A nexus analysis of reading the news in a second language: Exploring media and cultural literacies among Finnish learners of English

Joshua M Ward
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Faculty of Humanities
University of Oulu
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# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

2. Research methodology and materials .......................................................................... 5
   2.1 Nexus analysis methodology .................................................................................. 5
   2.2 Summaries of selected news stories ...................................................................... 7
       2.2.1 FOX News .................................................................................................. 8
       2.2.2 ABC News .................................................................................................. 9
       2.2.3 CNN .......................................................................................................... 11
   2.3 Structure of interviews with students ..................................................................... 12

3. Theoretical frameworks and background ..................................................................... 14
   3.1 Sociocultural view on language and learning ....................................................... 14
   3.2 Media literacy ....................................................................................................... 17
   3.3 Cultural literacy ..................................................................................................... 22
   3.4 Journalistic practices and ideologies ................................................................... 24

4. Results and analysis .................................................................................................... 28
   4.1 Establishing a zone of identification .................................................................... 28
   4.2 Analysis of news stories ....................................................................................... 29
       4.2.1 Sites of engagement, watching videos and reading written text .................... 29
       4.2.2 Information and ideology in discourse ......................................................... 34
       4.2.3 Historical contexts ....................................................................................... 42
   4.3 Interview results .................................................................................................... 47
       4.3.1 Social media and media literacy practices ...................................................... 47
       4.3.2 Student views on objectivity and bias in media discourse .............................. 54
       4.3.3 Student reflections on formal and informal learning experiences .................. 59

5. Summary and conclusion .............................................................................................. 64

References ....................................................................................................................... 67

Appendices
1 Introduction

The contentious relationship between President Trump and the mainstream news media was an important topic in media discourse in the initial months of his presidency in 2017. Public discussion over the topic gained momentum as Trump frequently referred to several of the prominent news outlets of the country as “fake news” in tweets, speeches, and press conferences. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show two prominent tweets from Trump attacking the mainstream US news media.

![Figure 1. Trump tweet (Trump, 2017a).](image1)

![Figure 2. Trump tweet (Trump, 2017b).](image2)

Such a contention between the President and the press is not entirely unprecedented in American media culture. For example, President Obama criticized the journalism of FOX News as “one television station entirely devoted to attacking [his] administration” (CNBC, 2009) that had “a very clear, undeniable point of view” which he disagreed with and represented a journalistic tradition
of using its position as a news agency to intentionally promote its views (Wenner, 2010). However, Obama also defended the role played by a free press in a healthy democracy when journalists ask questions that hold the president accountable and encourage them to remain transparent in their decision making (CNBC, 2009). What is different in the “fake news” label as used by Trump is its potential pragmatic implications: using the label against legitimate news agencies insinuates that their intent is to mislead and misinform, thus use of the label can be viewed as an attempt to undermine honest criticism of the government in order to assert hegemony over public opinion.

In recent years the use of the term “fake news” has been largely pejorative, denoting text containing misinformation that is presented as factual journalism with the intent to mislead readers or lure their attention for monetary gain (Berghel, 2017); however, “fake news” has also been used in media studies and the entertainment industry to denote satirical comedy presenting social critique through journalistic rhetorical patterns.

An example of manipulative fake news can be seen in a list of the five most widely engaged discredited news headlines on Facebook prior to the November 2016 US Presidential election: “Pope Francis Shakes World, Endorses Donald Trump”; “WikiLeaks Confirms Hillary Sold Weapons to ISIS”; “It’s Over: Hillary’s ISIS Email Just Leaked & It’s Worse Than Anyone Could Have Imagined”; “Just Read the Law: Hillary Is Disqualified from Holding Any Federal Office”; and “FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide” (Berghel, 2017). A partisan political agenda is evident in these headlines, and such a use of falsehood to manipulate voter opinion is widely held as unethical and as presenting a potential threat to fair and democratic discourse.

In contrast to manipulative fake news, the satirical work of comedians such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert has been presented by a number of scholars in media studies as an example of socially positive “fake news”. Meddaugh (2010) discusses the social impact of popular news satire programs such as The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and The Colbert Report in the opening decade of the century, holding Colbert as “a critic of the press, as well as a unique site of media literacy education.” Borden and Tew (2007) argue that Stewart and Colbert, while contributing to media
ethics through their imitation of journalists, do not fulfil the ethical role of journalism: Stewart himself supported this view by rejecting the “journalist” label and insisting on that of “comedian”.

The term “fake news” has thus been used to refer to a rhetorical strategy aimed at exploiting or manipulating opinions as well as to comic satire aimed at presenting social critique, imparting “fake news” with both negative and positive connotations. Is a text meant to inform, and if so is the information presented accurate? More importantly, is the text meant to sway the opinion of the reader, and if so towards what conclusion and, perhaps most importantly, to what end? Learning to discern the underlying validity, message, and intent of a text is an important aspect of developing media literacy, a key specific aim of modern educational curricula (Opetushallitus, 2014; Opetushallitus, 2015).

The contention between Trump and the mainstream news media thus highlights an important challenge in the modern digital information age: How does an individual determine the accuracy and reliability of information and identify potential sources of bias in texts? This question is central to the academic areas of Media Literacy, New Media Literacy, Digital Literacy, Information Literacy, etc. (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011). Citizens of the 21st century encounter information faster than ever before and require the ability to process it accordingly, but research suggests that these skills are currently lacking, at least in the United States. Results from a recent Stanford University study of American schools at three levels suggest that: 80% of surveyed middle school students misidentified a native advertisement as an actual news story; more than 80% of surveyed high school students failed to adequately question the authenticity and reliability of a photograph posted without a citation of its source; and more than two-thirds of surveyed undergraduate students failed to fully explain how the political agendas of a source may influence the content of a tweet (Wineburg, McGrew, Breakstone, & Ortega, 2016). Multimedia literacy and critical thinking are central educational goals in the Finnish national curricula (Opetushallitus, 2014; Opetushallitus, 2015).

The current work aims to illustrate the application of the nexus analysis methodology to study perceptions and habits of students in the social action of reading online news stories in English. The news stories analyzed in the study were shared on Facebook, an important modern social
media tool for distributing news and information. I selected and analyzed three reports covering a common event, the evacuation of the Oceti Sakowin protest camp, the site of a months-long protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline by the indigenous Standing Rock Sioux tribe and their supporters. The analysis considers the discourse features of the reports, metacognitive and social aspects of the interpretation process, and the historical bodies of myself and six advanced English language learners. The analysis addresses six research questions based on the nexus analysis methodology that are important to the critical assessment of journalistic texts and relate to the language learning goal of developing media literacy. What social actions are important in the process of reading news reports online? What discourse features are employed in the selected news reports? How do these discourse features reveal potential social or political biases in the texts? How do second languages learners perceive intercultural differences in discourse practices when reading news in the second language? What social practices do the students take in the nexus of practice of reading news online? What learning experiences do the students recall in their historical development of their literacy practices?

Section 2 presents the nexus analysis methodology used in the study, a summary of the structure and contents of the three news stories selected for the data set, and the structure and collection of the interviews with students. Section 3 establishes the theoretical framework underlying the data analysis and a brief survey of relevant previous research. Section 4 presents the data analysis, beginning with the process of selecting the news stories via social media, which is followed first by an analysis of the news stories and then by an analysis of the interview data. Section 0 presents a summary discussion and conclusion.
2 Research methodology and materials

The current work follows the nexus analysis methodology, which is an ethnographic methodological strategy that aims to understand social actions through discourse analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Section 4 will present the data collection process following the nexus analysis methodology, from establishing a zone of identification in the nexus of practice (section 4.1) to engaging the nexus of practice through an analysis of my own reading and interpretation of the news stories as well as through interviews with English learners (sections 4.2 and 4.3). In the current section, section 2.1 will introduce the nexus analysis methodology, defining the key concepts, terminology, and goals of the analysis and describing the three stages of analysis. Section 2.2 will summarize the structure and content of the three news stories selected for the study. Section 2.3 will present the structure and rationale of the interviews.

2.1 Nexus analysis methodology

A social action is an action, such as reading a news report, that is recognized as action by others in a social network (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). When a social action is performed repeatedly it can be recognized as a social practice (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). A series of social actions or social practices situated within a certain time and place, for example, logging into Facebook and reading a news report, form a site of engagement (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). A regularly repeated site of engagement constitutes a nexus of practice, which is the central concept of nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). To clarify the distinction between a site of engagement and a nexus of practice, the sentence, “I read a news report on the internet” would represent a site of engagement, a singular and specific instance of the social action; whereas the sentence, “Reading news reports on the internet reflectively is an important life skill” would represent a nexus of practice, a reference to the routine practice of the social action. A nexus analysis is ethnographic in that it seeks to enrich the understanding of a nexus of practice through active participation in the nexus of practice within the social network. This participation occurs within a zone of identification, a place within the social network where the researcher can observe the nexus of practice through patterns in the surrounding social discourse (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

Beyond merely cataloging and describing the social actions that make up a nexus of praxis, the goal of nexus analysis is to understand the social motives and historical factors that have
contributed to the development of the nexus of practice. This aspect of nexus analysis, understanding the motives for participating in the nexus of practice, is referred to as motive analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Why an individual participates in the practice in the manner they do is shaped by social and historical factors comprising their historical body, the various habits and tendencies developed over the course of one’s lifetime (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). This aspect of historical body is reflected in the larger framework of social constructivist learning theory, which considers the contribution of social norms and practices to the formation and development of an individual’s mental constructs for understanding and interacting with the world. It is important to note that while a nexus of practice is considered a social phenomenon – a set of social practices is performed in certain ways in certain contexts by members of the society – there is also an individual component to consider as each individual possesses a unique set of motives and mannerisms, which are influenced by his or her unique historical body. Individual viewpoints, the viewpoint of the subject or subjects as well as the viewpoint of the analyst, thus need to be considered in a motive analysis. The adjustment of the scope of the analysis to study different points of view in motive analysis is called circumferencing (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Finally, it is important to remember that the eventual aim of motive analysis is not to find a “true” motive, but rather to propose interpretations or explanations of why participants perform social actions in a nexus of practice in certain ways.

A nexus analysis centers around three main tasks: engaging the nexus of practice, navigating the nexus of practice, and changing the nexus of practice (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). These three tasks involve “a close analysis of not only what is said (ethnographic content) but how (discourse analysis) and why (motive analysis)” it is said (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Engaging the nexus of practice involves identifying a suitable zone of identification in which the analyst can take part and observe the social discourse surrounding the target nexus of practice. Navigating the nexus of practice involves identifying discourse cycles, historically repeated patterns of discourse and social actions that are important to defining and shaping the nexus of practice. Changing the nexus of practice involves applying insights obtained from the analysis to influence the nexus of practice to enact social change. These three tasks are not necessarily performed in this order: for example, engaging the nexus of practice requires some initial navigation of discourse patterns to establish a zone of identification (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).
In summarizing the activity of engaging the nexus of practice, Scollon and Scollon recommend: *start where you are.* The important thing is to try to make sense of where you are and what you are in relationship to the issue you are studying. The rest of the connections will develop very soon in this process. At that point you can then move on to navigating the nexus of practice which is the main work of a nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 83).

This aim, making sense of where I (an American now residing in Finland) am in relationship to the issue of teaching (American) media literacy to (Finnish) students in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting, is the first general aim of the current work. In an initial stage of engaging the nexus of practice, I identify and characterize key discourse markers in the texts, social actions I take in reading and interpreting the texts, and elements of my own historical body that are useful points for continuing the study with Finnish students of English in a navigation of the nexus of practice. Through interview conversations and collaborative reading of the texts collected in my initial engagement, I then note social actions taken by the student participants in viewing and interpreting the texts, differences in their historical bodies and motives, and consider the influence of these differences on their social actions.

### 2.2 Summaries of selected news stories

The research data set for the current work consists of online news stories shared through links on the popular social media platform Facebook and interviews with six Finnish learners of English. The current section will summarize the three news stories selected for analysis, first establishing the common elements and structure of the news stories and then summarizing their contents.

For clarity, it will be useful to define the terms that I will use to refer to the different elements of the news stories throughout the analysis and discussion. Each *news story* consists of a *Facebook post*, the text shared on the social media platform by the respective news agency, and a *news report*, the text published on the agency website. Figure 3 shows one of the Facebook posts examined here, which contains a *post video* and a short *blurb* (“Dakota Access pipeline protesters set fire to their camp ahead of today’s deadline to evacuate the area or face arrest. http://fxn.ws/2Ioz275”) promoting and linking to the news report. *Comments* from other users in
the social media network appear below the Facebook post. The linked news report contains a video report and a written news article.

Figure 3. Facebook post from one of the examined news stories (FOX News, 2017a).

2.2.1 FOX News

The first news story in the dataset was shared on Facebook by FOX News with the blurb, “Dakota Access pipeline protesters set fire to their camp ahead of today's deadline to evacuate the area or face arrest” (FOX News, 2017a). The blurb was accompanied by a post video depicting a structure engulfed in flames in the background behind a native teepee. Figure 3 presents this Facebook post.

The text of the linked news report (FOX News, 2017b) is preceded by a video report from FOX News television coverage in which the correspondent on the scene explains the situation. The studio anchor introduces the story by describing “tensions running high” at the protest camp with
“activists setting a huge fire as they fight to stay with a deadline to clear the site just hours away” (FOX News, 2017b). The on-the-scene correspondent points out that the fires were intentionally set and reports that the reasoning behind setting the fires was that the camp would be easier to clear away as ash rather than be dismantled. The correspondent goes on to state that “the protesters lost when Donald Trump won” (FOX News, 2017b), mentioning President Trump’s order to continue construction of the pipeline, overriding the order to halt construction signed previously by President Obama.

The correspondent presents the evacuation plans as civil and “humane”: an “amnesty bus” was arranged to transport protesters to hotels where they would receive paid stays and subsequent paid travel to their homes (FOX News, 2017b). The correspondent also reports official plans for a “ceremonial arrest” as a photo opportunity for protesters to share on social media, whereas “the hardcore guys” who want to show they “lost the war, but don’t regret the fight” could stay and be charged with a crime if they want (FOX News, 2017b). There is a statement from one of the protesters, whose voice is trembling as he talks about being “terribly sad, ...not just about the pipeline thing”, but also because the native “people have been pushed around for centuries” (FOX News, 2017b). The correspondent again presents the evacuation as “the humane thing to do” because the protesters are “broke” and the camp is “a dump” built in a floodplain that would soon be underwater anyway as the snow melted away in coming weeks (FOX News, 2017b).

The accompanying text of the written news article, attributed to the Associated Press, claims in the opening paragraphs that the burning “was part of the ceremony of the leaving” and describes the protesters as praying (FOX News, 2017b). These two details are missing from the video report, which presents the burning as a practical decision rather than a cultural or spiritual one as the text suggests. The text emphasizes the civil nature of the evacuation process at the time as presented in the video.

2.2.2 ABC News

The ABC News Facebook post video depicted burning structures in the camp, shown from several vantage points, with a blurb mentioning the ceremonial aspect of the act: “Dakota Access Pipeline
protesters conduct ceremonial burning of camp structures ahead of deadline to vacate protest site” (ABC News, 2017).

In the linked news report on the ABC News website, the anchor in the video report initially describes “a fiery scene” with “demonstrators ceremoniously burning their tents before state and local authorities start to clear the area” (Winsor & Hill, 2017). The demonstrators are identified as Sioux, “fighting not only for the purity of their water source, but also for respect” (Winsor & Hill, 2017). The reporting correspondent states that demonstrators were ceremonially setting fire to the camp, “preferring to burn it rather than have it seized and destroyed” (Winsor & Hill, 2017). A police officer says on camera that the arrests were being made with the intent of cleaning up the camp before the coming flood. As he is speaking, the visual cuts to images of uniformed police officers wrestling protesters to the ground and handcuffing them. The video report then presents a summary of the protest, which “has lasted nearly a year” with “sometimes heated clashes with authorities” with the intention of blocking the construction of the pipeline on reportedly sacred land, which could also, they say, pollute their drinking water (Winsor & Hill, 2017). Clips of protests from various cities are presented to show the nationwide support for the protestors, who “call themselves ‘water protectors’” (Winsor & Hill, 2017). There are clips of native protesters beating drums by the Cannonball River opposite a line of police officers at the top of a hill that, according to the claim of one protester, is a traditional burial ground. The video report then goes on to present the legal dispute regarding the 1851 treaty that established the Sioux reservation and the restructuring and reclamation of land that has occurred since then. The indigenous tribe claims that the US government has encroached on their land, in violation of this treaty.

The video report includes clips of police firing tear gas at protestors and comments from some of the young natives at the camp as evidence of some of the “heated clashes with authorities” in which the demonstrators reported approximately 300 were injured and 26 were hospitalized (Winsor & Hill, 2017). These scenes of the show of force by the government are followed by “what appears to be a stunning reversal” as the Army Corps of Engineers announced the decision to refuse the easement needed to build the pipeline (Winsor & Hill, 2017). The demonstrators are seen celebrating and crying, and a young “indigenous person” is shown saying that “it feels good to be acknowledged as a human being” (Winsor & Hill, 2017). “But it is a short-lived victory” as
recently inaugurated President Trump is shown signing a memorandum expediting the continued construction of the pipeline (Winsor & Hill, 2017).

The written news article accompanying the video report (Winsor & Hill, 2017) summarizes the events of the day before transitioning to a more detailed account of the background events of the protest. The dispute is presented as both a legal contention over land ownership from the points of view of both parties as well as an infringement of constitutional religious rights from the point of view of the tribe. Viewpoints and statements from both sides of the dispute are presented as quotes and attributed by name.

2.2.3 CNN

CNN promoted its news story (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017) on Facebook with a post video of protesters marching out of the camp to the beat of drums and native chanting, captioned with the blurb: “About 100 protesters chanted and waved flags while voluntarily marching out of the Standing Rock protest camp ahead of the deadline to evacuate” (CNN, 2017).

The video report at the top of the linked news report on the CNN website opens with a summary of the events of the evacuation. The majority of protesters reportedly left the camp voluntarily and peacefully, while some remained behind. The studio reporter states that “some protesters have been setting fire to their own camps either because they did not have enough time to break them down or because the tents are, quite frankly, frozen to the ground” (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017). The correspondent on the scene depicts some of the evacuees as crying as they marched from the camp, and then gestures to the camp in the background, farther away than usual because “law enforcement pushed us away” to make room for their cars in the evacuation operation (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017). The correspondent mentions that both the authorities and the tribal council reportedly wanted people to leave, because the camp is “a wet, muddy mess” in the floodplain (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017). This is followed by a short clip from an interview with a tribal member, reportedly one of the last to leave at that point, who says that he fears for the safety of those who had decided to remain and were negotiating with the police. The correspondent then reports the ceremonial aspect of setting the fires, burning structures to allow
them to return to the earth when the tribe relocates. She mentions a television, unplugged because of lack of electricity in the camp, but decorated with a sign: “it said, ‘the revolution will not be televised’ – I beg to differ” (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017). The video report draws to a close as the studio anchor mentions that the protests “have not only been emotionally charged, but...also quite financially costly”: $22 million in expenses for the local sheriff’s department “if you listen to what law enforcement has said” according to the correspondent, and $8.7 million for the National Guard response according to the infographic displayed at the bottom of the screen (“ND NATL GUARD: PROTEST RESPONSE COST $8.7 MILLION”) (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017).

The accompanying news article focuses on the smoothness of the evacuation as most of the protesters volunteered to leave, citing a tweet from the local sheriff’s department and a quote from the Governor of North Dakota in a reported news release as supporting evidence. The law enforcement officials are described as “patient” when “confronted by ‘agitators’ who approached”, an opinion attributed to a spokesman for the North Dakota Highway Patrol (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017). Officials offered travel assistance and accommodations to those who volunteered to leave. The text states that the Standing Rock Sioux tribe also “repeatedly asked protesters to leave for safety and environmental reasons” as melting snow threatened to flood the floodplain (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017). The news article closes with a brief summary of the pipeline project, the dispute over the easement and the environmental risks, and the legal dispute over the land ownership and tribe’s treaty rights.

2.3 Structure of interviews with students

The above summaries reflect my own initial observations of the three news stories selected for focus in this study, but as part of the nexus analysis methodology I also invited other participants to engage and navigate the nexus of practice collaboratively with me in order to gain additional insight into social practices of reading the news. Each interview consisted of two parts: the first part was an open-ended interview loosely following a semi-structured plan, which is provided as Appendix A; and the second part was a collaborative interpretation of the three news stories summarized in the above section. The total interview data set consists of six interviews, each approximately two hours in duration.
I collected audio and video recordings of the interviews by smart phone and camcorder, respectively. I relied primarily on the audio recordings in the analysis. The video recordings helped capture relevant gestures to the computer screen while discussing news reports, which could help make sense of any indefinite references (e.g., identifying which report is being referred to by the phrase “this one says”). Time logs of each audio recording indexed the timepoints of questions posed to the interviewee and a summary of answers. Analysis of these time logs revealed themes which were used to select sections of each interview for detailed transcription.

All interviewees were ethnic Finns and first-year university students majoring in English. As the interviewees were advanced language learners, the news stories were in English, and the research topic was their engagement with English as second language users, we conducted the interviews in English; however, to help ensure that the participants were able to communicate abstract ideas, I did encourage and employ code switching to Finnish to promote clarity. Transcript excerpts presented in the results and analysis of section 4 are thus direct quotations rather than translations, excepting minor edits for conciseness (to display statements most relevant to the analysis and discussion while maintaining context) and clarity (omitting interjections, particles, etc. that did not contribute significantly to the message). Code switching to Finnish is maintained in the transcriptions with utterances in Finnish italicized as foreign words. Signed consent to record the interviews was obtained from each subject with assurances that their anonymity would be maintained and that the recordings would be kept confidential and deleted upon completion of the research thesis. To ensure anonymity, I refer to each participant by a pseudonym (Aino, Emma, Jenna, Antti, Laura, or Sara) when presenting quotes and insights.
3 Theoretical frameworks and background

In addressing the research aim and questions outlined in section 1 and the nexus analysis methodology introduced in section 2, the analysis in section 4 will draw on theoretical concepts from sociocultural theory, metaliteracy, cultural literacy, and journalism ethics. Applying the nexus analysis methodology within these theoretical frameworks, the analysis will consider what actions I and the interviewed English students took while reading online news stories, what discourse practices we noticed in the reports, how we identified and interpreted these discourse practices as readers, and how our social and historical backgrounds have potentially shaped those practices and interpretations.

This section will introduce important concepts from each of the abovementioned theoretical frameworks and summarize previous research relevant to the current work. The presentation will begin with theoretical considerations of sociocultural views of language and learning in section 3.1, address more specific sociocultural and educational views on literacy in section 3.2, explore aspects of cultural literacy and language learning in section 3.3, and conclude with a discussion of journalistic ethics, ideologies, and practices in section 3.4.

3.1 Sociocultural view on language and learning

The overarching research paradigm of the current work is based in social constructivism and sociocultural theory, which originates from the psychological work of the Russian cognitive psychologist Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1962; Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015). Central to sociocultural theory is the notion that knowledge is constructed socially and influenced by societal norms and patterns of behavior. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development theory describes learning as a process of acquiring increasingly advanced competence as the learner advances from the ability to perform a task (for example, express a thought through language) to the ability to perform a task that is just slightly beyond their previous ability (for example, express the thought more precisely through a new word or more complex linguistic structure). These levels of ability are viewed as zones of development expanding outward from a core zone of basic competence to zones of ever increasing competence and self-regulation (Lantolf et al., 2015). The learning process is facilitated by an expert–novice social interaction between more knowledgeable experts, teachers, or peers who can help guide the novice learner from the current zone of development to
the next, proximal, zone of development (Vygotsky, 1962; Lantolf et al., 2015). While the individual develops their own cognitive constructs for processing information in the world in advancing from one zone of development to the next, this development (learning) is influenced and shaped to a certain extent by the social environment through factors such as social norms, social practices, and views and habits of the teachers and peers in that social learning environment.

Sociocultural theory forms part of the paradigmatic foundation of Finnish education, as reflected in the national curriculum:

Learning occurs in interaction with other students, teachers, experts, and communities in different environments. Learning is diverse and bound to those actions, situations, and cultures in which it occurs. (Opetushallitus, 2015, p. 14)

This social interaction, by its social nature, is subject to the historical context and social norms that guide their behaviors and views of the world (Vygotsky, 1962; Gee, 1996). These historical contexts, social norms, and the practices they shape are reflected, for example, in curricula, not only in visible curricula, the codified norms written in curricula documents, but also in hidden curricula, the unwritten norms guiding actual social practices in the classroom, and preactive curricula, the underlying beliefs and values shaping how the visible curricula are written (Turunen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2013).

The above depicts learning as the process of building and developing mental constructs – patterns and routines of thought through which an individual interprets the world and communication – is influenced by their social interactions with others and with the social learning environment. Sociocultural theory refers to mediators of this social influence on learning, theoretical connections between these social interactions and the learning process, as discourses.

Social discourses mediate influences of the social environment on learning (Gee, 1996; Lankshear, & Knobel, 2011). Gee characterized (big ‘D’) Discourses as “composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing with other people and with various objects, tools and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognisable identities engaged in
specific socially recognisable activities” (1996, p. 171). He distinguished between “primary Discourses”, which are experienced early in life in the sociocultural setting of the family and “constitute our first social identity” and personal values (Gee, 1996, p. 187), and “secondary Discourses”, which are experienced as part of the socialization process in “various local, state and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialisation” that influence our public practices and identities (p. 188). These conceptualizations of social interaction introduce social contexts in which identity, how one views themselves and their place or role in a social environment, is formed or influenced by Discourses in those contexts.

For example, Turunen et al. (2013) discussed how discourses in curricula documents reflect how the child (as learner) and adult (as teacher) are perceived and the roles and interactions between them are officially defined in the educational system. They performed a discourse analysis of Finnish pre-school curricula from 1996 and 2000 which demonstrated a paradigm shift in the national education system from viewing children as natural learners requiring opportunities for learning that can be provided by a teacher to viewing children as immature humans requiring the guidance of a teacher to develop the skills required in adulthood (Turunen et al., 2013). Nikula (2005) highlighted how learners’ perceptions of and engagement with English were affected by differences in discourse practices between Finnish CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classrooms, where English is used as an instructional language to teach a subject, and traditional Finnish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, where Finnish is used as an instructional language to teach English as the subject. She concluded that students in CLIL classrooms exhibited “a greater sense of personal investment and immediacy” when trying to understand topics in English, using more first-person expressions placing themselves and their personal interests as the subject of discourse than their counterparts in traditional EFL classrooms, who tended to use more third-person expressions placing the characters and topics of the course materials as the subject of discourse (Nikula, 2005, p. 54). Leppänen and Nikula (2007) observed that in “Finnish CLIL classrooms, the students’ knowledge of English, which at times exceeds that of their teachers, seems to provide them with a sense of expertise that has relational implications: it diminishes the asymmetry between teacher and student roles and it provides the students with greater conversational rights than would be normal in foreign language classrooms”, further
illustrating how differences in classroom discourses impacted social interactions between teachers and learners (p. 368).

3.2 Media literacy

The 1970s saw a rise in the development and popularity of sociocultural theory in language studies and the social sciences which strongly impacted how literacy and practices of handling texts were conceptualized and understood during the 1980s and 1990s (Gee, 1996; Lankshear, & Knobel, 2011). As alluded to in the introduction, literacy is a pluralistic concept in modern academic circles, which has led to a number of specialized academic concepts such as New Literacy, Media Literacy, New Media Literacy, Digital Literacy, Information Literacy, etc. (Gee, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Mackey & Jacobson, 2011). Gee begins an argument that literacy is fully integrated with and inseparable from overall social practice by writing that

literacy surely means nothing unless it has something to do with the ability to read. ‘Read’ is a transitive verb. So literacy must have something to do with being able to read something. And this something will always be a text of a certain type. Different types of texts (e.g., newspapers, comic books, law books, physics texts, maths books, novels, poems, advertisements, etc.) call for different types of background knowledge and require different skills to be read meaningfully. (1996, p. 47)

Thus, literacy is not just the ability to read and extract the meaning of a text, but the ability and knowledge to identify how to properly read a particular type of text in a given context. Literacy is a social practice in which the reader uses their background knowledge, familiarity with text genres, reading habits, beliefs, agenda, etc. to interpret a text that was generated by the writer through their background knowledge, familiarity with text genres, writing habits, beliefs, agendas, etc. The statement that different skills and knowledge are needed to read different text types also reflects the pluralistic nature of literacy, which gives rise to the need for discussing the nature of literacy practices. Discussing the evolution of the concept of literacy as the ability to read and write to the concept of new literacies, Lankshear and Knobel “define literacies as ‘socially recognized ways in which people generate, communicate, and negotiate meanings, as members of Discourses, through the medium of encoded texts’” (2011, p. 33).
Considering the task of learning or developing literacy – or more specifically for this thesis, learning to read modern online journalism – the metaliteracy framework of Mackey and Jacobson (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011; Mackey & Jacobson, 2014) offers some useful theoretical concepts that supplement and clarify the sociocultural paradigm. The prefix “meta” here represents the idea of using concepts and language to explicitly describe a phenomenon of interest. Developed as part of research in information processing theory, metaliteracy represents “a way of thinking about one’s own literacy” in order to understand and critically self-assess one’s own strengths and competences in reading (Mackey & Jacobson, 2014). This theoretical view places the individual at the center of the social environment, surrounded through engagement with the social network by an incoming and outgoing flow of information that must be cognitively processed. Metacognition, or rationalized self-awareness of this cognitive processing – of one’s understanding of how they interpret and understand information encountered in social networks as well as process their own internal thoughts to form messages for contribution to social networks – helps the learner rationalize his or her participation in the collaborative construction and exchange of social knowledge and plan strategies to improve in this participation.

Multimedia literacy and critical thinking are central educational goals in the Finnish national curricula (Opetushallitus, 2014; Opetushallitus, 2015). Critical thinking is highlighted as a key trait of an educated and productive member of society in the mission statement of the secondary education curriculum:

The mission of secondary education is the strengthening of comprehensive general knowledge and abilities. In secondary education general knowledge and abilities consist of the values, information, attitudes and volition, which aid individuals capable of critical and independent thought in acting responsibly, acceptably, socially and successfully. (Opetushallitus, 2015, p. 12)

The national curricula discuss media literacy in conjunction with the broader concept of multiliteracy, which is listed as a key cross-curricular theme, one of the socially important interdisciplinary pedagogical challenges and transverse competences reflecting current social values which are to be fostered by the educational process (Opetushallitus, 2015).

Multiliteracy refers to the skills to interpret, produce, and evaluate texts in different forms and contexts. Media literacy is a part of multiliteracy.
Multiliteracy is grounded in the concept of general knowledge and abilities, which considers texts as verbal, visual, auditory, numerical, or kinesthetic symbolic systems or their combination to form a whole. Multiliteracy supports the development of thinking and learning skills and deepens critical literacy and language awareness. Different literacies develop through instruction in all subjects. (Opetushallitus, 2015, p. 38)

Thus, helping students develop the ability to interpret, assess, and analyze information from a wide variety of media contexts and forms and apply that information responsibly in a variety of contexts in their daily lives as a responsible and productive member of society is a central aim of the educational system in Finland.

Exploring media usage from a cultural studies and media sociology perspective, Suoninen (2004) described what she termed “media language skills”, conceptually similar to “media literacy”, among Finnish young people ranging from 3 to 21 years of age, paying special attention to their “ability to select, use and interpret different media as part of their own lives” (p. 248). The theoretical distinctions between “media language skills” and “media literacy” are beyond the scope of the current work, but the overall model of media usage from the study provides a useful reflection of the different social practices influencing literacy processes. She classified media language skills into eight basic elements: being aware of the availability of different media; knowing enough about different media to rationally choose a suitable medium for a situation; being aware of personal needs and motivations for using media; having the technical knowledge and skills to use appropriate media; understanding the media language of particular media; knowing how to distinguish the reality of the real world from the fiction of the media world; knowing how media are produced and structured; and being able to evaluate media in terms of content and technical, aesthetic, and social values (Suoninen, 2004, pp. 248–251).

The focus of media language skills on the use of media as a part of daily life highlights the importance of extra-curricular experiences on learning. Taalas, Tarnanen, Kauppinen, and Pöyhön (2008) reported survey results acquired from ninth-grade students and their teachers across Finland regarding in-class and out-of-class media usage, characterizing differences in the
media landscapes of language learners and language teachers relevant to gaps between in-class teaching practices and out-of-class media literacy practices.

Dedicated learning sites are not very frequently used, but many of the sites the pupils visit are in other languages than their mother tongue. This fact alone is significant for foreign language teaching. The teachers’ free time media use is more instrumental and there is a practical purpose for most of the use: the Internet is for finding information, taking care of certain everyday chores (banking, checking timetables and filling in forms), whereas the pupils’ use is mainly social and relates to their hobbies. Online gaming is typical for boys mostly, the teachers play very little and more than half of the girls (60%) do not play either. The main divider between the teachers and their pupils lies notably in between the use and non-use of social media. (Taalas et al., 2008, p. 252)

The “divider between the teachers and their pupils” observation reflects the concepts of digital natives (such as modern students, members of a younger generation who have grown up with exposure to the Internet their entire lives) and digital immigrants (such as teachers, members of older generations who have learned to use the Internet later in life) and the potential for social disconnect between the two groups on the basis of their literacy practices (Prensky, 2001). This position views teachers as being less proficient than their students with the literacy practices those teachers are expected to help their students learn, resulting in an unproductive asymmetry of expertise in the expert-novice social interaction that potentially limits the effectiveness of the teacher in helping students progress to the proximal zone of development. Research has suggested that these gaps in teaching practices can be alleviated by taking advantage of this asymmetry through increasingly student-centered teaching practices that encourage students to develop learner autonomy and self-regulation by increasing their engagement with the subject and agentive identity (Nikula, 2005; Leppänen & Nikula, 2007; Kotilainen & Rantala, 2008; Taalas et al., 2008; Schofield & Kupiainen, 2015).

The concepts of agency (how one feels they shape or are shaped by social practices) and identity (how they perceive themselves as members of social networks) are important to the development of literacy through understanding one’s place in society and ability to participate in social practices (Gee, 1996; Suoninen, 2004; Kotilainen & Rantala, 2008; Wohlwend, 2009; Schofield & Kupiainen,
The development of agentive identity is a lifelong process beginning with primary Discourses of social interactions with family and childhood peers that give rise to one’s social identity which is then further shaped by secondary Discourses in social institutions such as the educational system (Gee, 1996; Suoninen, 2004; Wohlwend, 2009). For example, Wohlwend (2009) studied influences of gender discourse on the social identities of American kindergarten schoolgirls, considering Disney Princess toys and merchandise as identity texts and how gender roles depicted in their fairy tale narratives were reflected in social actions during classroom play and in picture book writing exercises. Agency and identity are reflected in this case by how the girls conformed to the idealized examples of the Disney texts or expressed their own sense of identity in their play and writing. Suoninen (2004) recognized the ability to distinguish reality from fiction as particularly important media language skill for young children to develop. A fictional text can reflect social values and practices, but it is also important for children to develop their identities and recognize how they can find or determine their place in society in the real world. An awareness of one’s own needs and motives for engaging with different media and the social roles, functions, and importance of those media is another important basic element of media language skills (Suoninen, 2004). In a study of the development of civic identity and media education in Finnish schools, Kotilainen and Rantala (2008) argued that the development of youth democratic participation can be fostered through media education that functions as a learning community, encourages students to participate in media production, and engages public audiences. Schofield and Kupiainen (2015) used a mediagraphy approach to examine Norwegian secondary students’ self-analyses of media usage and the evolution of media practices over four generations of their family histories, highlighting different students’ attitudes and approaches to viewing their own agency and identity and concluding that such self-reflection “can potentially help students develop an agentive identity in a time of insecurity, with rapidly shifting social and cultural conditions and increasing media density” (p. 79).

Scollon (1998) highlighted the importance of agency in literacy practices in a mediated discourse analysis study exploring news discourse as social interaction, in which he argued for viewing news texts as instruments of social interaction within multiple communities of practice rather than through the usual “false analogy of the sender–receiver or writer–reader model” (p. vii). In Scollon’s (1998) view, journalists write news texts to construct their social identities and
relationships to other members of journalistic communities, and readers or viewers demonstrate agency when they appropriate news texts “in accomplishing mediated actions within their own communities of practice as significant means by which identity is socially constructed” (p. 5). The reader demonstrates agency in this view by deciding what media to engage, how they interpret texts, and what they do with the information they obtain from them.

3.3 Cultural literacy
As the current work considers the literacy practices of Finnish learners of English engaging Anglophone journalistic texts in English a second language, aspects of cultural literacy are also important to the theoretical framework. Schirato and Yell defined cultural literacy “as both a knowledge of meaning systems and an ability to negotiate those systems within different cultural contexts” (1996, p.1). “Meaning systems” here refers to semiotics, to how individuals employ symbols (words, images, gestures, etc.) to encode ideas and information in communication with others, and similarly how others decode those symbols depending on the social or cultural context. Social or cultural contexts can vary both within a language (for example, regional dialects or subcultures) and between languages (for example, between Finnish and English).

Schirato and Yell (1996) described a context as a semiotic construct that helps individuals make sense of the world and depends on aspects such as “what is going on and where, those involved, the role of the text in that situation, the other texts (intertexts) which are related to this one, and the wider social and cultural context” (p. 51). Contexts are dynamic, differ depending on who is reading the text or who is generating the text, and can even change over the course of a text itself as perspectives or rhetorical strategies change to meet the evolving message, purpose, or communicative goals of the text. They referred to the discourse analysis work of Halliday, defining three dimensions of context: the field, the purpose of the communication or what the communication is about; the tenor, who is involved in the communication and the social relationships between them; and the mode, the rhetorical structure and language of the communication (Schirato & Yell, 1996). These three aspects of context and how they affect the communication of meanings in discourse will be referred to in the analysis.
Researchers at the University of Jyväskylä surveyed the perceptions of Finnish middle school language teachers (foreign and mother tongue) and their students regarding what aspects of new literacies they found important, how those aspects were taught, and how students use media in and out of school (Luukka et al., 2008; Taalas et al., 2008). This study compared practices and beliefs in first language and foreign language contexts, as well as in the contexts of school work and free time. The results of the survey indicate that skills related to media literacy are typically addressed primarily in first language classes, while foreign language classes focus more on linguistic and communicative goals. This suggests an expectation that students are readily able to transfer media literacy skills from their first language to foreign languages; however, discourse structures are interconnected with cultural norms and practices (Schirato & Yell, 1996; Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Each culture can have a unique set of discourse structures or rhetorical patterns for meaning making, and these rhetorical differences can possibly cause problems for second language learners (Rozycki, Nagelhout, & Connor, 2008).

The contrastive rhetoric, or intercultural rhetoric, framework has been used to study differences in rhetorical patterns between languages and how those patterns are used to construct meaning in different cultures, text genres, and social situations (Rozycki, Nagelhout, & Connor, 2008). Such intercultural rhetorical differences can possibly cause problems in second language acquisition even at advanced stages of learning. For example, in a qualitative analysis of academic literacy practices among Malaysian university engineering students, Wahi, O’Neill, and Chapman (2013) reported that, while the academic community presumed students possessed the skills to overcome their English literacy deficiencies upon entering the university, most students struggled to adapt to the second language rhetorical patterns and were still unable to communicate effectively and confidently in academic English at the completion of their studies.

Literacy practices have been shown to be influenced in complex ways by the different cultural environments and social contexts an individual is exposed to (Burns, 2003; Li, 2007; Pietikäinen & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2013). In an ethnographic study comparing adult foreign language learners’ reading practices in their first language (L1) at home and their perceptions of reading in the target language (L2) in class, Burns (2003) concluded that “[l]iteracy is intimately bound up with their lives outside the classroom in numerous complex cultural, social, and personal ways that affect
their L1 and L2 identities” (p. 23). Cultural differences between home and classroom environments can be particularly important and formative for children. In an ethnographic study of Chinese Canadian first graders who spoke Chinese at home and English at school, Li (2007) aimed “to examine the students’ reading and writing practices in school and at home and to understand the thoughts, beliefs, resources, and concerns of these children when they are socialized into different sociocultural discourses” (pp. 2–3), finding that the children faced a gap between the sociocultural gap between home and school, leading to the development of different social and literacy practices at home (in Chinese) and at school (in English), and that this literacy gap placed them at risk of future scholastic failure. Multilingual environments are not inherently detrimental to the development of literacy practices across languages, however, and can even foster cultural literacy. Pietikäinen and Pitkänen-Huhta (2013) studied multimodal literacy practices in multilingual Sámi classrooms in Finland, focusing on “what meaning-making resources are available for these children and how they make use of them while designing [multimodal] picture books” (p. 231). They highlighted three different orientations toward the books: one child recycled resources from the standard variants of the Sámi languages and iconic symbols to promote Sámi culture; a second adhered to the literary genre conventions of a children’s picture book; and a third demonstrated “imaginary mobility” crossing linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries to express future aspirations (Pietikäinen & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2013, p. 244).

3.4 Journalistic practices and ideologies
The final theoretical element considered in the framework of this study is journalism ethics and objectivity. Democratic society expects that ethical journalism be informative and objective, providing the public with the information needed to make informed decisions without manipulation that would bias the decision-making process toward a certain viewpoint (Ward, 2015). Traditional objectivity is reflected in six widely accepted journalistic standards: factuality (the presented information is true and accurate), fairness (rival viewpoints are presented in a balanced manner), non-bias (subjective interests do not distort the report), independence (journalists are able to report without interference), non-interpretation (the journalist provides only facts without inserting his or her own interpretation of the information presented), and neutrality and detachment (the journalist does not favor one side over another in the dispute) (Ward, 2015).
According to the pragmatic objectivity theory of journalist and philosopher Stephen Ward (2015), the last two of these traditional journalistic standards (non-interpretation, and neutrality and detachment) are the most controversial in modern practice: adhering to them, while providing the semblance of traditional objectivity, can possibly unethically mask bias. According to this view, it is impossible to completely eliminate personal perspective and historical background from an analysis of facts; therefore, it is justifiable for modern journalists to reflect their viewpoint, or bias, in their reports, but that bias should be declared or recognizable to the reader in order to report ethically. From the metaliteracy perspective, this recognition of bias is an important critical thinking skill to be understood and developed by the learner, and, applying Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development theory, it is important for the teacher to understand typical social discourse conventions that will reveal biases and aid the student in recognizing them in order to help the learner in this development.

Bias is an important concept to consider in this study because bias reflects underlying ideologies in discourse (van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 2010), and ideological conflict lies at the heart of the contention between Trump and the mainstream press that sparked my initial interest in this topic. Ideology is a frequently used word that can be difficult to define precisely in academic contexts. According to van Dijk (1998), ideologies are social representations reflecting principles of the social identity of a social group and defining the interests of the group. Fairclough (2010) defines ideologies as “ways of representing aspects of the world, which may be operationalized in ways of acting and interacting and in ‘ways of being’ or identities, that contribute to establishing or sustaining unequal relations of power” (p. 8). Ideologies are sometimes necessary to establish and maintain social power relationships (Fairclough, 2010) by organizing group attitudes which influence personal opinions, “evaluative beliefs” that reflect presupposed judgements about individuals, things, or ideas depending on social or cultural values (van Dijk, 1998). These opinions are reflected in discourse practices, for example, in text or speech that is positive toward the group and negative toward other groups. These discourse structures can appear at various linguistic levels, such as the lexical items used to label and describe individuals or concepts, the coherence between sentences or paragraphs, or the explicit or implicit presentation of claims.
Ideologies can be seen in journalism in how different groups and ideas are represented in the discourse of news reports. Salovaara-Moring and Maunula (2011) explored the historical development of the representation of the United States in Finnish newspapers between the years 1984 and 2009, concluding that:

In the case of Finland, the editorials and commentaries reflected both changes in the geopolitical position of the country and the development of and change in the print media as an arena for elite discourse. Traditionally, Finnish editorials or analyses have not been examples of punchy comment, or reactive and canny argumentation. Rather, an observational style that emphasizes neutrality and scant argumentation came from a willingness to maintain ‘objectivity’ and impartiality in the midst of clashing power blocs. In 1984, Finland had yet to emerge from being a ‘buffer zone’ between the East and the West, only later, in 1994 with its membership in the EU, did it finally establish what was portrayed as its ‘natural’ place on the map. By 2004, elite discourses had started to converge with common European perspectives in their criticism of America and the differentiation of European ways and values from those of the USA. In 2009, shaken by economic crisis and the complexity of a multi-polar world, Finnish discourses cautiously welcomed Barack Obama and his perceived willingness to see beyond the USA. (Salovaara-Moring & Maunula, 2011, pp. 103–104)

This analysis highlights the influence of changing economic, political, and social factors on discourse practices and journalistic philosophies in the Finnish press from the Cold War era to the beginning of the Obama administration. Finland is reported as identifying itself as a small nation positioned between the two opposing global superpowers of the Soviet Union (the East) and the United States (the West) prior to 1994: this political position created a motive to maintain a tradition of ideologically neutral and impartial discourse in its media to avoid appearing to take one side over the other in the social conflict of the Cold War. With the fall of the Soviet Union and beginning Finland’s EU membership in 1994, the national identity shifted toward Europe and created the motive for the Finnish press to assert ideologies more and more in journalistic discourse practices until the economic destabilization of 2009 once again created a motive to temper ideologies in discourse practices. The influence of these different factors on ideologies and discourse reflect the social nature of ideologies and discourse practices.
Recent interest has focused on changes in journalistic practices in response to socioeconomic pressures that have altered which news sources are preferred by the public and the availability of funding to support journalists. Nielsen (2013) examined economic and technological influences on media practices in Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, concluding that the media of these countries between 2000 and 2009 underwent unique structural changes resulting from a complex combination of parallel and particular developments related to broader developments in media landscapes and media production rather than becoming structurally similar as the result of a hypothesized Americanization process. A recent follow-up to this study focusing on public discourses regarding developments in the newspaper industries of the six countries concluded “that debates on the newspaper ‘crisis’ are only partly influenced by (1) economic realities and (2) media policy traditions in the six countries but also reflect (3) the strategic motives of powerful actors and (4) the diffusion of frames across borders, particularly those coming from the United States” (Brügemann et al., 2016, p. 533). Relevant to this thesis, these studies show that while the social and economic station of the United States has had some influence on media practices in Finland, a uniquely Finnish journalistic culture distinct from that of the United States still exists.

Intercultural differences in journalistic discourse practices (particularly between Finland, the United Kingdom, and the United States) are especially relevant to the current work. Tirkkonen-Condit and Liefländer-Koistinen (1989) compared editorials from Britain, Germany, and Finland and concluded that English and German editorials tended to argue for an opinion while the Finnish editorials tended to provide the reader with background information upon which to form their own opinion (as cited in Pak, & Acevedo, 2008, pp. 126–127). Curran, Salovaara-Moring, Coen and Iyengar (2010) compared the news media of Finland and the United Kingdom, concluding that the Finnish press is influenced more by public support and a professional journalistic culture than the British press, which has resulted in the Finnish press covering more hard news than the British press and, among other factors, contributed to Finns being generally more knowledgeable about hard news topics, yet less interested in politics, than their British counterparts.
4 Results and analysis

The current work represents a preliminary engagement and navigation of the nexus of practice of reading online news stories in English. Section 4.1 describes my process of establishing a zone of identification, the selection via social media of an event reported on by different news sources with different socio-political perspectives and agendas. Section 4.2 presents the analysis of the selected news stories regarding discourse and social action following the nexus analysis methodology described in section 2.1. This analysis includes both my own insights made prior to the interviews and insights gained from interpreting the news stories with the students in the interviews. Section 4.3 presents insights into learner perspectives on media and media usage, highlighting social actions and social practices reflected in their reported habits and views.

4.1 Establishing a zone of identification

The research data set for the current work consists of online news stories shared through posts on the popular social media platform Facebook. In the process of following the news via Facebook, I noted several posted news stories about the closing of the Oceti Sakowin protest camp by law enforcement officials. The camp was the site of a months-long protest by the native Standing Rock Sioux tribe and their supporters against the construction of the Dakota Access oil pipeline. The protest had been a socially contentious topic for several months, appearing via Facebook as public posts directly from news agencies I had been following as well as posts shared and commented on by friends. This event thus provided a possible zone of identification for engaging the nexus of practice, as it represents a focal point of contention between conservative and liberal socio-political positions with a long historical background, considering both the duration of the specific protest and the undertone of centuries-long historical background of ethnic tensions.

Searching Facebook, I used the search terms “dakota access pipeline” and “standing rock” for posts and followed links therein to English-language stories posted on 22nd and 23rd February 2017 covering the final evacuation of the protest camp. This search obtained 22 posts linking to news reports and blog entries, of which I have selected three representative news stories to present here: one from FOX News (FOX News, 2017a), one from ABC News (ABC News, 2017; Winsor & Hill, 2017), and one from CNN (CNN, 2017; Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017). The discourse of these three news stories presents the evacuation from a range of socio-political viewpoints. While the
news stories contain a common set of facts, the details are presented in different ways and reflect the different ideological stances of the journalists or news agencies. Thus, according to the aim of understanding the nexus of practice, the analysis focuses not only on what information the journalists present but also how they present it and possible motives for why they present it in that manner. Furthermore, I consider the social role of myself and the interviewees as readers (and viewers, in the case of videos) of these news stories, how we engaged their texts, what we devoted attention to in the process, how we interpreted the information presented, and what social practices and knowledge from our historical backgrounds influenced our roles, actions, and interpretations.

4.2 Analysis of news stories

The analysis of the selected news stories is presented here in three stages. Section 4.2.1 will consider the processes of watching the videos and reading the written texts of a news story as social actions. Section 4.2.2 considers polarizing language in each news story that influences the interpretation of information presented in the story and reveal underlying ideologies of the news agency or the reporting journalists. Section 4.2.3 considers the historical context of the event and how the historical elements are featured and employed in the discourse, particularly in light of the polarizing language discussed in section 4.2.2.

4.2.1 Sites of engagement, watching videos and reading written text

As reflected in the summary of handling the news stories presented in section 2.2 and section 4.1, the social practice of “reading a news story shared on Facebook” can be described more precisely as a series of social actions: “watching a video in the news feed post”, “reading the blurb of the news feed post”, “following the hyperlink to the news report”, “watching a video report on the news agency’s website”, and “reading the written news article of the news report”. Each of these social actions seems to serve a slightly different purpose in the overall social practice and each social action provides different information. This section will explore some differences between the social actions of watching a video and reading a written text.
Each of the presented news stories feature a video with accompanying written text, both in the Facebook posts and the news reports on the news agencies’ websites. In fact, even before accessing the full news report on each news agency’s website, it was the post videos of the burning structure in the background behind the tepee on the FOX News and ABC News Facebook posts that first drew my attention to the story. The image successfully captured my attention, both visually and thematically: the image of a fiery blaze seemed a potentially dramatic climax to the months of social tension in the dispute. The short blurbs in the Facebook posts provided relatively little information, and a fuller understanding of the evacuation and why the protesters had set the fires was only attainable through following the links to the full news reports. It is worth noting that after following the link in each case, the video report preceding the written news article drew my initial attention, and only after having watched the video report did I read through the accompanying news article: this order of social actions is reflected in the rhetorical structure of the summaries of the news stories presented in section 2.2.

The student participants exhibited a variety of reactions and attitudes to the videos and written texts, which expanded upon my own views of watching a video and reading written text as social actions. In the first three interviews (with Aino, Emma, and Jenna) we spent more time watching the video reports than reading the news articles, while in the latter three interviews (with Antti, Laura, and Sara) we spent more time reading the news articles than watching the video reports. This shift in focus was due in part both to how I guided the interviews and to the students’ own stated preferences and practices. I initially decided to focus on watching the video reports in the interest of time, feeling that an hour would be insufficient time to adequately address the amount of written text in all three reports. Aino and Emma seemed comfortable with this focus on the video reports in the first two interviews, but Jenna commented during the third interview that she does not usually watch news videos, preferring to read news articles online, which prompted me to open the decision of how to approach the reports to the students. Handing the mouse and keyboard over to the final three participants led to us paying more attention to the written news articles and comments sections than we had in the previous interviews. This focus on the written text seemed to be a deliberate social action taken by the participants, as each paused the video reports when they started to play automatically upon loading the page. As anticipated, there was less time in the final interviews to analyze the discourse of the news articles at the same level of
detail as we analyzed the discourse of the video reports in the initial interviews, but the approach did provide some insights into social practices which will be discussed in more detail later in section 4.3.1.

The videos drew my initial attention to the story, perhaps because the post video is the most prominent element of the Facebook post and the video report is positioned near the top of the news report, thus making the video the first portion of the Facebook post or news report that becomes visible. It also required less time and effort for me to watch the video report than to read the written news article in all three cases. The audiovisual component engages multiple senses simultaneously, conveying information through sight and sound, whereas the written text presents only a visual stimulus. While the reporter is heard speaking in the video images, written text displayed on the screen or clips of footage filmed on the scene are presented that reinforce the audio message. For example, in the ABC News video report the images of teary-eyed native protesters displayed as the reporter speaks about previous clashes with the law enforcement officials help reinforce the emotional appeal of the argument; in contrast, while reading the written news article I would have to access this image through my own empathy and preexisting knowledge of the protesters’ point of view.

The interviewees also noted such elements of emotional appeal and the structuring of tenor in the video elements. The students highlighted the focus on fire versus the focus on people in the Facebook post videos, commenting that the ABC News and FOX News Facebook posts placed more focus on the event of the camp structures being burned by the protesters, whereas the CNN post placed more focus on the protesters themselves. Antti drew this conclusion based on the initial thumbnail images alone, even before watching the post videos:

(1) Interview with Antti

Antti: I don’t need to see the video, I just need to see the first thing. That’s what matters. Fire [from ABC News]. And the next one [from FOX News] is a fire as well. And CNN is the Native Americans. That is already a big difference.

Josh: Why so?

Antti: The first image that leaps to you. From the first two ones it’s fire, and here it’s protesters, so CNN is likely going to be on the protesters’ side, based
on the first picture.

Josh: Because they’re showing the people?

Antti: Yeah. They want sympathy.

These comments illustrate how the initial visual images can not only attract attention to the text, in this case a Facebook post, but also immediately communicate meaning to the viewer. From the perspective of the viewer, the action of interpretation can be taken as soon as the action to look at the first image is taken. In the case of Antti, the initial images communicated the expectation that the ABC News and FOX News reports would focus more on the events of the evacuation, whereas the CNN report would focus more on the experiences of the protesters in the evacuation. Emma expressed the appeal for sympathy as an action that makes the process a lot more human:

(2) Interview with Emma

I think that this [the CNN Facebook post] makes the process a lot more human than the FOX News post did because they are actually showing the people and, I don’t know, something about how they structured the sentence. Maybe it [the blurb of the CNN Facebook post] uses the word “voluntarily”? Like “voluntarily marching out of the Standing Rock protest ahead of the deadline to evacuate”?

Of course, they use the word protesters, but that’s what they are, I guess. But they didn’t use the word “Native Americans” or anything similar that would humanize them a lot more.

This excerpt provides an example of how the social actions of watching a video and reading written text can be combined in the overall process of interpreting a Facebook post. Emma mentions that the CNN post is actually showing the people, a social action taken by the journalists that places greater focus on the protesters, giving them greater agency, or a more active role, and closer contact with the viewer in the tenor of the discourse. This positioning in the tenor is reinforced or made more explicit by the blurb displayed with the post video. The use of voluntarily marching out of the Standing Rock protest ahead of the deadline to evacuate in the blurb humanizes the evacuation process or depicts the protesters with a more positive attitude by explaining that they chose to leave in the evacuation rather than force the authorities to remove them.
The video component of each news report in the data set provides an accessible summary of the larger story presented in the written news article, but in editing the news story, selecting which information to include in the video report and which information to reserve for the written news article, each news agency emphasizes different aspects or views of the events. The FOX News video report emphasizes the defeat (including the reference to Trump and Obama, who are not mentioned in the written article) and arrest of the protesters, the provision of transportation and assistance by the authorities, and the trash and debris left in the camp area. The ABC News video report emphasizes the emotional hardship of the indigenous tribe members in the social and legal battle against the government and corporation building the pipeline. The CNN video report focuses on events at the scene, emphasizing the peacefulness of the evacuation process while acknowledging the emotional tensions of the dispute, and closes with details of the financial costs of the law enforcement operation without addressing the information in the written article about the economic details of the pipeline project and the legal dispute over the land rights. Watching only one of the video reports would thus provide a markedly different perspective on the protest and evacuation than watching a different video or multiple videos, and this perspective would differ still from that provided by reading either a different written news article or several of the articles.

While watching the video reports was more engaging and required less time than reading the written articles, reading the articles ultimately proved more informative in each case. As indicated in the summaries above, the situation depicted in the news articles could be noticeably different in tone and detail than as depicted in the video report, different to the point of potentially leading the viewer of the video report to a different interpretation of the situation than the reader of the written article alone might draw. These differences in tone relate not only to the information presented, for example the emotional images of the native protesters featured in the ABC News video, but also in the prosodic features of the language used by the reporters, such as the almost celebratory tone in the FOX News reporter’s voice describing Trump’s victory over Obama’s policies and the protest.

The practice of editing is in part a necessary stage of text creation due to factors such as time constraints in the broadcast television medium or page restraints in print media; however, it is
important for the viewer or reader to consider what information the journalists are including or emphasizing, their motives and objectivity in the editing process, and what information they may be omitting or deemphasizing. This emphasis or deemphasis of information is key to recognizing and identifying ideology in a text.

4.2.2 Information and ideology in discourse

As highlighted in section 3.4, the discourse resulting from the social practice of reporting the news is shaped to some extent by the underlying ideologies of the journalists undertaking that practice (van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 2010; Ward, 2015). The common aspects of journalistic standards — factuality, fairness, non-bias, independence, non-interpretation, and neutrality and detachment — have evolved through iterative changes in the nexus of practice to regulate the influence of ideology on discourse, but these standards cannot eliminate that influence (Ward, 2015). This section will highlight some of the discourse elements observed in the three selected news stories and discuss what underlying ideologies they reveal.

In social discourse, individuals will tend to depict their social group and its opinions positively and depict opposing social groups and opinions negatively. This discourse practice, referred to as polarization, stems from important social functions of ideologies: the establishment of social group identity, the promotion of group beliefs, and distancing the group from outsiders (van Dijk, 1998). Polarization is detectable to a varying extent in all three of the news stories presented here. It is evident in word choices, in which information is presented or omitted, and in the order in which that information is presented.

In my own reading of the three news reports, each news agency frames the story as a dispute between two opposing social groups, depicting each group in a different light. The FOX News report presents the humane government as victorious over the criminal protesters. The ABC News report presents the protesters as being discriminated against and having their rights violated by the government. The presentation of the CNN report is between these two extremes, but there is still a detectable undertone of support for the protesters’ cause against the government’s actions. The student interviewees drew similar conclusions in their readings.
The FOX News report presents favorable depictions of government and law enforcement officials against the protesters. A key sign of polarization in the FOX News video report is found in the comment by the correspondent that the protesters lost when Donald Trump won (FOX News, 2017b). The tone in the journalists’ voices is light-hearted, and the emphatic intonation (marked in the excerpts here by underlining stressed words) of the contrasting verbs, lost and won, gives the light-heartedness a celebratory feel that contrasts the trembling voice of the interviewed protester telling how terribly sad he is for the people who have been pushed around for centuries and trampled on (FOX News, 2017b). Prior to this clip of the protester, the correspondent details

(3) FOX News Report Video (FOX News, 2017b)
two interesting caveats. There is going to be an amnesty bus. So, protesters will be offered to get on that bus, they’ll go to a transition center where they’ll get a voucher for a hotel night and a bus ticket anywhere in the United States. Secondly, there’ll be a ceremonial arrest for those individuals who want to be able to tell their friends they were arrested, get a photo taken, and put it on their social media sites, the cops will accommodate them for the next several days. Now for the hardcore guys who want to be charged with a crime, we spoke to some of them, and they said, “Well, we lost the war, but we don’t regret the fight.”

This is immediately followed by the clip of the aforementioned protester, implicitly presenting him as one of the hardcore guys. His statements of the indigenous people being pushed around and trampled on are countered by the correspondent’s follow-up, when he says that

(4) FOX News Report Video (FOX News, 2017b)
according to state officials, you know, a lot of the protesters are frankly broke, and so they think it’s the humane thing to do, to give them the night in the hotel and the bus ticket and to let them out; after all, Abby, this is North Dakota, people here are really nice.

The amnesty bus and voucher for a hotel night details support the statement that the officials were doing the humane thing, but the correspondent’s elongated pronunciation of the underlined words in amnesty bus and ceremonial arrest imply the opinion that the protesters do not deserve these accommodations, and his rising intonation on the word voucher and even sharper rising
intonation on hotel night imply an air of incredulity that these accommodations were being offered to them. In addition to describing the protesters as broke he describes their camp as a dump, a claim supported with a list of items reportedly comprising the trash and debris mentioned in the accompanying text.

Aino made similar observations to my own after watching the FOX News video report:

(5) Interview with Aino

I think it was a bit more on the government decision, maybe because of “well, their fight is over now”, “they are given a hotel night and bus ride”, or “they are given an arrest for protesting”, and kind of talking about them as if they are criminals. I think he did mention the word, like the crime they’ve done.

While she did not exactly quote the reporter, Aino did manage to reflect the nature of his intonation patterns by similarly stressing the word given in her summary. She thus demonstrates an awareness of the prosodic features of the reporter’s speech and associates the intonation with a pejorative meaning in her semiotic interpretation of the discourse. In terms of rhetorical structure, she noted how the short interview clip with the sad protesters was dismissed as the camera cut back to the reporter and the subject was changed:

(6) Interview with Aino

Obviously, they did interview one of the protesters, about how sad they are to lose [...] but then they didn’t really comment on it, they were just like well how has it been in there for you, the reporter? [...] It felt like, “Well, we have to include an interview with some local”, so let’s have it there but not comment on it.

Aino thus views presenting an interview with some local supporting an opposing viewpoint as a discourse strategy associated with objective standards of neutrality and detachment, and she interprets the lack of exposition on that opposing viewpoint as a demotion of the protesters’ position in the tenor of the discourse to promote the ideological position of the government authorities.

The ABC News video report, with its focus on the perspective of the indigenous tribal members, portrays the protesters positively as individuals fighting for respect and freedom against
government officials. The protesters are given greater agency throughout the video report, depicted more as individuals, as people, while the authorities are presented more as a collective force of intruders. For example, one young protester is shown saying that


as an indigenous person, sometimes you grow up feel like nobody sees you. You feel like people don’t want you around, and you feel like if you disappeared everyone would just be happy. And it feels good to be acknowledged as a human being.

The protesters are identified as calling themselves water protectors, fighting not only for the purity of their water source, but also for respect (Winsor & Hill, 2017). It is reported that some ceremonially set the fires in the camp, preferring to burn it rather than have it seized and destroyed (Winsor & Hill, 2017), seized and destroyed by the law enforcement officials shown outside the camp dressed in riot gear in the images following this claim.

The protesters are thus favorably portrayed in the video report as protectors of purity and respect, while the authorities and the oil pipeline they are implicitly defending are unfavorably portrayed as destroyers and polluters on the opposing side of the conflict. The one law enforcement official seen and heard directly speaking in the video report, who says that the intent is to clear the area with the potential threat of a flood, is presented amid images of individuals being wrestled to the ground and handcuffed by groups of police officers, an aggressive image that contrasts the peaceful image of the protesters. Other scenes show confrontations between the two sides with lines of military vehicles and uniformed officers in riot gear using water cannons, sound cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets against unarmed protesters in civilian clothing.

The rhetorical depiction of the protesters as a peaceful social group can also be seen in one scene where some protesters are shown swimming across the river and shouting at a line of police standing along the opposite bank dressed in riot gear. The protesters have come to pray, but some cross the river to confront the police (Winsor & Hill, 2017). The use of some here rhetorically distances the agitators from the protesters as a social group: the supporters agitating the authorities are not exhibiting the ideological beliefs of the peaceful protesters who are the focus of the report. Personal testimonials from some of the indigenous youth describing the struggles of
the protest are provided on camera. Following a summary of the historical conflict between the Sioux Nation and the United States government, one of the tribal leaders explains the protest of the pipeline as a message saying, *enough is enough. Respect our lands. Respect our rights* (Winsor & Hill, 2017). The disputed area at the protest camp is described as *sacred* several times in the video, and, speaking on camera, indigenous tribal members call the authorities trespassers and immigrants, in particular President Trump, whose presidential campaign featured anti-immigration rhetoric.

While the tenor of the ABC News video report strongly favors the position of the indigenous tribes and the pipeline protesters, the tenor of the news article is relatively balanced. The presentation of viewpoints from both sides of the dispute is more balanced in the news article than in the video report, as both are quoted in the same medium, in written text, and statements from both sides are attributed to individuals by name, placing them on more equal footing than the presentation of quotes from the authoritative side in written text read by the reporter juxtaposing the direct words and emotional amplification of direct interviews with individual protesters does in the video report.

Jenna noted the use of emotional appeal as a rhetorical strategy associated with ideology and politics in the ABC News video report:

(8) Interview with Jenna

This one brought emotions into it again with the burial sites and the crying when they said the pipeline wouldn’t be constructed, and then brought Trump in again when he said that it will be built. And then again showing the Native American man talking about how Trump is an immigrant, so I thought that showed some politics on that again.

When asked how the government and the law enforcement were presented she said,

(9) Interview with Jenna

Like the bad guy. Because they were ruining their burial sites and not letting them pray and [...] showing Donald Trump as the worst when he allowed the pipeline to be constructed.
In these comments, Jenna traces a string of interconnected images and ideas threaded throughout the video report, pairing cultural symbols and emotional expressions that divide individuals into groups over the course of the discourse and establish the sociocultural positions of those groups with respect to each other, to the journalists, and to the viewer in the tenor of the discourse. The burial sites, a cultural symbol representing the indigenous tribes’ traditional attachment to the land, are paired against the pipeline construction, a cultural symbol of the dominant American culture’s invasion of the land, reinforced by the native leader’s statement that Trump is an immigrant. The indigenous protesters crying as the pipeline construction is reapproved is contrasted by the air of victory as Trump is shown signing the order to reapprove the pipeline construction. When asked what she thought of the presentation of background information in the ABC News video report in terms of fairness Jenna said,

(10) Interview with Jenna
I’m not quite sure. It did show the area of land that they had just getting smaller and smaller and can’t they have even just this, and then they brought in the talk of the black snake which has been foretold. So, I think that this was maybe then siding with them. ABC News was siding with the protesters, more than, for example, FOX News.

These points extend and reinforce the discourse establishing the protesters as the native inhabitants of and protectors of the land and the state as invading immigrants and destroyers of the land. Conversely, as discussed above, FOX News portrayed the protesters as losers living in a dump being helped by the humane and really nice people of North Dakota.

The CNN news story appears to be the most traditionally objective presentation in the current data set, but it does feature remarks that imply a critical or skeptical view of the authorities and supportive view of the protesters. The Facebook post video places the focus on the protesters, but is relatively unsensational in comparison to the images of the fires that FOX News and ABC News posted – unless a viewer takes offense to their display of the United States flag hung upside down, a social action taken to demonstrate a situation of distress but can be also be viewed as an offensive act of desecrating the flag depending on the context (WPXI News, 2014; FOX News, 2016; Barnes, 2017). This latter point illustrates the relevance of historical body in this analysis, as
the cultural implications of hanging the flag upside down are likely known to an American but not to a Finn. None of the students interviewed commented on this detail of the flag.

The CNN journalists in the video report maintain a traditionally neutral, journalistic linguistic register and make fewer overt expressions of position relative to the FOX News or ABC News video reports. For example, they do not refer to law enforcement officials as cops, or to protesters choosing to remain in the camp after the deadline as hardcore guys like the FOX News correspondent. The CNN field correspondent mentions the sadness of the protesters, the storms they had weathered over the months of the protest, and that they left willingly, but this emotional element does not form a central theme of the CNN video report as it does in the ABC News video report described above. The lexical items throughout much of the CNN video report are less dramatic and polarizing with respect to the FOX News or ABC News video reports. For example, the CNN anchor mentions some of the protesters...setting fires to their own camps without referring to the situation as a huge fire or fiery scene like the FOX News and ABC News journalists, respectively.

However, while the overall register of the CNN video report maintains a traditionally objective tone, the CNN correspondent does establish rhetorical distance from the authorities in the tenor of the discourse, stating that the camp is very far away in the background because law enforcement pushed us back...saying they needed the room for their cars, and there is a huge contingent of law enforcement, bigger than we have ever seen since this encampment ended up being populated (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017), and later mentioning the sign on the television in the camp reading the revolution will not be televised, adding personal commentary with the subsequent statement of I beg to differ (Cuevas, Sidner, & Simon, 2017). This personal commentary implies a level of identity and solidarity with the protesters, particularly with the earlier depiction of the huge contingent of law enforcement pushing us back. Also, while detailing the reported financial costs of the law enforcement efforts she interjects with if you listen to what law enforcement has said, which casts a skeptical attitude against the authorities.

Like the video report, the overall tone of the accompanying news article of the CNN news report is largely neutral, adhering to a traditionally journalistic register. While the language describing the
law enforcement operation is more neutral than the image of a huge contingent pushing the protesters from the camp, the presentation of, for example, the legal dispute over land rights features the arguments of the tribe and its supporters in more detail than those of the government or pipeline company.

Jenna made an interesting observation regarding the use of the phrase ceremonial burning in the CNN and ABC News video reports, suggesting that the expression was used to encode different meanings between the two contexts.

(11) Interview with Jenna

In the beginning I noticed that CNN had said, “ceremonially burning down the campsite to turn it back into the Earth”, versus ABC News said, “ceremonially burning them so that they can’t be taken”, or something like that. I think it changed the meaning of “ceremonially” to where it’s got nothing to do with their rituals versus just standing against the law enforcement.

Similar to how Emma felt the use of the phrase voluntarily marching affected how she interpreted the images of the CNN Facebook post video and humanized the evacuation process, the different contexts in which CNN and ABC News use ceremonially burning in their video reports affected how Jenna interpreted the intended meaning of the word ceremonially and its connection to the underlying political ideology of each video report.

Polarization in the news reports is thus encoded in the information the journalists select to include in the message, the words they use to convey ideas, the order in which they build their arguments in their texts, and (in the case of video reports) the prosodic features of the delivery. Lexical choices depend on negative, positive, or neutral connotations associated with words and phrases: setting fire to tents is a more neutral statement (less dramatic, less sensational) than setting a huge fire or creating a fiery scene (which are more dramatic, more sensational phrases). The order in which these lexical choices are arranged can accentuate or attenuate the impact of these connotations: a series of negative descriptors may suggest a clear pejorative trend, while a single negative descriptor may be less significant. Intonation can be significant or insignificant in a similar fashion. These connotations and intonations are socially determined features of the language, subject to cultural and social differences, and can potentially be challenging for language learners.
at certain stages of the learning process. Such details and examples could be a potential linguistic feature to focus on when helping students read the news in a foreign language.

The students participating were all advanced learners of English studying at the university, so they showed few signs of difficulty in recognizing and interpreting many of these sociolinguistic features. We did discuss their recollections of acquiring and developing their awareness of these aspects as part of their historical bodies, which is detailed later in section 4.3.3. The next section will explore the historical background of the news stories in the dataset and aspects of the historical contexts of myself and the students and how those contexts influenced how we viewed and interpreted the stories.

4.2.3 Historical contexts

The historical context of a text is a critical element for determining the nature and quality of rhetorical structures and possible motives in social discourse. Historical events help shape attitudes of social groups with respect to the world and each other. An individual’s historical body influences the social actions one takes and the way they view and interpret the social actions of others within various nexuses of practice. The dispute over the legal claim to the land where the pipeline was to be constructed is an important element of the historical body of the three accounts of the evacuation under comparison here because the land dispute marks one of the key differences between the three news reports: the ABC News news report makes the dispute a key argument of its story in both the video report and news article, the CNN news report mentions it relatively briefly in the news article, and the FOX News news report does not mention it at all.

Of the three news reports, ABC News provides the most in-depth coverage of the historical context of the report, extending back to the 1851 treaty that the Sioux cite in their lawsuit over the land rights. Native Americans have been negotiating with the government for centuries, and by the end of the 19th century they had endured discrimination, the banning of their religion, and the massacre at Wounded Knee (Winsor & Hill, 2017). The argument of the tribal claim to the land is repeated throughout the video report and in the news article. The land is referred to as sacred several times in the video report, and it is explicitly stated that the Standing Rock tribe has called
this land home, since long before was renamed the State of North Dakota (Winsor & Hill, 2017). One indigenous protest supporter compares the police kicking rocks around in what the tribe claims is a burial site on a hill by the river to tribal kids standing on gravestones in Arlington Cemetery (Winsor & Hill, 2017). (The cultural significance of this reference to Arlington Cemetery might be a point that would need to be explained to EFL students, who may not recognize it as the national military graveyard just outside of Washington D.C. where honored military veterans are buried.) This presentation of the indigenous tribe defending its land and religious freedom against the invading government authorities rhetorically strengthens the polarization depicted between the two social groups. The motive of the ABC News journalists thus seems to be to support the ethical justification of the protesters against the unjust actions of the government.

In contrast, the FOX News news report does not mention the land dispute, which strengthens the rhetorical depiction of the law enforcement officials as moral victors over the criminal protesters. There is only one sentence in the news article related to the subject of land ownership, which states that the protest camp is on federal land in southern North Dakota between the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation and the pipeline route (FOX News, 2017b). Not mentioning the uncertainty over land rights in the pipeline project strengthens the ethical position of the law enforcement officials: in this scenario, the protesters are trespassing on federal land, therefore the federal agents are ethically justified in removing them. This strategy is rhetorically coherent with the polarizing language discussed above, which emphasizes the humane actions of the law enforcement and describes the protesters as broke and living in a dump (FOX News, 2017b). The motive of the FOX News journalists thus seems to be to support the actions of the law enforcement officials who are enforcing a policy of the conservative government.

The presentation of the legal dispute in the CNN news report is again between the two extremes of the ABC News and FOX News news reports, with the details summarized relatively briefly in the news article to provide some supporting insight into the context of the protest. The legal dispute is not highlighted in the video report, and it is mentioned only in the closing paragraphs of the news article, which indicates that the detail was considered unimportant relative to the other information in the report, although thematically it receives roughly as much attention as the other themes of the article. This possibly suggests a motive of presenting a balanced and informative
news report that provides the reader with sufficient detail from which to make an informed decision. However, as mentioned in the previous section, the presentation of the dispute gives more attention to the tribe’s claims and position than those of the government or pipeline developer: of the 17 sentences of the news article related to the dispute, one sentence expresses a view or claim from the pipeline developer whereas seven sentences express a view or claim from the tribe. This would imply that the journalists favor the cause of the protesters over the actions of the government, which would cohere with the slight polarization in the rhetoric discussed above; however, the imbalance in the news article could also be the result of the court or legal defense providing less commentary on the case for the journalists to report. In this case, the motives behind the reporting actions are less clear.

The students who were actively engaged with social media and the news at the time of the pipeline protests expressed familiarity with the main points of the dispute. Several were able to recall, for example, that the dispute was over the construction of a pipeline near native land. However, each of the students exhibited a certain level of unfamiliarity with some of the deeper cultural and sociopolitical undertones. For example, though Aino said she was familiar with the discussion of the story on social media at the time, she recognized her relative lack of cultural knowledge regarding Native American history in her historical body as a Finn.

(12) Interview with Aino

Aino: The history behind the area where they are at, I thought that it was a good addition to why they are protesting, so widely, to share that history if someone watching didn’t know.

Josh: About the cultural background.

Aino: Yeah. I don’t know if it’s taught in history in the US.

Josh: That amount of detail, yes, probably in most places in the US.

Aino: Ok.

Josh: The historical depiction I was kind of familiar with having grown up there. Probably I would have read the story with more of that in the back of mind in terms of the tribes and the reservations and their interactions with the government.

Aino: Yeah, and as for being Finnish, it wasn’t that widely discussed. I mean it
was part of when world history was taught, like the US and how it was colonized, but it wasn’t that widely discussed.

Josh: Or the state of relations today in the culture between the minority culture and the mainstream?

Aino: Yeah, it has never really been discussed.

In this exchange Aino indicates that the historical background of the area added to her understanding of the motives for the protest. Without this historical background, the students focused on the environmental aspects of the protest against the pipeline construction, but once the historical background was added to the story they could acknowledge the additional issues of ethnic minority rights and social inequality between the groups that might affect their view of the presentation of the two sides in the tenor of discourse. For example, when asked what her interpretation that the ABC News video report sided with the protesters was based on, she said,

(13) Interview with Jenna

Based on what they showed. The treaty, and just like overall how they’ve been pushed around. I don’t know, they were siding with them more just talking about it, but compared to the other two, I think it showed more of that.

This comment suggests that Jenna’s interpretation was based primarily on the contents and rhetoric of the video report, with relatively little influence from her background knowledge of the story.

The interview with Aino provided another illustration of the influence of historical body on the interpretation of a text as she explained why she was confused while watching a video clip of President Trump speaking in the State of the Union Address. The speech was trending in the news that day, and during the interview she had mentioned noticing comments about it on Twitter but not fully understanding what the speech was about, so I prompted her to search for a report, which she located with a google search. In the clip, Trump was commending the efforts of a twelve-year-old boy who had raised money for placing flags on the graves of fallen war veterans in California (CNN, 2018). Aino expressed some confusion about not only the nature and purpose of the speech itself but also differences between Finland and America in the cultural significance of honoring soldiers:

(14) Interview with Aino
I don’t know, it’s just I feel like in America they...enhance, highlight?...the importance of...sotilas – [I provide the translation “soldiers”] – yes, soldiers, thank you – that are in Afghanistan or wherever much more than any other country, I think – ah troops, was the word – and in Finland we honor most those veterans who were in the Winter War and the Continuation War, while these veterans they mean the ones who fight abroad, right? Not some war veterans?

I (incorrectly) answered in the affirmative at the moment, misinterpreting how she was using the word veteran. From my sociolinguistic perspective the term veteran identified a distinctly different group (those who have returned from active service, either living or deceased) than troops (those who are currently deployed in active military service), whereas Aino appears to have been using the two words interchangeably as semantic equivalents. She continued to give an example of how cultural identity is manifested in discourse:

(15) Interview with Aino

Yeah, ok. So, I think it’s a big part of American identity, to support the troops abroad, but I don’t know much about it. Like, why they are fighting in other countries. What do they mean by “protecting their country” when they’re not fighting in their country? It’s a bit confusing to me. But I guess it’s nice that he honored those fallen veterans.

Aino suggests a semantic disparity between how she views the phrase protecting their country being used in American texts and how she apparently interprets the phrase as a Finn. Following up on the statement that it was a bit confusing to her, I asked how that kind of cultural difference influenced her view of the speech, if it was just adding confusion about the event or possibly something more:

(16) Interview with Aino

Maybe yeah, and the whole thing that America has so many troops fighting overseas and they are very proud of them and all that, it’s very confusing to me. Because Finland doesn’t have this similar type of culture or, yeah, I’m not very aware of these things.

I did not pursue the topic further, electing to proceed with the interview, but found the exchange to be an interesting example of a limitation in cultural literacy limiting the interpretation of the text.
Antti demonstrated cultural literacy with American media as he readily categorized statements as *left wing* or *right wing* while browsing through user comments on the Facebook posts and news reports. He swiftly identified key words and rhetorical patterns upon which he formed his decisions and explained his reasoning, exhibiting metaliteracy awareness through understanding how and why he interpreted the comments as he did. Antti claimed that he had developed this literacy naturally through practice reading American news media, which highlighted the importance of informal learning through practical engagement with the language in media outside of the classroom. Antti also viewed sensationalist discourse practices of tabloid media sources more favorably than the other interviewees, who held tabloids in lower regard for their lack of objectivity or perceived professionalism. Antti was particularly interested in British tabloids and the commercial American press as forms of sensational infotainment that are culturally distinct from the journalistic discourse practices of the Finnish press.

### 4.3 Interview results

The initial interview questions invited the students to reflect on and discuss their media usage practices and preferred sites and media for accessing news and information. Section 4.3.1 presents and analyzes some of these self-reflections and discussions, which provided interesting insights into the students’ social practices in accessing news stories and reading and watching news reports. Section 4.3.2 discusses students’ views on ideology and bias in journalistic texts and the influence of these views on the students’ media practices. Section 4.3.3 presents students’ reflections on their personal history of learning English and media literacy, considering both concepts and skills addressed in their formal education and extra-curricular learning experiences.

#### 4.3.1 Social media and media literacy practices

The six interview participants reported various degrees of general engagement with news media and preferred social practices for accessing the news. Aino and Emma preferred to follow Twitter for its rapid access to international news and discussion between users. Jenna and Sara claimed to receive their news primarily through items shared by friends on Facebook. Laura claimed to check the news daily through mobile apps and news agency websites. Antti claimed to not use social
media personally but did claim to read discussions on Reddit and similar online discussion platforms which are accessible without a user account. Antti and Sara were particularly interested in reading comment sections, which they valued as a potential source of alternative viewpoints and insights into public opinion on the topic of an article. Similarly, Emma valued discussions on Twitter as a source of alternative viewpoints.

Aino attributed her preference for Twitter to the international and up-to-date nature of information on the platform.

(17) Interview with Aino
I get most of my news from Twitter. I use it daily. I think it has the most up-to-date information, that some information might be there before it has reached Finnish media.

Here we see getting the news from Twitter presented as a social practice that Aino undertakes daily with the motive of maintaining the social practice of staying up-to-date on international news. She did provide a caveat to the perceived advantage of rapid availability of information on Twitter, saying,

(18) Interview with Aino
I think the news just – obviously though, the news are really, like, fast there? Like they come really – if something happens they’re really quickly on Twitter and take time maybe to have a news report, so it might be that it’s not the full truth on Twitter, that it might have some biased views on it. […] You have to think about that it’s just, like, one tweet and there’s not that much they can fit into it, but you can get the kind of, like, the general picture of what has happened.

With this general picture of the story Aino can then follow up on the details through the news agency’s website and potentially other sources if she finds the story particularly important or interesting. In this follow-up comment Aino recognizes an additional social action, thinking about the limitations of the tweeted information, as part of the social practice of getting the news via Twitter. The comment also expresses metacognitive awareness, recognizing the potential for incompleteness, inaccuracy, and bias in the information of a tweet and the need to consider or think about these factors as part of good media literacy.
Emma also preferred Twitter as a social media platform offering access to current, international news and social discourse. When asked what kind of media outlets or sites she preferred, she replied,

(19) Interview with Emma

Twitter is one because there’s a lot of short messages and usually linked some articles I’m usually interested in reading, and if there’s something really current it’s usually there first in Twitter. Tumblr is another thing. There’s interesting news, too, but there’s also a lot of false information and a lot of weird people, so I don’t think that’s a really reliable site for news, and of course some news articles that are years old circulate there and usually people can’t make difference if it’s current news or was it published three years ago and is no longer reliable.

Emma highlights interest as a criterion for evaluating social media sites, preferring sites that provide her with information she wants to engage further. The focus on a lot of short messages reflects an appreciation for information that can be accessed and interpreted quickly, which is a typical view of information processing among digital natives (Prensky, 2001).

Facebook was selected for the site of engagement in this study as a popular social media platform. When asked about Facebook Emma said,

(20) Interview with Emma

I don’t use that. I have an account, but I don’t go there regularly. I think that Facebook culture has toned down a lot since 2009, if you want my opinion on this. My parents used it at that time, and there was a lot of media there, and it was like norm that everyone was there, but I think it’s not as important nowadays as it used to be. I think that nowadays it’s more old people, if I can say that, but it’s not so current anymore in my opinion.

Emma identifies a Facebook culture, a phrasing which, when in combination with her association of the social media platform primarily with her parents and old people, rather explicitly describes Facebook more as its own culture with a unique set of social practices than a mere site for social interaction on the Internet. She also reaffirms her preference for current sources of information or
social interaction. When asked if she had heard about fake news on Facebook or what she thought about it she said,

(21) Interview with Emma

Yeah, I think because old people take everything on Facebook as if it’s fact. I read about this. That if it’s on the Facebook they usually don’t do research, they just think it’s real because it’s on the Internet. I don’t know. I read an article about this, that if you present something as if it’s a fact on Facebook, there’s a really big chance someone will believe you without doing any research.

When asked how she felt that Facebook compares to Twitter in this regard she said,

(22) Interview with Emma

I think that Twitter is – there’s a really short message limit, people cannot do long posts themselves, they just link an article and then talk about it. Usually you can tell if the article they are linking is legit and if they have the facts right because you have the article they are talking about and there’s usually a lot of people who put their opinion there and it’s a discussion, mostly. [...] somebody links an article and then talks about it in a few messages, and somebody answers them with their own opinion, so there’s usually a long thread of discussion, and it’s interesting to read a lot of opinions from people. [...] I’m not sure why Facebook fools so many more people than Twitter. Maybe because more old people use Facebook than Twitter and, I don’t know, I don’t want to be age-racist, but I think old people, the older generation, believes things a lot easier if it’s presented in any format that seems legit.

Emma went on to say that she wasn’t sure if there are fake news articles on Facebook but reiterated her perception that it was a generational problem, that older people are less likely to fact check information than her generation. Accurate or not, Emma’s statements contain expressions of social identity and social practice that affect her engagement with the mentioned sites: she views Facebook as an online community populated more by older people than her peers and Tumblr as a community of weird, media-illiterate people; she views the Twitter community as engaging in critical discussion more than the Facebook community; and she views the Twitter interface, with its character limit encouraging the practice of linking to source texts, as promoting better transparency than the Facebook interface, where she perceives longer expository posts and
less linking to source texts relative to Twitter. Emma’s social identity, which social groups she associates herself with and where she sees herself fitting into society, helps guide and shape which social actions and practices she takes as she selects and engages the nexus of practice.

Jenna reported accessing most of her news via Facebook and Instagram, following up on stories of interest by searching additional sites for more detail. In contrast to Aino’s description of her Twitter usage, Jenna claimed not to subscribe to many news agency feeds. Aino appeared to seek out information feeds that provide updates direct from news agencies, whereas Jenna appeared to rely on her social network as a mediator of news. Jenna’s news consumption could thus be described as relatively passive, as she relies predominantly on articles shared by friends rather than news agencies, but she also checks specific websites, namely Kaleva and Iltasanomat, for additional or up-to-date information on specific stories of interest. For example,

(23) Interview with Jenna

I’m part of Puskaradio Oulu [a public group on Facebook], so just this morning there was news about the fire in Äimärautio. And also – well, there was a lot happening last night – there was the car crash into a tree, and then there was a garage burning in Kastelli, so all of those I saw because someone shared them, either personally or in Puskaradio. [...] Today I – again, all these things that happened in Oulu last night – I got on the bus in the morning and I checked Kaleva’s website for the most recent news, because I wanted to get it from there, what’s happened, and not from Iltasanomat. Even though they’ve been presenting the stories all night: Oulu’s been a really big character in Iltasanomat today. I just felt like seeing it on Kaleva’s page would be more efficient.

Jenna had stated previously in the interview that she rarely checked Kaleva directly, despite having access to the e-subscription on her phone. This anecdote gives an example of social practice as Jenna passively receives information of the incidents through her Facebook feed and then feels motivated to actively seek additional information on the subject through the Kaleva website. The detail of checking Kaleva while on the bus during her morning commute illustrates additional locational and temporal aspects of the social practice, showing how the social action of checking Kaleva’s website can fit into the context of her daily routine.
Similar to Jenna, Sara described a more passive consumption of news via her Facebook feed that was guided by what stories were shared by members of her social network. Her social network on Facebook provides her with links to both Finnish and American news stories shared by friends. She mentioned a tendency to follow local news stories from her rural hometown. She also spent a year on exchange in the US, so the American news in her feed contains local news from the exchange community in addition to international news stories. Following local news sources suggests a willingness to maintain social connections with local communities as a significant social motivation to check the news. While paying attention to local news seemed to be part of maintaining social ties, her discussion of international news topics suggested a motivation more of civic duty to be informed of key social issues and developments and occurrences.

The analysis and discussion of the section to this point shows some of the motives and reasons the interviewees provided for selecting preferred sites of media engagement and general practices in interacting with those sites. The interviews also provided some insights into more specific social actions within these broader social practices, such as differences in physical interaction with print or digital media and choosing to read a news article or watch a video report.

Interview comments from Sara and Emma revealed developments in media technology, namely a shift from print to online media, in their historical bodies with different importance in their current reported social practices. Sara described how she used to read the newspaper in the morning, but since moving out on her own the practice of flipping through the newspaper had been replaced by the practice of scrolling through her social media feeds during breakfast. The shift from print to online media in Sara’s case thus seems to represent an exchange of largely equivalent technologies: rather than flipping through paper pages with text printed in ink, she scrolls through electronically rendered text on an electronic screen, but she views her processing of the information or social action through both media as functionally equivalent. Conversely, Emma expressed a preference for printed newspapers, stating that she likes to underline printed text as she reads, but reads news online nowadays because she lacks the money to subscribe to the newspapers. Emma thus recognizes differences in how she physically and cognitively interacts with the different media technology and that those differences impact the social practice of
checking the news, distinguishing two different social practices – reading the newspaper and reading the online news.

Antti, Laura, and Sara actively paused the video reports upon loading each webpage from the hyperlink in the Facebook post and focused on reading the articles. Sara did not give a clear reason for pausing the video. Laura explained that it was a habit because she often does not have her headphones at hand when she checks the news on her smartphone. These responses suggest that pausing the video is a habitual social action for them, and perhaps a subconscious habit for Sara (though I did not think to follow up on this point at the time in the interview). Pausing the video was an intentional social action for Antti, who during the initial interview said,

(24) Interview with Antti

Some websites now have automatic players, so you can’t really avoid the video. Often I just ignore it. I often feel like I don’t need some anchor telling me what the article is saying, so I just read the article.

I found the anchor telling me what the article is about comment particularly interesting because it suggested possible feelings of reduced agency or social distance in the context of watching a video relative to the context of reading an article. Antti describes the video as telling him the news, implying that he sees himself more as a passive recipient of information while watching the video report than he does while reading the news article. Describing the field of the communication, what the anchor is telling him, as what the article says implies that the information of the video, what some anchor is telling him, is merely an interpretation of the news article being mediated by the video. The video report stands between Antti and the news article in this case. Choosing to read the article rather than listen to some anchor telling him what the article is saying, implies that he feels he has greater agency or independence in assessing and interpreting the text of the article himself. There is also a pejorative tone in the delimiter some in some anchor that creates social distance between Antti and the anchor of the video report. As discussed in more detail in the next subsection, Antti identified journalists as a social group which aims to shape public opinion through news reporting. In this sense the I often feel like I don’t need some anchor telling me what the article is saying statement represents a motive for Antti to take the social action of rejecting the presumed social authority of the video journalists as experts and identify himself as an independent consumer and interpreter of information in the social network.
This section has focused on the interviewed students’ reported views on their preferred sites of media engagement, preferences about those sites, and motives and habits for interacting differently with different media text types. The next section will address their views on discourse practices within media texts, focusing particularly on issues of objectivity, ideology, and bias.

4.3.2 Student views on objectivity and bias in media discourse

When asked about their views on information reliability, ideological bias, and credibility in news stories, most of the students expressed a preference or a favorable attitude toward neutrality or objectivity as a property of ethical journalism. Looking for objective news appears as a social practice in the interview comments. Aino, Emma, and Laura claimed to actively consider and value objectivity in the news articles they read. Jenna and Sara valued objectivity as an important ethical consideration, but they don’t always take the time to actively assess the objectivity of the news they read. Antti was the significant outlier of the interviewees, downplaying neutrality as an ethical expectation for journalists, instead placing greater importance on the responsibility of the reader to evaluate and interpret the text and draw a reasoned conclusion.

Antti expressed a view that bias is unavoidable in journalistic texts and truth or factuality are ultimately open to the interpretation of the reader. I asked him what he called a fact after he said that he felt *alternative facts* may be a reality in the modern information environment:

(25) Interview with Antti

I mean, something like a rock is a rock. After that it gets more complicated. With the news it’s really hard to trust things these days. The basic information is there. If it says someone did something, then he probably did it. But it’s like, a journalist giving me the reasons why he did that, then it’s already a bit shady. Then I have to wonder. It sort of gives the immediate reality, but not the behind-the-scenes stuff. It’s mostly speculative. So that’s why reading multiple sources and listening to different analyses is important. To sort of get the best picture.

Like the other interviewees, Antti advocated checking multiple sources as a social action that generates the best picture of the story, but he also downplays the need for those source texts to
exhibit objective neutrality in order to be considered reliable sources of information. He places the responsibility of objectivity and neutrality instead on each reader who is interpreting a text and expanding the context of discourse by reading multiple sources and analyses. The *behind-the-scenes stuff* comment reflects the importance of context in the social action of interpreting a text: the reader must consider what details are present or might be missing in the field of the discourse, who is represented in the tenor of the discourse and how are they being represented or possibly misrepresented, what linguistic structures or rhetorical strategies are used in the mode of the discourse to affect the field and tenor, among other points. These are points to be considered by the reader as they compare sources and analyses to form their understanding the truth of the situation in their own context.

Facts and truth are determined by social consensus in the form of popular opinion in Antti’s view, not only through the presentation of different viewpoints by multiple journalists but also through different interpretations by multiple readers, which Antti noted he accesses through comments sections, saying, *I like reading the comments, because it gives me other opinions. It’s interaction as well.* He went on to tie the social practice of reading comments to wider social practices of democratic participation:

(26) Interview with Antti
if we are a democracy, then the public has the power, ultimately, and what they think, so it matters what they think. They’re going to vote based on that, so...
What the news media says doesn’t necessarily reflect what the public thinks, and you can see that from the comments often. If the comments are smashing the article, then probably the article isn’t what the public feels is right, even if it’s right. The facts don’t always matter, it’s what the public opinion is. At least in a democracy.

Public opinion appeared to be a central construct in Antti’s understanding of media literacy and its connection to social practice in other comments as well. For example, when I asked how he viewed the social role of journalists and entertainers, he felt that journalists see their job as shaping public opinion through sharing the news, reiterating the view that ideological bias in journalism is inherent and unavoidable. Similarly, he felt that entertainers see their job as
entertaining, but that they shape public opinion through a social activism that is inherent to entertainment.

Antti’s comments about the inherent social activism of entertainment are similar to scholarly views on the positive social activism of satirical fake news mentioned in the introduction, but he appeared personally to only associate the “fake news” term with the modern, pejorative connotation referring to manipulative texts. When asked about fake news more specifically and its potential impact on society or public opinion:

(27) Interview with Antti

What is fake news? One side hates the other side, and the other side hates the other side. I feel like it’s sort of up to me to decide what’s fake news to me. Obviously if it’s a blatant lie it’s fake news, but what is or what isn’t, it takes some time to understand. Am I worried about it influencing people? Not really. I feel like it’s not a new thing. I feel like there’s nothing new under the sun, basically. Everything that’s happening is something that happened before but it was discrete and nobody talked about it. I don’t think anything has changed because of some fake news allegations.

Antti is navigating various connotations of meaning of the “fake news” term in this excerpt, pointing out that “fake news” can refer to a blatant lie, as in the manipulative discredited headlines on Facebook mentioned in the introduction, or to a text from an opposing ideological viewpoint, as in the use of the term as used by Trump discussed in the introduction. Antti appears to recognize the concept of fake news as a deeply ingrained, subconscious or discrete phenomenon or social construct or practice that has recently received overt attention and a new label in modern discourse.

The other students used several words to refer to the concept of objectivity, each tending to prefer one term to refer to the concept. Aino repeatedly used the word neutral. Her comments emphasized the presentation of multiple viewpoints on an event or topic with minimal injection of opinion. Laura frequently used the word professional. For example, while viewing the FOX News and CNN News video reports Laura felt that the CNN anchor and reporter, who maintained a journalistic register with relatively little emphatic intonation, were more professional than the FOX
News anchor and reporter, whose colloquial language and emphatic intonation reinforced the ideological bias of their report as discussed above in 4.2.2. With similar implications, Emma described the tone of the CNN journalists as *respectful*, showing more sympathy for the protesters, and the tone of the FOX News journalists as *upbeat*, showing less sympathy. Emma focused her attention on rhetorical elements of emotional appeal, a social practice she associated with lessons on rhetorical strategies in her secondary education (which I discuss in more detail as part of historical bodies in section 4.3.3). Antti tended to use the word *sensational* to distinguish commercial tabloids from mainstream and national news sources.

Aino valued *neutral* news articles, saying she preferred those presenting facts fairly and from multiple points of view, but did not use that preference as a basis to completely exclude news sources that she perceived as displaying ideological bias from her information environment.

(28) Interview with Aino

Yeah, like I said, Al-Jazeera – or what I follow on Twitter is AJ+, so I think it’s some branch of it – they post, like, videos and stuff where they present the problem and then either, like, sarcastically or, like…anyways, biased from criticizing the political news and events that have happened. So yeah, compared to YLE and BBC, that just share the actual facts and not really like opinions.

She attributed the bias in AJ reporting to her observation that their articles tend to focus on criticism of Republican (in US politics) or Conservative (in UK politics) political policies, and consistently referred to BBC or YLE as contrasting examples of neutral news sources. When asked if neutrality made a source better, or more reliable or trustworthy, than a less neutral source, she replied,

(29) Interview with Aino

Yeah, I don’t think it’s about which… Obviously neutral news are kind of better, but then again they are quite different from each other, I think. Like, of course, when something happens I try to look for the neutral. It’s kind of hard these days with fake news media and stuff and all that. But, I do think that AJ+, they do post neutral news, too, so it’s not kind of like, ok BBC News and YLE is better because…yeah…. I do consider AJ+ trustworthy, even though they have their kind of biased critical views, but they do present them with arguments and evidence
and, like, explain their views instead of just, “this is how it is because we say so”, which can be noticed from some, like, fake news media. That is now becoming very popular.

Aino mentions fake news here in contrast to neutral news, which she characterizes in excerpt (28) as providing actual facts rather than opinions, but also depicts a gray area between fake news and neutral news occupied by media sources providing biased critical views. Aino’s comments reflect metaliteracy as she implies a set of criteria to evaluate an article or news source in terms of neutrality and trustworthiness: neutral news is trustworthy, providing facts without injecting opinions; biased critical news can also be trustworthy, providing opinions supported by arguments based on factual evidence; and fake news is untrustworthy, providing opinions without reliable supporting facts.

Sara expressed the view that bias, or a writer’s opinion that shines through the text of a news article, is unethical outside of opinion pieces. She felt this obligation to avoid expressing opinions in the news being reported was especially true for big news companies:

(30) Interview with Sara

Because if they are big news companies and they provide news for regular people they shouldn’t be affecting the readers’ opinions. They should let the reader choose his or her own opinion.

This view reflects educational goals in the Finnish national curriculum regarding critical thinking, multiliteracy, and civic responsibility touched upon in the introduction: the educational system is a social environment that values independent, critical thought and aims to strengthen students’ awareness and ability to independently and responsibly analyze texts and form their own opinions. With the exception of Antti, who felt that the reader’s freedom and ability to interpret a report as they like renders moot the influence of journalist bias, most of the other student respondents expressed views on bias that were similar to Sara’s, suggesting that this view represents a social norm.

This section has explored the interviewed students’ reported views on objectivity, ideology, and bias in journalistic texts and how they assess the reliability of a text. The next section explores the
student’s recollections of where they developed their views and their literacy practices, addressing formal learning experiences in school and informal learning experiences in their daily lives.

4.3.3 Student reflections on formal and informal learning experiences

Key to the sociocultural learning theory underlying the framework of this investigation is that an individual’s processing of information is shaped by the discourses, conventions, and practices of the social environment in which the learner develops. The educational system is a key site of engagement for this socialization process, so the interviewees were asked to recall classes and tasks that taught aspects of media literacy in their educational background. They also discussed sites of engagement outside of school that have influenced their social practices involving English. These experiences of formal and informal learning were considered as contributions to each student’s historical body in the nexus analysis.

Sara was unable to explicitly explain the basis of her view that bias is unethical outside of editorial opinion pieces in news reporting. This lack of explicit explanation suggests her media literacy relies less on metaliteracy awareness and more on social practices based in social norms. Her recollection of discussing journalism ethics in her high school Finnish classes described journalistic objectivity or neutrality being explicitly taught as a social norm:

(31) Interview with Sara

The teacher just, like, explained us how official news shouldn’t contain any opinions of the writer, like, there are separate opinion pages where you can say, like, “Hey, I like Trump.”, but that shouldn’t shine through the text you’re writing if you’re, like, a real journalist.

This view that journalists should maintain the social practice of maintaining objectivity in their news reporting as a social norm is supported by the fact that most of the interviewees expressed the view that quality or professional news articles should be neutral, unbiased, or objective.

As anticipated based on the previous survey research findings of Luukka et al (2008), most of the interviewed students claimed that media literacy was primarily taught through practical applications in Finnish classes during primary and secondary education. The participants provided
descriptions of learning media literacy through practical application and mentioned the analysis of rhetorical and multimodal discourse strategies in advertisements as a particularly memorable exercise. Aino also recalled focusing on the importance of checking and considering the reliability of sources in history essays.

(32) Interview with Aino

It [feedback on media literacy training] was mostly based on advertisements and if you noticed colors and like placings of the writing and pictures. That was kind of like a good thing... I don’t really remember, honestly, but yeah... And obviously during history it was also notified if you had a source and it wasn’t – and you hadn’t, like, seen if it was a reliable source then it was notified that, hey, maybe this is not a valid bit of information after all.

Similar to Aino’s use of the word obviously here, Antti claimed that most of the points covered or practiced were common sense stuff. These comments suggest that literacy practices can develop subconsciously through long-term exposure and emphasize that learning in a gradual socialization process rather than a momentary event or action. Those students who attended Finnish-speaking secondary schools claimed that media literacy was not specifically addressed or trained in their English courses, which they claimed instead focused more on linguistic aspects of the language. This relative lack of explicit instruction of media literacy in English was anticipated based on the mentioned previous survey research and suggests that students are expected to transfer their literacy skills from their native language (Finnish) to foreign languages.

While the interviewees who attended Finnish-speaking secondary schools recalled addressing media literacy through practical application integrated into their subject courses, Emma and Laura, who both attended IB secondary schools with instruction in English, also mentioned courses specifically aimed at discussing and identifying rhetorical structures of logical fallacies in argumentative or persuasive texts.

(33) Interview with Emma

I was in IB after junior high, and I think there we had a course called Theory of Knowledge. That course revolved around detecting what was real knowledge and what was fake knowledge. Like, it taught us to detect language that made it sound legitime [sic] what was not. [...] It was a difficult course, but I think it was
really useful because it had a lot of tricks people may use to make their arguments sound more legible [sic]. And there was all these fancy names for these ways to amplify your fact as a fact, even if it’s not. One was called slippery slope that was roughly about presenting a fact and then starting to talk about something irrelevant from that to distract the reader from the fact and not make them think about it that much, and in that way make them think that that’s ok.

Emma revealed some vocabulary limitations as indicated by legitable and legible marked by [sic] in this excerpt as she searched for the word legitimate. Her description of the slippery slope logical fallacy as she recalls learning it from the course indicates that she learned not only to identify how it is implemented as a rhetorical structure in the mode of the discourse (presenting a fact and then starting to talk about something irrelevant) but also how the structure achieves the aim of masking a fallacy as a fact (to distract the reader from the fact and not make them think about it that much, and in that way make them think that that’s ok). These comments thus demonstrate metacognitive aspects of metaliteracy.

Emma was particularly focused on rhetorical structures associated with emotional appeal, particularly when discussing sociocultural similarities and differences between Finnish and Anglophone media, and appeared to make a realization about her perceptions of English and Finnish over the course of the interview.

(34) Interview with Emma

Actually, now that I think about it, it might be that I notice them [emotive words] because I’m trained to notice them, because I went through the courses and everything that taught me to detect the language that is used for emotional appeal, but I don’t know if somebody who has not gone through that and doesn’t know how to detect the emotive language, they might not notice that. Like now that I think about it, it might be that English language is more subtle in the emotive language and can conceal the feeling they are trying to emit. Better than Finnish, because it’s not usual in Finnish language to use emotional words and when they do, then it’s like, whew. I see that. So, I really can’t speak for someone who has not gone through these courses where you had to detect this language, and this word may mean they are trying to appeal to you emotionally. So, in my
own experience it’s obvious now, but I can’t say what I would have said to that question like five years ago.

This excerpt shows an example of the influence of historical body on social practice, as Emma proposes how her learning through her rhetoric courses gives her a different body of knowledge or viewpoint for recognizing rhetorical structures (because I’m trained to notice them) than somebody who has not gone through that. She suggests that the use of emotive language might be subtler in English than in Finnish because of supposed sociolinguistic differences between the two languages in the frequency of emotional language usage. This articulation of the fact that the structure of a language is influenced by underlying social practices of the culture reflects an awareness of a key aspect of cultural literacy. That she makes this realization over the course of the interview (now that I think about it) illustrates a limitation in her cultural literacy despite her advanced English competence. This realization also illustrates how engaging and navigating the nexus of practice can provide not only the researchers but also non-researcher participants with insights that can potentially be applied to change the nexus of practice and enact social change.

All the participants attributed a significant part of their extra-curricular language learning to Internet usage in general, citing both practical and social motivations to use English online. The students said they use English so much that the language feels natural to them as advanced learners. This perception felt largely accurate while reading news reports together, as few clear misunderstandings due to language proficiency (for example unfamiliar vocabulary or phrases) arose and the students were able to read the texts and watch the videos fluently. All the participants mentioned online information retrieval as an important social practice where they use English. Jenna gave a clear statement for her motivation to use English to search for information:

(35) Interview with Jenna

English is my number one Google language because it’s more efficient. [...] Finnish just takes you to, like, Keskustelupalvelu 24 and stuff like that. It’s really not as good.

This sentiment was echoed or implied to various degrees in the other interviews, as the students expressed an almost unquestioning acceptance of the position of English as a lingua franca on the Internet. English functions as a linguistic code or semiotic tool that mediates intercultural
communication with non-Finns, while Finnish mediates intracultural communication with family and friends. The general view in the interviews was that Finnish was not as good, not because it is an inferior language, but rather that the interviewees associated its social purpose or context with domestic contexts.

Several students mentioned that games provided important and effective opportunities for language learning through purposeful social interaction. Emma and Antti both specifically mentioned the importance of video games and YouTube videos in their extra-curricular language learning environment. They said video games offered them not only a social connection to collaborative international social networks where English is used as a lingua franca, but also required them to use English to interact with the plot and user interface of the games themselves. Laura shared her hobby of text-based roleplaying, in which the players shared blocks of text via WhatsApp to generate a collaborative narrative. Her social circle in these roleplaying games preferred writing in English for several reasons: the players were used to using English on the internet as well as in the IB secondary school they attended, the original materials or genres inspiring the game were in English, and fantasy settings felt more foreign and immersive in English as a foreign language.

The insights into the learning experiences of the research participants discussed in this section were explored and collected as an attempt to probe social practices that facilitate the development of literacy practices, particularly second language literacy practices among users and learners of English as a second language. The current participants were first-year university students who had completed their secondary education two or three years earlier, thus the reliability of their insights is limited somewhat by the interference of time. Nevertheless, the teaching practices and learning experiences they recall represent potentially important influences on literacy development because they are experiences that have made a lasting impression on the students.
5 Summary and conclusion

Media literacy comprises a set of cognitive and communicative skills that are critical for productive citizenship in the modern era. Fostering the development of media literacy is thus an important pedagogical goal in modern educational curricula. The increasing importance of the Internet and social media in information distribution and creation in modern society have changed the speed and manner with which information media are engaged and handled, making the subject of media literacy an important area for research and development.

The current work was an attempt to engage and navigate the nexus of praxis of reading online news stories in English as a second language, systematically locating and analyzing social discourse practices in American news stories and how these news texts were viewed from the perspective of Finnish students of English. The analysis considered the information presented in the three news reports selected for the data set, cognitive and practical aspects of locating the reports and watching the videos and reading the texts comprising them, observations of student participants as they read and discussed the news reports with me, and views and perspectives of the students regarding wider aspects of news media, media literacy, and their learning experiences. The information in the reports was analyzed for polarizing discourse features that portray one social group or ideology more favorably than another social group or ideology, and the historical context of the common news event covered by the reports and how elements of this historical context were presented or omitted to support the ideological agenda and possible motives of the reporting journalists.

The social practice of “reading an online news story via Facebook” was considered as several individual social actions: “watching a video in the news feed post”, “reading the text of the news feed post”, “following the hyperlink to the full report”, “watching a video on the news agency’s website”, and “reading the text of the full report”. The action of watching a video felt more engaging and efficient to me than the action of reading the text, though watching the video proved less informative than reading the text due to the journalistic practice of editing; however, some of the students preferred reading news articles to watching video reports, revealing that personal preferences influence choosing which social action to take in the nexus of practice. The importance of editing as a social practice was illustrated through the comparison and contrast of
information presented in the three news reports, which provided three different perspectives on the same event. The presentation of these different perspectives highlights the importance of the social practice of seeking out multiple sources of information from socially diverse sources, and the student interviewees held this social practice as important in reading the news as a responsible member of society.

The discourse analysis of polarizing language and presentation of the historical background of the event highlights various social actions taken by journalists to emphasize and deemphasize favorable and unfavorable details and views in presenting the news. The FOX News report analyzed here presented the government and law enforcement officials with positive descriptions and language emphasizing their victory in closing the Oceti Sakowin protest camp and presented the protesters with negative descriptions and language emphasizing their loss. The report omits the detail of the ongoing legal dispute over the legality of the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, the focus of the protest, which would weaken the rhetorical impact of describing the protest as lost and over. The ABC News report focuses on the course of the native protesters against the government’s intrusion on their land, relying on rhetorical appeals to emotion and presenting the protesters as individuals fighting the force of the government as a social institution while downplaying the background fact that the legal dispute was still unresolved. The CNN News report falls rhetorically between the two extremes of FOX News and ABC News, but a rhetorical undertone of support for the cause of the protesters over the authorities can be identified within the rhetoric of the traditional journalistic standard.

Analyzing the texts of the news stories collaboratively with me, the students drew many interpretations similar to my own but also provided additional observations and viewpoints of their own. We arrived at similar assessments of left-leaning (liberal) or right-leaning (conservative) ideological bias or preference for one side or the other (pro-protest or pro-government) in the tenor of the discourse of each news report. As Finns reading American news stories, the students did show some limitations in interpreting some nuances in the news stories due to their relatively limited familiarity with elements of the cultural background of the story, specifically regarding the deeper social undertones of intercultural division between the minority indigenous American tribes at the center of the protest against the pipeline and the majority non-indigenous American
culture represented by the oil corporation and the government. Regardless, the students were generally able to engage the news reports fluently and comfortably as competent, advanced users of English as a lingua franca and were generally able to notice key rhetorical features that revealed underlying ideological biases across the intercultural divide between Finnish and American journalistic discourse practices. Most students valued objectivity over ideological bias in journalistic texts, though several also believed that the reader is ultimately responsible for recognizing bias and deciding which information is reliably factual. They attributed their development of literacy practices both to practical assignments in school as well as practical use of English out of school as part of their daily lives, for example through information retrieval on the Internet, social media, and gaming. The interviews revealed a variety of attitudes and practices regarding general media usage practices, preferred social media platforms, and objectivity or bias in news reporting. This variety of views highlights the social diversity of the students’ media literacy practices, the individuality of historical body, and the important influence of historical body on the nexus of practice.

To improve media literacy education, it is important to help students recognize and understand the rhetorical strategies highlighted in this analysis, identifying what information is presented in a news report, how that information is presented, how that presentation portrays different viewpoints with respect to each other, and what information and viewpoints may be missing from the report and needs to be sought out elsewhere to ultimately draw a well-informed conclusion. These points received the most attention in the current analysis and yielded insights into literacy practices and language awareness of the advanced English learners who participated in the study. Future research could explore the same themes with younger leaners who are still in the primary or secondary education stages to extend the study as a pseudo-longitudinal investigation of the development of literacy practices. The insights into learning experiences and teaching practices gained from the current analysis are limited in part because they are based on recollections of the interviewed students, but those recollections reflect teaching practices that have made a lasting impression on the students and the insights they have provided make good starting points for further analysis.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Structure

1. Background Information
   a. Personal
      i. Name
      ii. Birthyear
      iii. Gender
      iv. Native language
   b. Educational
      i. Starting year at university
      ii. Major and minor
      iii. Current year of study
      iv. Year of matriculation

2. Media usage
   a. What kinds of media (e.g. newspapers, magazines, television, radio, books, films, social media) do you tend to use?
      i. Which do you tend to use the most, and how often?
      ii. Online or offline? Do you have preferences? Why or why not?
      iii. Entertainment or information?
   b. Which media do you tend to use English with? Finnish? Other languages?
      i. What factors make you use one language over another?
      ii. How do you feel using English/Finnish for entertainment, fiction, etc.?
      iii. How do you feel using English/Finnish for non-fiction?

3. Let’s focus on journalism now....
   a. How often, or when, do you tend to check the news?
      i. What motivates (or demotivates) you to check the news?
      ii. How important is it to you to follow the news? Why is it (un)important?
   b. What kinds of news stories usually interest you? What themes do you pay attention to?
      i. What interests you about them?
      ii. What catches your attention (headline, picture, theme…)?
   c. Where do you tend to get your news? (Online/offline, text/video, social media...)
      i. If there is a preference...
         1. Why do you prefer that source/those sources?
         2. Do you find other sources worse or inferior? Why or why not?
      ii. Do you follow local, national, or international sources?
         1. From Finland? From abroad?
         2. In English, Finnish, other languages?
         3. How does the source of the news affect what or how you view it?
      iii. How do you find news stories?
         1. Direct from the media outlet?
         2. Via social media?
3. While surfing the net?
   d. How do you decide if a news story or source is reliable (in the language, in the subject, in the facts, in the pictures...)?
      i. What comes to mind when you hear the term ‘fake news’?
         1. Is it a real problem?
         2. Have you encountered it?
      ii. What do you think of bias in journalism?
         1. Should reporters tend to be neutral or biased?
         2. Do reporters tend to be neutral or biased?
         3. How do you react to stories that agree or disagree with your views?