing the interviewees to represent straightforward and one-sided identities, interviews commonly concentrate on one topic which then becomes extensively explored.

The significance of allowing disabled people to speak for themselves, to reword their own stories and create their own discourses within the media for instance, lies in the challenge these stories provide against the hegemony of representing disability by the non-disabled majority, and in the alternative frames of reference these challenging discourses offer for disabled people. Fairclough (1995a:2) has concluded that in modern society “discourse has taken a major role in sociocultural reproduction and change”. Thus, through creating their own discourses and retelling their stories, the disabled people have the possibility of powerful discursive struggle. Fairclough (1995a:209) calls the power that text producers have to challenge the social order and to claim their own identities, reconstituting of the social identities and forms of self. Also the advocates for disability movements have emphasized this process of disabled people defining their own identities. But the responsibility of challenging the stereotypical constructions of disabled people should not only be left to disabled people. After all, the hegemonized representations of disabled people have been created and maintained by the non-disabled majority and thus it should also be their responsibility to redefine them.

The data included many voices. Due to the conventions of the genre, the dominating voice belonged to the interviewee, accompanied by the voice of the interviewer. However, the issue was not that straightforward as both these voices included rich intertextual aspects. Both drew on other voices, recontextualizing them within their own voices. These included artistic, political, educational and medical voices. Both participants were also drawing on the autobiography of the interviewee and hence adding to the intertextuality of the data. Even though the participants act under the discursive and social constraints of the context, they are at the same challenging and changing them. According to Fairclough (1995a:2), text producers are continuously challenging the constraints under which they are operating by creating “new combinations of genres and discourses” and producing heterogeneous texts both in form and meaning. They are using the resources “in new ways” (Fairclough 1995a:8). In these data, the participants were using intertextuality and interdiscursivity in creative and new ways. They

for example brought together two strikingly different discourse types, the medical and the societal one, and freely combined them. This kind of discursive challenge is the key to social change.

The heterogeneity and ambiguity of the data carries far more far reaching implications than simply indicating the contested nature of the data. According to Fairclough (1995a:8), “the heterogeneity of texts code social contradictions” making texts “the sensitive indicators of sociocultural processes”. Thus, it can be concluded that the fact that the blind identity became constructed as such a heterogenous, contested and inconsistent issue in the data, provides insights into the ongoing struggle over meanings of disability and disabled identities in society. Even though I cannot draw any generalizations on the basis of such small data, I can argue that the data certainly reflect and indicate to the social change that is taking place within the area of disability. Despite the fact that my data consisted of an interview with a blind person that possibly has more resources (economic, educational, occupational, being a public figure etc.) and potential to confront the traditional conceptions of disability, I would hardly consider the data exceptional. The hegemony of medicine is being challenged more and more vigorously, the social movements of disabled people and their advocacy groups are contesting the traditional definitions and redefining disability as a political concept.

Despite the ambiguity of the data, there was still a tendency towards closure at the end. Gradually, the participants were moving towards the climax of the end: the ‘revelation’ of the meaning of the interviewee’s difficulties and adversities in life. This denouement of the interview was constructed through the idealistic discourse. The tendency towards closure can be explained once again by the conventions and the format of the interview: the interview is supposed to have an end, preferably a happy one, especially when the interview is about reconstructing a life story, a biography of a kind that is destined to have a meaningful end.

The construction of blindness in the data seemed to be strongly connected to the issue of struggle between sameness and difference. In the data, the issue of

being normal and being deviant turned out to be transformed into the question of being the same and being different. The participants did not achieve any agreement or arrive at closure as concerns this issue. Rather, Stephen Kuusisto was represented as struggling between belonging to and not fitting in; an issue inherently inscribed into the concept of identity. Basically, identities are constructed in order to demarcate between us and them, I and you, to categorize others and distinguish one's own place in relation to them. Furthermore, the issue is not whether one is normal or deviant, the same or different, but how one is labelled and responded to: a deviant among other deviants is nothing but normal and a normal among deviants is a deviant.

The way blind identity became constructed in the data challenges both the hegemonized medical discourses and definitions of disability in society and the common way of thinking of blindness as a one-sided and negative identity, a condition in which a person does not see at all. The discourses constructed in the interview represented blindness as a multidimensional and dynamic identity which does not mean not seeing but seeing in a different way from the sighted people. Thus the findings challenge the common stereotypes of blindness as a devastating destiny maintained by the non-disabled majority.

The findings and insights provided by this study also have practical implications. The practical application of CDA called 'critical language awareness' (CLA) aims at raising awareness and bringing about critical attitude towards conventions of the media in schools and other educational institutions (Fairclough 1995a:219, 215-253). CLA aims at applying critical theory by explicating the relationships between language and power (Fairclough 1995a:221) and drawing attention to the influence of the media as an actor in the social domain. Indisputably, the media is gaining more and more influence in contemporary society. The increasing role of the media also demands increasing knowledge and awareness of the practices and conventions of the media. Reflexivity and critical media literacy occupy central roles in this process. Fairclough (1995a:222) has concluded that "a critical awareness of language is a prerequisite for effective citizenship, and a democratic entitlement". Thus it

could be argued that gaining critical language awareness is the responsibility that citizens in contemporary societies have. CLA does not aim at critique in its own end but it aims at empowering people by raising their awareness of the linguistic and discursive practices of the media for instance and the social origins, consequences and implications of these practices (Fairclough 1995a:232).

As I see it, the findings of this study could be applied at least in four different sectors of social life by raising critical language awareness. Firstly, there is the socially influential sphere of politics, politicians and social policy makers. On one hand, they should be made aware of the social nature of disability, its negotiated and interactionally constructed character and on the other hand, their hegemonized discourses ought to be challenged and provided with alternatives. Secondly, the people in the 'disability business' (see p. 15 for discussion on the topic), the endless line of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, speech therapists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists, in other words people working with the disabled people, should be made aware of the fact that the medical world and the medical discourse promoted by them may occupy only a marginal role in the life of a disabled person. Besides this, the medicalized view of disability possibly fostered by these professions should be rejected by demonstrating the vast variety of discourses that can be used in constructing disability. In short, it should be emphasized that disability is much more than an impairment, it is socially constructed. Thirdly, critical language awareness has a strong potential to be realized in the field of education. Young people can gradually be taught the basics of critical media literacy and how to take a critical stance towards mediated representations of marginal and stigmatized groups of society by raising their awareness of the connections between language use and societal power. Fourthly, these kinds of encouraging findings of versatile ways of constructing blind identity could provide disabled people themselves with alternative frames of references in relation to which to project and within which to construct their own identities. The discourses drawn upon in the process of constructing minority identities do not always have to be those created by the majority. The disabled people's own constructions can take the floor from these discourses, challenge

the hegemony and provide the local negotiations of disabled identities with versatile, dynamic and valued frames of reference. A discourse analytic study can start off the process of raising critical awareness and sensitivity towards the media and minorities, for instance, but the next stage is to transform the awareness into actions. Otherwise, there is a danger of the process of raising awareness simply being reduced into fancy rhetoric and good will.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In this study I set out to explore the linguistic and discursive construction of blind identity and the ways in which blind identity and other identities become constructed within mediated interaction. The theoretical and methodological background of the study consisted of critical discourse analysis, constructionist approach to the study of identities and disability research. The data consisted of a television interview between a blind American interviewee and a sighted Finnish interviewer. The data turned out to be rich and multidimensional, not only in combining verbal and visual discourses but in being amazingly many-sided, ambiguous, heterogenous, allowing inconsistency, contradiction and at the same time consisting of two voices: that of a blind interviewee and that of a sighted interviewee. The data formed a macro-narrative, a story of a blind man with a clear beginning, an end and a plot. Within this narrative, blindness and blind identity were approached through seven different discourses each of which provided a different perspective towards blindness and represented the blind man in varying subject positions. The discourse types were medical, familistic, psychological, emotional, art, societal and idealistic. Even though the discourses were separated for analytic purposes, they included a great deal of heterogeneity and interdiscursivity which was also explored more closely.

Basically, the linguistic and discursive tools used to analyse the construction of blind identity included the analysis of the discourse types, transitivity and wording and rewording blindness. The quantitative analysis of transitivity; the distribution of the process types and the participant roles in the data, and the analysis of the different ways of wording blindness throughout the data provided an overview of the whole data from these two perspectives. They were an effective way of summarizing the distribution of transitivity and ways of wording blindness in the whole data and provided a backcloth against which the more qualitative findings were evaluated. Even though the quantitative findings included illustrative textual examples, the quantitative analysis still always decontextualizes language, and therefore it was followed by a qualitative analysis



of seven different discourse types of the data. There were three basic criteria for distinguishing a discourse type: terminology, contents and the point of view. Some discourse types fulfilled these criteria more distinctively than others. The discourse types were first characterized on a general level and then analysed through a long textual example. In the discussion of these textual examples I was able to concentrate on transitivity and wording of blindness on a local level and show the contextualized, dynamic and heterogenous ways of constructing blind identity.

Analysing the different discourses through rather long textual examples was one decision that I made. I could also have analysed the discourses on a more general and descriptive level, focusing on general characteristics of each discourse type and illustrating these findings through typical textual examples. However, I chose to carry out the analysis the other way around: moving from the analysis of the textual level to the more general conclusions and findings. This decision had both its strengths and weaknesses. On one hand, it restricted my possibilities to draw general conclusions about a particular discourse type on the whole, as the findings only concerned one example of this discourse, but on the other hand, it enabled me to analyse the construction of blind identity as a process since the long examples demonstrated the processual nature of negotiation between the participants and also revealed the heterogeneity of the discourses. Including so many textual examples of my data in the analysis also provided the reader with the opportunity to construct his/her own conclusions; agree with my interpretations or argue back. Thus, the readers were welcomed to construct their own arguments and conclusions. This is also the essence of discourse analysis: one study provides one perspective to the data, and even though systematically analysed and logically reasoned and argued, it cannot claim to exclude all the alternative interpretations. What I did in my analysis, was to categorize and organize the data in one possible way, highlighting and emphasising certain aspects of blind identity construction and thus making some relevant aspects visible that a casual reader otherwise might not take notice of.

Within the scope of this study, I was only able to focus on a few selected aspects of a very rich and many-layered data. However, there were several aspects

in the data that had to be left out in a study of this size but which would certainly have provided fruitful and relevant insights into the construction of blind identity. One of these was the issue of narrated identity. In my analysis, I did pay attention to the narrative macro-structure of the interview and to the way a blind person's account of his life became structured as a story with a beginning and an end but it would have been interesting to focus on this issue more extensively. The interview included numerous short narratives; the interviewee's flashbacks and reminiscences, small stories and pieces of relived history, whose analysis would have enriched the analysis of the narrated identity. After all, narratives are a way of formulating experiences into texts, becoming linguistic and textual resources for the display of identities. Our identities emerge through narratives as we construct positions for ourselves and others and reflect issues on a wider sociocultural level within narratives. In the words of Schiffrin (1996:200), "We are continually locating and relocating ourselves, defining and redefining ourselves and our worlds" and the telling of stories is one resource of managing this dynamic process of identity construction.

Furthermore, I did not analyse the visual language, the picture, systematically in my study either. I only paid attention to the video inserts and discussed whether their contents were in line or conflicted with the spoken language, but I did not carry out any systematic audiovisual analysis. In a visual medium such as the television, the influence of the picture is indisputable and it certainly constructs meanings as effectively as spoken language. In this study, however, my focus was on spoken language and consequently there was not enough space for visual analysis. Besides the analysis of the video inserts, it would have been fascinating to explore the nonverbal language of the blind person. Such analysis could have provided interesting insights into the nonverbal language of a person who, due to his sense impairment, might have learnt a different way of expressing himself nonverbally and who is also especially sensitive, 'tuned in' to the body, both to his own and those of others and is possibly much more open to information through several channels.

Finally, I would have liked to look at the intertextuality of the data in more

detail. The interview was intertextually very rich, including quotations of poets, musicians and politicians and consisting of metaphors and allegories, references to ancient mythology and the language of poetry, for example. The newly published autobiography by the interviewee was also referred to many times in the interview and used as an intertextual resource in constructing blindness by both the interviewee and the interviewer. Obviously, the data were having a dialogue with texts of the past and thoughts by people in history, recontextualizing these within its format and thus functioning as one link in the intertextual chain of texts, given birth by previous texts and giving birth to new ones.

This study shows how both the hegemonized ways of defining disability as a medical problem, a categorical and straightforward issue and the image of blindness and disability in our common train of thought as a negative, oppressive and easily distinguishable identity can conflict with the way a blind person constructs and rewords his own life. For Stephen Kuusisto, blindness seems to be nothing but ambiguous, inconsistent, heterogenous. Blindness is filled with fear, shame, joy, pride and power and being blind means being the object and goal but mostly being the actor being in control and having independence. Being blind also has a physical and bodily domain: blindness is something felt in the bones and seen in changing colours, shapes and dreams. Blindness is also a way of living: it is seeing with the heart and the head. For this blind man seeing seemed to be more of a philosophical issue of being able to see differently and more deeply; being able to question the self-evident truths of the sighted people. In addition to this, for Stephen Kuusisto being blind does not mean being nothing but blind. Blindness is only one aspect of his identity, one way of being Stephen Kuusisto the poet, the man, the son, the sick person, the human being. The fact that I did not discuss these other aspects of the interviewee's identity in detail was a necessary analytic choice. The focus of this study was on the construction of blind identity and thus the other aspects of his identity were only touched upon as they were constructed in relation to blindness.

Theoretically, the findings of this study show the power invested in language as the locus of the construction of meanings and identities. The findings

of this study provide interesting insights into the discussion of the relationship between texts, discursive practices and sociocultural practices. In my study, the focus was on the textual and discursive analysis and thus the discussion of the sociocultural practices was more tentative. After all, my interests and abilities lie within the field of linguistics. However, I pointed out some relevant social themes discussed more extensively in previous chapter that the study of discursively constructed blind identity concerns. These relate to the multiplicity and dynamic nature of disabled identities when constructed from within, to the ongoing struggle between sameness and difference that seems to be in the essence of marginal identity negotiations and the influence that the media holds in maintaining and fostering the hegemonic discourses surrounding disability but also functioning as a potential arena for challenging them and providing alternatives. The heterogeneity and interdiscursivity of the data also seems to reflect the ongoing social change as concerns the definitions and signifying practices of disability as the hegemony of medicine is being challenged and disability is being defined in many fields, resulting in challenge and contradiction. In a way then, as a social text, these data contributed to this social change. Practically then, the insights of this study could serve as an effective way of raising both the awareness of disabled people themselves but more importantly those of the non-disabled majority about the multiplicity of ways of 'being disabled'. To conclude then, the emancipatory interest of this study has a strong potential to be fulfilled as soon as these encouraging findings leave the shelves of the library and meet the hands, the heads and the hearts of the non-disabled majority.

This study provides many insights for future study. Earlier in this chapter I have pointed out some of the possibilities that these particular data could offer for future research but there are also more general insights that the study stimulated as concerns the field of discursive constructions of disabled identities in the media. Firstly, analysing other narratives by blind or otherwise disabled people would broaden the perspective onto the issue of signifying disability. Different aspects become important for different people and the study of personal narratives of other disabled people would offer insights into the vast spectrum of

these meanings. Secondly, it would be interesting to study the ways in which blind and/or other disabled identities become constructed in other arenas besides national television, especially in the disabled people's own media where the editorial control is also at the hands of disabled people. A great amount of research has been conducted within CDA on minority groups but for some reason the study of disabled identities seems to be lacking altogether. However, discursively oriented study of disability and disabled identities is desperately needed in order to deepen our understanding of the linguistic and discursive ways through which a socially marginal and even stigmatized group such as disabled people construct their own identities, contest the traditional discourses and definitions of disability and challenge the existing discursive hegemony in society.

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**THE TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS**

te [xt1 ]	
[ text] 2	overlapping utterances
text1=	
=text2	latching utterances
(0.7)	a pause, timed in tenths of a second
(. )	a pause shorter than 0.4 seconds
(x)	unintelligible item, probably one word only
(xx)	unintelligible items, approximately of phrase length
(xxx)	unintelligible items, beyond phrase length
(text)	uncertain transcription
((coughs))	transcriber's comments
(h) (h)	laugh tokens
<b>CAPITALS</b>	loud speech
°high circles°	soft speech
@text@	altered tone of voice, usually when quoting someone
<b>bold font</b>	prominence, via pitch and/or amplitude
>fast<	fast speech
<slow>	slow speech
exte:nsio::n	noticeable extension of the sound or syllable
°hh	inbreath, the number of h's indicating the length of the inbreath
hh	outbreath, the number of h's indicating the length of the outbreath
↑	rising intonation
↓↑	falling-rising intonation
.	falling intonation, not necessarily the end of a sentence
,	continuing intonation, not necessarily between clauses or sentences
cutoff s-	cutoff word or sentence
<i>italics</i>	mispronunciation
wo(h)rd	(h) denotes laughter within words
*text*	whispering of an utterance

- text•           laughing production of an utterance
- ☺ text ☺       smiling production of an utterance
- ♪text♪          singing production of an utterance

(adapted from the transcription conventions originally developed by Jefferson, in Atkinson and Heritage 1984:ix-xvi)

## SEMANTIC FIELDS IN THE ORDER OF FREQUENCY

**Life phases (99)**

adult 2  
age  
beginning  
boy  
boyhood  
boys  
century  
child  
childhood 6  
childhoods  
children 8  
dead 2  
friends  
future  
girl  
girls  
life 19  
lives 3  
people 14  
person 6  
teenage 2  
teenager  
teenagers 2  
thirties  
time 8  
times 3  
woman 4  
women  
years 5

**Blindness (69)**

blackness  
blind 19  
blindness 10  
braille  
cane 5  
disabled  
dog 4  
eye  
eyes 7  
glasses 3  
sensation 2  
sense 9  
telescopes 4  
view  
viewers

**Physical world (64)**

archives  
area

attic 6  
basement  
bed  
bicycle 3  
bridge  
car 2  
cars 2  
door  
house 6  
lights  
path  
photograph  
photographs  
place 5  
places 4  
player  
players  
playgrounds  
railway  
raitiovaunu  
room  
skateboards  
station  
streets  
surroundings  
teaspoon  
towns  
train  
truck  
underwear  
weight  
world 11

**Art (55)**

art  
colour 2  
colours 9  
conductor  
gold  
music  
opera 3  
orchestra  
painting 2  
play  
poems 3  
poet 6  
poetry 2  
poets  
record 3  
records 2  
rock' n roll

rock  
silver  
singer  
song  
songs 2  
sound  
sounds 3  
tape  
violin 2  
voice 2

**Mental (50)**

adversity 3  
attention  
beauty  
belief  
character  
consciousness  
decisions  
deprivation 2  
difficulties  
dream 2  
dreamer  
dreams 5  
energy 3  
expectations  
experience 2  
experiences  
freedom  
idea  
imagination  
insistence  
masculinity  
memory 2  
mind 2  
nightmare 2  
problems  
process  
stigma 2  
struggle  
tendencies  
thinking 2  
thought  
turmoil  
vitality

**Communication (47)**

book 9  
books  
conversation  
conversations

essays  
 interview  
 jokes  
 language 4  
 letters  
 news  
 notes  
 notice  
 page  
 press  
 questions  
 radio  
 reader  
 response  
 stories 4  
 story 3  
 studies  
 television  
 word 4  
 words 2  
 writer

**Medicine (38)**

ailments  
 alcoholics  
 anorexia 3  
 cancer  
 condition 4  
 diagnosis  
 disease  
 disorder  
 doctor  
 hospital 2  
 incubation  
 incubator 2  
 infant  
 infants  
 medications  
 oxygen 6  
 pregnancy  
 prematurity  
 prescription  
 psychoanalyst  
 relievers  
 retinas  
 retinopathy  
 scars  
 trimester

**Society (38)**

change 2  
 city 4  
 civilization  
 community  
 costs  
 crowd

crowds  
 culture  
 emperor  
 foundation  
 immigrant  
 instance  
 instances 2  
 institute  
 politicians  
 public 3  
 rights  
 services 2  
 state 2  
 system  
 taxes  
 upstate  
 welfare  
 work  
 worker 3  
 workshop

**Family (33)**

brother 4  
 family  
 father 5  
 grandmother  
 mother 11  
 parents 7  
 son 2  
 twin 2

**Emotions (29)**

anger 2  
 bitterness 2  
 denial  
 depression 3  
 desire 3  
 emotions  
 exhilaration  
 fear  
 feeling 2  
 helplessness  
 love 3  
 pain 5  
 passion  
 shame  
 sorrow  
 stress

**School (24)**

blackboard  
 board  
 chalk  
 classes  
 classroom  
 grades

recess  
 school 10  
 slate  
 teachers 3  
 university 3

**Nature (22)**

dolphin 3  
 environments  
 garden  
 lakes  
 lilies  
 microcosm  
 plant  
 rhubarb  
 tree  
 water 4  
 wind  
 wood  
 woods 4  
 universe

**Human body (15)**

ankles  
 brain  
 vocal cords  
 ears  
 faces  
 hand 4  
 hands  
 head  
 move 2  
 muscle  
 nose

**Supernatural, religion (12)**

angels  
 ghosts  
 god  
 heroes  
 mars  
 minister  
 miracle  
 monster 2  
 occult  
 saint  
 wonder

**Substances (7)**

cigarettes  
 drinking  
 drug  
 LSD 2  
 marihuana  
 reefers

**Others**  
 basis  
 behaviour  
 beings 3  
 benefit  
 benefits  
 bungee  
 care 3  
 case  
 category  
 choices  
 course  
 cruelties  
 cutters  
 day 3  
 deal 2  
 definitions  
 delivery  
 depth  
 difference  
 driver  
 embrace  
 example  
 exercise  
 experiment  
 extent  
 fact 4  
 fascination 2  
 focus 2  
 fog  
 force  
 fragments  
 game  
 guardian  
 guide 2  
 help 7  
 inches  
 influence  
 invador  
 lift  
 maori  
 messengers  
 miner  
 mistake  
 mistakes  
 moment 4  
 moments 3  
 names  
 night  
 opportunities  
 options  
 part 3  
 parts  
 partnership  
 point  
 points  
 pounds 2  
 power 2  
 proof  
 proportions  
 quality  
 reaction  
 reason 2  
 refuge  
 scene  
 shadow  
 shadows  
 side  
 space 2  
 speed  
 strangers  
 symbol  
 symbols 2  
 task 2  
 terminology  
 thing 10  
 things 8  
 tribesmen  
 trip  
 version  
 way 13  
 ways 3