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Bias and Progressiveness in Textbook Naming Patterns: Gendered and Cultural Norms Presented to Young Readers in Sweden

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Abstract

This article explores how three 21st century Swedish language textbooks represent gendered and cultural diversity for 10-year-old pupils through the use of names. The study is inspired by a Progressive Discourse Analytic approach (cf Hughes 2018), which aims to identify limiting representations (re)constructing prejudice or bias as well as potentially emancipatory representations offering readers to imagine diversity in new ways. The study focuses on primary school textbooks and an age group that has received little attention in previous research, but is of great importance, since pupils' own experience of the world at this point are still limited, giving authoritative textbooks a stronger influence (Weninger & Williams 2005). By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study discusses who is treated as important enough to be known by name and which cultural and gendered identities seem emphasized or hidden in the construction of diversity. In addition, the study discusses the specific role of naming as tool for inclusion in a multi-semiotic discursive textbook landscape.

Keywords: socioonomastics, personal names, gender, culture, bias, textbook, diversity, multimodality

1. Introduction

Discursive practices are powerful and may both consolidate existing hierarchies and inspire social change. Building on social constructivist theorists such as Fairclough (2010) and Van Dijk (2015), this study examines textbook discourses directed at young children (age 10) with a focus on how meanings related to gender and diversity are (re)produced for young readers, acknowledging that these discursive constructions will likely influence readers' perceptions of social reality (Van Dijk 2015) and could enforce bias. Especially for children, whose personal direct experiences of the world are narrowed to the immediate social environment, textbooks constitute important authoritative sources of knowledge about the wider world (Weninger and Williams 2005) and may act as "border-crossing artefacts" (Ibrahim 2022), but they may also act as devices for cultural othering, stereotypification, and marginalization (Niehaus 2018, Risager 2023). While a large body of research has analyzed textbook constructions directed at teenagers, this study brings attention to a younger group of readers, 10-year-olds, which has not often been studied but is sometimes assumed to receive more including and gender-equal textbooks (cf. Niehaus 2018; Ohlander 2010). In addition, the study explores the often overlooked aspect of textbook naming as strategy for semiotic meaning making.

Personal reference can be accomplished in several ways, including the use of personal names (given names, surnames, nicknames, or combinations), use of pronouns (Swedish "hon/han" [she/he] or the recently introduced gender neutral "hen"), titles, and describing noun phrases. Using names for personal reference not only contributes to framing the referent as important to remember (See the 1971 lecture in Sacks 1992, 445–457) and with a certain topical status within the text (Downing 1996), but also contributes to acknowledge the referent as an important, human individual (Nübling 2023) being connected to various social and cultural identities (Aldrin 2016). As Pultz Moslund (2011) concludes, the occurence of a proper name within a text releases "a rush of presence effects", bringing forward all the semantic meanings and individual experiences that the reader connects with the name and allowing these to become part of the discursive context.

This study explores textbook naming strategies and particularly investigates how names act together with visual images within a multi-semiotic discourse (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) and contribute to constructing gendered and cultural identities in intersecting ways (cf. Crenshaw 2017). The studied Swedish language textbooks are designed for mother tongue education in Sweden, but are specifically aimed for the growing number of multilingual classrooms in the country inclusive both monolingual (L1) and advanced second language (L2) learners. The study aims to examine following questions:

(1) How are gendered and cultural identities represented through name choices in the studied textbooks?
(2) To what extent and in which ways are current naming patterns contributing to limiting or potentially empowering young readers in Sweden?
(3) What is the specific role of names in the discursive multimodal process of textbook diversity construction?

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2. The Swedish Context

Sweden is a country with a long tradition of gender debate (Tollin 2011). Equality movements during the 1960s and 1970s introduced important changes such as free childcare, free abortion, individual taxation, and the right to paid parental leave for both parents. During the 1980s a new liberal agenda brought debates on female leadership and equal salaries. In the early 2000s LGBTQI movements have enabled legalization of same-sex marriages, in vitro fertilization for women in same-sex couples, prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation, and a right to carry gender-contrary names (e.g., a child legally registered as a boy may carry a conventionally female name and vice versa). Today, the concept of gender, like culture, is often understood by people in Sweden as a social construct accomplished through actions, representations, and negotiations throughout social life (cf. Crenshaw 2017). However, unlike certain European countries such as Iceland and Germany, Sweden only applies two legal genders (man/woman). This also affects naming practices. Naming trends for diverse children remain unknown, while the majority of given names are still conventionally connected to gendered identities, associating them with either men or women. A small stock of gender-neutral names also exists and is regularly used for both men and women (among the most well-known are *Kim*, *Alex*, *Robin*. See Leibring 2016). In addition, since 2017, the Swedish Name Law, regulating the naming of children, allows for gender-contrary name usage (i.e., giving a conventionally female name such as *Anna* to a boy, or conversely giving a conventionally male name such as *Anders* to a girl). As of yet, however, this possibility is not widely used and the most commonly used baby names remain conventionally gendered. In 2023, the most common names for girls were *Vera*, *Elsa*, *Alma*, *Maja*, and *Leah*, while the most common names for boys were *Noah*, *Hugo*, *Valter*, *William*, and *Oliver* (statistics from The Swedish Tax Agency 2024). Very few names reaching the top 100 list were gender neutral, although examples do exist, such as *Lo*, which reached number 79 on the top list for girls (and was also given to 16 boys during year 2023) and *Charlie*, which reached number 20 on the top list for boys (and was also given to 36 girls during the year).

There are five national minority groups in Sweden: the indigenous Sami, Jews, Roma, Swedish Finns, and Tornedalers (residing along Torne River near the Sweden-Finland border). These minorities enjoy state recognition and support, yet The Equality Ombudsman (2023) identifies pervasive discrimination issues, particularly against the Sami and Roma. In addition, Sweden has seen an influx of further minority groups due to migration during the 20th and 21st centuries. By 2018, 24% of Swedish schoolchildren were either born abroad or had parents born abroad (Statistics Sweden 2020). The country encompasses over 150 spoken languages (Parkvall 2015). Some of the most spoken ones are Finnish, Arabic (predicted by Parkvall 2015 to soon become the largest minority language), Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Kurdish, Turkish, Aramaic, Persian, Somali, and Thai. These diverse linguistic and cultural groups have varying historical roots in the Swedish society, as well as varying socioeconomic profiles, immigration reasons (e.g., work, love, refuge), and cultural significance, thus creating complex hierarchies. Sweden, like other Nordic nations, is becoming increasingly diverse with new kinds of socially intertwined migration/urbanization-driven diversifications (cf. Vertovec 2019). This brings about (re)negotiations of identities that need to be addressed in Swedish textbook discourse (cf. UNESCO 2018) and these new developments call for an intersectional analysis of textbook discourse, and, I argue, a PDA-approach exploring both critical issues and potential positive role models.

3. Theoretical Background: A PDA Approach to Textbook Representations

This study focuses on representations, defined as "the linguistic and visual ways in which individuals and groups are presented in public discourse" (Azimova and Johnston 2012; cf. Hall 2001). Representations constructed in textbooks not only convey which cultural norms, identities, and relations are seen as important within a society, but also act as a way for children "to imagine and thus to identify and transform themselves" (Khan and Sultana 2012). Previous studies of textbook representations have often used a critical discourse analytic approach (CDA, see Van Dijk 2015) emphasizing discursive (re-)productions of power relations and how representations are characterized by issues such as stereotypes, othering, inequality, or suppression (see, for example, Niehaus 2018). However, a one-sided focus on problematic constructions risks neglecting forms of resistance and positive semiotic strategies in use, which, if amplified, might support change. As an attempt to escalate social development, discourse analysts have in recent years suggested an adjusted analytic approach described as Progressive Discourse Analysis (PDA) [See Hughes 2018].

PDA acknowledges that discursive practices have the power to re-construct meanings of present social life as well as to create "imaginaries" of how things could be (Fairclough 2003). It builds on the seminal work of Kress (2000) promoting a semiotic theory of transformation which emphasizes "design" and focus on

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individuals constant re-shaping of existing semiotic resources of representation. As Martin (2004, 183) phrased it in his initial work: "deconstructive *and* constructive activity are both required [when] [. . .] developing understandings that can energize social change". The aim of PDA is thus to "amplify progressive discourses and better understand semiotic mechanisms of resistance and empowerment" (Hughes 2018, 194). PDA is not an opposition to CDA, rather a variant of it, using similar steps and tools with a clearer emphasis on positive role models and constructive mechanisms. To my knowledge, PDA has not yet been explicitly used in either textbook research or in onomastics, but textbook studies have indicated that certain tools such as visual and linguistic complexity allow "shifting perspectives and movements across worlds" (Ibrahim 2022). Studies of other discursive genres have highlighted the positive impact of representations emphasizing strategies such as pluralism or multiple voicing (Rogers and Mosley Wetzel 2013), emotional expressions connected to representations (Su 2016), empathy (Martin 2004), and playfulness (Hall 2001). Arguably, investigations of these or other semiotic mechanisms can be further explored within textbook naming strategies, which the present article addresses.

Research on textbook representations is a vast international field, spanning over 50 years and incorporating various disciplines, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies (see Risager 2023 for a recent overview). Gender and cultural diversity constructions have been extensively studied, with international trends often indicating that women are still underrepresented compared to men in both written content and illustrations, while gender stereotypes persist (Chisholm 2018). Considering textbooks on Swedish literature, Graeske (2010) found a dominance of white male authors in terms of quantity and qualitative descriptions. This gender bias extends to other subjects, with Berge and Widding (2006) and Ohlander (2010) discovering significant male overrepresentation, as well as more varied positioning of male characters compared to female ones. Similar gender biases and stereotypes are reported in textbook studies from multiple countries (Hall 2014; Khan & Sultana 2012; Blumberg 2007). Moreover, transgender and non-binary identities are often overlooked by textbooks (Moore 2020; Graeske 2010; Berge & Widding 2006). Ohlander (2010), who observed greater gender equality in Swedish textbooks directed at younger teenagers than older ones, attributed this to the use of fictional characters and concrete content. The current study builds on Ohlander's research by examining gender diversity in textbooks aimed at even younger pupils 10 years of age.

In examining textbook representations of cultural and gender diversity, Niehaus (2018) found that contemporary studies often reveal a recurring theme of marginalized groups being portrayed at a distance, set apart from a modern, active "us". This pattern seems to transcend various forms of marginalization globally, whether based on cultural, religious, or other factors. While there has been a trend toward improved diversity representation over time, specific issues persist. Eilard's (2004) study of Swedish reading materials highlighted that both visualizations and linguistic descriptions of skin color contributed to normalizing "white skin" as the dominant norm, associating individuals with different skin colors with distancing, cultural deficits, and low language proficiency. Similarly, Waallann Brown and Habegger-Conti (2017) noted that indigenous people in Norwegian EFL textbooks were often depicted with less power and limited interaction with viewers compared to images of white people. In the United States, Gay (2013) identified problems with overrepresentation of certain cultural groups over others in textbooks, and the avoidance of complex questions about inequality, injustice, and suppression, while focusing on "safe" subjects related to culture and diversity.

Textbook research has also recognized that inequality is constructed through multiple interconnected social systems and has employed intersectional analyses (Crenshaw 2017), although such studies are not as widespread. Within Swedish textbook research, Carlson and Kanci (2017) explored how constructions of gender were intertwined with ideas of nationhood and citizenship in history textbooks from Sweden and Turkey. Immigrants were often depicted as less gender equal than imagined Swedish citizens, reflecting a form of cultural "othering" expressed through the concept of equality. Gay (2013) made similar observations, noting that individuals representing cultural minorities in American textbooks were primarily middle-class men aligned with Euro-American norms. Allen and Wallace (2010) examined intersections of gender and cultural identities in visual textbook representations in America and found that male immigrants were not only more frequently portrayed but also placed in leadership positions, while women were depicted as victims or as impoverished.

Naming strategies are often overlooked, underestimated, or unclearly handled in textbooks research (see for example Gay 2013; Azimova & Johnston 2012). However, as described by Thomas and Samjose (2022), childrens' books do often consider name issues in connection to cultural identities and may contribute to infusing both negative and positive feelings and actions (cf. Keller & Franzak 2016). In addition, an innovative exploratory study by Macintyre and Hamilton (2010) has suggested that textbook names are noted by pupils and can evoke various attitudes. The present study therefore aims to contribute to the sprouting field of research on textbook naming.

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4. Methodological Approach

This study applies a PDA-approach to analyze gendered and cultural diversity representations in Swedish language textbooks at a micro-semiotic level. It includes critical examination of limiting representations and identification of constructive semiotic strategies within three selected textbooks intended for Swedish primary school (year 4—i.e., 10-year-old pupils). The selection of textbooks, shown in table 1, was partly based on a small survey from 2018, where primary schools in a medium-sized Swedish municipality described their use of educational materials in various subjects. Although only a few schools participated (6 out of 27), their responses revealed common practices in the municipality regarding use of three major publishing companies throughout several subjects. Regarding Swedish language teaching, the survey indicated consistent use of one textbook (SW2). In addition, two further textbooks were selected (SW1, SW3), published by companies that are widely used for other subjects within the municipality, while also being among the five largest publishing companies in the country (Official Reports of the Swedish Government SOU 2021:70, 111) in order to ensure widely used materials. While the selected textbooks are all well-established in Sweden, the data selection is not representative of all Swedish textbooks. In Table 1 below, information is provided about each of the textbooks in the sample. For the column "Named Invididuals", the total number of references is provided in parentheses; and in the column, "Depicted individuals", parentheses are also used for the total number of images depicting humans.

Table 1: Overview of the Textbook Sample

Textbook	Pages	Named Individuals	Depicted Individuals	Reference
Eriksson, Michaela, and Pär Sahlin. 2015 *Klara Svenskan: Tala, läsa, skriva, Åk 4.* [Manage Swedish: Speak, Read, Write, Year 4]. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.	96	50 (121)	40 (123)	SW1
Ingelsten Eva, and Lillemor Pollack. 2012. *Simsalabim: Grundbok 4, Svenskan 4.* [Abracadabra: Basic book 4, Swedish 4]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.	166	105 (594)	131 (256)	SW2
Fällman-Bajagic Karin, Christina Hansson, and Susan Nieland. 2011. *Zick Zack: Skrivrummet,* Åk 4. [Zigzag: Writing room, Year 4]. Stockholm: Bonnier Utbildning/Sanoma.	117	17 (30)	27 (63)	SW3
Total	379	172 (745)	198 (442)	

The textbooks, designed for use in multilingual classrooms accommodating monolingual (L1) and advanced (L2) Swedish learners, are highly multimodal. They encompass reading and writing exercises, along with photos, illustrations, and striking graphic designs, offering several modes of representation and design possibilities (Kress 2000). This study will acknowledge the multimodal setting by focusing on how name usage functions in connection with visualizations of individuals. The study combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis involved close examination of each text, cataloging every instance of named or visualized fictitious individuals and their linguistic and visual context. For each textbook, the quantitative ratio of names and images connoting different gendered and cultural identities was calculated. The study also included in-depth analysis of the use of names in their context, highlighting both constructive and deconstructive elements.

While most Swedish given names are clearly gendered, associating them with male, female, or gender-neutral identities (Leibring 2016), linking names to culture is more subjective, influenced by cultural and onomastic knowledge (Aldrin 2023). Nevertheless, some broad connotations are widely recognized, and The Equality Ombudsman (2023) highlights that individuals with Arabic/Muslim names face heightened discrimination and harassment in Sweden, emphasizing the role of naming practices in the process of "othering'". A survey conducted by Aldrin (2023), involving 155 participants of different age groups, revealed certain features that increased the likelihood of names being associated with "ethnicities other than the imagined Swedish majority" (as interpreted by the participants themselves), creating an effect of cultural markedness. The study found that these connotations were influenced by a name structure uncommon in Swedish name stock; recent introduction of an imported name; or a low number of current name carriers of an

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imported name. Many names were associated with both people connected to "the imagined Swedish majority" and "other ethnicities", highlighting the international nature of certain names. Based on these findings, this study examines textbook name usage, focusing on names likely to be perceived as showing "cultural markedness" (i.e., names that are not unmarked Swedish or unmarked international names, but rather names that include name structures that are atypical within the majority of the traditional name stock used in Sweden, or are uncommon, imported names, or imported names recently introduced in the country). This allows the study to include names connected to any of the Swedish national minority groups as well as to more recent immigrant groups. By analyzing both the degree of and the kind of "culturally marked" names that are included in the textbooks as well as their connection to various identities, the study attempts to understand how cultural diversity is presented linguistically to readers.

5. Results

The studied Swedish language textbooks include representations of varying characters: real-life people (typically authors of novels), characters from cited works of fiction, and invented characters in textbook-internal narratives. Some of these are named and/or visualized. In this section, the discussion will first consider how various gender identities are discursively constructed through both images and name choices in the studied textbooks. Second, the analysis will focus on representations of cultural identities through naming, while also investigating how intersections of cultural and gendered identities are being produced.

5.1 Multimodal (Un-)Doing of Gender Identities

In Sweden, although most names are conventionally associated with either males or females, a small number of names are regularly used for both men and women (Leibring 2016), giving an opportunity to create gender ambiguousness. However, within the studied textbook sample, only a few such names occur (a total of eight names corresponding to 5% of all named individuals). Although at least one such name can be found in all three studied textbooks, unisex names seem to be an under-explored resource. Among the gender ambiguous names, some are nicknames eluding gender (such as *Röde Balle* 'red ball', *Fågelskrämman* 'Scarecrow' [my translations]) or unusual historic names mentioned in mythological tales or on rune stones (such as *Fot* 'foot', *Hel* 'whole'). Only one name is a well-established unisex name used for both men and women in contemporary Sweden (*Kim*). A further name is an unusual, innovative coinage (*Zick*). The use of gender ambiguous names could contribute to deconstructing gender binarity and enabling wider identification possibilities. However, most examples include the additional use of a gendered third person pronoun for reference to these individuals (she/he—while gender neutral "hen", introduced in Sweden in the early 2010s, is not yet embraced in any of the textbooks) which weakens the deconstructing effect of the naming strategy. Furthermore, both *Kim* (in SW2) and *Zick* (in SW3) are visualized with conventionally feminine attributes (a long hairbraid and a skirt, respectively). The attempts to onomastically deconstruct gender binarity in the textbooks therefore remain limited.

While the overall use of names is highly gendered, the visual representation of children clearly emphasizes gender deconstruction. All three Swedish language textbooks include high amounts of visualizations of individuals, both photos of real-life people and illustrations of invented characters. Most visualizations occur in SW2 and SW1, while fewer occur in SW3 (see table 1, indicating this pattern through both types and tokens, the latter in paretheses). Regardless of linguistically indicated gender, clothing is presented in strikingly gender-neutral ways: children typically wear simple pants and a shirt, without any accessories. Furthermore, potentially gendered physical attributes are avoided. Since visual similarities are far more extensive than differences, the Swedish textbooks seem to level out gender binarity so that girls and boys are visually primarily constructed as "children", and less as representatives of a certain gender. The strong tendency to use conventional gender binary names must thus be seen as a complement to visual gender deconstruction, which creates an overall more balanced flexibility in the construction of gender allowing for varying interpretations. In addition, haircuts appear as a gendered visual attribute. While characters linguistically constructed as female are normally depicted with long hair reaching the shoulders (or at least below the chin) and sometimes ponytails or twined braids, characters linguistically constructed as male are depicted with short hair (typically not reaching below the ears) and quite often a sprawling haircut. This differentiating pattern results in most visualizations of people in the textbooks being gendered (see figure 1), even when individuals are not named. As evident from figure 1, the ratio of visualizations of girls/women and boys/men is more or less equal across textbooks, with the exception of SW2 showing more male than female visualizations.

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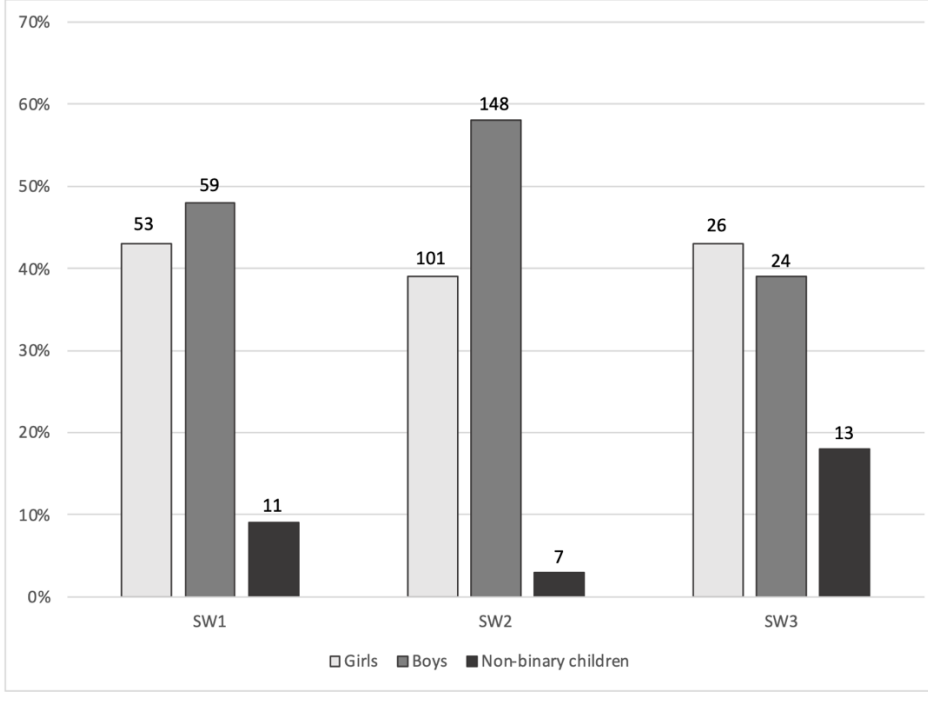

Figure 1: Textbook Visualizations of Gender in Total (N=442)

The textbooks also display interesting examples of visual gender play. One illustration (SW1 p. 68) shows a smiling, young person with long, blond hair and a bright red shirt together with a big, grey, curly beard, thus combining a mix of gender attributes. The headline "Now it's your turn to dramatize" underlines the playful setting. Another illustration (SW2 p. 45) depicts a young person with very short hair and what looks like a sport shirt, who is doing a performance on a small scene. While haircut and clothing might indicate masculinity in the discursive context, the ballet-like position, with a long scarf swept over the arms as well as a long-hair wig may introduce feminine attributes. Again, the headline ("Create – dramatize") underlines the dramatized scene. The third example (SW2 p. 147) shows two children doing a rap performance with characteristic facial expressions and hand movements while wearing pink skirts/shirts, having ponytails/long hair, as well as caps worn backwards, and thus combining traditional female "soft" attributes (pink clothes, ponytails) with attributes from "tough" hip hop culture (bold gestures, caps worn backwards) in a way that creates a mix of gendered identities. These examples encourage readers, through visualizations as well as assignments, to take on and explore non-stereotypic gender identities such as a girl with a beard, a ballet-dancing boy, and bold hip hop girls in pink. However, the examples are few, indicating that transgendering is still not permeating Swedish textbook discourse (cf. Moore 2020; Berge & Widding 2006). These individuals also consistently remain nameless, creating a anonymizing effect, which in these cases may be interpreted as a way to offer readers to approach gender play "from a safe distance". Furthermore, the depicted individuals are all displayed with light skin and hair, without any other cultural or religious visual attributes, thus disconnecting gender play from cultural minority groups.

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5.2 Name Choices Constructing Cultural Diversity in Gendered Ways

Most characters in the textbooks carry names that are likely to be conventionally perceived as common Swedish names (e.g., *Alice, Johan, Julia, Per*; cf. Brylla 2004). Only a small group of characters (16.28% corresponding with N=28 of a total of 172) carry names indicating cultural diversity. This creates a statistic mix that is slightly uneven in comparison with demographic statistics showing that around 20% of Swedish school children were born abroad or had parents born abroad at the time (Statistics Sweden 2020). Furthermore, very few of the characters carrying these names are visualized in diversified ways, as people of color or in connection with minority cultural attributes (only two in SW1, one in SW2, and one in SW3). The overall pattern thus suggests that cultural diversity is given a marginalized position within the Swedish textbook discourse, both onomastically and visually. At the same time, however, the few examples of named and visualized characters emphasizing diversity that do occur seem to carry an important progressive function within their discursive contexts by emphasizing cultural hybridization in non-stereotypic ways. For example, the two characters appearing in SW1 present a form of multimodal, cultural mixing. These characters always appear together, side by side, and interact with one another. One is a boy, named *Ibra*, and the other is a girl, named *Maja*. Their similar name forms (two syllables, ending with -a) underline their unity and equality.

However, important differences between them also appear, creating a semiotic mix of cultural connotations. The name *Ibra* is likely to be perceived as culturally marked in Sweden (i.e., it does not have a long tradition in the country, differs structurally from traditional Swedish male names which seldom end with an -a, and is uncommon, carried by fewer than 50 persons according to Statistics Sweden 2022). The name could be perceived as Arabic (through its similarity with *Ibrahim*) [cf. Hanks et al. 2006)], or as a parallel to the nickname *Ibra* used for the well-known Swedish football player *Zlatan Ibrahimovic*. In addition, its form is in line with Swedish nicknaming conventions (cf. fem. *Bella* from *Isabella* and masc. *Gurra* from *Gustav*) and, as such, constructs a sense of perceived closeness (cf. McConnell-Ginet 2008). The boy carrying this name is visualized with light skin and light brown hair and no other visual attributes indicating any minority culture, i.e. only the name emphasizes cultural diversity. The name *Maja*, on the other hand, is a conventionally unmarked and quite common Swedish name (Scandinavian form of *Maria* established in the 14th Century) [See Brylla 2004]. The girl carrying this name is depicted with dark skin and long, dark hair, clearly emphasizing cultural diversity. Thus, the combination of naming and visualization creates a multimodal effect of hybridization and cultural mixing that contributes to blurring stereotypical traits of cultural identities. Thereby, it might encourage readers to critically reflect on assumed connections between varying names, appearances, and cultural identities (cf. the use of "visual disruptors" identified by Ibrahim 2022).

Notably, many of the culturally marked names situated in a Swedish context within the textbooks can be classified as Arabic (e.g., *Ahmed, Ali, Ibra, Ibrahim*) [See Hanks et al. 2006]. Names connotated with other linguistic origins also exist, such as Finno-Ugric *Jorma* and *Maarja* (see Patjas & Kortesuo 2015), Turkish *Kemal* and *Mehmet* (see Kohlheim & Kohlheim 2016), the Greek/Latin form *Jesus* commonly used in Spain (See Kohlheim & Kohlheim 2016) and *Sorush* (possibly Persian). However, the strong dominance of Arabic (often male) names in the Swedish textbooks implies that linguistic diversity through naming is primarily constructed through young men with connections to Arabic cultures. Considering that Arabic is in fact only one of many immigrant languages in Sweden, although among the largest (cf. Parkvall 2015), this works simplifying and stereotypical in several ways. Firstly, it over-emphasizes one language group (Arabic) at the expense of others. Secondly, it positions this group in sole opposition to a fairly homogenous Swedish majority, creating an effect of polarization ("us" vs "them"). Thirdly, it constructs men as primary representatives of this group while rendering Arabic women invisible.

Other major immigrant languages from Asia and Africa such as Thai and Somali (cf. Parkvall 2015) are completely ignored in the textbook naming strategies (although Muslim names are also used among Somali immigrants in Sweden, primarily for boys) [cf. Löfdahl & Wenner 2018], creating a simplified linguistic landscape. Furthermore, most of the officially supported national minority languages (Sami, Yiddish, Romani) also remain invisible in the textbooks, which points at remains of a colonial ideology ignoring indigenous people, in line with other Scandinavian textbook studies (cf. Waallann Brown & Habegger-Conti 2017; Eilard 2004). Some possibly Finnish names are included in the textbooks, acknowledging the largest national minority language to some extent, but they occur in very small numbers. If a larger multitude of names with varying cultural connotations had been used, it could have created a sense of "transculturalism" (Ibrahim 2022) underlining cultural variation rather than consolidating the presence of specific cultural groups.

Some of the chosen cultural names are very well-known within a Swedish context and risk being perceived as stereotypic (Aldrin 2017 cf. Hall 2001) choices (such as *Ahmed, Ali, Zlatan*). Others are far less known (such as *Jorma, Mehmet, Sorush*) and contribute to diversification. Especially in SW2, which includes most cultural names situated in a Swedish context, the mixed usage of common and uncommon cultural names contributes

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to onomastic multitude and underlines diversity. However, SW2 also includes a highly problematic name choice: The fictitious Greek name coinage *Tsatsiki* (included in an extract from a well-known Swedish work of fiction) which evokes problematic connotations with the famous Greek dip *Tzatziki* working to both exotify and diminish (food categories are seldom used as a basis for personal names in Sweden and may suggest dehumanization).

Finally, as evident from table 2, boys are generally overrepresented among characters emphasizing cultural diversity in the textbooks. This is the case both among characters represented with name only and with characters represented with image only, while the number of characters represented with both name and image are so few that conclusions can hardly be drawn. In addition, boys of color are more often represented only with a name, while girls of color are more often represented only visually. Out of the 12 named individuals carrying a first name that indicates cultural diversity who are positioned within a Swedish context, 10 refer to boys. The reader gets to meet *Ibra* (SW1), *Ali, Ibrahim, Jesus, Kemal, Mehmet, Zlatan* and *Tsatsiki* (SW2), *Ahmed,* and *Sorush* (SW3). Only one young girl carrying a culturally marked name appears (*Jorma*), and only one adult woman (author *Maarja Talgre*), both in SW2. Thereby, diverse naming is primarily connected to male gender in the Swedish textbooks, resulting in females with diverse backgrounds being less emphasized. Notably, table 2 also shows that all textbooks include one non-binary character of color (in all instances this person is displayed passively within a larger group and typically without eye contact with the reader, indicating disconnectedness (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). Furthermore, it can be concluded that characters of color are mostly displayed either with an image or a name, but seldom both. This discourages deeper interaction and enhances the risk of perceiving the characters as shallow illustrations rather than fully elaborated individuals.

Table 2: Representation of Individual Characters with Diverse Backgrounds, Situated in Sweden or Elsewhere

	Diversified Girls			**Diversified Boys**			**Diversified Children With Unclear/Non-Binary Gender Identity**		
	Image Only	Name Only	Name + Image	Image Only	Name Only	Name + Image	Image Only	Name Only	Name + Image
SW1	4	1	2	7	4	-	1	-	-
SW2	4	3	-	7	13	1	1	-	-
SW3	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	1
Total	*8*	*4*	*3*	*14*	*19*	*1*	*2*	-	*1*

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This article has approached textbook representations of gendered and cultural diversity inspired by a Progressive Discourse Analytic (PDA) approach (see Hughes 2018). Based on analyses of names in their multimodal setting in three Swedish Language textbooks for primary school pupils, it has attempted to show complexities of textual meaning making through onomastic choices. The first research question was: "How are gendered and cultural identities represented through name choices in the studied textbooks?". In answer to this question, it can be concluded that all three of the studied textbooks display a variety of strategies in their constructions of gendered and cultural identities. The visualizations of characters were highly gender neutral, constructing depicted individuals as "children" rather than representatives of a certain gender and thereby contributing to levelling out gender differences, which confirms Ohlanders (2010) suggestion that textbook equality may be facilitated by extensive use of fictitious characters. At the same time, however, most characters were onomastically and linguistically constructed in a clearly gender binary way, as either women or men, creating a restraining effect on the deconstruction of gender binarity. The available stock of Swedish gender ambiguous names (Leibring 2016) was seldom used and the gender-neutral pronoun "hen", nationally spread since 2013 (Milles 2013), was not yet embraced in any of the texts. In addition, examples of visual gender play were never interconnected with representations of cultural diversity. In the construction of cultural diversity, a variety of strategies were identified throughout the Swedish textbooks. SW3 attempted to elude the construction of specific cultures altogether, through avoidance of cultural names. SW1 brought cultural diversity closer to readers through numerous illustrations of diversified people, although they often remained anonymous and unnamed. SW2, on the other hand, included a high level of diversified people using both visual

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and onomastic strategies of emphasis, but primarily focused on boys. It thus became apparent that naming and visualization strategies together create a complex multi-semotic landscape of meaning making.

The second research question considered in this study was: "To what extent and in which ways are current naming patterns contributing to limit or potentially empower young readers in Sweden?". In sum, the three studied textbooks displayed more limiting than empowering micro-semiotic mechanisms in the construction of diversity. As a consequence, the textbooks render an important risk of unintentionally promoting biased thinking among the young readers. Cultural diversity was typically expressed either onomastically (SW2) or visually (SW1, SW3) in the textbooks, but characters were seldom both named and depicted. This created a reoccurring effect of anonymization constructing cultural characters in a superficial way and thus as less important. In addition, diversified girls were less often included in the textbooks or remained unnamed. This result is in line with other recent studies pointing at diverse girls being represented in diminishing ways (Chisholm 2018). When cultural names did occur, they expressed connections to a limited set of languages, primarily Arabic, which resulted in a constraint of the multitude of linguistic diversity in contrast with the linguistic landscape present in Sweden at the time (cf. Parkvall 2015). This not only risks reconstructing stereotypical prejudices, such as Swedish immigrants being primarily Arabic speaking (cf. Gay 2013), but also hides the presence of Swedish national minority groups: the indigenous Sami, the Jews, the Roma, the Swedish Finns, and the Tornedalers. The general naming strategies deployed by the Swedish textbooks generally reproduce existing cultural hierarchies rather than attempt overarching these.

However, a number of potentially progressive semiotic tools did also occasionally appear. These included (1) use of varied naming strategies (well-known/less known cultural names, gendered/gender ambiguous names, nicknames developing social closeness) allowing wide identification, (2) multimodal mixing of visual and onomastic attributes with varying connotations encouraging critical reflection, (3) playful and/or non-realistic use of gendered or cultural attributes. These strategies, if better amplified, could contribute to construct gendered and cultural diversity as a natural part of textbook discourse, highlighting multitude and cross-bordering rather than categorization, and thereby provide young readers as well as teachers with tools for progressive imagination and engagement with the varying cultural worlds of contemporary Swedish society (cf. Ibrahim 2022). The formation of an inclusive and non-segregated society relies on members with diverse backgrounds being equally recognized and motivated to complete education, find occupation, and engage in society. In order to achieve this goal, textbook discourses need to represent identities in progressive rather than limiting ways.

Finally, the third research question was: "What is the specific role of names in the discursive multimodal process of textbook diversity construction?". Here it can be concluded that the study has illustrated how name usage may confirm, complement, or contradict other constructions of diversity (in this study: visual constructions). In addition, while visualizations may contribute to making discursive identities vivid and tangible, naming is needed in order to de-anonymize, humanize, and individualize (cf. Nübling 2023), to provide identities with discursive value within their context (cf. Downing 1996) and frame them as important to remember (See the 1971 lecture in Sacks 1992]), but also, I argue, to encourage interaction with readers. The rich semiotic connotations evoked by names (cf. Aldrin 2016; Pulz Moslund 2011; McConnell-Ginet 2008) contribute to pulling readers into a process of meaning making, thereby encouraging interaction both with the named characters and with the text as such. This underlines the importance of studying names in textbooks as part of the multimodal discursive landscape in order not to miss out on fundamental parts of the meaning-making process.

While some name choices in this study seemed to act as stereotypes that risk encouraging prejudiced thinking among readers, other name choices rather functioned as playful de-constructions of taking-for-granted identity traits encouraging reflexive thinking among readers. Even the ratio of named/un-named characters was significant, since un-named individuals may contribute to anonymizing, de-personalizing, hiding, and suppresssing specific groups within the discourse. However, naming (as well as name analysis) requires deep textual, linguistic, cultural, and onomastic knowledge to function well. Image production may be "easier" for producers to take notice of, scrutinize, and handle with semiotical care. But this does not mean that name usage should be ignored, on the contrary, it urges researchers to explore naming as an important part of the discursive construction of textbook identities, norms, and hierarchies.

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