

## Whose Voices Matter? Source Distribution and Structural Hierarchies in Finnish News Stories by Immigrant Background Journalists

**Reetta Nousiainen**

Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

### Abstract

This study contributes to the growing field of research on news diversity (Joris et al 2020, 1895), which often emphasizes the presence of various sources in journalistic content (Heft et al 2024, 240). There is a wide consensus that journalism should include a variety of voices (Núñez-Mussa 2022, 277) and being quoted in the news media legitimizes individuals as participants in public discourse and thus as actors within societal power structures (Seuri et al 2024, 194).

Research on news sources commonly distinguishes between elite sources and citizen sources (Kleemans et al. 2017, 468). In Western contexts, journalism has traditionally privileged elite sources: mainstream media have often been characterized as echo chambers for establishment perspectives and elite voices (Maesele & Raeijmaekers 2017).

This article examines 131 articles produced during internships for journalists with immigrant backgrounds in seven Finnish newsrooms. Between September 2023 and February 2024, thirteen journalists produced these stories. The analysis examines both the distribution of sources and the interpretative frames assigned to them. Research questions are: What do immigrant-background journalists bring to Finnish journalism, and who gets a voice in the stories they produce?

The study uses a mixed-methods approach. A quantitative analysis maps the distribution of personal sources, while qualitative content analysis explores the framing and roles assigned to these voices within the articles.

The analysis draws on principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which has frequently been employed to uncover how political rhetoric, news texts, and other forms of elite communication sustain dominant groups while marginalizing others (Crawford 2011, 625).

The data includes 364 personal sources. Of these, 75% (274) are framed as non-native Finnish. This marks a significant departure from mainstream journalism, where immigrants struggle to enter the news arena (Masini et al 2017, 2339) and tend to have low visibility as actors (Núñez-Mussa et al 2022). However, deeper analysis reveals that nearly 90% of non-native Finnish sources were framed as sources of lived experience, which are often defined as authentic, but lacking credibility (Vodanovic 2024, 574). I categorized these sources into four roles: minority of a minority, voice of the voiceless, unreliable storyteller, and enriching element.

In contrast, 72% of native Finnish sources were framed as experts. According to the analysis, these expert sources typically oppose, validate, or look down upon the lived experiences of non-native Finnish sources. Only twice were Finnish experts challenged within the stories, suggesting a persistent hierarchy of credibility.

Most of the stories focused on themes related to immigration or immigrants. Notably, political voices were almost entirely absent (only one politician was quoted), even though political sources typically play a central role in Finnish journalism (Seuri et al 2022). This absence is particularly striking given the highly politicized nature of immigration discourse in Finland.

Journalism by amplifying voices of non-native Finns. Yet, the framing exposes structural barriers that limit non-native Finns' full participation and influence within mainstream Finnish journalism.

News diversity is widely recognized as essential for journalism (Joris et al. 2020, 1895), often emphasizing the presence of various sources in journalistic content (Heft et al. 2024, 240). There is broad consensus that journalism should include a variety of voices (Núñez-Mussa 2022, 277), and being quoted in the news legitimizes individuals as participants in public discourse and positions them within societal power structures (Seuri et al. 2024, 194). Yet, implementing internal pluralism in practice remains challenging (Núñez-Mussa 2022, 285). Research on news sources commonly distinguishes between elite and citizen sources (Kleemans et al. 2017, 468), and in Western contexts, journalism has traditionally privileged elite voices, mainstream media often functioning as echo chambers for establishment perspectives (Maesele & Raeijmaekers 2017).

This article examines 131 stories produced during internships for journalists with immigrant backgrounds in seven Finnish newsrooms. Between September 2023 and February 2024, thirteen journalists authored these stories. The analysis addresses two research questions: What do immigrant-background journalists bring to Finnish journalism, and who gets a voice in the stories they produce? We focus on both the distribution of sources and the interpretative frames assigned to them.