

“She ain’t heavy, she’s my wife!”

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**THE REPRESENTATION OF THE WIFE CARRYING WORLD
CHAMPIONSHIPS IN THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS**

Master’s Thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Suomessa on viimeisen vajaan kahdenkymmenen vuoden aikana järjestetty useita eriskummallisia ja humoristisia kisoja, joista monista on tullut yksi paikkakuntansa vuosittainen vetonaula ja osa kisoista on kehittynyt maailmamestaruustasolle asti. Myös kansainvälinen media on huomannut näiden hauskojen kisojen esiinmarssin ja nykyään ulkomaisten kilpailijoiden lisäksi monissa näistä tapahtumista nähdään myös ulkomaista mediaa. Tässä tutkimuksessa keskitytään vuodesta 1996 Sonkajärvellä järjestettyihin Eukonkannon MM-kisoihin, joka on yksi laajimmin maailmalle levinneistä suomalaisista ilmiöistä ja tapahtumista.</p> <p>Työn tarkoituksena on kartoittaa Eukonkannon MM-kisoista uutisointia ja kirjoittelua englanninkielisessä lehdistössä ja huomiota kiinnitetään erityisesti kirjoittelun laajuuteen ja luonteeseen. Työssä vastataan seuraaviin kysymyksiin: 1) Missä mittakaavassa Eukonkannon MM-kisoista on kirjoitettu englanninkielisessä lehdistössä?, 2) Miten kirjoittelussa kuvataan a) itse kisa ja b) osallistujia? Onko havaittavissa merkityksellisiä teemoja eli diskursseja? ja 3) Millainen kuva Suomesta ja suomalaisista välittyy Eukonkannon MM-kisoista kirjoittelun yhteydessä?</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu reilusta sadasta Eukonkannon MM-kisoja käsittelevästä uutisesta ja artikkelista, jotka on kerätty amerikkalaisista, kanadalaisista, brittiläisistä, irlantilaisista ja australialaisista sanomalehdistä. Aineisto kerättiin lähinnä lehtien online-versioista, mutta osaksi myös Eukonkantotoimiston juttukokoelmasta. Koska aiheesta ei ollut aiempaa tutkimusta, kerättiin mahdollisimman edustava otos sen mukaan mistä sanomalehdistä aineistoa näytti löytyvän. Analyysissä hyödynnettiin sisällönanalyysiä ja kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä nojautuen aiempiin tutkimuksiin kansainvälisistä urheilutapahtumista sekä Faircloughin kriittiseen diskurssianalyysiin.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että Eukonkannon MM-kisoista on kirjoitettu verrattain laajasti etenkin anglo-amerikkalaisessa lehdistössä. Itse tapahtumaa kuvattiin humoristisen ja historiallisen diskurssin kautta ja eukonkanto tuntui häilyvän urheilun ja ei-urheilun välillä. Osallistujien – naisten ja miesten – kuvauksessa esiin nousivat heidän välinen (pari)suhteensa, roolit eukonkannossa ja poliittinen korrektius sekä naisten painoa käsittelevä diskurssi. Suomesta Eukonkannon uutisoinnin yhteydessä välittyi yllättävän vähän tietoa ja aika ajoin eukonkannon tapahtumapaikka jäi lähes pimentoon. Suomalaisia kuvattiin outojen urheilulajien ekspertteinä, tosin eukonkannossa hieman virolaisten varjossa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

For a medium-sized country like Finland in a northern, some would say peripheral, location it is not self-evident to have frequent coverage in foreign media. Moreover, in order for smaller and marginal countries to get covered in the first place it usually entails an extremely newsworthy story, that is, something very interesting or out of ordinary. In this respect it can be seen as a very good achievement for a Finnish event, for example, to be notified by international press and in some rare cases even by international television. One of these rare cases is the annual Wife Carrying World Championships organised in the municipality of Sonkajärvi in Eastern Finland. Having developed from a humorous show number at a local county fair, wife carrying nowadays attracts competitors from several countries as well as the attention of international media every year by its humorous and eccentric nature. The growing international interest towards the contest throughout the years has resulted into what the wife carrying competition is today: an international media event at the level of world championships.

The purpose in the present study is first to examine the extent of the coverage that the Wife Carrying World Championships receive in the English-language press. Second, the objective is to examine the representations of the contest and the event itself as well as those of the participants within this press coverage. Furthermore, the study aims at finding out what kind of images of Finland and the Finns are conveyed abroad in and around the press coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships.

The topic for my thesis arises from my personal experience and observations about the competition and its on-going success. Having spent practically my whole childhood in Sonkajärvi and still returning there often, I have witnessed very closely how this event has evolved from a small village event first into the Finnish Championships and a few years later into the World Championships, an international media event known almost throughout the world and gathering thousands of visitors – both foreigners and Finns – for one weekend to the small country village of Sonkajärvi, previously definitely not known by that many foreigners. Having seen the impact this competition as well as its growing visibility in both Finnish and foreign media has had and still has on foreigners' knowledge about and their interest in Sonkajärvi, Finland and the Finns, I became interested in finding out what kind of image it really is that these media offer them.

The success and visibility of the wife carrying competition keeps growing throughout the world even today after sixteen years of carrying wives (or any female over 17 for that matter) with diverse styles on the world championship level. Still, this international phenomenon has been subject to very few studies. In fact, only two studies (Lee, Titze and Oja 2011, Pietikäinen 2000a) dealing with wife carrying could be found. In examining whether Finland was still seen as peripheral in the press of Great Britain and France in the end of 1990s as compared to the beginning of the decade, Pietikäinen (2000a:104-107) included in her analysis an article about Finnish wife carrying as an example of the *Guardian's* coverage of Finland from 1997-98. However, here wife carrying has been used only as one example in a larger research, and thus commented on very briefly. Lee et al.'s (2011) study, on the other hand, focused exclusively on wife carrying, but more in the field of health research with their attention on possible factors resulting in better performance. Consequently, a study focusing solely on wife carrying and specifically on its image in the international media has been missing. There is, however, a comparable study to the present one in terms of the nature of the event examined and of the focus of the study. Starck (2007) was interested in the representations of the Air Guitar World Championships in British and American media. Both the Wife Carrying and the Air Guitar World Championships are eccentric and less conventional Finnish events that have made it into the wider world and bring foreign visitors, competitors and media to Finland every year.

Finland's image conveyed specifically through English-language press coverage has been studied previously, and these studies have mainly focused on Finnish culture, nature, politics, technology, Finland's history or location on the world map as well as Finnish sports heroes as the main instigators or sources of the country's image abroad. However, Finland's image in relation to wife carrying or anything alike has not been examined before. In the sports field, in particular, so-called mega sports events including for example the Olympics and the World Championships or World Cups in football or Formula One are naturally well covered in the media almost without exception throughout the world, and these events and the images they create about the hosting countries, for instance, have also been studied previously, though more elsewhere in the world than in Finland. Meanwhile, smaller-scale international and less conventional sports events like the Wife Carrying World Championships have received far less attention. Recently Finland in particular has become known as a country hosting many strange international, though rather small-scale, sports events, wife carrying being

one of them, and many of these unusual Finnish contests have been notified in international press as well.

For Finland, as a medium-sized and marginal country, all possible visibility and coverage abroad is important and it is equally important for most of this coverage to be positive and beneficial. Wife carrying, for instance, does not need to be just one of the ‘crazy’ Finnish inventions, but there is good potential for exploiting this competition and its worldwide visibility in a positive way in marketing Finland abroad. Since the Wife Carrying World Championships is one of the few Finnish events that has a great deal of visibility around the world, as pointed out by Mähönen (2006:A4), it is well worth examining the image and representations of Finland and of the Finns especially from the point of view of this particular competition. After all, the media have a great deal of influence on how foreigners perceive Finland and the Finns and what their attitude toward our country and us will be. As Danner (1997:65) also points out, “national images are also acknowledged to influence public opinion”.

The data of the present study consist of articles and news on the Wife Carrying World Championships that were gathered from the newspapers of five English-speaking countries: USA, Canada, the UK, Ireland, and Australia. The texts come from the period of 1995-2009. Data will be first analysed in terms of the extent of the press coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships, mainly through content analysis. This analysis will be based on previous research on the representation of international sports events in print media (e.g. Danner 1997, O’Donnell 1997, O’Donnell and Boyle 1997, Boyle and Monteiro 2005). Previous research will be treated as providing guidelines for the analysis and categorization of the data rather than providing any strict theoretical framework. After having created an overall picture about the press coverage and its extent, the data will be analysed in terms of the representation of the Wife Carrying World Championships, participants, Finland and the Finns. At this stage, the attention will be directed to identifying the most prominent discourses within each group of representations. The framework for this more detailed analysis will be borrowed from critical discourse analysis and in particular Fairclough’s (2003) approach to it. Moreover, previous research both on Finland’s image abroad and on the representation of media sports events will be drawn upon selectively in discussing and interpreting the findings and the results of the present study.

The organisation of the thesis is following: I will first briefly outline the history of the Wife Carrying World Championships and its development into today's media event as well as present the rules of the contest. After that I will discuss previous research on Finland's image in the English-language press. Then it is time to outline the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis and previous research on media sports events. Research design will be presented before delving into data analysis and description. Finally, the results of the study will be summarised and discussed.

2 WIFE CARRYING: FROM PAST TO PRESENT

Wife Carrying World Championships are a good example of how local history and Finnish folklore can be innovatively and successfully used to create an international event bringing worldwide visibility to a small rural municipality. The success story of wife carrying and the extent of coverage it gets in the international media are indeed remarkable. The purpose in this chapter is first to take a look at the history behind the event and to outline its development into an international media event. In the second part of this chapter the rules of the contest are explained in order to create as clear picture of the nature of the competition as possible.

2.1 From legend to reality

The modern wife carrying competition is said to have deep roots in the local history. The legend has it that in the late 19th century there was a man called Herman “Herikko” Ronkainen living in the area of Sonkajärvi. Although Ronkainen was deep-down a charitable and a gentle man, his rough looks often made people think of the contrary. Over the years he also ended up living in the woods, and as rumours about a thief stealing from the rich and giving to the poor started to spread around the area, he gained the epithet of Rosvo Ronkainen (‘Ronkainen the robber’). Moreover, other men wanting to live like Ronkainen the Robber started to gather around him and soon there was a group of bandits roaming around in the woods of Sonkajärvi and arousing fear among the villagers. Ronkainen the robber also developed a test that everyone who wished to join his troops had to pass: the candidates were required to complete a challenging track by jumping over hurdles and ditches with a heavy sack of rye over their shoulder. In addition, part of the legend suggests that Ronkainen the robber and his troops might have stolen also women from the neighbouring villages every now and then, and as one can imagine, the women were not usually that willing to go with the villains. In those days it was indeed a common tradition to steal women from the neighbouring villages. (Mähönen n.d., Paldan n.d.).

Nowadays the basic idea of the wife carrying contest remains the same: to prove one’s worth on a challenging track. However, in the modern version the sack of rye has been replaced by the willing ‘wife’ and the track has been modified to meet the modern

conditions. The idea for the current Wife Carrying Championships originates from Eero Pitkänen, the cultural secretary of Sonkajärvi and the CEO of the Wife Carrying Ltd. Initially wife carrying was designed to be just a small humorous contest as part of the annual Sonkajärvi county fair. The first Wife Carrying Finnish Championships were organized in 1992, and as the news of the peculiar Finnish sporting event reached the world and international interest started to increase, the event achieved the status of World Championships in 1996. Since then the contest has attracted a good number of foreign participants each year, 2008 being clearly the peak with as many as 40 foreign entries (see Appendix 1), and the interest from the part of the international media has been growing year by year. Today the competition is still part of the two-day Sonkajärvi county fair which is scheduled every year for the beginning of July. The grounds of the local school complex have provided the arena for the annual media event right at the center of Sonkajärvi. The Wife Carrying World Record categorised in the Guinness Book of Records and held by Estonian Margo Uusorg and Birgit Ullrich is 55.5 seconds from the year 2000 (Results 2000). It is worth noting, however, that this record was made before setting the minimum weight of 49 kilograms for women in 2002, and at the time Ms Ullrich weighted only 34 kilograms (Stubbs 2005:C7). The Finnish record of 56.7 seconds from 1993 is held by Jouni and Tiina Jussila (Wife Carrying World Championships n.d.).

Compared to other big events organised in Finland, the Wife Carrying World Championships may seem as a rather small-scale event, and even more so in the eyes of the wider world. However, when considered from the point of view of the hosting village and the surrounding area, it is one the biggest and most important events in the county of Upper Savo, especially internationally when thinking about tourism and marketing the region abroad. A quite good standard of comparison speaking for the importance and the scale of the event in this region is the population of Sonkajärvi: 4561 inhabitants at the end of May 2012 (Väestörekisterikeskus 2012). In the best years the Wife Carrying World Championships almost double the population of Sonkajärvi. In 2005, for example, the event gathered close to 10 000 visitors (Sonkajärven kunta 2006). The number of visitors as high as that obviously has some benefits not only for Sonkajärvi, but also for the surrounding area including for instance Iisalmi, the nearest town, and the city of Kuopio. After all, there are many interesting attractions besides wife carrying for the tourists to see in the larger North Savo region. Pennanen (2008:10) sums up the collective benefits of the wife carrying event aptly by saying that the Wife

Carrying World Championships have functioned throughout the years as an efficient gateway to Upper Savo and to Finland as a whole. In addition, it is really a huge achievement for a small place like Sonkajärvi to have visibility in such a great extent in international media. Organising and providing the setting for the whole event is also a great example of the good and lively spirits and co-operation of the villagers and people from nearby because every year right from the beginning most of the preparations and work have been done as voluntary work.

Nowadays the event has also bigger sponsors especially from the local enterprises including for example the Olvi brewery. It has even attracted the former NBA player Dennis Rodman who visited Sonkajärvi for the competition in 2005 (see e.g. Hunter 2005:E1, Kuitenbrouwer 2005:A3). However, one of the most important co-operators for the wife carrying event has probably been the Finnish Tourist Board (FTB). The co-operation between the Finnish Tourist Board and Wife Carrying Ltd was launched in 2006, and according to Jaakko Lehtonen (MEK ja Sonkajärven eukonkanto yhteistyöhön 2006), the chief director of the FTB, wife carrying creates a cheerful, bright, and imaginative picture of Finland. The purpose of the co-operation was exploiting this image in promoting and marketing Finland abroad. Lehtonen (Sonkajärven kunta 2007) also points out that wife carrying brings a funny element to Finnishness that is otherwise often associated with seriousness and matter-of-factness. The wife carrying event and its organisers have also gained success on another sector. In the national competition on Municipal Marketing in 2006 (Kuntamarkkinoinnin SM-kilpailut 2006) the municipality of Sonkajärvi together with the Wife Carrying Championships was awarded the first prize in the tourism class. It was the originality, innovations, and the good results the wife carrying event has gained that impressed the jury.

2.2 The rules

The rules for the competition are set by the International Wife Carrying Competition Rules Committee (Rules n.d.). The length of the official track is 253.5 meters, and it has two dry obstacles plus a water obstacle, about one meter deep. The rules are quite simple: a man has to carry the 'wife' all the way to the finish line, and the couple who completes the track fastest is the winner. Although the name of the contest is wife

carrying, the 'wife' does not need to be a legal wife – she can be borrowed, she may have been found further afield or she may be a girlfriend or just a friend. The only prerequisites are that she must be over 17 years old and since 2002 she must have weighed at least 49 kilograms – the weight of Armi Kuusela when she was crowned the first ever Miss Universe in 1952 (Thurow 2003:A2). In case the woman weighs less than that, she will be burdened with a rucksack so that the total weight reaches the required minimum. Should the man drop his 'wife', he has to relift her onto his back or on his arms before continuing the race. Previously the couple was actually penalized with additional 15 seconds for each drop, but for the 2009 competition the rules were slightly changed and the penalty for dropping the 'wife' was omitted (Keränen 2009:2). The carrier can wear a belt for the carried one to have a better grip on him, but no other equipment is allowed. The contestants race two at a time. However, the most important rule states that everyone should have fun and it is precisely humour that is in the heart of all this. Nowadays, though, wife carrying has become serious sports for some of the contestants. According to the humorous instructions on "How to Become a Master in Wife Carrying" (n.d.) posted on the official Wife Carrying website, "The wife carrying is composed of humour and hard sport on a fifty-fifty basis".

The style of carrying is free, but generally three different styles can be distinguished: the piggyback, the fireman's carry (the wife over the shoulder), and the Estonian carry (the wife dangling upside-down her legs around the man's shoulders, holding onto his waist). The piggyback has been practised throughout the times, the fireman's carry is what Ronkainen the robber might have practised, but the Estonian carry has proved to be the most effective one so far. It was introduced for the first time in 1998 by the Estonians (see e.g. *The Washington Times*, 6 July 1998, p.A13) and hence it was dubbed the 'Estonian carry'. The strength of the Estonian style is that it leaves the carrier's hands free for balancing and maximizes the mutual rhythm of the man and the woman.

Besides the main event, the Wife Carrying World Championships, there is also a team competition and a sprint competition. In the team competition, which takes place on Saturday just before the world championships, the track is the same as in the main contest, but the team consists of three men carrying the 'wife' in turns. At the exchange point the carrier also has to finish the official 'wife carrying drink' before the next one is allowed to continue with the 'wife' on his back. The sprint competition takes place on Friday evening and in this one the length of the track is 100 meters including the water

obstacle. There are qualification rounds with 5 to 10 couples running at a time. The first three of each round continue to the next one until three couples are left in the finals. Although wife carrying is hard sports, one must not forget humour, and creating one's individual carrying style, wearing a funny costume or being funny in any other possible way is more than desirable since the most entertaining couple, the best costume as well as the strongest carrier are also awarded. (Rules n.d.) In addition, the spectators have a chance to take part in the contest and raise the atmosphere in the form of a cheerleader's competition. In order to compete one just needs to find four to six persons to form a cheerleading group, fitting outfits and shout as loud as they can. (Eukonkannon sarjojen esittelyt n.d.).

Today there are several spin-offs from the Finnish wife carrying competition in many other countries. Qualifying competitions, for example, have been organised in some countries for several years already. These include at least the annual Estonian Wife Carrying Competition in Väike-Maarja¹, The North American Wife Carrying Championship at Sunday River Ski Resort in Newry, Maine², and The Australian Wife Carrying Titles at Countryfest in Singleton, New South Wales³. Usually the winners have been offered a chance to travel to Sonkajärvi to compete in the World Championships. In addition, year 2008 saw the dawn of two more championships: at the end of July the first Irish Wife Carrying Championships at Sneem Family Festival in County Kerry⁴ and in the beginning of March the first UK Wife Carrying Race in Dorking, Surrey⁵. Furthermore, wife carrying will be featured at the World Alternative Games 2012 organised in Llanwrtyd Wells, Wales⁶, over a fortnight from mid-August until the first days of September.

¹ <http://www.v-maarja.ee/index.php?part=html&id=55> (accessed 4 May, 2011)

² http://www.sundayriver.com/Events/Main/Summer/Wife_Carrying_Championship.html (accessed 4 May, 2011)

³ <http://home.exetel.com.au/countryfest/> (accessed 4 May, 2011)

⁴ <http://www.sneemfamilyfestival.com/> (accessed 25 June, 2012)

⁵ <http://www.trionium.com/wife/> (accessed 25 June, 2012)

⁶ <http://www.worldalternativegames.co.uk/events/wife-carrying/> (accessed 25 June, 2012)

3 FINLAND IN THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS

The present study is closely related to research on Finland's image abroad and specifically in the Anglophone countries. One of my aims, after all, is to examine in what ways Finland and the Finns are portrayed in the English-language press coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships. As my focus is on American, Canadian, British, Irish and Australian newspapers, previous research on Finland's image in the press of these five countries is of particular interest and relevance for my research objects. In this chapter I intend to take a brief look at relevant previous research and literature in this field in order to situate and reflect my own research in relation to it.

One of the best ways to survey the image of a particular country in other countries is to take a look at how this country is represented, written and talked about in the media abroad. Especially the print media is often very revealing for this purpose because the words and sentences can be read in many different ways and they can also contain some implicit or hidden messages – either intentional or unintentional. Focusing on some of the major English-speaking countries, Finland's image has been studied previously especially in British and American media, whereas the country's image in Canadian, Australian or Irish media appears not to have been studied as much.

Salminen (2000) has studied Finland's image in British press as part of his broader research of the country's image in the press of Russia and the EU between 1990 and 2000. According to him, the general view of Finland in the British press has been positive in the end of the 1990s especially when talking about culture, economics and progress in technology. He also points out that Finland's connections with the East and Russia in particular have moved more to the background after having dominated British press coverage about Finland for years. (Salminen 2000:123.) Salminen (2000:125) continues that although the overall picture about Finland in Britain has been positively charged when proceeding to the 21st century, the “fragments of information” have been detached and latent. He adds that Finland's image in Britain is inevitably fragmented and not so structured because historically British people have such different interests.

According to Salminen (2000:135), one funny, but at times also embarrassing element in the coverage of Finland in both European as well as American press are the Finnish peculiarities featured every now and then. Often they are short pieces of news that relate

to our folk customs, excessive use of alcohol and sex. Salminen (2000:135) continues that also the world records in ice swimming, Wellington boot hurling and wife carrying sometimes cross the news threshold. As to wife carrying, the present study confirms Salminen's findings with a good number of news texts from both American and British newspapers. He goes on to explain that the oddities get more valuable and interesting if the country in question is poorly known or even relatively unfamiliar among the wider public. Thus, the popularity of these stories can be explained by the exoticism of the strange, distant and peripheral country. (Salminen 2000:135.) Wife carrying as well as the other unusual Finnish sports events, I would argue, in themselves are exotic and strange, at least to the rest of the world, but no doubt the fact that these kinds of events are organised in a distant, different and not necessarily that well known country makes stories about them more interesting and eye-catching to a foreign reader. This is also why the picture about Finland portrayed through these stories, though not always that serious, should not be underestimated, and why I think they are a good, additional venue for spreading and improving Finland's image in a positive and humoristic way.

Another study addressing Finland's image in British press is that of Pietikäinen (2000a). She examined the news coverage of Finland in the quality press of both Great-Britain and France in the 1990s. She was particularly interested in finding out whether there had been any change in portraying Finland as peripheral between the beginning and the end of the decade, focusing on the years 1991-92 and 1997-98. In her study she too combined content analysis with a more qualitative approach giving first a general view of her data and then taking a closer look at the language used in the selected, representative articles. In my content analysis I will deal partly with the same categories as Pietikäinen (2000a): the number of articles, their length and their sources.

Pietikäinen (2000a:39) notes that research on the image of Finland in Britain has repeatedly pictured Finland as northern periphery in Europe. She also points out that the stereotypical images about peripheral countries are rarely positive and that it is difficult to get rid of these stereotypes without being granted more space in the newspapers (Pietikäinen 2000a:32-35). Moreover, Rusi (1987 as quoted by Pietikäinen 2000a:35) states that for a small and neutral country like Finland image politics can be very important. It is, after all, a way of seeking the recognition of the larger nations.

Pietikäinen's (2000a:54-61) content analysis resulted in the main finding that during the 1990s the number of articles about Finland had decreased both in British and French press, but the differences between the topics had levelled out: in the end of the decade there were less political and economic news than at the beginning of the decade, and more news relating to culture and travel. In general, the number of articles about Finland was not that high in any of the newspapers, and since Finland had such a low visibility in them, Pietikäinen (2000a:55) suggested that the development of Finland's image through newspaper coverage might be completely random. Now, if this is combined with Salminen's (2000:125) finding that the information about Finland is rather fragmented and latent as well, one might in fact question the efficiency of newspaper coverage as one way in developing the image of Finland. Nevertheless, one has to keep in mind that for a medium-sized country like Finland all visibility, especially positive one, is important, even if it comes in small pieces.

In her more detailed qualitative analysis Pietikäinen (2000a:115) found out that every article selected for the analysis included some kind of stereotypical reference to or expression about Finland, whether it was about coldness, smallness, being far away, exotic Lapland, or the history of Finlandization. However, she also noticed that the taciturnity, seriousness, or use of alcohol usually associated with the Finns were almost completely absent. Pietikäinen (2000a:89-90) remarks that often the only function of the stereotypes is to make the story more accessible for the reader without having anything to do with the actual content of the story. As a consequence, they are often unnecessary for the news themselves. In this case, according to her, they only tell about not taking the country seriously because of its peripheral location. In fact, she takes a certain kind of indifference and the fact that the news stories are typically 'fill-in' material or curiosities as indicators of peripherality.

Interestingly, for the purposes of the present study, Pietikäinen (2000a:104-107) has chosen as one of the articles to be analysed a story about the Wife Carrying Championships from *The Guardian* (Henley 1997:9). The same article will be part of the data of my study, and some of Pietikäinen's interpretations of it will be reflected upon in my data analysis and in relation to my findings. As noted in the introduction, this is one of the few studies that could be found incorporating the wife carrying competition.

Pietikäinen (2000a:118) concludes by stating that periphery stays often in the background in the European central press because it does not have any economic or strategic significance for the centre. This is also the case with Finland which does not have a central place in the world system. Nevertheless, her study shows that the news coverage about Finland in the quality press of Great Britain and France has become less stereotypical during the 1990s (Pietikäinen 2000a:122).

Särkkä (1999) had a more narrow focus in her study. She examined how Finnish culture, including the areas of music, design, film, and architecture, was represented both in British and Finnish newspapers, concentrating particularly on ‘opinion’ articles about the *Valo – reflecting Finnish culture* -festival organised in London between 16 November, 1997 and 1 January, 1998. Her aim was to find out the main themes in the coverage of the festival and to see whether the articles and representations were ideological. Moreover, she discussed the differences between representing Finnish culture in British and Finnish newspapers. Her data, 16 articles from both countries, came from two Finnish newspapers (*Helsingin Sanomat* and *Aamulehti*) and from several British newspapers. In her data analysis, Särkkä also gave an overall view of the articles after which she describes her data in more detail through four different themes she identified in the British articles relying on critical discourse analysis.

The four themes identified by Särkkä (1999:44-67), through which Finnish culture was depicted in the British articles, included nature, nationalism, individualism and originality and education. Nature was the most common theme, and Särkkä (1999:47) suggests that nature was used as “a way to categorise Finland in order to make it more comprehensible for the British readers.” She also discovered that Finnish architecture and music were described with terms coming from the nature as well. Another distinct theme emerging from the British articles was nationalism. According to Särkkä (1999:53), in describing Finnish design and music, for example, the history of Finland and the struggle for independence were drawn upon, and especially Sibelius’ music and nationalism were usually linked to one another. Individualism and originality were manifested likewise especially when writing about Finnish design and music, and education was given as one of the reasons for Finnish cultural achievements (Särkkä 1999:56, 62).

According to Särkkä (1999:84), the overall picture about Finland and Finnish culture was positive in the British articles whereas a more critical stance was adopted in the Finnish ones. She states that both journalists and readers are products of their cultures, thus having their own world views, but that mass media help to form attitudes and beliefs about people living in other countries and act as a great cultivating power. She also argues that Finland is promoting the categories known to interest foreigners, the already accepted aspects of Finnish culture. (Särkkä 1999:82, 87).

All the studies discussed so far illustrate the image of Finland in the English-language print media in the late 20th century. Some similar themes have been present in the press coverage of Finland in the 21st century as well, during which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has published annual reports by the Finnish embassies on the coverage of Finland in foreign, mainly print media (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2001-2009). These publications offer a good and concise picture of how Finland and the Finns have been portrayed each year in the print media abroad, and in the rest of this chapter I will summarise Finland's image in the English-language press in the 21st century using these publications as my source.

In the mainstream English-language press certain themes and Finnish names seem to recur year by year, and largely these are the same in the media of each of the major Anglophone countries – the US, Canada, the UK, Ireland, and Australia. There are of course slight differences in emphasis between the different countries and years, but still it is possible to summarise the main coverage of Finland in the media of all these five countries through certain shared themes. According to the reports from the above mentioned five countries, Finland is first of all presented in their press as a country of high culture: Finnish music, design and architecture seemed to have been written about frequently throughout the years. Especially in the field of classical music Finnish conductors and opera singers are well known for their talent abroad and written about year after year in the English-language print media. Lately also Finnish heavy metal and rock music have become popular in these countries in the wake of bands like Lordi, HIM, The Rasmus, or Apocalyptica. This is the case especially in the US where Finland seems to be perceived as a “superpower of culture” (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2006: 81). In addition, Finnish education system has been praised for its excellence and effectiveness as a result of Finland being number one in all three PISA-tests (Programme for International Student Assessment) so far. The results have

created a lot of discussion in the English-language press and aroused an interest towards Finnish schools and education system. Moreover, Finland being number one in many other international comparisons as well has not gone unnoticed in the English-language media and Finland is known for its good competitiveness. Furthermore, Finland's expertise in high technology and Nokia in particular have been recurrent themes in all major Anglophone countries. As for tourism, the most common subjects to write about throughout the years have been apparently Helsinki, Lapland and Santa Claus. (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2001-2009.)

Besides the well-known Finnish rock bands and virtuosos of classical music, another big Finnish name in the field of culture is unquestionably Aki Kaurismäki, a successful script writer and film director, whose most famous film from 2002, *The Man Without a Past*, is well known abroad. In the USA and Canada also Linus Torvalds, a Finnish software engineer and the author of Linux computer operating system, seems to be frequently written about in the local press. Some of the Finnish politicians and of course Tarja Halonen, the president of Finland during the 21st century, have also become familiar to English-speaking newspaper readers mostly in relation to state visits and EU-politics. More recently especially the former president Martti Ahtisaari has been featured in foreign press because he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008, and this brought lots of positive media coverage both about him and about Finland. Moreover, many Finnish sports personalities are well known among the consumers of the English-language media, one of the best known being the formula one driver Kimi Räikkönen. In Canadian press in particular, however, it is especially the Finnish ice-hockey players including Saku Koivu, Jari Kurri and Teemu Selänne that are the envoys of Finland. (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2001-2009.)

Even though famous Finns or Finnish corporations like Nokia are regularly featured in the English-language media, this does not automatically imply that Finland would be getting much publicity at the same time. In discussing Finland's visibility in Australian press in 2007, for example, it is mentioned that although news about Räikkönen and Nokia were again common, in these contexts Finland was rarely profiled, but simply just given as the nationality of Räikkönen and the place of origin for Nokia (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2007: 103). Hence, the media coverage of the Finns or Finland-related matters does not always mean that Finland as a country is getting more visibility. In relation to Canadian press, on the other hand, it is mentioned that at times it

becomes apparent that in Western countries there are still certain attitudes towards Finland left by the period of Finlandization, but that nowadays they are not usually dared to be written down anymore (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2005: 63). In fact, political or economic issues about Finland are rarely brought up in Canadian media (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2006: 81, 2007: 68, 2008: 80).

The reports published by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland also show that several off-beat Finnish contests and curiosities, the Wife Carrying World Championships being one of them, have made their way into the English-language print media in many years. This has been mentioned especially when discussing Australian media (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2001:5, 2002:76, 2003:82-83, 2004:70, 2007:105, 2009:81) and Canadian media (Suomi ulkomaisissa tiedotusvälineissä 2008: 81). Furthermore, Länsipuro and Johansson (2002:5) point out that especially in non-European countries, where Finnish politics is practically unknown, knowledge about Finland is mediated through economic relations, culture, and the “oddities” like wife carrying crossing the international news threshold. In this sense news about wife carrying and alike are also important for mediating knowledge about Finland, even if they were just curiosities.

In recent years Finland has been in the public eye in foreign media more than before, but not always in such a positive light. On one hand, things like winning the Eurovision song contest in 2006 and hosting it the next year or Martti Ahtisaari winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008 have of course generated more positive media coverage of Finland and the Finns. On the other hand, the shocking news about the school shootings first in Jokela and then in Kauhajoki, both within one year, caused a crack in Finland’s image abroad bringing more negative coverage. One might say that Finland has been recently featured in foreign media both in good and in bad. Tuomi-Nikula (2008:3, 2009:3) also acknowledges that even though most of the media coverage is still positive, Finland’s image has lately acquired new, more critical and negative tones. In this sense, lighter news like the ones about wife carrying might become particularly important since they offer a humoristic and a more positive approach to Finland. Furthermore, Tuomi-Nikula (2009:3) points out that along with more profound and critical publicity, the image of Finland has also become more realistic.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical background for the present study draws upon two sources: critical discourse analysis and previous research on media sports events. The former provides the means and concepts for a more detailed analysis of the representations of the competition, participants, Finland, and the Finns. Critical discourse analysis is based on the ideas and framework provided by Norman Fairclough (2003). The latter provides mainly the basis for the overall content analysis, but is also used to support the detailed analysis of the texts and the interpretation of the results. These two points of departure will be drawn together especially in the data description and analysis of the present study because critical discourse analysis provides a convenient way of commenting and elaborating the more superficial content analysis and the findings it provides. The purpose of the following two chapters is to give an account of the two frameworks, focusing first on critical discourse analysis and then on previous research in the field of media sports events.

4.1 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) is one of the approaches to discourse analysis that takes a special interest in ideological workings of text and discourse and in the relations between language and power. One of the main tenets in CDA is that language is “a form of social practice” and that there is a dialectical relationship between language and social structures surrounding it: language is shaped by these social structures, but in turn it also shapes them. In Fairclough and Wodak’s (1997:258; emphasis original) words, language is “socially *constitutive* as well as socially shaped”. Furthermore, language is constitutive in two ways because it does not only help to reproduce and sustain the social structures, that is, social relations and identities and objects of knowledge, but it also transforms them. (Fairclough 1992:63-65, 1995a:54-55; Fairclough and Wodak 1997:258.) Thus, language is a powerful means for transforming and manipulating the social practices framing it, and as many changes in the surrounding social structures are often reflected in language use, i.e. in discourse, it is also a sensitive indicator of these changes.

CDA has been widely used especially in media studies, where it provides useful frameworks for detailed analyses of different media discourses and for uncovering any implicit ideologies and unequal power relations. Media discourse is, indeed, a site for a lot of ideological loading, for different assumptions, values and representations as well as for social inequalities. As Macdonald (2003:31, emphasis original) points out, “even in less extreme examples, most media texts offer a variety of ideological positions rather than a single ‘preferred’ reading”. This study concentrates on print media discourse: newspaper articles and texts about the Wife Carrying World Championships. CDA and especially the approach developed by Fairclough (2003) with its orientation to close analysis of texts was selected as the main theoretical framework because it provides the most suitable and relevant analytical tools for my purposes, that is, for analysing the representations of social events and actors as well as different discourses drawn upon in the data.

CDA has been developed from an earlier attempt to analyse the relation between discourse and social power and ideology in particular known as critical linguistics, which was developed at the end of the 1970s in Britain (see Fowler et al. 1979, Fowler 1996:3-14). The critical linguistics was based on Halliday’s (1994) systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) which posits that language is simultaneously representing the world, the events and processes in it (its ideational function), and expressing social relations and identities (interpersonal function). SFL gives prominence to choice as it holds the view of texts consisting of certain linguistic choices from among the options available in the systems of grammar – for example, choices in vocabulary or choosing to use the passive instead of the active voice. Fowler (1996:4) sums up:

Critical linguistics insists that all representation is mediated, moulded by the value-systems that are ingrained in the medium (language in this case) used for representation; it challenges common sense by pointing out that something could have been represented some other way, with a very different significance. (Fowler 1996:4.)

As the above quotation indicates, critical linguistics and SFL draw attention to both what is in the text and what is left unsaid and omitted from the text. In other words, choosing a certain way to express and represent something either in written or spoken discourse excludes any other possible ways of saying the same thing. These kinds of choices, furthermore, may carry some ideological meanings, and it is the objective in critical linguistics to demystify any underlying ideologies in texts. (Fairclough 1995a:25-27, 1995b:210; Fowler et al. 1979:187-189.)

The underlying idea in critical linguistics of texts working in ideological, social and political interests has provided the basis for the different versions of what is today known as critical discourse analysis. CDA is often talked about as an interdisciplinary area of study because it draws upon various disciplines in its theories and methods and, accordingly, CDA can be applied to a wide variety of studies on discourse. According to Pietikäinen (2000b:195-196), CDA is more like a general term for the different approaches to studying discourse that, however, share an interest in the interconnections between the social practices of language usage and power relations. Consequently, CDA does not really have a unified theoretical framework or methodology as all the various approaches within it take slightly different forms. In van Dijk's (2001:352) words, rather than being a particular "direction, school or specialization" in the field of discourse studies, CDA "aims to offer a different 'mode' or 'perspective' of theorizing, analysis, and application throughout the whole field". The different and most known approaches to CDA include for instance Fowler's (1991, 1996) continued work on critical linguistics, Hodge and Kress' (1988, 1993) developments in social semiotics, van Dijk's (1988a, 1988b) socio-cognitive approach, and Fairclough's (1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2003) focus on sociocultural and discursive change. As explained earlier in this chapter, the present study takes Fairclough's (1995a, 2003) model for critical discourse analysis as the main point of reference, and a more detailed description of his model will be provided in the next chapter.

Although CDA offers an extremely useful framework for analysing many kinds of discourses, it seems to have certain shortcomings as well. Even though the interdisciplinary nature of CDA is often seen as important and useful, it has also been the reason for most of the criticism about the discipline. It is precisely the variety of different approaches within CDA that creates confusion about the concepts used among them. Pietikäinen (2000b:213) has pointed out that due to being a multidisciplinary research area as well as having been a relatively new one at the turn of the 21st century, variety was to be expected, but that this variety could also be seen as a sign of a lack of an organising principle, conceptual clarity and analytical frameworks. Widdowson (1995:157-172), for example, has criticised CDA of a lot of conceptual confusion arguing that the distinctions between discourse and text as well as analysis and interpretation are not clear enough. Toolan (1997:83-103), on the other hand, asserts that critical discourse analysts should engage themselves more in making corrections to discourses and proposing changes and alternatives, that is, he thinks CDA "is not

prescriptive enough”. Moreover, he argues that CDA needs to be more critical about its own strategic discourse, more convincing in its argumentation and more standardized in its methods. Finally, there has been lively discussion about the nature of CDA and of writing about it, namely, about it being “esoteric”, i.e. difficult to understand for the broader public (see van Dijk 1995:5-6 and the discussion in *Discourse & Society* 1995, 6(4), 555-572).

4.2 Fairclough’s three-dimensional model

Fairclough’s (1992, 1995a, 1995b) framework for critical discourse analysis, often referred to as a ‘three-dimensional model of discourse’, emphasizes a textual orientation to discourse analysis, attempting at the same time to bring it together with a more socially oriented approach to analysing discourse. It is precisely because of the multifunctional nature of his model – the focus on textual, i.e. linguistic, analysis, combined with social theories of language – that it is useful for this study. Specifically, his latest method for doing CDA (Fairclough 2003) that extends his previous work in the direction of more detailed linguistic analysis of texts will be taken as the main analytical framework for the present study. I will first summarize his earlier work with the ‘three-dimensional model’ because it provides the basis for his later developments on CDA that will be discussed in more detail afterwards.

Fairclough’s (1992:1-61) ‘three-dimensional model’ developed from his aspiration to come up with an approach to language analysis that could be used to study social change. He saw that there was a gap between linguistics and language studies and social theory of language, the latter being detailed in its linguistic analysis with little social theory, whereas in the former the social theory is more developed, but the linguistic scope very narrow. Consequently, Fairclough argued that social theory should be more informed by linguistics and vice versa. His objective of bringing these two orientations to discourse together was greatly influenced by Foucault’s (1972, 1979) social-theoretical views on the constitutive nature of discourse and on the relationship between knowledge and power. As in many other approaches to CDA, Halliday’s (1994) systemic functional linguistics provides most of the tools for linguistic analysis in Fairclough’s model as well.

In his framework for critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (1992:62-96, 1995a:57-62) distinguishes three interrelated levels, or dimensions, of analysis: text, discourse practice, and social practice. For him, doing CDA means analysing the relationships between these three dimensions. Grounding his multifunctional view of texts on Hallidayan tradition he sees them simultaneously contributing to the construction of representations of social practice as well as to the construction of social identities and social relations. The dimension of discourse practice in Fairclough's model entails text production and consumption, and on this level analysing intertextuality, that is, the articulation of different discourses and elements from other texts within the one to be analysed, is particularly important. The dimension of sociocultural practice has different levels of abstraction ranging from the immediate situational context to a wider frame of the society and culture. Moreover, the intermediate level of discourse practice also functions as an indirect link between the other two levels since sociocultural practice shapes texts by way of shaping the nature of discourse practice. Richardson (2007:45) summarises all this by saying that the aim in CDA is for language

to be analysed in relation to the social *context* in which it is being used and the social *consequences* of its use; and, more specifically, the relationship(s) between discourse and its social conditions, ideologies and power relations needs to be examined. (Richardson 2007:45, emphasis original.)

Hence, all three levels of analysis are connected to each other and each level both shaped by the other two and shaping them. Figure 1 illustrates Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis.

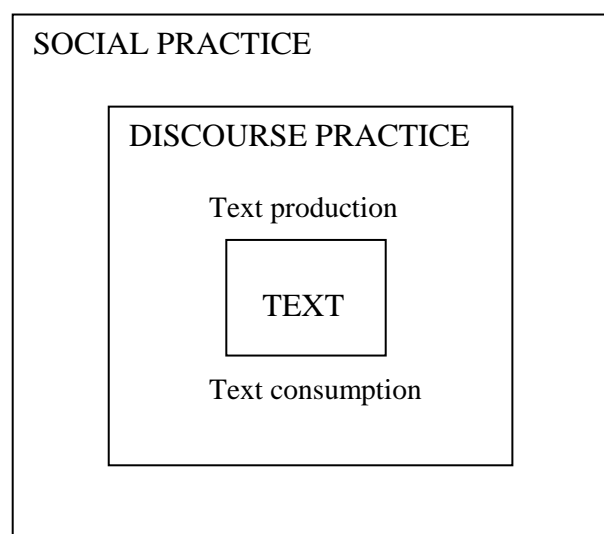


Figure 1. Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model for CDA.

On each of the three levels, Fairclough (1992:73-96) identifies further analytical tools, including for example grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, coherence, and intertextuality that together constitute the framework for analysing texts. He has, however, revised his original framework and methods for CDA and developed a more textually-oriented framework for the concerns of social research (Fairclough 2003). This is the specific framework that suits my research concerns the best – it is the most recent, up-to-date, and clearest textually-oriented framework for analysing discourse. As Fairclough (2003:2) himself explains, this framework extends his previous work on discourse analysis in the direction of a more detailed linguistic analysis of texts. The basic tenets from his earlier work just discussed in this chapter remain the same, though, which is why they have been outlined above.

In his latest framework Fairclough (2003) distinguishes several main issues that can be examined in textual analysis. These include analysis of the text for example on the levels of social events, genres, intertextuality, assumptions, semantic and grammatical relations between sentences and clauses, discourses, styles and modality. As such, however, the framework is too wide for the concerns of my study, and thus I will be drawing from it selectively and concentrate on two levels in particular: analysing *discourses* and *representation of social events*. Analysing discourses means paying attention to questions like what discourses are drawn upon, how are they textured together, and what features characterise these discourses. On the level of representation of social events the attention is directed to what elements of social events are included or excluded, how are processes and social actors represented, and whether there are instances of grammatical metaphor.

4.3 Previous research on media sports events

As it has already become clear, Finnish wife carrying has so far stayed largely untouched as an object of research, and this seems to be the case also with other unusual competitions or events, both Finnish and international. In fact, the only activity comparable to wife carrying that I was able to find studies about was the phenomenon of air guitar. Both the Wife Carrying and the Air Guitar World Championships are atypical, humorous, so called sports events organised annually in Finland that have gone from small-scale to international. In her research, Starck (2007) focuses on comparing

the representation of the Air Guitar World Championships in British and American press with that on the event's official website. Thus, we are both dealing with partly similar aims: trying to unmask the representation of comparable events in the English-language press. Starck's (2007) study is currently the closest one to the present study.

The phenomenon of playing air guitar and actually competing in it is apparently also a subject for another, broader scale research. Starck (2007:47-51) discusses three articles from British newspapers that introduce Amanda Griffiths, a student at the University of Salford writing her PhD in Air Guitar. According to Starck (2007:51), the main theme in these articles was the amazement over such an unusual subject for dissertation, which she thought was an indication of air guitar not being a "serious enough" topic. Griffiths' aim, as reported by Curtis (2005) in one of the articles, is to take a closer look at different trends in different cultures and to tackle the gender issue around air guitar: why is it that women are so underrepresented when it comes to playing and competing in air guitar. The gender issue seems to be one of the themes shared by wife carrying and competitive air guitar, though interestingly for different reasons. As Starck (2007:16) puts it for air guitar, "women are not discouraged from entering into the competition, but for some reason the men are overwhelmingly prevalent", while in wife carrying one would not be obviously even able to compete without the women. Hence, compared to air guitar, in wife carrying it is not the lack of women that is causing the gender issue, but the fact that some see in wife carrying unequal opportunities for men and women and see it also as demeaning to women. This gender issue around wife carrying will be discussed in more detail in the data analysis.

Returning to Starck's (2007:8-13) study, she relies on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis in the linguistic parts of her study combining his theories with cultural, media and communication studies in creating a suitable framework for her own analysis. She borrows especially Fairclough's (2003) concept of 'value assumption' in order to uncover the assumptions and implicit messages residing in the articles about the Air Guitar World Championships and on the event's official website and to compare those with each other. The present study has a slightly differing emphasis; while Starck (2007) uses the value assumptions (what is good or desirable) as her main tool in unearthing major themes around the air guitar discourse, in my data analysis I will employ different and a greater variety of tools provided by Fairclough (2003), such as word choices, metaphors and other grammatical features. Assumptions play, of course,

an important part in identifying discourses and ideologies, but in the present study they are used merely as an additional tool.

The emerging themes and values unveiled by Starck (2007:65-70) from her data are particularly interesting because some similar themes can be expected to be found in my data as well. Her analysis shows that there were a few common themes in British and American newspapers: in both of them air guitar was seen essentially as a sport, but it was also seen as embarrassing. The rest of the themes were fairly different between the presses of the two countries, but in both there were some interesting ones for my concerns. Starck (2007:65-68) reports that in the American press the Air Guitar World Championships were seen also as fun and ridiculous. Nevertheless, she also notes that the theme of 'having fun' seems not to be as dominant as defining air guitar embarrassing or ridiculous. Especially the attributes of having fun and being ridiculous certainly match to wife carrying as well because of the extremely humoristic nature of the competition. In Starck's (2007:68-70) British dataset there were two more themes that are interesting from the point of view of my research. According to her, in British newspaper articles air guitar was linked to sexuality, homosexuality and masturbation. In wife carrying, which involves women as much as men, homosexuality and especially masturbation are not usually a factor, although the gender equality discourse around it might touch on the issues of homosexuality. However, wife carrying too is certainly linked to sexuality in general. In fact, eroticism and the relationship between men and women seem to be among the prominent discourses. Another theme identified by Starck (2007:68) in her British dataset stated that "air guitar is something only men would do." In wife carrying, on the contrary, women naturally have an important role, but still it seems to be at times represented more male dominated and masculine.

Starck's (2007:71) ultimate conclusion was that the 'official' view of the air guitar competition and of its most important values conveyed on the event's website was mostly at odds with the image represented in Anglo-American press. The official values, including for example world peace promotion, democracy and tolerance of difference were not reproduced in the foreign press, and they seemed to be more idealistic than the ones in British and American newspapers. Such results show that the original values or ideas promoted along with an event are not always transmitted into foreign media.

In the absence of more previous research on smaller and unusual sports events the present study relies on studies on the representation of larger scale and more ordinary sports events in the print media. Particularly interesting are studies where the focus has been on the host country image within the press coverage of such an event. Many large sports events, including for example the Olympics, World Cup tournaments and other major World Championships that are often also referred to as ‘megasports’ events, are huge media circuses bringing together different media from all over the world. They usually also generate a worldwide interest among the public and, as a consequence, offer a splendid chance for the host country and the host city to transmit knowledge and images about itself, its culture and people to the rest of the world. Taking the most out of the media exposure is particularly important for smaller countries and less known places, if they even are lucky enough to host a major sporting event. Smith (2005:218) talks about “sport reimagining” as one way of making contemporary cities more attractive to tourists, meaning “a process whereby a municipal government, either alone or in partnership with private sector agencies, deliberately exploits sport to modify the image of a place”. He suggests that it is not so much sport’s popularity among the wider public that makes it an efficient medium in transmitting and affecting images of the host city, but rather the fact that many positive meanings are associated with sport nowadays and that in today’s society sport has become more visible, important, and penetrative (Smith 2005:231.)

Although the Wife Carrying World Championships are far from mainstream sports, the event has managed to catch the interest of the international media and to help promote Finland abroad. It has to be noted, however, that the media events like the Olympics or the UEFA European Football Championship to be discussed in the rest of the chapter are very much larger in scale and much more prestigious than the Wife Carrying World Championships which seems like an extremely small-scale event compared to the Olympics, for example. Although the wife carrying competition is not in the same category with these ‘megasports’ events, it still is an international media event, only on a different level. Therefore, I think the studies conducted on these larger scale media events can be in part applied to the analysis of smaller scale media events as well. I will be drawing upon these previous studies selectively especially in my content analysis as they provide some useful tools and concepts for categorising the data.

Boyle and Monteiro's (2005) research relates particularly well to the present study. They examined "the way aspects of Portugal and Portuguese culture and society are talked about in and around the media coverage of a major international sporting event" (Boyle and Monteiro 2005:223). They studied the media coverage of Euro 2004 both in the British and Portuguese newspapers, but their main concern was not the event itself but the representation of Portugal and the Portuguese through the media coverage of this particular event. The present study has the same basic idea: examining representations of Finland and the Finns in the English-language press coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships. However, unlike Boyle and Monteiro (2005), I am going to examine also the representations of the event, i.e. the wife carrying competition, itself in more detail.

Boyle and Monteiro (2005:225, 242) looked at a representative sample of newspapers across the British and Portuguese broadsheet/tabloid markets including 19 different newspapers from the UK and 7 newspapers from Portugal. They analysed sports, news, comment, magazine and features sections of the press and they aimed at identifying the main themes and discourses emerging from the coverage of the event. In discussing Portugal and its national identity, Boyle and Monteiro (2005:225, 227) suggest that Portugal has been and still is searching for some form of post-peripheral identity and that Euro 2004 actually became an instrumental discourse in this quest.

One of the most interesting findings in Boyle and Monteiro's (2005:231) study was that in the British tabloids the location of the tournament was largely irrelevant. Boyle and Monteiro (2005:231) continue that "it would be left largely to the broadsheets to bring any sense of the significance of the cultural location of the tournament to its readers." In the Portuguese press, however, the tournament was frequently talked about as an economy booster and promoter of tourism revenues, whereas in the UK press other topics were more interesting, which is of course understandable because any political or economic implications for Portugal were at the time of little concern for the British readers (Boyle and Monteiro 2005:228-229.)

On the contrary, Portugal as a holiday destination was a recurrent theme during Euro 2004 in the British press. As Boyle and Monteiro (2005:236) note, this was not very surprising since one of the aims of the Portuguese was to exploit the event to raise the international awareness of Portugal. In the British tabloids, Portugal as a holiday

destination was associated with Algarve and references to the country included sun, sea, partying and British/English-style bars – basically aspects of what Portugal has to offer to tourists. In addition, negative stereotypes of Portugal and the Portuguese were missing (Boyle and Monteiro 2005:240-241). They note that “For many newspaper readers, one of the dominant images of Portugal is that of a friendly, but backward, unsophisticated and ultimately unimportant country, offering no economic, cultural or political threat to Britain.” However, Boyle and Monteiro’s (2005:236) results showed that in the British broadsheets features of Portugal were cleverly hung around the coverage of Euro 2004 and that the broadsheets also offered holiday experiences “off the tourist trail”.

Boyle and Monteiro (2005:239, 242) conclude that often sporting success has potential to change international perceptions only temporarily, and they claim that “any country that places an unrealistic weight of expectation on sport to deliver wider national and cultural success can almost be guaranteed disappointment.” Nevertheless, their research also shows that the national media has an important role as it can “inflect and represent international media events through national frames of reference.”

Danner (1997), O’Donnell and Boyle (1997), and O’Donnell (1997) have all studied the 1994 Winter Olympics as part of an international comparative study drawn together in Puijk (1997, 2000). Their aim was to examine how the image of Norway during the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer was pictured and how it was received in eight different countries. The three mentioned studies in particular were considered useful since they all deal with the press of the countries included in the present study. In her contribution to the research, Danner (1997) studied both television and newspaper coverage of the Winter Olympics in the US. For my purposes especially her analysis and findings on the newspaper coverage are of particular relevance. She examined the coverage of the Olympics and the portrayal of Norway in *The Seattle Times*. In addition to all full-length articles and items about the Olympics, she included in her data also the editorial columns about Norway written by Steve Kelley, the newspaper’s correspondent in Lillehammer.

The results of Danner’s (1997:73, 91) survey showed that as small a number as 8 % of the total coverage of the Games was devoted to Norway or Norwegian culture. Moreover, she found out that the items about Norway were mainly small ones within

the articles and that not a single purely factual article about Norwegian culture could be found in her data. Furthermore, most of the articles were written by humour columnists and Norwegians were repeatedly depicted as sportsmanlike hosts loving winter sports. Even in the columns by *The Seattle Times* correspondent, covering 38.1 % of the newspaper's stories on Norwegian culture, much of the content was humour (Danner 1997:76-77). As Danner (1997:91) sums up, "Norwegian culture was mostly ignored by *The [Seattle] Times*." Similar results about the portrayal of Finland and Finnish culture can be expected in the present study as well. It seems to be the case here too that most of the information about Finland, the Finns or Finnish culture comes through many small items embedded within the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships. It is worth noting, of course, that Danner (1997) focused only on the coverage of one newspaper and one might ask whether the results might have been more versatile if she had surveyed a number of newspapers. However, other studies also show that despite broader data, the images of the country hosting a major international event and of its culture can still be limited and in some cases the location of the event can even be largely ignored (see O'Donnell 1997, Boyle and Monteiro 2005).

Similarly to Danner (1997), O'Donnell and Boyle (1997) studied Norwegian images both on television and in the press, but those in the UK. It is again their press analysis that is of particular interest for the present study. O'Donnell and Boyle (1997:111-112) covered both the popular and quality UK national press. One of their main findings was that the coverage of the Games in the popular press was mostly minimal. As a consequence, their analysis is mostly based on the coverage in the broadsheets, where an interest in the Olympics was generated by the middle-class connotations of skiing and the potential of Norway as a holiday destination.

O'Donnell and Boyle (1997:117-121) discovered that the coverage of the Winter Olympics in the UK quality press was positive with only a few exceptions. However, their main finding was that even though the Olympics were covered in many ways in the quality press, there was a real lack of a "domestically-oriented agenda", i.e. no forceful British point of view could be found. Thus, the official Norwegian discourse and interpretation of the event as a 'folk festival', 'the People's Games' and 'the Green Games' was reproduced in the UK national press somewhat superficially and uncritically. O'Donnell and Boyle (1997:120) explain the absence of a British interest in the Games as well as the absence of a strong Norwegian stereotype in British culture by

Norway's peripheral position and by the fact that Britain does not see Norway as a serious political competitor on the world stage.

Unlike Danner (1997) and O'Donnell and Boyle (1997), who analysed the Olympic coverage both on television and in the press, O'Donnell (1997) focused solely on the press, which is why his analysis was perhaps somewhat more comprehensive. His interest was especially in the Scottish press and his analysis is based on five daily newspapers and three Sunday newspapers. O'Donnell points out that the question of covering the Winter Olympics in Scottish media is somewhat problematic due to, firstly, lack of interest resulting mainly from the lack of Scottish success, and, secondly, due to the question of Scottishness as opposed to Britishness, which was further complicated by the fact that Scottish competitors were part of a larger British team, thus not competing in their own right. (O'Donnell 1997:124-131.)

Both O'Donnell's (1997) and O'Donnell and Boyle's (1997) finding that there was a lack of interest in the Olympic Games in Scottish and British print media speaks for the importance of national focus in reporting about a non-domestic media sports event. In sports journalism it is usual to find a domestically oriented view on a sports event organised in another country and often this comes naturally through following the success of the possible contestants from one's own country. According to Puijk (2000:318), all media, whether print or broadcast, "try to find those items that are most interesting from their perspective." If there are no domestic contestants or the host country is uninteresting, either politically or otherwise, from the perspective of the country of the media in question, finding a "domestically-oriented agenda", as O'Donnell and Boyle (1997:119) put it, might be more difficult and result into a greater lack of interest towards the event and the host country.

In his analysis of the portrayal of the Olympics and Norway in the Scottish press, O'Donnell (1997:132-137) discovered that the tabloids actually ignored the whole event in its early stages, and once it was covered, it was done in a rather negative tone dismissing the event as not proper sport or as simply crazy. Furthermore, similarly to Danner's (1997) findings, any serious reference to Norway was missing altogether, and the country was "present merely by implication as the site of the Games, and even then in a very indistinct way" (O'Donnell 1997:137). In addition, O'Donnell (1997:137-139) found out that the coverage of the Winter Olympics became in fact a vehicle for talking

primarily about Scotland and its relationship with England, which explains the lack of interest in Norway. In the Scottish broadsheets, in contrast, references to Norwegians were made, though initially somewhat stereotypically. However, later on the Norwegians were depicted more often as patriotic, friendly, fair-minded and warm. According to O'Donnell (1997:149), though, these characterisations "tended to be brief moments of interest in much longer reports." Although the broadsheets followed the tabloids in creating somewhat negative evaluations of the Games (O'Donnell 1997:144-147), they were also the only site in the Scottish media where an attempt was made to come to some understanding of Norway as a country. A certain kind of parallel was developed between Norway and Scotland, and Norway was in fact presented as a political model from which Scotland might learn something. (O'Donnell 1997:151-153.) O'Donnell's (1997:153, 155) final conclusion was that despite the efforts put into conveying a certain image, the originators of this image have little if any control of how it is finally re-interpreted locally. Smith (2005:229) also found out that the cities promoting specific images using sport as the main vehicle do in fact have little control of how those images are represented in the media because the emphasis of the messages might change along the way and the media coverage of the city in relation to the sport in question depends on the success of the local teams, something that the organisers are obviously unable to control.

Finally, Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell (1993) examined in their book the national dimensions of the media coverage of international sports events and how the media contribute to the frequent reconstitution of national identity. They discuss the media coverage of several events including for example Italia '90, Wimbledon '91, and the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Likewise, they draw illustrative examples both from the press and television of many countries like Britain, German, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and the Soviet Union to mention a few. Generally Blain et al. (1993:3) state that "inevitably, the discursive output of the media is bound up with the interests of the state" and they show in their analyses of the coverage of sports events how in the popular and quality newspapers and on television this coverage can become "an articulation of various kinds of ideological position at the level of state interests." They also acknowledge that mediated sport does not always necessarily serve political and economic interests, in other words, it does not have much to do with power relations.

Blain et al. (1993:12-15) argue in the light of existing sports literature that sport has been an important cultural arena for articulating collective identities partly due to the universality of sporting activity. They also note that the governments have viewed organised sport as “an important sphere for forging of ‘national character’, with the project often serving specific political ends.” However, they also notice that portraying sport as an apolitical arena bringing people and countries together in friendship is in fact an important strand in media coverage of sporting activity. Blain et al. (1993:194) came to the conclusion that “international sports events are diagnostically just as useful for a wider understanding of mutual attitudes and beliefs as they superficially appear.”

5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The following three chapters will outline the aims of the present study as well as the methods used to reach these aims. First, I will present and explain the research questions. This will be followed by a description of how the data were collected and what exactly do the data of this study include. Finally, it will be explained how the research problems were approached, in other words, what is the analytic framework of the present study.

5.1 Research questions

The ultimate aim in the present study is to create as comprehensive picture as possible about the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships in the English-language press as well as about the visibility of Finland and the Finns in this coverage. This will be done by seeking answers to the following three research questions:

1. To what extent do the Wife Carrying World Championships receive coverage in the English-language press?
2. How are a) the Wife Carrying World Championships and b) the participants represented within this press coverage? In particular, are there any prominent discourses, and if so, what are they?
3. What kind of image is conveyed about Finland and the Finns within the English-language press coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships?

First of all, the aim is to create an overall picture about the extent of the media coverage of the Finnish wife carrying competition in the English-language press. This means describing the data in terms of their amount, in terms of which newspapers the texts actually came from and how they were attained, and in terms of their general character (e.g. focus and length of the texts). In other words, this will be the content analysis part of the study. Creating the framework for the coverage in this way does not only serve as a basis for the more detailed linguistic analysis, but it is also relevant and interesting because the media coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships has not been researched previously. Moreover, as was seen in chapter 4.3, there is a lack of research concerning smaller and more peculiar competitions at large, which is why the present study gives some kind of indication of how extensively such a contest has been covered in foreign media.

Secondly, this study aims at finding the most prominent discourses within the English-language press coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships. The emphasis will be in the representations of the contest itself as well as in the representations of the participants and especially of them as men and women. The latter case is well worth examining because men and women, their relationship and their performance are, after all, the focus of the event and of much of media discourse surrounding the issue. This study borrows particularly Fairclough's (2003:124-126) view of discourses. He defines discourses as ways of representing the world with a degree of commonality and continuity, specifying that "one distinguishes discourses when particular ways (partly stable, partly variable) of representing the world are of social significance". In identifying different discourses Fairclough (2003:129-133) states that one can identify particular parts of the world – the main themes – and the perspective from which they are represented. Moreover, discourses can be distinguished by features of vocabulary and specifically by the semantic relations between words, metaphors, assumptions, and several other grammatical features. In the representation of social events discourses differ for example in how the processes and social actors are represented or what elements are included and what excluded about the event (Fairclough 2003:135-150). Fairclough (2003:139) sees the representation of social events as a process of recontextualization, explaining that "in representing a social event, one is incorporating it within the context of another social event, recontextualizing it".

Thirdly, since wife carrying is one of the best known Finnish sports events abroad, it is interesting to discover how much and what kind of information about Finland and the Finns can be derived from the media coverage of the event and thus shed some light into what kind of picture is provided about us in the English-language print media in relation to wife carrying. Although Finland's image in the English-language press has been studied before (see chapter 3), most of the previous research has been more general in nature, or if they have focused on a certain event or phenomenon, it has been very different from wife carrying. Hence, the present study offers a novel point of view on the research of Finland's image in foreign press by examining it in relation to a totally different and previously not researched Finnish event.

5.2 Data collection and selection

The data of the present study consist of articles and news about the Wife Carrying World Championships from several English-language newspapers. The reason for choosing to examine the issue from the point of view of English-language media is that through it wife carrying presumably reaches the biggest possible audience and that nowadays a considerable number of foreign competitors as well as press come from the English-speaking countries including USA, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and Canada (see Appendix 1). This research focuses on newspapers only because along with collecting the data it became clear that that is where most of the texts about Finnish wife carrying could be found. Starck (2007:4) also points out that newspapers generally have the capacity to reach a larger audience than the more specialised magazines. Most of the data has been retrieved from the online editions or archives of the newspapers because accessing the original, printed ones has been possible only in a few cases.

The focus in the present study is specifically on the Wife Carrying *World Championships*, that is, on the *Finnish* wife carrying competition. It is necessary to point this out because nowadays many other countries have their own national wife carrying competitions (see chapter 2.2). While gathering the data, it quickly became clear that there are numerous articles and news also on these foreign wife carrying contests in which also Finland and the World Championships get often mentioned. This is of course understandable as it is often necessary to illuminate the background of such an eccentric event for readers who might be unfamiliar with the contest. In fact, most

often it seemed to be the case with this news on foreign competitions that Finland was mentioned as the origin of the whole concept and in many cases the alleged historic origins of the Finnish wife carrying event were also brought up. Anyhow, texts in which the main focus was on a qualifying or other wife carrying contest in some other country than Finland were excluded from the present study regardless if Finland or the Finnish competition were mentioned in them. In any case, the mentions about the Finnish competition did not seem to make much of a difference to the data in general.

Running some preliminary searches on the Wife Carrying World Championships proved that articles and news about the event seemed to be scattered more or less all over the English-language press, which obviously made data collection more complicated. Nevertheless, this was also why it was seen useful to first map roughly the extent of the media coverage of the competition, that is, how much and in what kind of English-language newspapers was Finnish wife carrying written about in the first place. Keeping this first research question in mind, I decided to include in my study all five English-speaking countries that have been represented in Sonkajärvi considerably often and with good number of competitors, namely USA, the UK, Ireland, Australia, and Canada (see Appendix 1). Since most of these countries also have their own national wife carrying contests it could be assumed that the interest of the local media has been the highest in the above mentioned countries.

Before reaching the decision to include all of the above mentioned countries the option of concentrating on the press of just one or two of them was also pondered, but this would not have served so well the intention of finding out the media coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships in the English-language press at large and, in my opinion, might have resulted in a one-sided picture. In the framework of this study, however, a systematic search covering every single newspaper in each of the five countries was not possible because they would have been far too numerous. Therefore, different approaches to data collection needed to be considered.

At first I was thinking to concentrate on a number of selected papers from each of the five countries. This would certainly have been a reasonable choice, had it not proved to be problematic and had some major downsides. First, it was not possible to tell for sure which newspapers from such a wide variety might have featured Finnish wife carrying most often at their pages or offered the richest data. Thus, picking a few newspapers

from each country would have been very difficult and random. In addition, limited access to the online archives of some of the newspapers caused further problems: in some cases the archives were available no earlier than 2000, and this is why there are some inequalities between the data from different newspapers. For these reasons and for the fact that news and articles about the Wife Carrying World Championships were scattered across the newspapers, it soon became evident that concentrating only on few selected newspapers might not provide enough and not as rich data as possible. Furthermore, texts about Finnish wife carrying within one newspaper appeared to be in many cases very similar in content.

Ultimately, the approaches to data collection and selection described above fail to accomplish the original goal of my research: disclosing the possible variation in and the extent of the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships in the English-language newspapers. Narrowing the data search down to a few, selected newspapers from each country or to the press of one or two countries would have, in my opinion, totally missed the point of mapping the coverage of the event as well as its extent in broad lines, and it might have also resulted in partial and even slightly biased representation of the wife carrying contest. Collecting a random sample, on the contrary, enabled capturing both the variance and the extent of writing about Finnish wife carrying in the English-language newspapers. It was also a reasonable method for data collection in the circumstances where the subject had not been previously researched and there was not really any preconceived impression of the actual extent of the coverage and of the possible amount of data. After all, the lack of previous research was the main reason for wanting to first map out roughly the extent of the coverage, and random sampling offered a convenient way to achieve this foremost aim within the framework of the present study.

Like the other options for data collection described above, random sampling also has some downsides to it that need to be taken into consideration. For example, as the name of the method already implies, it does not usually provide exhaustive data, which is why it is highly possible that some texts that might have even made a difference may not have found their way into the data of the present study. Once this is acknowledged, it is easier for the researcher to be more critical towards the findings from the data analysis and to be careful not to make any hasty or broad generalizations. In addition, taking a random sample means not necessarily getting exhaustive coverage of any newspaper in

particular, but as discussed earlier in this chapter, this is not actually such a huge shortage considering the aims of my research. All in all, the assets of random sampling and especially its ability to bring forth the width and variety of the coverage compensate for the possible downsides.

However, I did not go into data collection completely blind-eyed as I was able to get some clues of which newspapers might be the most profitable as data sources. Firstly, running some preliminary searches on the Wife Carrying World Championships enabled me to form a broader picture of the coverage and gave some indication of which newspapers in each country had covered the event at least in some years. Secondly, having been closely associated with the event I had the advantage of some personal knowledge of the international press and competitors having visited Sonkajärvi throughout the years, which also helped by providing further guidance and hints for data search.

Thirdly, with the help of the Wife Carrying Headquarters in Sonkajärvi I was able to go through their collection of articles and news from foreign press from the preceding years. What they have in the Headquarters is not exactly a systematic archive in its normal meaning, but rather a collection of copies of articles and news on Finnish wife carrying from all around the world. This collection consists of texts gathered by the employees of the wife carrying organisation that they have happened to find and come across and of texts that other individual people, embassies or other organisations both from abroad and from Finland have sent or faxed to the Headquarters. Hence, their collection is not exhaustive, but still it contains a great number of texts on Finnish wife carrying in many different languages. Consequently, this collection offered several articles and news in English that could not be found on the Internet. Without access to this collection many articles dating back to 1990s would have been impossible to trace because in the online editions of some of the newspapers the archives did not go all the way to 1992.

To summarise, in the spirit of random sampling data collection was mainly based on which newspapers actually seemed to have articles and news about the Wife Carrying World Championships and on searches loosely guided by my personal knowledge as well as by the clues and data attained from elsewhere. An attempt was made to track down as many and as diverse texts as possible. Ultimately, the data of this research

cover both copies of the texts from the collection in the Wife Carrying Headquarters as well as copies from the online editions of English-language newspapers. Stories were accepted as data only from the online editions based on a printed newspaper.

The data were searched from the period of 1992-2009, which was naturally set by the lifespan of the competition itself at the time of data collection. However, since the oldest articles and news that could be found dated back to no earlier than 1995, in practice the data of this research spans over 1995-2009. The data from the online editions of the newspapers were gathered basically by exploiting their online archives where possible. Different search engines, including mainly Google (www.google.com) and PressDisplay (www.pressdisplay.com), were also taken advantage of in the process. The main search terms included:

- a) “wife carrying world championships”
- b) “wife carrying” AND Finland, and
- c) “wife carrying” AND Sonkajarvi.

Majority of the articles and news in my data have been published in July, which is logical because the event is held every year during the first weekend of July. In addition, texts could be found from June, though in considerably smaller numbers than from July, and individual articles and news from other months both before and after the annual competition.

Although the data of this research are and were not designed to be exhaustive, I think it still is a good and representative sample of the English-language press coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships because it reflects well the general nature of the coverage. The data consist of around 100 texts, including longer articles as well as shorter news and passages. Settling for a collection of about one hundred texts can be justified by the fact that, first, in a qualitative research like mine it is important not to have too large data to analyse, and second, by the fact that it had become clear that the gathered texts already offered what there was to offer on the whole, that is, the data had reached its saturation point. This, again, was because many of the texts featured actually quite similar information and themes and in some cases they were even almost identical. This kind of recurrence of similar themes implies that there are certain things in wife carrying that are written about most often regardless the newspaper. In addition, the data

of about 100 texts already suggests how widely wife carrying can be written about, especially in the case of the USA and Canada, since they come from newspapers based on different parts of the countries.

5.3 Methods of analysis

This study combines content analysis with linguistic analysis, both qualitative in nature. The former draws on previous studies on media sports events whereas for the latter the analytic framework is provided by Fairclough's (2003) method of critical discourse analysis. According to Väliaverronen (1998:16), qualitative content analysis is a useful way of creating a general picture of relatively large data. Nevertheless, he also reminds that it is not sufficient alone, but requires support from theoretical and analytical frameworks. The main purpose of the content analysis in the present study is to create a general picture of the extent and nature of writing about Finnish wife carrying in the English-language print media. Moreover, it will frame the following analysis of representations of the competition itself, of participants and those of Finland and the Finns. Previous research on other, mostly larger scale media sports events that my content analysis relies on does not, however, provide any strict framework, but rather some useful concepts and possible ways to approach the analysis.

Content analysis entails categorising one's data in a variety of ways. In the present study the data will be described in terms of the sources in two different meanings: which and what kind of newspapers do the texts come from and have they been credited to a single journalist or to a news agency. Furthermore, it will be categorised according to the types of texts, that is, whether they focus solely on Finnish wife carrying, consist of several pieces of shorter news, or mention Finnish wife carrying only briefly. In this context the length of the articles and pieces of news is a relevant factor. In analysing the representations of media sports events it seems to be a popular approach to code articles according to their time of appearance (pre-, during, and post-event) and discuss the media coverage before, during and after the event (see e.g. Danner 1997, O'Donnell & Boyle 1997). This is no doubt a useful way of approaching the analysis, but for the concerns of the present study it does not seem to be applicable for a number of reasons. First, since the Wife Carrying World Championships does not take more than just one day, there is no 'during the event' coverage. Second, the focus seems to be clearly in

‘post-event coverage’ as major part of the articles have been published in July, shortly after the competition. And third, similar themes appeared to be brought up throughout the whole data regardless of when the articles were published. In this sense, analysing pre- and post-event coverage would not have given any significant results.

As the discussion in chapter 4.3 shows, in most of the previous research a ‘main themes -approach’ has been adopted, meaning that the aim has been to identify the key themes and discourses emerging from the media coverage of a certain international sporting event, and my study will follow this tendency. The main themes, or discourses, emerging from the data will be discussed while analysing the representations of the event itself, the participants, Finland and the Finns. This part of the study will be based on linguistic analysis drawing upon Fairclough’s (2003) critical discourse analysis that serves as a tool for getting into and creating an image of the representations of the four aspects through different discourses.

I started analysing the data by colour-coding, i.e. highlighting with different colours, all the references to the four aspects stated in the research questions: the competition itself, the participants, Finland, and the Finns. After this I went through the whole data again, this time collecting and writing down all the relevant phrases, sentences, and passages grouping them according to which of the four aspects they referred to. In other words, I created a corpus of the representations of the Wife Carrying World Championships, the participants, Finland, and the Finns. This way it was easier to first get a general picture about how these four aspects were represented in my data and later to see if any particular discourses emerged from among the representations.

The analysis and categorisation of the prominent discourses within the data of the present study relies on Fairclough’s (2003:120-155) definition of discourse, explained in more detail in chapter 5.1., and on his means for identifying the discourses and analysing the representation of social events. It was, indeed, possible to distinguish several discourses within each group of representations, which were all largely defined and characterised by a few main discourses. In the representation of the event itself the three most prominent discourses that could be identified included humoristic discourse, sports status discourse, and historic discourse. The participants were likewise represented through three different main discourses: relationship discourse, gender equality discourse, and the discourse around the woman’s weight. In representing

Finland and the Finns the most prominent themes arising from the data were the scattered and fractured nature of information about Finland, the Finns being depicted as experts in weird sports, and the protagonist-antagonist setting between the Finns and the Estonians. All these main discourses will be discussed in more detail in chapters 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4.

6 DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

In the rest of this study the data will be uncovered and analysed by using the methods of content analysis and Fairclough's (2003) approach to critical discourse analysis. At first the attention will be directed to analysing the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships in general and especially to the extent of this coverage. After creating a general frame for the data a closer look will be taken into how the competition itself, the participants, Finland and the Finns have been represented in the English-language press. Here the focus will be in analysing the main discourses emerging from each group of representations. Finally, the findings from the data analysis will be brought together and evaluated in discussion.

6.1 Coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships

The next two chapters will give an overview of the English-language press coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships. The focus will be first directed to the extent in which the event has been written about in the first place, and attention will be paid to the range of the sources of the texts, that is, what kind of English-language newspapers have covered the event and how they have attained the news stories about Finnish wife carrying. Next, the general nature of the data will be discussed in terms of the focus and length of the texts. The data will be categorised according to whether the focus is solely on wife carrying or whether wife carrying forms one part of the article. This kind of general overview provides the basis for and frames the more detailed analysis of the representations discussed in the rest of the thesis.

6.1.1 The extent and sources of the data

Right from the early stages of gathering the data the overall impression of the coverage of the Finnish wife carrying competition in the English-language press was that it appeared to be rather scattered all over, which already gave some indication of how widely the Wife Carrying World Championships have been written about in the Anglophone world. As explained in chapter 5.2, this ‘one here, another there’ type of coverage together with the lack of any previous research made data collection more difficult, and finally, one of the aims being to capture the extent and variety of the data, taking a random sample was considered the best option. Thus, my data comes from the English-language newspapers that actually seemed to have articles and news on wife carrying, and the texts were mainly attained through data searches on newspaper archives and from the collection in the Wife Carrying Headquarters.

All in all, 103 texts were selected to the final data set. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the data between the newspapers based in different English-speaking countries. As the table shows, especially the British and American press are better represented in the current data, with 40 and 32 texts respectively. Out of the 40 texts coming from British newspapers, 33 came from broadsheets and 7 from tabloids. Canadian press is represented with considerably lower number of texts than British and American press, but still, with 19 texts, it clearly outnumbers both Australian (8 texts) and Irish (4 texts) newspapers.

Table 1. Distribution of the data between newspapers from different countries

British newspapers	40
American newspapers	32
Canadian newspapers	19
Australian newspapers	8
Irish newspapers	4
Total	103

As to British and American press, it could perhaps be expected for them to be represented in slightly larger numbers since USA and the UK are in the top three after Estonia when it comes to the number of participants from each country throughout the

years (see Appendix 1). In addition, it was much easier to find texts on the Wife Carrying World Championships in American, British, and Canadian newspapers than in those from Australia or Ireland, which, I think, also indicates that the first three have probably been more interested in writing about wife carrying. One has to keep in mind, though, that these 103 texts are the result of random sampling and therefore most likely just a part of all possible texts, but they already show that Finnish wife carrying has indeed been written about in great numbers. Moreover, coming from 48 different newspapers in five different countries and especially in the case of the USA and Canada from newspapers based on different parts of the countries they also indicate the wide scope of the coverage.

There were texts from all years between 1995 and 2009, with some variation in their number each year, as shown by figure 2 below. The fact that any texts on Finnish wife carrying could not be found in the English-language press before 1995 is comprehensible because in its early years the event was purely a Finnish event. Nevertheless, the odd Finnish competition was notified in a few foreign newspapers (e.g. Gordon 1995, Smith 1995:4) already before it became World Championships. Note that the numbers in figure 2 can only be indicative of the coverage each year and of changes in it since my data is not all-inclusive. Nonetheless, the fact that Finnish wife carrying has been written about more or less every year since 1995, tells about the continuing interest towards the event.

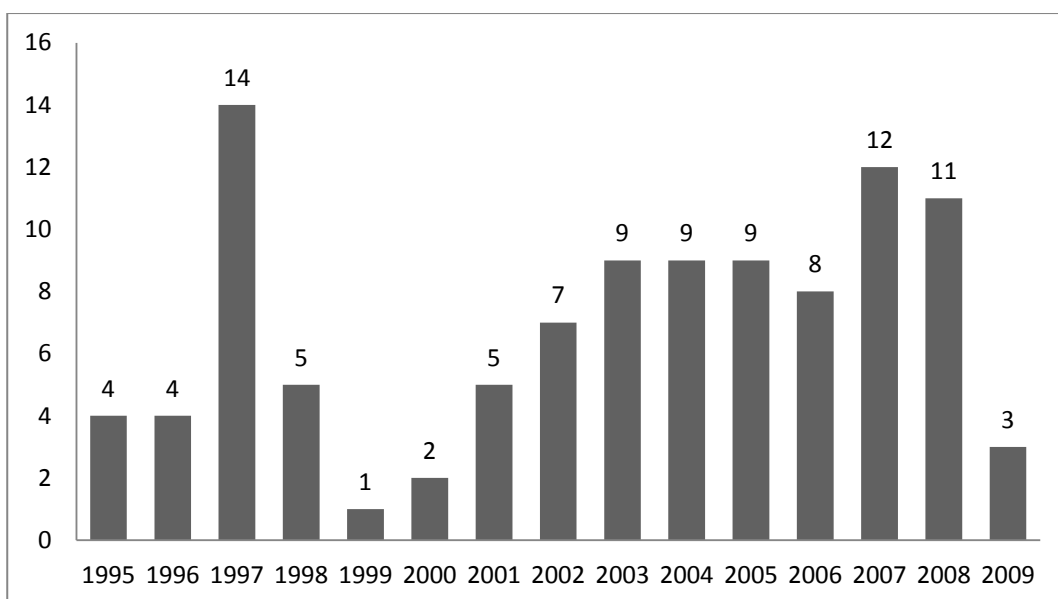


Figure 2. The number of texts on the Wife Carrying World Championships per year

The changes in the numbers in figure 2 are particularly interesting at two points: in 1997 and from 2001 onwards. First, there is a clear peak in the number of texts in 1997, increasing from four in 1996 to fourteen, and then again falling back to five in 1998. One possible explanation for this kind of increase is that after going officially international by introducing the World Championships in 1996, wife carrying might have become even more interesting in the eyes of the wider world and also more easily written about in international press. After the first World Championships in 1996 the event might have also gained more potential to become news abroad. Second, it seems that in general the Wife Carrying World Championships have received more coverage during the 21st than the 20th century. From 2001 onwards the annual numbers of texts are greater than before – with the exception of 1997 that has the highest number. Of course, only the second half of the 1990s is represented and data from this period were more difficult to track down mainly due to limited newspaper archives. If we take a look at the table of foreign participants (Appendix 1), we can see that the Anglophone world has been represented in the main wife carrying competition actually in quite limited numbers before the 21st century, which might as well partly explain why the data from the 1990s are scarcer. The same table also shows that the participation from these countries is emphasized in the latter half of the 21st century, Americans and British having been there since 2000-2001, but in greater numbers only after 2005, the Irish not making their first entry until 2003, and the Australians activating in 2006 (there was one Australian participant in 2000, but none again until 2006). The Canadians, on the contrary, have taken part with two participants in 1999, 2004-2005, and not again until 2010. Curiously, though, the highest number of texts, 14, could be found as early as 1997, as shown by table 1, but in this particular year there were not any participants from any of the English-speaking countries. This might make one ask whether the number of participants from certain countries is such a good predictor of the media coverage of the event in those countries after all.

It is remarkable in the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships in the English-language press that many of the newspapers that have written about the event are large and prestigious ones. Among those having covered Finnish wife carrying during the years are for example such big titles as *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*. The mentioned papers are amongst the largest national ones by circulation

in their countries of base, that is, USA for the first three, the United Kingdom for the following two, and Canada for the last two.

However, the coverage in a large or any other newspaper does not in any case mean extensive or frequent coverage, but rather mostly occasional few texts within one newspaper between 1995 and 2009. The fact that the coverage does not seem to be continuous in any of the papers adds to the overall scattered nature of the data. Still, I think it is a remarkable achievement for the Wife Carrying World Championships to have made its way to some of the larger newspapers, even if only a few times. On the basis of the current data, the only newspapers with a higher number of texts on Finnish wife carrying per paper are *The Independent* and *The Seattle Times*. In *The Independent* thirteen texts could be found where Finnish wife carrying had been dealt with either shortly or in a longer article or piece of text. Two of them came from 1995, one from the years 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003-2006, and two again in 2008 and 2009. In the case of *The Seattle Times* there were eight texts in which Finnish wife carrying was written about, but in all cases the excerpt about wife carrying was part of a longer compilation of events and happenings from around the world. Out of these eight two dated back to 1997, one to 1998, two again to 2003 after which there was one each year until 2006. Consequently, even in these two cases the Wife Carrying World Championships have not been covered each year, and even though this has been done in some successive years, there are gaps of several years without any coverage at all. In general, when thinking about the whole data from the point of view of single newspapers, it appears that this particular event has been covered periodically for some years every now and then and forgotten at other times.

As to the sources of the stories about wife carrying, in 67 of the texts a journalist had been identified as the writer, 22 came from a news agency, and in 14 no information about the origin of the story was available. Some of these 14, however, are most likely from news agencies as well. It is no surprise that the data include quite a few texts coming from news agencies since wife carrying classifies of course as foreign news and often also as a curiosity or a “fill-in” story, and these kinds of news are more easily attained from news agencies. A story released by wire services is often found in different newspapers with minor or no changes at all. This seems to be the case also with reporting about wife carrying as there are a few clusters of similar texts, only in different papers. Many of the articles from 1997, for instance, have been credited to

news agencies and they are a good example of a group of similar texts about wife carrying. For example, a Reuters text has been reprinted on the same day, 6 July, 1997, in five American newspapers (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Deseret News*, *The Boston Sunday Globe*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *Houston Chronicle*,) and in one Canadian paper (*The Ottawa Citizen*) with only minor changes between the papers, like leaving out a paragraph or two or changing the wording slightly. However, both in *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Ottawa Citizen* the article has been credited to Sara Henley, Reuters, ie. the name of the journalist has also been given, whereas in the other four only Reuters has been given as the source even though the text in all six cases is more or less the same. Similarly, another text by Associated Press has been reproduced also on 6 July, 1997 in *Daily Herald* (published in Columbia, Tennessee), *St. Joseph News-Press* (St. Joseph, Missouri), and *Recorder* (Amsterdam, New York), likewise with a difference of only one or two paragraphs. Similar examples of almost identical texts could be found from some other years as well and not only by news agencies, but also by a journalist in which case their article had been published usually in two different newspapers (see e.g. Winkleman 2008a, 2008b).

This kind of recurrence of similar articles further contributes to the relatively repetitive nature of the whole data. Regardless of the newspaper or the length of the text, ‘the basics’ of wife carrying seem to be there nearly each time: the idea and the history behind wife carrying briefly explained, the main rules of the woman not needing to be a real wife and of her weight reviewed, and the main prize stated. This basic information recurs one article after another, and the shortest texts usually concentrate only on these basics while in the longer ones some more information about the contest, the contestants, the place (Finland and/or Sonkajärvi) has been given and certain themes further elaborated. However, given that these themes too can be encapsulated by a few most prominent discourses (discussed from chapter 6.2 onwards), the data do indeed largely focus on the same kind of information about wife carrying and issues around it. Hence the repetitive tone in the data in general. There are, however, also texts in which original points of view and opinions have been brought up.

6.1.2 Categorisation of the data

The final data could be clearly divided into four different types of texts according to what kind of role the Wife Carrying World Championships were given in them. First, there were articles and news in which Finnish wife carrying was the main focus of interest, that is, they were solely about the Wife Carrying World Championships. These were traditional articles in a sense that they clearly focused on one main issue, wife carrying, and were relatively long ones. Out of the total of 103 texts, 45 belonged to this first category.

The second category had almost the same number of texts as the first one, only one less, thus mounting up to 44. The texts in this category, however, were significantly different than in the first one. They were articles, news or compilation of news in which the Wife Carrying World Championships were just one part of the text. Within these texts that were mostly rather long as a whole wife carrying was usually talked about in a few paragraphs. The texts were mainly compilations of short news stories from around the world or lists of some kind in which the Wife Carrying World Championships was featured as one part of the list. The titles of many of these texts illustrate quite well their ‘put-together’ nature. Consider for example titles such as *Around The World (The Seattle Times, 5 July 1998)*, *In Other News (Toronto Star, 13 July 2003, p.F2)*, *Briefly (The Washington Times, 8 July 2007)*, *Quick Hits (Chicago Sun-Times, 9 July 2007, p.88)*, or *The Weirdest Contests In The World (The Daily Record, 16 October 2007)*. These kinds of titles already suggest that the articles consist of several pieces of news stories. The passages on the Wife Carrying World Championships varied in their length, but generally most of them fell between 30-200 words.

The first two categories were clearly the dominant ones, covering about 86 percent of the whole data. However, two more categories could be distinguished, and even though they had considerably fewer texts compared to the first two, they again clearly differed from the previous categories. Thus, the third category contained six long articles on ‘weird and silly’ Finnish contests more broadly and on Finns’ liking on unconventional sports, one of them being naturally wife carrying. In contrast to category one where the focus was exclusively wife carrying, in this third category the articles focused more on the Finns’ tendency to like all kinds of silly sports and wife carrying was brought up as just one example of these along with several others. Furthermore, similarly to category

two texts, wife carrying was mentioned as part of a longer text or article in the category three texts as well, but what differentiates these two is that in the former most of the texts are more like compilations or lists of brief news stories that usually come from around the world, whereas the texts in the latter are all about Finland and about these ‘wacky’ Finnish competitions. Again, the titles of the articles in the third category are very illustrative of their main content: “For sheer craziness, you can’t beat Finland”, Nolan (2007:D3) informs the readers in the title of her article in *The Hamilton Spectator*, and according to Flak (2008a:2), “Finns have own take on sport: weirder, wilder, wackier”, as she declares in the title of her article in *The Edmonton Journal*. Besides wife carrying, other unusual Finnish contests mentioned in these articles include for instance the Air Guitar World Championships, the Mobile Phone Throwing World Championships, the World Sauna Bathing Championships, the World Swamp Football Championships, and the World Championship of Mosquito Killing. Also mentioned were competitions in cattle-calling, milk-stool throwing, karaoke singing, boot throwing, or ants’ nest-sitting.

The fourth and final category with eight texts includes articles in which Finnish wife carrying has been mentioned very briefly, usually in just one or two sentences. In a way, wife carrying was mentioned as an aside in an otherwise longer article that might have been about (eccentric) sports somewhere else than in Finland or about something else Finnish in connection to which wife carrying was briefly mentioned. The short references to Finnish wife carrying in this last category do not really add much to the informational content of the data, but I think it is worth pointing out that wife carrying can come up in articles not directly connected to it, although usually just briefly, as it seems.

6.2 Representation of the Wife Carrying World Championships

Besides finding out how widely and in what kind of articles the Wife Carrying World Championships have been covered in the English-language press, taking a closer look at the representation of the competition and the event itself is of course worthwhile because it is fascinating to see how such an unusual and funny contest is portrayed in foreign press. As one could anticipate, given the humoristic nature of the contest, humour and irony play indeed a significant role in all coverage of the Wife Carrying

World Championships that are often portrayed as a curiosity in the Anglophone press. This humoristic discourse is, in fact, pervasive throughout the data. Another notable issue in the representation of wife carrying seems to be its status as sports: can one talk about wife carrying as sports in the real meaning of the word, or is it more like ‘so-called sports’ where the curiosity factor overcomes its sports value. Furthermore, the origins of wife carrying are a recurrent theme within the data, and in a few cases the Finns have been said to honour the tradition that wife carrying stems from. These three discourses – humoristic discourse, sports status discourse, and historic discourse – are the most prominent ones through which the Wife Carrying World Championships have been represented in the English-language press, and they will be discussed in the next three chapters respectively.

6.2.1 Humoristic discourse

If one had to describe the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships in the English-language press with only one word, the best and the most illustrative one would be no doubt ‘curiosity’. Representing wife carrying as something rare, very unusual and out of the ordinary cuts through the whole data and no doubt the curiosity factor is further influenced by the strong humorous aspect of wife carrying. It is this humoristic curiosity nature that partly explains the world wide appeal of wife carrying. After all, everything unusual and strange is known to interest people and stories about such curiosities tend to catch the public eye at some point.

Humour as well as irony is strongly present in most of the texts and there is a prevailing humoristic tone in the data. Of course, this could be anticipated given the humoristic nature of the whole event and the fact that one of the most important rules states that every single participant must have fun (Rules n.d.). Some of the humour comes as part of the genre many of the texts from the data belong to: news lightening. These not-so-serious news stories are meant to be lighter pieces of news and often they are about funny things. The wife carrying competition serves as a perfect topic for news lightening and fill-in stories due to its highly humoristic and odd nature and thus high entertaining value. In addition, the competition is a good example of sporting activity and humour going hand in hand and it manifests how sports can be extremely fun with a little creativity and innovation.

In the articles themselves humour seems to be generated by the use of certain humorous words and expressions as well as some puns, and it seems to thrive especially in describing the carrying positions, particularly the Estonian one, the curious connection between the woman's weight and the prize, and the possibility of having someone else than one's own wife on the back. Furthermore, in analysing Henley's (1997:9) article from *the Guardian* as part of her study, Pietikäinen (2000a:106) suggests that in this particular article the laughs and the humour come mainly from the fact that wife carrying is actually taken seriously. This, in my opinion, could as well be expanded to writing about wife carrying in the English-language press in general because frequently in my data the funniest thing about wife carrying appears to be indeed that this kind of 'sport' actually happens and what is more, it is taken very seriously by some of the contestants.

Macdonald (2003:29, emphasis original) notes that "in discussions of the media, irony is often claimed to pose a challenge to all forms of serious discourse. If everything is 'tongue-in-cheek', ideology may indeed become obsolete or at least moribund." She adds, however, that "playful irony does not necessarily contest established power." Although majority of the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships seems to be coloured by humour and irony, it is mostly done in a positive rather than negative tone. Hence, the general tone in the data as a whole is rather jokey in a positive way than mocking or ridiculing. It appears as if humour was a natural way to tackle the issue of such a funny and unconventional sporting event. Moreover, being represented as a funny curiosity largely explains why one tends to find passages about Finnish wife carrying in articles titled 'The weirdest contests in the world' or something alike and why many of these passages tend to be fairly brief.

While considering all the humoristic aspects of wife carrying, it is worth keeping in mind how it all initially started and what kind of role humour has played throughout the years. Wife carrying started in the first place as a bit of a joke and as a humorous contest to stimulate the Sonkajärvi county fair. Consequently, humour has been at the heart of the whole contest right from the beginning and in those days it had perhaps a more prominent role than it has today. The fact that wife carrying was launched as more of a joke and that no one really thought it would go on for more than a couple of years implies that it was never really meant to be taken too seriously. The stigma of being 'crazy' and 'funny' has always been there, and although wife carrying has grown out of

its initial and rather modest objective, certain tongue-in-cheekiness has survived until today. The success and longevity of wife carrying came as a surprise even to the organisers, as is indicated by Simo Mäkinen, municipal director of Sonkajärvi, who has been quoted in *USA Today* (6 July 2003): “At first we developed this just as a show number for the local fair and thought we’d only use it for a couple of years. But it was so popular that we’ve kept it going.” In a sense, one might think that since wife carrying started as a joke in the first place, it is perfectly justified to write about it with a twinkle in the eye and even to make fun of it. Despite the fact that there is an increased sense of seriousness as well as competitiveness in the contest today, the humorous factor is still strongly involved and there to stay, and I would argue that it is only natural to tackle with humour something that in itself is strongly humoristic.

6.2.2 Sport status discourse

One of the discourses in writing about the event itself seems to be encapsulated by the question of whether wife carrying is and can be talked about as sports. In many of the texts the sport status of wife carrying seems to be in fact questioned, whether explicitly or more implicitly between the lines. It appears as if wife carrying was seeking some kind of definition in the English-language press. On one hand, there is not really any reason why it could not be called sports. It is, after all, as or even more physical and demanding as any other sport would be, and as Thompson-Noel (2002) points out, “modern-day wife-carrying is organised with the same attention to rules and detail as a regular athletics meet.” On the other hand, wife carrying is clearly not traditional or mainstream sports, but rather it is one of the untraditional contests that do not easily fit into any existing sports category. It is specifically this kind of a borderline position between sports and non-sports that creates discussion and at times even confusion about the sport status of wife carrying.

This ‘quasi-sports’ -status is well exemplified by how wife carrying has been defined and categorised in some of the texts from the data. Reinhart (2005), for example, talks about “an *alleged* sport of wife-carrying” (emphasis added) in *the Globe and Mail*. He defines wife carrying as sport, but by further defining it as *alleged*, he at one level questions its status as real and true sports. Saying that something is *alleged* suggests that there is some doubt about the true nature of what it refers to. Consequently, Reinhart

(2005) is being somewhat sceptical about whether or not it really is or can be called sports. Even though wife carrying was regarded as sports, it would still most likely be thought of as ‘so-called’ sports.

Moreover, some other similarly illustrative categorisations could be found. For instance, wife carrying has been listed in an article titled “The List: if World Cup fever leaves you cold, escape with our guide to the ten greatest alternative sporting events” (*The Glasgow Herald*, 25 May 2002, p.6). Here, thus, wife carrying has been categorised as ‘an alternative sporting event’, as opposed to mainstream and more traditional sporting events, like World Cups. The above categorisation entails the assumption that wife carrying is different from mainstream sports, i.e. untraditional. Similarly, Shields (2004:19) writes about wife carrying as “minority sport of the week”, clearly making a statement between minor and major sport. Labelling wife carrying as “alternative” or “minority” sport and thus opposing it to mainstream sport suggests that it is not perhaps as traditional and its status not as established in the sports field.

The nature of the competition has definitely developed over the years along with more international participants and rivalry. At the beginning, when wife carrying was just a humorous show number at the county fair, it was not taken too seriously, and whether someone thought about it as real sports was not really a primary concern. Today wife carrying is for some of the participants a serious sporting activity for which training or dressing accordingly is just as important as for any other sport. Henley (1997:9) describes nicely the development of the competition in *The Guardian* by writing as follows: “But wife-carrying is becoming a serious sport. Where once the women wore fancy-dress and flogged their men with birch twigs, they now wear lycra suits and train before the competition.” First of all, the opening line, “But wife-carrying is becoming a serious sport”, contains the assumption that it was not previously “a serious sport” – maybe a funny sport, but not serious – and that it was only becoming such at the time. Second, although there is a certain tinge of humour in Henley’s (1997:9) description, it still is particularly illustrative of the time because after going fully international in 1996, wife carrying was quickly becoming more serious and more sports-like at the end of the 1990’s, perhaps partly as a result of more sport-conscious participants and the amounting rivalry, even though humorous, between the participating nations. Although Henley’s (1997:9) description of the ongoing change in the nature of the competition is over ten years old, in my opinion it still applies today and maybe even more so than in

1997 considering the sportsmanship and seriousness that some of the competitors engage in nowadays. Indeed, it seems that in wife carrying we have got a similar trend as in competitive air guitar, as observed by Starck (2007:61): humour and having fun give way to an increasing sense of seriousness and competitiveness as the competition gets more and more international.

Moreover, the prevailing humoristic tone in the data in general appears to somehow play down the sport status of the event, as if wife carrying could not be taken as serious sports because of the strong humorous aspects it carries. Although it is often referred to as sport, it is just as often associated with adjectives such as *silly*, *strange*, *bizarre*, *quaint*, or *offbeat* within the same sentence. In a way humour and calling the event for example silly at times seem to trivialise any existing sport status wife carrying might have been granted. One thing in this sport status discourse is clear, though: if you ask the organisers of the event, they have no doubt about the real and true sport status of wife carrying. In fact, they have even taken it a step further by suggesting that wife carrying has also potential for becoming no less than an Olympic sport (Henley 1997:9).

6.2.3 Historic discourse

The historic discourse in the data stems naturally from the origins of the contest. As was explained in more detail in chapter 2.1, modern-day wife carrying is rooted in the alleged legend of a local brigand raiding the nearby villages as well as on a tradition of wife-stealing. This little piece of local history seems to have been picked out frequently by the English-language press, which is shown in the data by numerous references from different years to the origins of the competition. Although these historic references are mainly rather brief, they are very frequent perhaps because of their value to the readers of the English-language press as explanatory and insightful information. Indeed, it might be easier for foreigners to understand the idea behind wife carrying and to relate to it when they know that even though it all may sound totally crazy and as though it had been invented out of the blue, it is actually based on local history.

The information about the origins available for international media seems to be more simplified than for those understanding Finnish. There is a section on the history of the contest on the official wife carrying website (Mähönen n.d, Paldan n.d.) in Finnish, but

no equivalent on the English version of the website. In Finnish there is the whole story of Ronkainen the Robber, but in English the story seems to be reduced to just stating the essential about him and wife stealing. This might explain why the historic references in the data are so brief since the amount of information provided is directly reflected on how much background information is offered in the English-language press. Usually the tale of the local bandit group stealing wives from the neighbouring villages in the 19th century is repeated in a few sentences. In some of the newspapers Ronkainen the Robber, the main chieftain said-to-be, gets mentioned in this context while in others just marauding gangs are talked about, without explicitly referring to Ronkainen the Robber. It appears that in a few cases among the present data the tradition of wife-stealing and the tale of Ronkainen the Robber testing aspiring members to his gang have been mixed up. Consider, for instance, the following example:

According to local legend, the contest dates back to the 1800s when a local bully challenged other men in the village to prove their worth by carrying their wives – “a proper wife, a stolen wife, or someone else’s wife” – through an obstacle course. (*USA Today*, 6 July 2003)

This extract from an article in *USA Today* refers to a test created by Ronkainen the Robber to see who were strong enough to join his gang. In here it is correctly claimed that the test included successfully completing an obstacle course, but incorrectly claimed that it was a ‘wife’ the aspiring members had to carry while running the course. According to the legend it was not the wife, but a heavy sack of rye that the candidates were required to carry over their shoulder all the way to the finish line. It is easy to see the possible reason for the misapprehension in the example above because the legend does mention wives, just not in the context this example makes us believe. Carrying wives has perhaps been mixed up with Ronkainen the Robber’s test because it is partly the reason for it: anyone joining his gang had to be able to steal wives from the neighbouring villages, and as the wives were not usually very willing to go, they had to be carried away. Hence the test to decide who were strong and fit enough to join the troops.

In another example from *The Glasgow Herald* the legend and the tradition of wife stealing have also been interpreted in a way that might give false impressions. Consider the extract below:

[Origins of the contest] To be found in the antics of Ronkkainen the Robber [*sic*], a nineteenth-century rogue who made recruits to his gang prove their daring by “stealing” a wife from a neighbouring village. (*The Glasgow Herald*, 5 July 2002, p.21)

First of all, from this example the reader might easily get the impression that the requirement for joining Ronkkainen the Robber’s troop would have been making off with somebody else’s wife and this way proving one’s courage. However, as was explained above, the actual test was not carrying or stealing a wife but completing the obstacle course (Mähönen n.d., Paldan n.d.). Only after completing the course and passing the test the accepted candidates were permitted to join the gang that would then roam around possibly stealing other’s wives. Moreover, there are no records of Ronkkainen the Robber having insisted further prove of his recruits’ daring in the form of wife stealing, as is declared in the example above. One could easily imagine, though, that stealing wives was the recruits’ way to show their daring and loyalty to the group, whether the main chieftain insisted it or not.

There is one more thing worth mentioning about the historic discourse in the English-language press. Namely, in a few articles it is put forward that the Finns are taking history and tradition of wife carrying very seriously and that it is in fact a matter of honour for them. For example, Dowbiggin (2007:D2) writes in *Calgary Herald* that “the race honours a legendary Finnish pirate [*sic*] who made his gang run through a forest carrying heavy sacks on their backs”. Here the ‘Finnish pirate’ obviously refers to Ronkkainen the Robber. Likewise, his legend is told to be honoured in *The Globe and Mail* where Markus Rätty, a Canadian of Finnish descent, is quoted saying that “the race is not some dark holdover from a sexist past, but rather a twisted tribute to an old legend ...” (Reinhart 2005). In a few other articles it is told that some of the contestants also honour the practice of wife stealing by entering the competition with someone else’s wife (*The Edmonton Journal*, 6 July 2008; Flak 2008a:2). Interestingly, all the above examples come from Canadian newspapers. Only one equivalent example could be found in the newspapers from the other four countries, which was in the *Irish Times* where McNally (2001) lets the readers know that the tradition of wife stealing is being honoured by the Finns in the rules of the competition since it is still allowed to take up

the challenge with somebody else's wife. Other than this, it seems that explicitly honouring the legend and the practice of wife stealing are mostly brought up only in Canadian newspapers.

6.3 Representation of the participants

Within the data of the present study, the most interesting part in the representation of the participants in the Wife Carrying World Championships is definitely how men and women, in particular, have been depicted and how parallels have been drawn between the real life relationships and wife carrying. Especially the representation of women in relation to that of men is worth taking a closer look. Moreover, the issues of gender equality and women's weight were generating a lot of interesting discourse in the English-language press. All these things, of course, are central to wife carrying since it is naturally men and women who form the core of the whole competition, and the relationship between them as well as woman's weight are both obviously crucial factors in trying to catch the first place. Hence, the next three chapters will be dedicated to exploring how the participants are represented in relationship discourse as well as in discourses of gender equality and weight. The analysis of relationship discourse will be more on a general level, but both in gender equality and weight discourses some of Fairclough's (2003:145-150) means and concepts for analysing the representation of social actors, which he defines as "usually Participants in clauses", will be particularly useful.

6.3.1 Relationship discourse

The wife carrying is an attitude towards life. The wives and the wife carriers are not afraid of challenges or burdens. They push their way persistently forward, holding tightly, generally with a twinkle in the eyes. (How to Become a Master in Wife Carrying n.d.).

The above extract has been taken from the official website of the Wife Carrying World Championships where one can find slightly humorous instructions on "how to become a master in wife carrying". This particular passage is found under the heading 'Life' and it exemplifies the relation between wife carrying and real life. Just like in wife carrying, in real life there are also 'challenges' and 'burdens' that need to be overcome and in both certain determination and not taking everything always so seriously helps to get

through obstacles. Hence, getting through the wife carrying obstacle course is like getting through real life with ups and downs, figuratively speaking. Similar parallels between wife carrying, getting through life and real life relationships can be found also in my data. In addition, metaphors of marriage seem to be abundant in the texts about wife carrying, and the English name of the contest has already some marriage-related notions compared to its Finnish counterpart: *wife carrying* and *eukonkanto* ('old woman carrying') differ slightly in how well they mediate the range of women allowed to enter. These two issues will be the main focus in the current chapter.

Winkleman (2008a) draws apt parallels between wife carrying, relationships and getting through life in general while asking whether she and her husband could win the "life's great wife-carrying competition". In her column in *The Independent* she displays a discussion between herself and her husband about whether he would carry her and about their chances for winning. This is how she explains the true meaning of wife carrying to her husband:

It's about hanging on for dear life and staying the course, even when there are obstacles, and it's about working as a team and being together and going through all kinds of stuff to get to the end. And sometimes it won't be fun, but the trick is to just keep going. (Winkleman 2008a.)

In here she visibly likens wife carrying to getting through real life as her description resembles to a great extent dealing with normal, everyday life with its ups and downs. Moreover, in Winkleman's (2008a) description getting through the wife carrying obstacle course becomes almost like a metaphor for getting over the obstacles in relationships and in life in general. Just like in relationships, in wife carrying it is also crucial to "work as a team" and be strong together to overcome obstacles. Thus, in a way, a wife carrying contest could sometimes be conceived as a test for the relationship between the man and the woman. In addition, according to the instructions on mastering wife carrying (How to Become a Master in Wife Carrying n.d.), training for the sport also makes an excellent way to take care of the relationship since one can make it part of the daily routines – like practising in the super market or in the playground and even in the bath. As is assured in the instructions, all in all, "wife carrying is good for your relationship".

Nevertheless, in a wife carrying competition the term ‘wife-support’ gets a new and more literal meaning. As Bleach (2007) puts it, “a man should be able to support his wife”, even with the risk of being called old-fashioned in today’s more egalitarian atmosphere. In the world of wife carrying, however, what has been traditionally meant by ‘wife-support’ in a marriage, now acquires a more physical and symbolic meaning. After all, being able to support one’s wife in a wife carrying contest literally means being able to carry her and to support all her weight all the way to the finish line. At the same time, this entails symbolic meanings too, as successfully completing the wife carrying course can be seen as a symbol of the husband’s ability to support his wife throughout their marriage in general. Therefore, a wife carrying contest does not test only the man’s ability to support his wife or a partner in terms of her weight, but also, in a broader and figurative sense, his ability to support her in their real life relationship. It also seems like women are eager to see how their men succeed in this, given their reluctance to change roles and their explanation for this being that it is the men’s turn to carry and support them after having been carried by their women for years (Higgins 2003:A1). Furthermore, until 2008 there was a 15-second penalty if the wife was dropped at any point on the course, and as has been ironically suggested in a few articles, failing to support one’s wife could have lead into some trouble back at home. Smith (2006), for example, reckons in *The Age* that besides the additional 15 seconds, there might have been “a good earful for the husband as well”.

Relating to the relationship discourse, marriage and commitment that comes along with it appeared to be rather frequent, often humorous references in representing the relations between the male and the female contestants. Of course, this was somewhat predictable since it is a *wife* carrying competition, but the rules allow also non-married couples to enter. Often it is, indeed, a ‘fake’ marriage and how the partners have been found that is the origin of the humorous tone in the references to marriage. Thurow (2003:A2), for example, quotes Taisto Miettinen, a Finn that had been trying to catch the Estonians for several years, in *The Wall Street Journal* telling how he found his then current ‘wife’ for the competition: he simply approached one of his female co-workers, first asking for her weight, and then dropping the big question. His colleague “thought about it overnight and accepted the proposal”, thus becoming Miettinen’s ‘wife’ for the 2003 Wife Carrying World Championships. Equally amusing is the story of Julia Galvin, an Irish “crazy competition addict” and a die-hard fan of wife-carrying, who in 2004 actually hired herself a ‘husband’ for that year’s competition (Carton 2004). As these

examples indicate, the definition of marriage in wife carrying is rather loose and marriage is, in a way, used as a metaphor for temporary commitment and for having ‘wives’ or ‘husbands’ just for this particular occasion.

Another interesting marriage-related notion that has been brought up in a few articles is that of polygamy. However, this has really nothing to do with the main event, but it seems to occur when mentioning the relay that is also run each year. In the relay race the ‘wife’ plays the role of a baton that is passed between three men, and according to Ricketts (2004), it carries “a faint whiff of polygamy”. Similarly, Tong (2009) also suggests there might be some polygamous traces in the relay competition. Consider the following passage from the section on Finnish wife carrying in his article in *The Independent*:

But recent years have seen the introduction of a relay which has complicated matters. The wife acts as a baton and is passed between three runners. But whose wife is it, anyway? The prize is her weight in beer so presumably the trio share that, if not the conjugal duties. (Tong 2009.)

Both Ricketts (2004) and Tong (2009) apparently draw their claims of polygamous action from the three men-one ‘wife’ -setting, while Tong (2009) goes even further by suggesting the possibility of sharing the ‘wife’ in the “conjugal duties”. These kind of references to polygamy are obviously meant not be taken too seriously given the fact that the ‘wife’ is not necessarily married to or not even in a relationship with any of the three men carrying her. In my opinion, it is merely interesting and witty that such connections to marriage and polygamy have been found, and it is not that difficult to see the reasons behind such thinking. Besides, some eroticism can be easily sensed in wife carrying as it highlights the relationship between the man and the woman, and as the instructions on “How to become a master in wife carrying” (n.d.) state about eroticism and wife carrying, “intuitive understanding of the signals sent by the partner and becoming one with the partner are essential in both of them...”.

Finally, one of the biggest inconsistencies relating to the issue of marriage in wife carrying is that between the name of the competition and its rules stating that the ‘wife’ does not need to be a real wife. This is especially highlighted with the English name of the contest, Wife Carrying World Championships, which refers explicitly to *wives* giving thus the false impression that marriage might in fact be a prerequisite. Consequently, *wife carrying* is actually a “misnomer”, in the words of Thuro

(2003:A1). This is probably why this discrepancy seems to be one of the most often commented aspects among the articles about Finnish wife carrying in the English-language newspapers. While the English name of the competition does not necessarily mediate that well the range of women allowed to enter, the original Finnish name, *eukonkannonkisasat* (lit. ‘(old) woman carrying race’), indicates better the fact that marriage is not required. The Finnish word *eukko* (‘old woman’) can be used to refer to any woman, whether married or not, although it is often used to refer to a wife, especially in a playful sense. Nevertheless, the Finnish *eukonkanto* (‘woman carrying’) is more inclusive than its English equivalent *wife carrying*. The official rules of the competition state about the ‘wife’ that, as long as she is over 17 years old, she can “be your own, the neighbour’s or you may have found her farther afield” (Rules n.d.). Because of being called *wife carrying* in English, it is often necessary to clarify that marriage is not indeed a prerequisite, and this is exactly what has been done in most of the articles in my data.

6.3.2 Gender equality discourse

According to the official rules of wife carrying (Rules n.d.), the competing couples can consist only of a male carrier and a female carried one. Thus, it is forbidden to change roles so that the woman would be carrying the man. This rule, logically, stems from the name of the contest – it is, after all, *wife* carrying, not *husband* or *man* carrying. By this rule, furthermore, the organisers seek to honour the tradition of wife-stealing and the tale of Ronkainen the Robber behind modern wife carrying. However, this matter has met relatively much controversy and discussion in the English-language press. Some people seem to think that not allowing women to carry men is politically incorrect and that wife carrying in general is demeaning to women. The earliest references to the questions of political correctness can be traced back to 1995 (Smith 1995:4), and since then it has been quite frequently referred to, mostly rather briefly, but at times more deeply.

Although the World Championships in wife carrying have always been a humorous event, the Finns seem to be fairly stern in keeping with the rules and this way honouring the tradition. This was proved as early as 1996, when it was reported in *The Ottawa Citizen* (8 July 1996) that four couples were in fact “disqualified for swapping roles”.

Politically correct or not, the Finns apparently wanted to set the record straight in the first ever wife carrying contest on world level and show that despite the funny element in the event, the rules are there to be abided. Besides, as Stubbs (2005:C7) also points out in the *Montreal Gazette*, neither the villagers nor the competitors seem to care much about any political incorrectness, no matter what the others say, but “embrace this as the goofy contest it is, enjoyed by couples who can laugh at themselves and others”. Personally, I can agree with Stubbs (2005:C7), having been there in most summers, because seemingly all the contestants know what kind of attitude to take towards wife carrying, that is, not to take it too seriously.

It is definitely Mattox Jr. (2006) who takes the discourse of gender equality to the farthest in *the Wall Street Journal*. He starts to wonder why so many people come to Sonkajärvi each year for the main wife carrying event and ends up in a lengthy talk about how he sees a curious paradox between “officially androgynous Finland” and the “gender-specific roles” promoted in wife carrying and argues that the Western world’s gender debate does not conform that well to wife carrying. Consider the beginning of his discussion:

Indeed, I find it curious that a He-Man event of this kind is held every year in the most androgynous region of the world. And I find it even more curious that the Finns – who determinedly promote gender equality in all their “official” decrees – just as determinedly promote gender-specific roles in the World Championship of Wife-Carrying. In fact, several years ago, four couples were disqualified for violating the rules that pointedly prohibit wives from carrying husbands. And one of the event’s vocal defenders, a feminist Finn leader named Pirjo Ala-Kapee, says she considers the event “uplifting” and “authentic” rather than demeaning to women.” (Mattox Jr. 2006.)

At the beginning of the passage, Mattox Jr. (2006) refers to the Wife Carrying World Championships metaphorically as a “He-Man event”, thus defining it as an event in which ‘real men’ have the opportunity to prove they have the necessary strength and endurance to carry their wives, suggesting consequently that wife carrying is a rather masculine affair. This impression comes forth especially when he says he thinks it is “curious” that an event like this is organised in a country where neither masculinity nor femininity is usually strongly displayed. Mattox Jr. (2006) goes on to claim that the Finns “determinedly promote gender-specific roles” in wife carrying, referring obviously to the rule of male carrier-female carried one, in spite of standing behind gender equality in their “ ‘official’ decrees”. Finally he gives voice to Pirjo Ala-Kapee, the former provincial governor of Eastern Finland, saying that in her opinion wife

carrying is anything but demeaning to women. In summary, Mattox Jr. (2006) seems to claim that the Finns support gender equality everywhere else except in wife carrying.

I can see where Mattox Jr. (2006) is coming from with his claims, but I also sense some exaggeration in his reasoning. The official rules prohibit women from carrying men, but I do not think there is any conscious promoting of gender-specific roles behind this rule. Rather, I think the rule has been kept unchanged, again, for historic reasons to maintain the contest as close to tradition as possible and because allowing women to carry men would change the spirit of the competition. Also, as mentioned before, in this case it would not be as straightforward to talk about *wife* carrying anymore. Then again, the whole thing was originally designed to be a light-hearted competition where the issues of political correctness should not be taken too seriously.

After reasoning as illustrated above, Mattox Jr. (2006) goes on to note that “the World Championship in Wife-Carrying doesn’t fit very neatly into the Western world’s framework of gender relations”, in which it is either gender equality or gender-specific roles – you cannot choose both in the official debate. In the end he too acknowledges that there is no point in taking wife carrying too seriously, but ends his article by adding that, unintentionally, the participants in the wife carrying contest “may be expressing – in an admittedly peculiar manner – that they want to live in a world where husbands and wives are equals, but their roles aren’t completely interchangeable.”

It is worth noting that elsewhere in the world, on the other hand, women are allowed to carry men as well in some of the qualifying or other national wife carrying competitions. This is the case for example in Canada (Higgins 2003:A1) and Australia (*The Sun-Herald*, 20 February 2005). However, there has not been any kind of rush from the women’s part to do this, as Higgins (2003:A1) informs his readers, quoting Rick Esseltine, the organiser of the Canadian Wife Carrying Championship, who clarifies that “a lot of women were saying, ‘I’ve carried my husband for years. It’s about time he carried me’”. According to Dowbiggin (2007:D2), at least the women in Sonkajärvi seem to think the same way, declaring women carrying men simply “redundant”. So even if it was allowed, women in Finland and elsewhere do not seem to be that excited to take up the challenge. Perhaps this is partly because of what Mr. Esseltine above presented: that women might see deeper, symbolic meanings about relationships in wife carrying, wanting their men for once to ‘support’ them. These

kinds of parallels between wife carrying and real life relationships were discussed in more detail in the previous chapter.

There is one more thing related to the gender equality discourse that needs some closer attention. The way that women, in particular, have been represented in the English-language articles about Wife Carrying World Championships is of special interest in the context of political correctness. Generally, in the data of this study women have been largely portrayed as just passive participants to the contest, men being the active ones and doing most of the work. This becomes evident especially in the way women and their actions tend to be passivised and identified merely as objects. Consider, for instance, examples (1)-(5):

- (1) Brawny male athletes *pick up a woman*... (*The Washington Times*, 3 July 1996, p.A2)
- (2) Husbands can *haul their brides* any way they wish – piggyback, fireman’s carry, over-the-transom style... (Mattox Jr. 2006)
- (3) Finnish footrace contestants prepare to *lug her for lager*. (*The Washington Times*, 3 July 1996, p.A2)
- (4) Specifically, I want to *toss her* over my shoulder and *carry her for gold, glory and grog*. (Juniper 2007:6)
- (5) There’s also the small matter of *being schlepped* a great distance at great speed... (Kuitenbrouwer 2005:A3)

In all five examples the woman is given an extremely passive role and presented as being at the receiving end of men’s actions. In Fairclough’s (2003:141) terms of participant types, men are represented as the actors in these sentences, while women are represented as the affected. It appears almost like women were likened to objects lifted and carried by men, and this impression is further reinforced by using verbs like *haul*, *lug*, and *toss* which are normally associated rather with inanimate objects. With *lug*, for example, one quickly thinks about lugging a suitcase rather than a woman, or, with *toss*, there is the connotation of throwing something carelessly, which one would not normally do with a human being. Furthermore, in examples (3) and (4), the phrases *lug her for lager* and *carry her for gold, glory, and grog* give the impression that the woman is simply a means for getting one’s hand on the prize and that she is traded for the glorious prize of beer. In example (5), the woman’s passive role is even more distinct since the process concerning her, *being schlepped*, has been passivised and in doing so female agency strongly backgrounded.

In fact, there are also examples of the woman being explicitly turned into an inanimate object. In some of the texts the relay race run before the World Championships has been mentioned and the woman's role in it described as shown by examples (6) and (7):

(6) There's also a relay, with the *female baton passed* among three men... (Stubbs 2005:C7)

(7) In the modern event, there is also a team competition in which *the wife is used as a baton* in a three-man relay race. (Hartston 1997)

In these two examples the 'wife' is metaphorically referred to as *a baton* simply being passed from one man to another, which does not really lend any active role to her. In addition, the use of passive in talking about the 'female baton' being passed or used reinforces the woman's passive role in the process. In summary, it seems like men's performance and efforts in carrying their 'wives' are in some extent manifested in the data while women are backgrounded and not granted an active role at all. This is perhaps why one tends to get a rather masculine picture about wife carrying from the present data in general. Both backgrounding, as one type of exclusion, and passivation have been identified by Fairclough (2003:145) among the choices one can make in representing social actors.

At this point one could perhaps argue that it is due to the rules prohibiting women from carrying men that they do not have an active role in wife carrying, and that this might be reflected in the media as well and in the different discourses about wife carrying in them. However, despite being represented more like passive participants on the paper, in reality women definitely are not just mere burdens to their carriers, but need to play their part as efficiently as possible, even though in a somewhat different manner compared to men. Tiina and Jouni Jussila (as quoted in Henley 1997:9), the holders of the Finnish record, defended women's role in wife carrying back in 1997, when Mr. Jussila confirmed that "she can't just sit there, she has to adjust her weight constantly" because gaining a mutual rhythm is vital. His wife, Tiina, added that "the most important thing is that the woman must not laugh. If she starts laughing, then it's all over". Therefore, succeeding in wife carrying rests as much on the woman's shoulders (though not literally) as on the man's shoulders. And this was in 1997, a year before introducing the Estonian carry, which, according to McNally (2001, emphasis original) "had the added benefit of making the 'wife' a more active participant" since it is not exactly that easy to be hanging upside-down on the carrier's back, simultaneously trying to conform to his rhythm.

6.3.3 Weight discourse

Another very interesting issue around wife carrying is the carried one's, i.e. the woman's weight. It is obviously one of the most important factors in a sport like wife carrying, where a smaller 'wife' usually equal better odds of winning. The organisers, however, have added a small and clever twist to this: part of the prize is the woman's weight in beer. Hence, 'the lighter the woman, the better' approach might work for better odds of winning, but not for the grand prize. Besides the curious connection between woman's weight and the first prize, the question of minimum weight has also received relatively much attention in the English-language press. Moreover, while women as participants are often referred to in terms of their weight, men are referred to in terms of their strength and other athletic characteristics. All these issues together create another intriguing discourse, the weight discourse.

First off all, in talking about the participants, that is, men and women, slightly different modes of representation have been used. While men have been mainly characterised by their strength and athleticism, the most commonly used attributes for women have something to do with their weight, whether it is disclosing their exact weight or using adjectives such as *light*, *lightweight*, *small*, or *tiny*, most of them indeed coming from the lighter end of the scale. Curiously though, nouns and verbs carrying connotations of mostly heaviness are also frequent in the data especially in the representation of women. For instance, women have been referred to as *human baggage* (Duffy 2004:22), *female cargo* (Stubbs 2005:C7), as a *strain* (Henley 1997:16), and even as being like a *backpack* (Tate 2009:45), none of them exactly flattering to women. All the above mentioned words and phrases imply heaviness in some degree and hence they implicitly refer to the weight of the women. Moreover, with references such as *baggage* or *cargo* women are, in Fairclough's (2003:146) terms, in a way impersonalised. Similarly, verbs like *lug*, *haul*, *hoist*, or *heft*, that have been frequently used to describe getting the female participant to the carrier's back, carry strong connotations of heaviness as they all mean 'carry or lift something heavy'. Therefore, they contain as well implicit references to weight contributing to the general impression of women being talked about mainly in terms of their weight. In short, women are often represented in terms of being a considerable *baggage* or a *strain* for the men carrying them by referring to them with words signifying a remarkable 'load'. This was interesting to notice because many of the female contestants are actually very slim and thus perhaps not so easily thought

of as a heavy burden, although to the carrier the required 49 kilograms can certainly feel like a heavy load.

Men, on the other hand, have been represented mainly in terms of their athletic characteristics, especially strength. The wife carrying men are in the data of the present study *strong, fit, big, burly, or brawny* and as the Finnish champion Jouni Jussila (as quoted in Hartston 1997) confirms, they need “speed, strong legs, and as small a wife as possible”. Unlike with women, the attributes to men do not as expressly refer to their weight, but to their physical strength as well as athletic and muscular characteristics. This kind of slightly differing representation of the two participant groups might, of course, partly derive from the fact that a couple consisting of a strong man and a lightweight woman is the optimal combination in the end. Descriptions such as “a man-mountain and willowy slip of a thing” (Bleach 2007) are quite illustrative of this combination. Or, calling men “really fit, young sportsmen” and women “as light as grasshoppers” (Keränen, as quoted in Huuhtanen 1998:25) illustrates well the terms in which both men and women have been represented throughout the data. Another significant difference in representing the participants is that not even once in my data was a woman granted the status of an athlete, whereas “male athletes” are talked about in a few occasions (see e.g. *The Washington Times*, 3 July 1996, p.A2; *The Glasgow Herald* 25 May 2002, p.6). When it comes to referring to the winners, the winning *couple* is frequently used, but in here too the word *champion* seems to be attributed more often to males than females.

The discussion about how little exactly can the woman weigh heated up especially after the race in 2001 when the female Estonian champion weighted as little as 34 kilograms. The Estonians had revolutionised wife carrying only a few years earlier with their new carrying position and this time they managed to create controversy by showing up with an even lighter ‘wife’. In a way, the Estonians are credited not just for their efficient carrying style, but also for initiating the trend towards choosing lighter and lighter women to carry. This is how Foley (2001) describes the debate around a suitable weight in the *Irish Independent*:

On the subject of World Championships, and yes, it’s not exactly an Olympic event, but nonetheless all sports experts should be au fait with the sensational controversy which has struck the ‘World Wife-Carrying Championships’ in Sonkajarvi [*sic*]. When Margo Uusorg (20) lifted Birgit Ullrich (18) and sprinted around the obstacle course to their second title in a row it caused a bigger flood of objections than your average transfer

night at a GAA [Gaelic Athletic Association] County Board meeting. You see Birgit only weighs 5st 5lbs! And the organisers, agreeing that the Estonian couple have an unfair advantage, have decided to impose a 6st 8.5lb minimum wife-weight restriction from next season. (Foley 2001.)

As this passage from Foley (2001) illustrates, it was Birgit's extremely low weight that stirred up the discussion about the fairness of the whole competition. It is, naturally, neither fair nor equal starting point if some of the competitors are carrying women that are considerably lighter than the rest of them. McNally (2001) also agreed that the missing weight limit was "a big weakness" and that giving everyone an equal chance of winning "would restore some credibility" to wife carrying. The organisers, as Foley (2001) tells, however, acknowledged this and set up a minimum weight for women in 2002. The limit was set to 49 kilograms, according to the weight of a former Finnish beauty queen Armi Kuusela when she was crowned Miss Universe (Thurow 2003:2.)

Interestingly enough, in the world of wife carrying it seems to be perfectly acceptable to talk about a woman's weight and even to disclose their exact weight publicly, something that most people usually consider a sensitive issue to talk about. This, however, makes sense considering the crucial part that the weight plays in the competition and, besides, the weight of beer won reveals at least the winning wife's weight. As mentioned earlier, the prize also adds a clever twist to the competition creating this conundrum between the woman's weight, winning and the prize. The prize adds an extra layer to the issue of weight, in a way keeping it on the surface year after year. Here is how Nolan (2007:D3) describes the conundrum in *The Hamilton Spectator*:

One of those petite little creatures whom other women love to hate makes a lighter load and, subsequently, a faster run and a better chance at the grand prize – the wife's weight in beer. Ergo, the tinier the woman, the less grand the prize. A good sturdy woman, shall we say wholesome, decreases a couple's odds of winning but yields a lot more beer if they do. (Nolan 2007:D3.)

This extract from Nolan's (2007:D3) article illustrates quite well the dilemma of choosing the 'wife' to carry: the heavier she is, the better the prize, but at the same time the odds of reaching that prize diminish. One would perhaps expect men to have slightly heavier women on their backs in the hope of gaining more beer, but it seems in fact quite the contrary: for many of the contestants winning, and consequently choosing a lighter woman, is the ultimate goal no matter what the quantity of beer won in the end.

6.4 Representation of Finland and the Finns

Staging an international event is often an excellent chance for the host city to promote not only itself, but also the host country to the wider world through the international media reporting the event. Usually the hosts see in this an opportunity especially for tourism and thus wish to raise the awareness of their country, its culture and people and to show what the host city in particular has to offer for travellers. Quite often certain themes and values fitting with the nature of the event are also promoted to enhance positive images about the country and the nation. Consequently, in many cases an international event becomes a vehicle for the organisers and the country to ‘show its best’. These kinds of events are magnificent opportunities especially for smaller and less known places and countries as they might not get visibility at the world stage so easily. As stated in chapter 2.1, wife carrying and especially the imaginative and cheerful picture it creates about Finland has been taken advantage of in promoting the country. The co-operation between the Finnish Tourist Board and the Wife Carrying Ltd has been no doubt important and profitable to both parties since wife carrying is one of the most widely spread Finnish events. For these reasons it was seen useful to take a brief look at what kind of picture does the English-language press coverage about the Wife Carrying World Championships give about Finland and the Finns. Considering the nature of the wife carrying event, it is particularly interesting to see how the country and the natives are portrayed in relation to such an unusual and humoristic event. In the next three chapters I will first discuss how Finland is represented in my data and then turn to the representation of the Finns that will be discussed through two most prominent discourses: the Finns as experts in ‘weird’ sports and the protagonist-antagonist layout between the Estonians and the Finns.

6.4.1 Bits and pieces of Finland

One of the most surprising findings concerning especially the representation of Finland in the present data was how little any information about the country was in fact provided. The location of Finland, for example, was provided in only few texts, and not very precisely in these either. It is of course possible that Finland’s location on the world map has been considered common knowledge, but this might not always apply, especially in the more distant countries (USA, Canada, and Australia). The little

information that the data explicitly gives about Finland is, in addition, quite trivial and does not offer very insightful views to the country. Instead of explicit information and facts, any kind of image of Finland as a country comes predominantly more implicitly in and around the representation of the wife carrying event and its surroundings – especially Sonkajärvi, the host village – and in the representation of the Finns. Though not much information can be deduced from these either and the overall image of Finland is rather scarce and fragmented.

The most often mentioned place in Finland within the data is naturally Sonkajärvi, the village hosting the Wife Carrying World Championships. Sonkajärvi has been frequently referred to as a *village*, which probably gives a more truthful picture about its size for foreign newspaper readers than the term *town*, which has also been used to refer to the place a few times. Officially Sonkajärvi has not been granted the status of a town, but, with its current 4561 inhabitants (Väestörekisterikeskus 2012), it is referred to in Finnish as *kunta* ('municipality'). A village is usually perceived to be smaller than a town and on the countryside and therefore it defines Sonkajärvi better than the term *town*. However, even the host village does not receive much coverage in the English-language newspapers, and the little that is mentioned about Sonkajärvi concentrates mainly on the surroundings of the wife carrying arena, depicting "the course in a rough forest clearing" (*The Canberra Times*, 8 July 2002), maybe mentioning the 10, 000-seat stadium built for the race, or the fact that everything is happening on the grounds of the village school.

Where a more precise location for Sonkajärvi has been given, it has been mainly defined either in relation to Helsinki, the capital of Finland, or to the Arctic Circle. In the latter case Sonkajärvi has been situated *near the Arctic Circle* (e.g. Gordon 1995, Ringle 2002:C1) or *a few hours' drive from the Arctic Circle* (e.g. *The Washington Times*, 3 July 1996, p.A2). These kinds of definitions are obviously rather rough since in reality Sonkajärvi is more than 400 kilometres from the Arctic Circle, which is not exactly very 'near'. I do not think anyone living in Sonkajärvi or nearby would refer to it being anywhere *near the Arctic Circle*, but it needs to be kept in mind that the points of reference are different for the Finns themselves than for someone living a bit farther away from the Arctic Circle. However, definitions like the above ones may be misleading and might result into Sonkajärvi being incorrectly associated more with Northern than Eastern/Central Finland, where it is located. Still, taking Helsinki or the

Arctic Circle as points of reference in defining Sonkajärvi's location in foreign press makes sense because they are probably the two places in Finland most commonly known by foreigners.

In spite of being frequently mentioned in the data, there is hardly any further information about Sonkajärvi available. This is because often it is briefly mentioned only as the locale for the Wife Carrying World Championships without any further information about the village or other possible places to see in there, for example. Although the location of the village in Finland, as explained above, has been provided in quite a few articles, even this information is missing in the majority of them, and the reader gets informed simply that the event takes place in Sonkajärvi, Finland. Furthermore, in a few cases Sonkajärvi was not mentioned at all. These were mostly shorter texts where it was only stated that the Wife Carrying World Championships are organised in Finland, without any reference to Sonkajärvi. One reason for this might be that because Sonkajärvi is such a small place and unknown to most foreigners, it is easier to leave it out and just say the event takes place in Finland.

It was surprising to find out that the Sonkajärvi County Fair, as part of which the Wife Carrying World Championships are held, was mentioned in only a few articles out of the whole data (see e.g. Considine 2005, Stubbs 2005:C7). In these cases, too, nothing else was really mentioned about the county fair except that it provides a sort of framework and setting for the wife carrying race. Nowadays the county fair is a two-day event, from Friday to Saturday, and wife carrying is one part of the fair with lots of other things happening during the two days as well. Unfortunately, this is not mediated very well in the English-language press coverage of Finnish wife carrying, as the focus is almost exclusively on the main wife carrying contest, while the context and setting in which it all happens has been mostly omitted. It is of course largely true that the Wife Carrying World Championships is “the crowning event of the Sonkajarvi [*sic*] County Fair”, as Considine (2005) puts it, and that it is the main reason for most of the foreigners to arrive to Sonkajärvi during that particular weekend. Over the years the focus has also shifted more on competing in wife carrying, but at least for many local people also the fair around the event offers plenty of other interesting things to see.

Although Sonkajärvi as a place to visit does not offer as many tourist attractions as some other and especially larger towns would, there are still a few worth visiting. One might think that some of them would interest the international visitors as well, but at least the international media does not seem to be too interested in them since virtually all potential places of interest in and around Sonkajärvi are missing in the present data. One of the tourist attractions in the village that might interest also foreigners is the International Bottle Museum with a collection of about 6000 bottles from all over the world (Kansainvälinen pullomuseo n.d.). The museum did get mentioned within the data, but in only one article out of the total of about one hundred. Hartston (1997) advises in *The Independent* not to miss the International Bottle Museum while in Sonkajärvi for the Wife Carrying World Championships, telling briefly about the collection in the museum. Besides the International Bottle Museum, there is for example the architectural attraction of Jyrkkäkoski Ironworks (History of Jyrkkäkoski n.d.), where one can still see blast furnaces from the 1830s used to produce pig and bar iron, nails and other cast iron products. Moreover, Volokinpolku, a 30-kilometre hiking route, could be an option for additional sports and a good introduction to Finnish nature. Furthermore, larger towns and cities close to Sonkajärvi can be easily accessed and offer more possible places to visit. However, with the exception of the International Bottle Museum mentioned once, none of the other places to see in Sonkajärvi or Northern Savo region have been brought up in the coverage of Finnish wife carrying.

In fact, it seems often as if the place, both the country and the village, was largely unimportant. My data seems to support the observation made by Pietikäinen (2000a:106) about Henley's (1997:9) article on wife carrying that what seems to be important is the fact that a sport like wife carrying actually exists, not the fact that it exists in Finland. The main interest is indeed in wife carrying itself with its funniness, while the location is left on the background. Therefore, not much information is being passed either about Sonkajärvi or Finland, and the little that is told, comes merely through small items embedded within the coverage of the wife carrying contest and of the Finns. Danner (1997:73, 91), O'Donnell (1997:137), and Boyle and Monteiro (2005:231) found some similar results of the location of a major international sporting event being largely irrelevant in international press. O'Donnell (1997:137) describes Norway being "present merely by implication as the site of the [Olympic] Games, and even then in a very indistinct way" in Scottish tabloid press, and this is basically the situation with Finland in the English-language press covering wife carrying.

It is, of course, highly probable that the scarcity of information about Finland and Sonkajärvi is in part also due to the chain of mediation that media texts often undergo. As the results of some of the previous studies on media sports events discussed in chapter 4.3 demonstrate, even if certain images and themes were promoted along with these events by the organisers and host cities, the re-interpretation of these images in the media might differ from the intended ones or they might not even make their way through the chain of mediation (O'Donnell 1997:153, 155; Smith 2005:229; Starck 2007:71). Nevertheless, I think there is room for more conscious promoting of both Sonkajärvi region and Finland together with wife carrying since, at the moment, Finland as a country and Sonkajärvi as the village hosting the event are not really profiled in any significant way in the English-language press coverage of the event.

In discussing the concept of ideology, Särkkä (1999:23) makes the important point that in addition to what is explicitly reported in media discourse, the things left untold are also significant. Indeed, often it is the case especially in media discourse that what is left unsaid or implicit may also carry some ideological meaning. In the present study, however, the question of whether the scarceness of information about the host country and village might have some ideological implications is not as straightforward due to the type of texts: the data consist of 'soft news' as opposed to 'hard news'. 'Soft news' offer more choice and freedom for the writer than the more factual 'hard news' and in them the question of what should have or could have been there is more open to interpretation. Furthermore, as many of the texts belong to the 'curiosity' category, one might ask whether it is so surprising in the end that images of Finland and Sonkajärvi are for the most part missing. Of course, completely ignoring the whereabouts of the Wife Carrying World Championships and not mentioning Sonkajärvi at all or being laconic about the location might give the impression that Finland and Sonkajärvi are of little importance and not very interesting from the point of view of English-language press. However, I would be wary of reading too much ideological meanings to this, considering the overall nature of the data as not so serious. It is also significant from whose point of view the issue is looked at: what seems missing for a Finnish reader may not seem missing for a British, American or Australian reader. After all, we all read and interpret newspaper articles through our own national and cultural frame of reference.

6.4.2 The Finns: experts in weird sports

They carry their wives, sit on ants, throw milking stools, boots and mobile phones – here in the home of weird world championships, participants will do just about anything to win their offbeat crowns. (Flak 2008a:2, Flak 2008b:A2).

The above quotation is from Flak's (2008a:2, 2008b:A2) article published both in *The Edmonton Journal* and *The Globe and Mail* and it illustrates quite well one of the most distinctive discourses about the Finns within the present data: that we are apparently perceived as sort of experts in 'weird' sports because Finland happens to be "home" of so many strange sporting contests. It is true that after introducing wife carrying back in 1992 many new and unusual events have found their partisans and place mostly in the Finnish summer, and today dozens of peculiar sporting events are organised annually in several Finnish towns and villages. It seems that the international media have also noticed the rise of these eccentric competitions, and in several articles from the data it is, in fact, mentioned that wife carrying is far from being the only bizarre competition in Finland with listings of some other similar tongue-in-cheek events. Bleach (2007) observes in the *Sunday Times* that "over the past few years, Finland has become the world capital of unlikely world championships", which is actually quite true. Not many other countries seem to have such a great number of unusual championships, not at least annually.

In some of the articles in which the Finn's love of unconventional sports is brought forward there is also some discussion about possible reasons for their high number as well as about their potential for tourism, for example. In a few articles the rise and success of both wife carrying and other unusual championships have been seen as sort of a sign of the Finns coming out of their shells and showing another, more humorous and extraordinary side of themselves. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from Bleach's (2007) article:

They [the Finns] don't have a reputation for being a barrel of laughs. The most admired virtue here is *sisu* – strength in adversity. Honest, tough and reliable, they are. Sought-after dinner-party guests, they're not. But there are signs they're starting to lighten up. Over the past few years, Finland has become the world capital of unlikely world championships. ... This makeover of the national character seemed worth investigating. (Bleach 2007; emphasis original).

In his article about participating in the Wife Carrying World Championships with his wife, which the above extract comes from, Bleach (2007) wonders why picturesque

Finland stays “virtually unvisited” in the middle of Sweden, Latvia, Estonia and St. Petersburg, all of which he calls “sexy holiday destinations”, suggesting finally that the Finns’ reputation as sullen and unsocial, as described in the extract above, might have had something to do with this. However, Bleach (2007) seems to take the Finns’ fondness for bizarre and funny sports as an indication of going to the opposite, lighter direction. Furthermore, he sees in these contests potential even for a “makeover of the national character”. Likewise, Fouché (2005:4) also seems to believe in the image-effecting potential of these bizarre contests in suggesting that competing on a world level in, for example, mobile phone-throwing “could go a long way to spice up Finland’s image as a country populated by introverted Kimi Raikkonen [*sic*] clones.” In here Fouché (2005:4) clearly uses “Kimi Raikkonen [*sic*] clones” metaphorically to refer to the Finns as reserved and quiet, or as she herself puts it, “introverted”, suggesting that the eccentric competitions might in fact add a lighter and a funnier side to Finland’s image.

Seemingly a certain clash has been noticed between the normally reserved Finns and all these more or less bizarre championships that require a good sense of humour while throwing oneself into the craziest activities. Stark (2004:C8), for example, makes it quite clear in the *Montreal Gazette* that when speaking about ‘weird’ and amusing contests, the Finns might not be the first in one’s mind. He also ponders some reasons for Finland having become the home of so many contests of this kind. Consider the following passage from his article:

Yet for some reason, sober Finland seems to be the locale of choice for a fair number of exotic competitions. ... Maybe it’s all an attempt to put Finland on the map. ... Or it could be that too much sobriety and solidity have finally gotten to the Finns. The New York Times recently featured an item on how therapists have started giving workshops to try to open Finns up. ... In part because of their ‘keep it all in’ nature, the Finns have among the highest rates of suicide and alcoholism in the world. (Stark 2004:C8.)

In here Stark (2004:C8) first of all implies that Finland and “exotic competitions” do not usually mix on the first thought because of the Finns being perceived as “sober” and “solid” rather than letting it all loose in all these crazy contests. This implication is reinforced by starting the first sentence with “yet for some reason”, as if it was surprising that it is Finland where these kinds of strange competitions are organised and as if the reasons for this were somewhat unclear. As the above example from his article shows, Stark (2004:C8) does not take the reasons he presents as obvious, but rather as

different possibilities, which is shown by the use of modal adverb *maybe* and modal verb *could*. He, in a way, juxtaposes all the sobriety (here meaning ‘serious’ and ‘sombre’), solidity and “keep it all in nature” of the Finns with all the excitement, eccentricity and wittiness that goes into the numerous “exotic competitions”. In fact, he reckons that these contests might be so popular partly because they offer a light relief for the Finns from all the seriousness and introversion.

Flak (2008a:2, 2008b:A2) also writes that according to the “normally reserved Finns” themselves, contests with a touch of silliness causing a rise in the adrenaline level provide the best way to rejoice the summer that does not last too long at the northern latitudes. In here, too, a certain juxtaposition between the ‘reserved’ and the ‘silly’ Finns is discernible, but the sentence also reveals another possible reason for the high number of these contests in Finland – the fairly short summer period following a long and dark winter. The Finns seem to have a craving for light summer silliness and getting together, and this has been explained by the Finns themselves in a few articles by wintertime being so dark and depressing for many of them. Fouché (2005:4), for instance, quotes Matti Wuori, by now deceased Finnish author and columnist, in *The Guardian* explaining that “in winter, we’re very masochistic, we nurse our own little depressions, so in summer, we need to get together”.

Slightly contrary to the Finns being perceived as serious and stolid, yet another reason offered a few times for their reign in unusual sports is their capability of self-irony and making fun of themselves. After all, a competition in wife carrying, mobile phone throwing or playing air guitar would not be possible without a good sense of humour and being able to laugh not just to the others, but to oneself as well. Fouché (2005:4) quotes both the Finnish producer of the air guitar world championships and the British ambassador to Finland, both agreeing that the Finns’ “healthy sense of self-irony” definitely plays a part in their domination of all things ‘weird’. Equally, in a short paragraph at the end of the editorial from *The Vancouver Province* (27 August 2008, p.A18), in which the Finns are told to be winners in offbeat summer sports (rather than succeeding in the Beijing Olympics), it is also noted that “the Finns’ love of weird world championships reflects their fondness for self-mockery”. Maybe it is precisely because of their good ability of self-irony in the midst of otherwise sober character that makes such a good ground for bizarre competitions; when the Finns do get out of their solemn mood, they are not afraid of making fun of themselves.

6.4.3 Protagonist-antagonist discourse

The Finns might be considered experts in untraditional sports and this theme might be quite visible in a number of articles in the present data, but this does not mean they would be invincible in their own games or rule them without any opposition from the other nations. Wife carrying is a perfect example of the contrary because for a whole decade, between 1998 and 2008, the reigning champions have not been the native Finns, but the neighbouring Estonians. In addition, over the years of Estonian supremacy a rivalry – at times even a heated one – has built up between them and the Finns. This is illustrated clearly in my data as well by a specific protagonist-antagonist discourse where the Estonians play the part of the former and the Finns that of the latter.

The Estonians have been winning the Wife Carrying World Championships since 1998 when they introduced the famed Estonian carry, and they are the only foreign nation that has been represented in the contest every single year with the highest total number of contestants between 1997 and 2012 (see Appendix 1). During the 21st century the Finns have been trying to win the crown back from them year after year, not managing to do that until 2009. In fact, Estonian supremacy has been such that it has prompted a few comparisons to other nations well-known for their reign in other sports. In the *Irish Times*, McNally (2001) declares that “Estonians are to wife-carrying what Kenyans are to middle-distance running”, and both Stark (2004:C8), from the *Montreal Gazette*, and Perry (2004), from *The Seattle Times*, have likened Estonia’s supremacy in wife carrying to that of Brazil’s in football as well as Canada’s in ice hockey. These kinds of comparisons place the Estonians in a good and skilled company and in them wife carrying has been equated with the traditional sports of running, football and ice hockey, thus adding a little more sports-value to it.

The Estonian success has been mainly explained by their revolutionary method for carrying their wives. This is how Thurow (2003:A1) describes the takeover of the new and improved carrying style in *The Wall Street Journal*:

Estonian men turned up in this little farming village lugging their women upside-down five years ago, and the sport of wife carrying hasn’t been the same since. Suddenly, gone were the glory days of piggyback carry, the fireman’s carry, the wrap-around-the-shoulders carry. The “Estonian carry”, as it was dubbed, was in. (Thurow 2003:A1, emphasis original.)

The above excerpt nicely captures the effect of the ‘Estonian carry’, that is, how it so suddenly “changed” the whole sport of wife carrying and surprised the Finns with its effectiveness, making wife carrying perhaps even a bit more sports-like than before. Furthermore, the new carrying style did not surprise only with its efficiency, but also with the fairly controversial position. Sure enough, my data also include some references to and descriptions about the position with some sexual connotations. Bleach (2007), for example, in presenting the different holding positions, explains the ‘Estonian carry’ as follows:

Or there’s the Estonian position. It’s hard to describe – you end up sounding like *More Joy of Sex* – but basically the wife hooks her knees over the man’s shoulders, drapes herself down his back and peers forward at the world from between his legs. ... The ergonomic advantage is huge. (Bleach 2007.)

In here Bleach (2007) refers to Comfort’s (1973) *More Joy of Sex* suggesting that the Estonian position sounds and looks like a very intimate affair. Admittedly, the carrier and his ‘wife’ are getting quite familiar when using this technique, but nowadays it is a widely used and approved method, and at least among the ‘wife carrying community’ it does not really generate that many jokes or blushes anymore. Of course, when seen or heard about for the first time, it is easy to imagine why it seems a bit strange and dubious. But as Bleach (2007) also acknowledges, the Estonian position brings an advantage because it enables a better and mutual rhythm for the carrier and the carried one and it leaves the carrier’s hands totally free.

All in all, from many of the articles in the data I got the impression that the Finns were in a way defined in relation to the Estonians and their supremacy as the underdogs in wife carrying. Although this is rarely directly indicated, for instance headlines like “Estonians Steal the March From Finns in Odd Sport” (Thurow 2003:A1-A2) or “Estonians run off with the wife-carrying title yet again” (*The Canberra Times*, 8 July 2002) and lines like “the Estonians ... are once again expected to be the victors” (Higgins 2003:A1) somehow give the reader the impression that no matter how hard the Finns (or the other nations) try, they always seem to lack behind the Estonians. Before 2009, that is, when they finally got the crown back and have been holding onto it since then. Michael Toohey, an American having participated in the Wife Carrying World Championships, and quoted by Thurow (2003:A1), compares the Finnish wife carriers to the Boston Red Sox saying that “people root for them, but they sort of know they won’t win”. Thurow (2003:A1-A2) also illustrates another reason that might have

slightly contributed to the Estonians winning year after year. He writes about Toohey going over the day of the race and realising just how seriously the Estonians take wife carrying, seeing them warming up early in the morning. To this, Thurow (2003:A2) adds that “the Finns, on the other hand, apparently just want to have fun”. This illustrates quite well the seriousness of the Estonians and the more laid back attitude of the Finns, especially at the early stages of the rivalry between the neighbouring nations. Over the years, however, particularly one Finn, Taisto Miettinen, got more serious about winning the competition, trying to catch the Estonians year after year and finally succeeding in his mission in 2009. Since then the Finns have again reigned in wife carrying and Miettinen with Kristiina Haapanen, his current ‘wife’, are the latest wife carrying world champions (Results 2012).

7 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to survey the extent in which the Wife Carrying World Championships were covered in the English-language press and to take a closer look at the representations of the competition itself, of the participants, and of Finland and the Finns within this press coverage. Attention was paid especially to discernible discourses in the representations. The data consisted of 103 articles and news items about Finnish wife carrying from American, Canadian, British, Irish, and Australian newspapers, and it is a representative sample of the English-language press coverage of the event. The data were collected in the spirit of random sampling as no previous research on the press coverage of wife carrying was available. However, as I got the opportunity to access the article collection in the Wife Carrying Headquarters for part of the data and had been closely associated with the event from the very first years, I was able to use this background information to loosely guide further data searches. Besides articles retrieved from the headquarter collection, the data mainly came from the online versions of the newspapers.

Since wife carrying and other extraordinary sports events have been subject to few studies previously, the present one fills one gap in this field. Due to the lack of previous research on similar events, my study drew upon research on larger scale and more normal sports events. Besides media sports events, this study also drew upon previous research on Finland's image in the English-language press since one of the aims was to examine how were Finland and the Finns represented in relation to wife carrying. In this field, too, the present study shed some light from a novel point of view as Finland's image in and around international press coverage of wife carrying – or any other competition alike – had not been studied before. In addition to some content analytical tools from previous sports studies, the main framework for analysing the data was provided by Fairclough's (2003) approach to critical discourse analysis and especially his outline for analysing discourses and social events. By paying attention to word choices, metaphors, what was said and what left unsaid and how social actors were talked about, the emerging discourses and representations could be identified and analysed.

The results of this study clearly show that Finnish wife carrying has been quite widely covered in the English-language press since 1995, though the focus was noticeably more on British, American and Canadian newspapers than Irish or Australian papers. The fact that so many different newspapers (48 in total) have covered the Wife Carrying World Championships over the years speaks for a wide interest towards the event abroad, and the fact that it has been covered more or less every year since 1995 indicates the continued and still continuing interest towards Finnish wife carrying. Keeping in mind that the present data is just a random sample, as such it is even more illustrating of the scope of the coverage as a more profound study into the press coverage of the event would probably mount up to much higher number and dispersion of texts. At the same time, however, this width of the coverage appears to be a symptom of the highly scattered nature of the data. The results suggest that Finnish wife carrying is not covered exactly continuously in any of the English-language newspapers, but rather periodically as within a single newspaper texts about wife carrying were not so numerous. Furthermore, the informational content of the data seemed to be fairly repetitive with 'basics' of wife carrying and emphasising similar themes. This was also partly influenced by the fact that there were a few clusters of pretty much the one and the same text coming from a news agency and just published in different papers.

Generally, the data could be divided into four categories according to the focus and length of the texts. There were clearly two dominant categories subsuming most of the texts. In category one texts the focus was solely on Finnish wife carrying whereas in the second category the Wife Carrying World Championships were brought up in just one part of the text, usually a compilation of news stories or a list of some kind. The third category, with considerably fewer texts, included articles about 'weird' Finnish contests in general, wife carrying being one of them. Lastly, there were a few texts in which Finnish wife carrying was brought up extremely briefly merely just as an aside of some kind.

The Wife Carrying World Championships were represented mainly through three different discourses: humoristic discourse, sport status discourse, and historic discourse. Especially the humoristic discourse was rather pervasive throughout the data, though this could perhaps be anticipated due to the role of humour in wife carrying and the fact that it is most often presented as a curiosity and featured largely as lighter news. Much of the humour seemed to arise from the fact that wife carrying is in fact taken seriously,

especially since it all started as a bit of a joke. However, having been launched as a humorous show number in the first place seems to legitimise the overtly humoristic approach to wife carrying. Although wife carrying is often depicted as ‘crazy’ and ‘weird’, this is mostly done in a positively humoristic tone rather than ridiculing the sport. This was an interesting result compared to Starck’s (2007:65-70) findings about the Air Guitar World Championships that were seen in Anglo-American press more as embarrassing and ridiculous than fun.

The prevailing humoristic tone in the data also appeared to partly affect the sport status discourse in that it often seemed to trivialise the potential of wife carrying as true sports. In fact, wife carrying was seen in the English-language press as quasi-sport, that is, hovering somewhere between sport and non-sport. The increased sense of seriousness and competitiveness that today go into wife carrying in certain extent lend it perhaps slightly more sportsmanship, but still, instead of being perceived as real sports, it is rather seen more as funny or silly sports. Starck (2007:60-70) found out that despite being ridiculous and because of being sports-like with training and performing well and being represented with several sports metaphors, competitive air guitar was seen as “essentially a sport” in the Anglo-American press. As was shown in the analysis of the sport status discourse (chapter 6.2.2), with wife carrying also some sports-like features were evoked, such as training, dressing accordingly, and attention to rules, but not in such a great extent, and most of the time wife carrying was opposed to mainstream sports one way or another.

The third discourse in representing the Wife Carrying World Championships was the historic discourse stemming from the origins of the competition, and it of course makes sense to background and explain such an unusual event for foreign readers. The tale of Ronkainen the Robber and/or the tradition of wife stealing were reproduced in many of the articles and news, although in a few cases these had apparently been mixed up. It has also been brought up a few times that the local legend and tradition are in fact honoured by the Finns and by some of the contestants.

In analysing the representation of the participants to the wife carrying contest attention was directed to them as men and women as they naturally form a ‘wife carrying team’ together. Indeed, the relationship between men and women was one of the most prominent themes throughout the data, with parallels drawn between getting through the

wife carrying course together as a team and real life relationships. The name of the race being *Wife Carrying Championships*, this was often referred to with the rule of “may be your own, the neighbour’s or you may have found her farther afield” (Rules n.d.), i.e. not needing to be a proper wife at all, and, accordingly, images of a ‘fake marriage’ were evoked. In this sense, wife carrying in a way perhaps challenges the traditional definition of marriage, although rather playfully. Moreover, the roles of both sexes in wife carrying created a whole discourse about gender equality as questions of political correctness were raised. A great deal of this discussion drew from the official rules prohibiting women from carrying men as it is a *wife* carrying competition.

Curiously, even though the question of gender equality is frequently brought up in the data, the language used in some of the articles and news when talking about the participants seems to at times support the notion of wife carrying as rather masculine. As was shown in chapter 6.3.2, women tended to be portrayed more as passive participants and in the case of relay even directly talked about as a *female baton*, hence foregrounding men’s performance in wife carrying. In the case of air guitar, Starck (2007:68-69) found out that in British newspapers it was also depicted as masculine and “something only men would do”. In the Air Guitar World Championships, though, masculinity comes from a prevailing male-dominant participation, while in wife carrying men and women are obviously equally represented, but still it seemed to be portrayed more as masculine in the English-language press. Furthermore, women were frequently referred to in terms of their weight whereas men more in terms of their athletic characteristics. The issue of woman’s weight created, in fact, a discourse of its own, due to the debate around the weight limit and the curious connection between the woman’s weight and the prize.

Taking a closer look at the representation of Finland and the Finns within the press coverage of the *Wife Carrying World Championships* resulted in the somewhat surprising finding that any kind of clearer or structured image of Finland as a country was in fact largely missing and that Sonkajärvi, the hosting village, was not really profiled either in any greater extent. The newspaper reader might have been simply informed that the event takes place in Sonkajärvi, Finland, without any further information about the location. Moreover, the little information that could be inferred especially about Finland was merely small bits and pieces embedded in the coverage of the *Wife Carrying World Championships*. Hence, besides scarceness of the information

about the host country, it was also mostly implicit. The interpretation, also supported by Pietikäinen (2000:106), made of all this was that since it seemingly is the phenomenon of wife carrying that is important and interesting, the location where it happens does not matter so much. Danner (1997), O'Donnell (1997) and Boyle & Monteiro (2005) came up with similar results, as their studies show that even in the case of larger scale media sports events images of the host country and of its culture can be limited and in some cases the location of the event can even be largely ignored. Such results suggest that even though Finnish wife carrying is quite widely covered in the English-language press, not much and certainly not very insightful information is necessarily mediated about Finland in and around this coverage.

The Finns, in contrary, were more clearly represented through a few prominent discourses. First, they were portrayed as experts in 'weird' sports because Finland happens to be the locale for a good number of strange competitions. The Finns being stereotypically perceived as reserved and stolid, the takeover of peculiar and 'crazy' sports events was seen as a sign of them lighting up and showing a new, more humorous side of themselves. In certain extent, the Finns' new character as masters in untraditional sports was seen as challenging the stereotype of the 'serious Finn'. In spite of being considered experts in their own games, the Finns were often represented in relation to Estonians as underdogs in wife carrying. This stemmed from the Estonians' century long reign in wife carrying and the rivalry between the neighbouring nations over the wife carrying crown. The Estonian success was mainly credited to their efficient carrying style as well as their slightly more serious take on wife carrying compared to the Finns.

The results of this study offer an introductory view to the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships in the English-language press, and as such quite well represent the general nature of the coverage. However, as the data were not designed to be comprehensive in the first place, but merely just a cut-through of the coverage, the results do not necessarily tell the whole truth. Had the data been larger and data search more systematic, it is highly possible that some new and different points of view might have turned up. Moreover, the interpretation of the results is my own, and someone else might have come to slightly different conclusions. The problem with analysing media texts is that they can be read and interpreted in various ways, and sometimes the reader

might attach meanings to a newspaper's article that are different from the ones the journalist intended.

Data collection and deciding the scope of the data search was somewhat problematic since wife carrying was largely an unstudied area and therefore it was hard to tell in the beginning how large the coverage might be and where to go for optimal data. As one of my aims was specifically to examine the possible extent of the press coverage of wife carrying, I did not want to narrow down the data search too much and thus decided to gather a random sample from the English-language newspapers. As the results of this study show, the coverage seems to focus more on Anglo-American as well as Canadian press, and for a more focused and systematic data search for example British and American press might be a reasonable choice. Also, critical discourse analysis as the chosen theoretical framework seemed to work more on a general level rather than providing specific tools for the analysis, and it probably works better in 'hard news' than in 'soft news'. Since the gender issues and the relationship between men and women proved to have such a prominent role in the representation of the participants, it might have been useful and insightful to look at gender studies as well, instead of or in addition to critical discourse analysis.

For future reference, the questions of gender equality and political correctness around wife carrying would certainly be worth of deeper studying as it seemed to generate a lot of interesting discourse and this study has only commented on main points rather superficially. In addition, it would be interesting to see whether the coverage of the Wife Carrying World Championships and the themes in it have changed diachronically. Borrowing from Starck's (2007) approach, also in wife carrying examining the official messages and values, i.e. those implemented by the organising bodies, and comparing them to the ones in foreign press coverage would shed some light into whether the intended values have been notified. Finally, if any of the other unconventional contests, either in Finland or elsewhere, were covered in international press, it would be interesting to compare their coverage to that of wife carrying.

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Appendix 1. Foreign participants in the Wife Carrying World Championships 1997-2012 (persons/country)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
Estonia	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	6	7	6	4	3	3	4	3	82
USA				1	2	3	2		6	3	9	7	6	2	8	1	50
the UK		1			1	2	3	2	2	7	4	13		1	1		37
Germany	4	2							2	1		5	2	2	5		23
Ireland							2	2	2		1	1	5	7	1	1	22
Australia				1						2	2	4	2	2		2	15
Norway	1	2		4	3	2											12
Canada			2					2	2					2			8
Denmark						2	2						2				6
Lithuania														4	2		6
Poland														2	4		6
France									2	2	1						5
Israel												2			2		4
Italy									2			2					4
Russia											2					2	4
Sweden		2										1	1				4
Czech Republic													1			2	3
Greece				3													3
Japan				1							1		1				3
Korea				2											1		3
Austria											1	1					2
France/USA														2			2
Spain											2						2
South-Africa											2						2
Switzerland	1	1															2
USA/Morocco										2							2
Belgium									1								1
Holland						1											1
Iceland																1	1
Mozambique											1						1
Total	12	14	8	18	10	16	15	12	25	24	32	40	23	27	28	12	

Source: <http://www.eukonkanto.fi/fi/Tulokset.html> (accessed 8 July, 2012)