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### Resisting an action in conversation by pointing out epistemic incongruence: *mä tiedän* 'I know' responses in Finnish\*

#### Abstract

This paper investigates the Finnish *mä tiedän*, 'I know' utterance in responsive position. The data, gathered from naturally occurring interactions, indicate that these responses occur in sequences with epistemic incongruence: the first pair part is an informing type turn, which presupposes an unknowing (or a less knowing) recipient. With the *mä tiedän* response, the response-speaker resists this implication and points out the epistemic incongruence there is at that moment. The *mä tiedän* speaker thus resists the unknowing status attributed to her/him and claims to be knowledgeable, and at the same time resists the social action being accomplished in the informing turn. The uniformity of the expression, its sequential context and interactional function suggest that this expression is rather formulaic. The verb *tietää*, 'to know' is typically described as a complement taking predicate, but the *mä tiedän* responses include no object argument whatsoever; the object of knowing is to be inferred from the previous turn. The form of the expression is fitted to its sequential position. The turn may also contain response particles (e.g., *nii* or *joo*) which specify its contextual interpretation. The data suggest that the use of these Finnish utterances is different from how *I know* responses are used in English conversations, where the responses may signal not only knowledge but also affiliation.

Keywords: knowledge; epistemics; epistemic incongruence; Finnish; informings; conversation analysis; interactional linguistics

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## 1 Introduction, method, and the data

A default assumption in interaction, while not explicitly expressed, is that we know what we talk about. As Pomerantz (1984a:609) observes, when speakers plainly assert something, "they are proposing to represent actual states of affairs and are accountable for being right." On the other hand, not knowing something is often explicitly expressed by people asking information-seeking questions, displaying uncertainty concerning some matter, and so forth. Many types of epistemic phrases (Thompson, 2002) also occur that modify and particularize the interpretation of the utterance they are attached to, such as *I think* (Kärkkäinen, 2003) and *I thought* (Kärkkäinen, 2012; Smith, 2013). But when is knowing something expressed overtly? When do participants say that they know something that is being talked about; what are the interactional contingencies for producing this type of turn?

This paper examines the use of the Finnish *mä tiedän*, 'I know' utterances that occur in responsive positions in naturally occurring interaction. I will analyze the interactional

environments and the sequence types where the utterance occurs, and investigate the social actions the utterance accomplishes. As the key element in the utterance is the verb *tietää*, 'to know', the current analysis adds to the body of literature investigating how epistemicity and, more specifically, participants' relative knowledge positions are managed in social interaction. As will be demonstrated, the Finnish *mä tiedän* utterances occur in sequences where the first-position turn presupposes an unknowing recipient. With *mä tiedän*, the responding speaker resists this assumption, pointing out the emerged epistemic incongruence, and indicates that the previous turn's action of informing was not appropriate (see section 2 for an initial illustration of the phenomenon).

In addition to the analysis of the interactional characteristics of the sequences with *mä tiedän* responses, another objective of the paper is to shed some further light on the role of formulaicity in spontaneous interactional talk and the flexibility of grammar as an interactional resource. This will be done by investigating the fixedness of the *mä tiedän* expression and by discussing the grammar of the verb *tietää*, 'to know' in light of the *mä tiedän* utterances. It will be shown that the *mä tiedän* expression is fixed to a relatively high degree. In other words, the analysis demonstrates that there is a great amount of consistency in both the composition and the position of the responsive *mä tiedän* tokens across the corpora used.

All the *mä tiedän* utterances analyzed in this study are in the first person, affirmative, and present tense. Only responsive sequential positions were included, which means that 'I know' tokens in tellings and other first-position utterances were excluded. Furthermore, all responses to utterances that included the verb 'to know' were excluded (the corpus

contained three of these responses). The utterances included in the collection contained the speaker referring to his/her own knowledge of the issue being discussed, and the object of knowing is what was uttered in the previous turn.

The data corpus consists of 28 hours of naturally occurring interactions and these were collected primarily from everyday situations. The data were selected from the conversational data archives in the Universities of Helsinki and Turku and have been transcribed according to the Jeffersonian system (see Appendix for the symbols). The collection comprises 22 instances of *mä tiedän*.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon is therefore relatively rare, occurring in the current database less than once an hour (once in 1 h 15 min on average). The negative utterance *minä en tiedä*, 'I don't know' is far more frequent, according to Helasvuo (2014, pc.): in her seven-hour corpus, the negative utterance makes up 82% (N 177) of the "first person + 'to know'" utterances, which means that 'I don't know' occurred approximately once every 3 minutes.<sup>2</sup>

The target utterance *mä tiedän* occurs in various forms in the data, depending on regional and other factors. First, the personal pronoun, *mä* (or *minä*, *mää*, or *mie*), is not always expressed. However, the person is by default marked in the verb: the final *-n* in *tiedän* denotes the first person singular (but in certain varieties of Finnish, this is sometimes not pronounced<sup>3</sup>). Second, the verb form of the expression is attested in several forms in the data: *tiedän*, *tiiän*, *tiiä*, *tiärä*, *tiädä*, *tiädän*, etc. – many of the differences in pronunciation

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<sup>1</sup>I would like to extend my gratitude to Päivi Hakamäki and Marja-Liisa Helasvuo for their help in compiling the collection.

<sup>2</sup>In Helasvuo's corpus, 'I know' occurs approximately once every 15 minutes, but contrary to the present study, her calculation includes all possible 'I know' cases.

<sup>3</sup> However, all instances contain at least one or the other, either the personal pronoun or the verbal suffix *-n*; most of the cases have both.

are due to regional factors. As the (standard) form *tiedän* is the most common of these variants in the data, and since the personal pronoun most often occurs in the *mä* form, the ‘I know’ expression will be referred to here as *mä tiedän* when the collection is discussed as a whole. When analyzing particular extracts, I will cite the form that occurs in the case in question.

The methods of study adopted here are conversation analysis (for example, see Sidnell and Stivers, 2013) and interactional linguistics (see, for instance, Selting and Couper-Kuhlen, 2001). This entails a detailed, data-driven, moment-by-moment sequential analysis of the excerpts.

## 2 Background on epistemics and an initial illustration of the phenomenon

Research on epistemics provides an essential background for the analysis of expressions dealing with knowledge. The following case is an initial illustration of how epistemics (and not, e.g., affiliation) has turned out to be a crucial factor in analyzing the collection. This excerpt is from a situation where Mom (Ä) and her 7-year-old daughter (I) are in the kitchen. The target lines in all extracts (here line 8) are glossed morpheme-to-morpheme (see Appendix for the symbols).

(1) [Sg 246, Kökköjä/Clumps]

01 (18.0) ((mom doing chores, child eating))

02 Ä: onks sin perunamuusissa kökköjä.  
**are there clumps in the mashed potatoes**

03 (4.0) ((child taps the mash with her knife, mom standing with her back towards the child))

04 I: mä en oo vielä syöny <perunamuussii;>  
**I haven't yet eaten the mashed potatoes**

05 (2.5)

06 Ä: älä ihmettele=siin vähä saattaa #olla;#  
**don't wonder there might be some**

07 (0.6)

08 I: mä tiiä-Ø,°  
1sg know-1sg  
**I know**

09 Ä: mistäs tiedät.  
**how do you know**

10 (1.0)

11 I: söin eilenki. ((mouth full))  
**I ate yesterday too**

Mom informs her child (line 6) that *siin vähä saattaa olla*, 'there might be some' ((clumps in the mashed potatoes)). This child responds by saying *mä tiiä*, 'I know' (line 8). In her next turn, Mom orients to her child's turn as being literally about knowing something when she asks, *mistäs tiedät*, 'how do you know' (line 9). This is the overall picture that emerges from the data collection of *mä tiedän*, 'I know' utterances: they are used when one participant informs the other on a matter that typically is not particularly affiliation-relevant, and the *mä tiedän* response concerns the knowledge of that speaker's on that particular matter. These fact-oriented sequences can be contrasted with those that have an initiating turn concerning an issue that has emotional value. Those turns – most often called assessments (see, e.g., Pomerantz, 1984b) – make relevant a response that takes up the evaluative potential in the turn and affiliates with it and this means that it endorses the affective-evaluative stance of the first turn (on affiliation in more detail, see, for example, Stivers,

Mondada & Steensig, 2011). Knowledge and emotion can even be regarded as separate interactional orders, organizing human action in their own ways – although they are often inter-related (see Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014).

One of the key notions for the following analyses is the *epistemic stance*, which refers to an expression of a participant's *epistemic status* – an expression of their access to a certain piece of knowledge. Participants can be evaluated on a continuum from being more knowledgeable ("K+") to less knowledgeable ("K–") about a certain issue, and these statuses are constantly negotiated and altered during the course of interaction. (Heritage, 1984, 2012a.) Thus, in fragment (1) above, Mom assumes that her child's epistemic status is unknowing, or K– when she delivers her informing (line 6). This is well-founded, as the child has only previously stated that she has not yet eaten the mashed potatoes on her plate (line 4). Then, contrary to expectations, the child claims knowledge following her mom's informing (line 8) – she claims to have a knowing epistemic status, or to be K+ on whether there might be clumps in the mashed potatoes. Mom questions what the child bases her knowledge on (line 9), and it transpires that even though the child has not eaten her current portion of mashed potatoes, she has eaten the (same) mashed potatoes the day before (line 11) and therefore knows about it.<sup>4</sup>

When interactants agree on who has (or does not have) access to some knowledge, this is referred to as *epistemic (access) congruence* (e.g., Stivers et al., 2011:10). When the participants do not agree on this, meaning that their epistemic stances are not compatible,

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<sup>4</sup> The child does tap the mashed potatoes after Mom's question (line 3) and may thus have some knowledge of the portion on her plate, but she does not refer to this in her verbal responses at any point. Mom, standing with her back towards the child, is not aware of the tapping.

this is referred to as *epistemic incongruence*. This is the case, for instance, when a first-position turn presupposes an unknowing recipient, but the response-speaker resists this and implies or states that s/he is more knowledgeable than supposed. (Hayano, 2011, 2013:38-39; Stivers et al., 2011.) The current collection consists of these types of cases, such as the one above. During her informing, Mom assumes that her child is unknowing, but the child denies this assumption in her response and claims to be knowledgeable – and thus straightforwardly points out the epistemic incongruence that exists at that moment, at the same time resisting the informing action of the previous turn. The marking of epistemic incongruence is a non-aligning (or even dispreferred) action, as the participants' epistemic stances are incompatible (see Terasaki, 2004 [1976]:181; Hayano, 2013:31).

As Heinemann, Lindström, and Steensig (2011) suggest, epistemic incongruence can be addressed, such as by using epistemic adverbs. The authors demonstrate how the Danish/Swedish adverb *jo/ju*, "when used in an answer slot, claims that the questioner failed to take into account shared knowledge, which should have informed the design of the question" (ibid. p. 107). However, in the data for the current study, epistemic incongruence is expressed straightforwardly and explicitly by claiming knowledge by saying *mä tiedän*, 'I know'. In other words, a speaker does not take into account the recipient's knowledge and this is pointed out and thus the wrong assumption is repaired.

Utterances concerning lack of knowledge are shown to be used for various purposes such as hedging (see Keevallik, 2011; Weatherall, 2011; Laury & Helasvuo, 2016 and other articles in the same special issue), but fewer studies focus on utterances that claim knowledge. However, the Estonian *ma tean*, 'I know' and its emergence as an epistemic



adverb has been examined (Keevallik, 2010), but in that data, the object of knowing occurs in the speaker's own turn. By comparison, the 'I know' speakers in my collection refer to something expressed in the co-participant's prior turn, and the expression is used in responsive positions. Very recently, also the English / *know* responses have been investigated (Mikesell et al., frth); the analysis shows that these turns may accomplish several actions, depending on the characteristics of the preceding turn. A comparison of the Finnish and English "I know" tokens will be carried out in section 4; let us now turn to analyze the interactional environments of the *mä tiedän* utterances first.

### 3 Analysis

The sequences with *mä tiedän* responses are initiated by using informing-type turns, as was illustrated in extract (1) above. *Mä tiedän* is not an expected response in this environment, but indicates epistemic incongruence and thereby resists the previous turn's action. This will be discussed in section 3.1 below. Section 3.2 will examine how the particles that occur in the *mä tiedän* utterances, especially *nii* and *joo*, further specify the contextual interpretation of the utterance.

#### *3.1 Epistemic incongruence in the collection*

When an informing is produced, the relevant next action for its recipient is to indicate that s/he has become informed (see, for example, Heritage, 1984; Maynard, 1997, 2003; Terasaki, 2004 [1976]; Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen, 2015:51). Epistemic congruence can thus be

said to be preferred (Hayano, 2013:101ff.). Informers (or tellers in general) try to formulate their turns so that they are tailored for their particular recipients (Goodwin, 1979). Certain practices may be used to determine the recipient's epistemic status regarding a particular issue to avoid telling the co-participants something they already know (for example, Sacks, 1974; Terasaki, 2004 [1976]). In short, the participants monitor one another's epistemic stances and match their own turns accordingly.

However, sometimes speakers do end up telling their recipients something they already know. Let us examine a case where both situations are attested; the recipient first responds to the informing turns here by using a news receipt token and this is then followed by a turn involving the recipient claiming knowledge of the information provided. Speaker A is recounting to speakers E and R what happened to her earlier that day. Before this extract, A has relayed that she has had a sore throat and had gone to the doctor. At this point, she provides some details about her visit. In line 3, E inquires about the particular building A mentions having gone to in line 2, and A subsequently provides a detailed explanation about the location of the building (lines 4–6). This explanation attracts the neutral news receipt token, *aijjaah* (see Koivisto, 2015), from E (line 8), and she then changes her claimed epistemic stance:

(2) [Sg 009, Talo/Building]

- 01 A: mää meni suara siihen jäävuarekadul siihe  
I went directly to the Jäävuorenkatu street to the
- 02 lääkä- siin kasvatusneuvolan taloon tai siihe.  
docto- to the child health clinic building or that.

03 E: °mikä talo [siin o.° ]  
**what is the building there**

04 A: [ja mul oli] lämpö- .hh ↑siin  
**and I had feve- .hh there**

05 jahtipaari suunile vastapäätä;=siin o semmone  
**approximately opposite the Jahti bar, there is a**

06 yksityine lääkärikeskus.  
**private clinic.**

07 (1.2)

08 E: aijsaah.  
**oh (okay)**

09 (0.4)

10 A: siin nii siin,  
**there (right) there**

11 R: jo[o  
**JOO**

12 E: [(-) ↑mää tiärä-Ø.]  
1SG know-1SG  
**I know**

13 A: [mis o shopsen]tterik[i. nii. ]  
**where also the shop center is. NII.**

14 E: [°mää tiärä-]n. joo.°  
1SG know-1SG PRT  
**I know. JOO.**

15 A: nii ja tota noi ni,  
**so and uhm,**

The news receipt token *aijsaah* (line 8) suggests that the information A provided was news to E, and thus A continues her report on the location of the building in question (line 10). At a point when A's turn is yet incomplete, E announces that she does actually have some knowledge of the building by saying *mää tiärä*, 'I know' (line 12), implying that the initial informing (lines 4-6) by A was actually sufficient for her to identify it and no more information about it is necessary. She begins her turn with a high onset, suggesting that

what she is saying is in contrast to her previous talk. Simultaneously with this, A continues her utterance regarding the location of the building. A attaches the particle *nii* to the end of her informing (line 13) to acknowledge E's knowledge claim, *mää tiärä*. This occurs in overlap with E's second *mää tiärän* utterance, which targets the now completed informing turn as a whole. These utterances are then followed by A continuing her original telling (line 15) that was interrupted by E's inquiry about the building that A had gone to. As we saw here, informing turns are not always met with news receipt tokens, but another possibility is that the recipient claims knowledge of the information provided in the previous turn and hence implies that the informing action was not appropriate.

The current data therefore indicate that the *mä tiedän*, 'I know' responses occur in sequences with epistemic incongruence. The first pair parts in these sequences are informings, tellings, and (news) announcements, etc. They all presuppose an unknowing (or a less knowing) recipient: the first speaker presents him/herself as a knowing participant, and the status of an unknowing participant is attributed to the recipient. The responding *mä tiedän* speakers resist the unknowing status attributed to them and claim that they possess knowledge (independent epistemic access) concerning either the previous turn, or the content, thus resisting the informing action accomplished by that turn. In some cases, the *mä tiedän* speakers continue their turn by demonstrating their knowledge in the subsequent talk, as we will see in the next extracts.

Although the turns that precede the *mä tiedän* responses are generally informings, the more fine-grained social action in them may vary. In the previous extract, the informing turn expressed a rather neutral stance. The following case is an example of a turn that takes



turn, not to the complaining character of it. This orientation serves as further evidence for the *mä tiän* being used epistemically and not, for instance, in an affiliative manner.

During the latter part of her turn (line 4), S implies that her recipient should also be informed as to the source of the beeping sound: *se o se nauhuri just*, 'it is **the** (very) recorder' – she uses the definite marker/article *se* (see Laury, 1997) and the particle *just* that indicate the supposed sharedness of the information. Nonetheless, the subsequent repair initiation in line 6 reveals that V is not really aware of (or remembering) the situation. The complaint-like manner in V's turn in line 2 is not actually responded to. For instance, the prosodic realization of the *mä tiän* turn does not convey an affiliative orientation by its speaker: the speech tempo is relatively fast, and the tone of voice somewhat lacks empathy; the speaker does not, for instance, match the prosody of the previous turn (see Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Szczepek Reed, 2006). Taken together, this all suggests that when Finnish speakers wish to affiliate with the co-participant in a context such as this, they will not choose the *mä tiedän* expression, but rather some other turn formats.

In the previous extract (3), the *mä tiedän* response was used to receive a complaint in a fact-oriented manner and at the same time to indicate that the complainable was already known to its recipient. More broadly speaking, the general, robust action accomplished in the *mä tiedän* turns is to halt/resist the course of the action that was implicated by the prior turn. This general action may be realized with slightly differing nuances. In the following extract involving two friends talking, the *mä tiedän* gives a signal to discontinue a description. Here, Miia is informing Anne about the mother of their acquaintance, Anu, whose rather recent death that came up in the conversation was news for Anne. Miia

describes the woman and her activities in lines 1–6, attempting to make Anne recall who that person was. The *muistat sie*, 'do you remember', line 1, is used here to remind the co-participant of the matter at hand, not to jointly reminisce.

(4) [Sg 151, Saman näkönen/Looking the same]

- 01 Miia: .hh >muistat sie< se kävi airobikis,  
.hh do you remember she went to aerobics
- 02 sil (oli) viel semmosii kammottavia  
she (had) even those horrible
- 03 iljetysluomia.  
disgusting moles.
- 04 (0.4)
- 05 Miia: mut muuten se oli ihan saman  
but otherwise she looked just
- 06 näkö[nen ku Anu.]  
the same as Anu
- 07 Anne: [kyl mie ti]iä-n joo.  
PRT 1SG know-1SG PRT  
KYL/sure I know ((her)) JOO
- 08 (.)
- 09 Anne: se oli viel kato-  
she was you see-
- ((2 lines omitted, an intervening turn by another participant))
- 12 Anne: [↑s'oli kans mei=i]skän, (0.4) ↓kaveri,  
she was also my dad's (0.4) pal,

In line 7, after Miia's descriptions of the woman, only then does Anne claim that she knows the woman: *kyl mie tiän joo*, 'sure I know ((her)) yeah'.<sup>5</sup> Anne stresses the verb *tiän* slightly,

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<sup>5</sup> Her prior lack of responding/indicating her knowledge might be related to her being so surprised, to the point of being speechless about the woman's death; prior to this extract, she had enquired about the details such as the time that the woman had died.

making the utterance sound somewhat self-evident. She then goes on to offer some evidence for her knowledge, some further information about the woman: *s'oli kans mei iskän kaveri*, 'she was also my dad's pal' (line 12). Hence, Anne indicates that no further description of the woman is needed. In addition, the particle *kyl* (roughly, 'sure') in the *mie tiiän* turn points to this direction: Anne uses it to corroborate her knowledge claim and to reassure her co-participant Miia, and to eliminate Miia's doubts and her assumption that Anne would not know the woman they are talking about, which is visible in Miia's prolonged description (on *kyl*, see Hakulinen, 2001).

What makes this example slightly different from the majority of the collection is that here the knowledge claim is, at least to some extent, invited or pursued, as Miia's previous turns aim at making Anne recognize the person being talked about. Nevertheless, in other respects, the example resembles the others in the collection. As in the previous extract, here, too, the explaining of the knowledge of the matter at hand (line 12) suggests that the *mie tiiän*, 'I know' is to be understood as referring to the speaker's knowings. More importantly, however, the *mie tiiän* turn here works to indicate that the previous informing is already sufficient or was perhaps not necessary at all and should be discontinued. In other words, the 'I know' speaker resists the course of action in the previous turn as unnecessary.

Not only volunteered informings, such as the one above, but also informings that have been requested by the co-participant (see Thompson et al., 2015:54ff.) may encounter an epistemically incongruent *mä tiedän* response that resists the prior turn's action (for a similar case, see ex. 2). In the following excerpt, the participants discuss a yearly event, a



competition during a festival that is soon taking place. Both the festival and the competition have a theme, and here Jonne requests information on the theme of that year:

(5) [D130, Aihe/Topic]

01 Jonne: mikä tässä on (.) aiheena nyt tänä vuonna.  
what is the (.) topic now this year.

((an unrelated turn by a co-participant omitted))

03 Joanna: se o- haku päällä ollu sen- (0.3)  
it is/has- on the prowl been its- (0.3)

04 Jonne: jo[o joo mä tie]rä-n se on se festari mut=  
PRT PRT 1SG know-1SG DEM be.3SG DEM festival but  
JOO JOO I know it is the festival but

05 Joanna: [aihe (°mut°)]  
topic (but)

06 Jonne: =siellä on joku- (.) teema yleensä.  
there is usually some- (.) theme there.

07 (.)

08 (?): krh=  
09 Joanna: =nii,  
yeah

10 (0.6)

11 Teijo: viime vuonna oli vallaton [rakkaus. ]  
last year was unruly love

12 Joanna: [mä en muist]  
I can't remember

13 tarkemmin  
more precisely

Joanna's informing in lines 3 and 5 was prompted by Jonne's request for information (line 1). It transpires that the information Joanna provided was not what Jonne was asking for, as he responds *joo joo mä tierän*, 'JOO JOO I know', resisting the implication that this would have been new information for him. It is also important to note that the reduplicated

particle *joo joo* that precedes *mä tiedän* indicates Jonne's insistence on the non-newsworthiness of the previous turn (see Kunnari, 2011; on multiple sayings in general, see Stivers, 2004). He even initiates his response at a point where Joanna's turn was not yet grammatically or prosodically complete. Jonne then continues directly to counter Joanna's answer and demonstrates that he does know about this already: *se on se festari mut*, 'it is the festival but'. Apparently, the name of the festival is "On the prow!" and Jonne knows this, and the topic of the competition is something else, which is what he was after. It appears that no one can recall the theme of the year at that moment, and the request for information remains unanswered.

Thus far, we have seen that the Finnish 'I know' responses are reactions to such informing-like turns involving the speaker who delivered some information that happened to be known to the recipient. The *mä tiedän* responses are used to resist the course of action implicated in the informing turn, in one way or another, indicating that it is not appropriate and should be halted. Let us now move to a more detailed examination of the interactional work accomplished by the particles in the *mä tiedän* turns, as they tint the overall action of these turns.

### *3.2 Particles in the mä tiedän turns*

As was evident in the extracts above, the *mä tiedän* response may also contain various utterance-initial particles as well as utterance-final particles, such as *nii*, *joo* or *kyl*. These further specify the contextual interpretation of the turn and indicate how the speaker relates

to the turn s/he responds to. Most of the instances in my collection include an utterance-initial particle, and a few include an utterance-final particle (see Table 1).

<u>Utterance-initial particles</u>	N	<u>Utterance-final particles</u>	N
<i>joo</i>	(6)	<i>joo</i>	(3)
<i>nii</i>	(6)	<i>juu + joo</i>	(1)
<i>kyl</i>	(3)		
<i>juu</i>	(1)		
<i>ai</i>	(1)		
	<b>Total 17</b>		<b>Total 4</b>
<u>No utterance-initial particles</u>	5	<u>No utterance-final particles</u>	18
	<b>Total 22</b>		<b>Total 22</b>

Table 1. Particles in the *mä tiedän* responses

The majority of the cases in the collection (17/22) include an utterance-initial particle: there are 6 instances of *joo* (1 of them reduplicated), 6 instances of *nii*, and a few others. Far fewer cases (4/22) include utterance-final particles. The particles have different interactional functions, and so it can be assumed that they also influence the precise interactional role of the utterance in which they are used. As these particles are regularly found in the *mä tiedän* responses, we will now examine their interactional import. Due to the limited size of the collection, we will only discuss the difference between the examples that have an utterance-initial *nii* and an utterance-initial *joo*, as these are the largest subgroups.

The response particles *nii* and *joo* are often used in similar sequential environments, but they have been shown to accomplish separate interactional functions (Sorjonen, 2001):



of the utterance does not express empathy, as it is produced with a fast pace, in a forward-orienting manner (cf., e.g., Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Ogden, 2006). Instead of affiliating, here the particle *nii* indicates that the speaker has access to what was said in the previous turn; in the same prosodic unit with the particle, the access is explicitly claimed with *mä tiän*. After uttering *nii mä tiän*, the speaker continues her turn with an explanation to the prior speaker's turn: what the reason is behind the beeping sound V is reporting on and why V's "ear is about to break". This explanation is then taken up by the *mä tiän* recipient and the topic becomes expanded. The data suggest that in general, *nii mä tiedän* is often followed by a continuation to the local trajectory of action, which differs from *joo mä tiedän* utterances.

Another case of a *nii mä tiedän* response is the following. Immediately before this fragment, Miia has expressed her somewhat disapproving opinion on their mutual acquaintance, a woman who has diabetes, which regulates her life, and who is a jobless single mother who is again pregnant without a steady partner. Susa takes a turn in response, prefacing it with *nii mut*, 'yeah but'; she does so to imply that even though she shares the overall action line with the previous speaker Miia, some type of a disagreement is to follow (see Niemi, 2014):

(6) [Sg 151, Raskaus/Pregnancy]

01	Susä:	nii mut miust tuntuu et ei se varmaankaan <b>yeah but I think that it hardly was</b>	
02		ollu millään tavalla suunniteltu [raskaus.] <b>a planned pregnancy in any way.</b>	
03	(?) :		[ (---) ]
04		(0.4)	

- 05 Anne: ja se voi olla- (.) dia- (.) beetikolleki  
and it may be- (.) for a dia- (.) betic
- 06 joku e- abortti ni aika (.) rankka.h  
an (e-) abortion quite (.) tough.
- 07 Miia: mts .hhh ei mut ku diabe#e#- beetikolle  
mts .hhh no but for a diabe- betic
- 08 nimenomaan raskaus on rankka. .hhh  
it is the pregnancy that is tough. .hhh
- 09 Susa: [nii on, ]  
“it is”
- 10 Miia: [se joutuu] käymään koko aika syynis  
she has to go all the time to be examined
- 11 sen v[e r i a r]voja tark[kail-]  
her blood counts are being monit-
- 12 Anne: [no se on<] [mm, ]  
NO it is- mm,
- 13 Susa: [nii ] mie ti[iä-n,]  
PRT 1SG know-1SG  
NII I know,
- 14 Miia: [esim,] (0.2)  
for example, (0.2)
- 15 [esim tota toi se, .hh toi: #m# (.)  
for example uhm that, .hh that
- 16 Susa: [mm.]
- 17 Miia: Jokisen Minnan se sisko se Tanja  
sister of Minna Jokinen, that Tanja

In lines 1–2, Susa presents her assumption that their acquaintance’s pregnancy was not planned, implying that she was not intentionally imprudent when she got pregnant. Anne constructs her following turn (lines 5–6) as a continuation of that line of argumentation using *ja*, ‘and’ as a preface, stating that an abortion might be *aika rankka*, ‘quite tough’ for a diabetic. They both attribute unknowing epistemic statuses to their recipients by designing their turns as informative tellings. Both these turns, especially Anne’s, also seem to be

somewhat supportive, or at least understanding of the woman's situation: Susa implies that the woman was not intentionally imprudent when getting pregnant, and Anne presents her understanding that an abortion would be 'tough' for the diabetic woman, implying that this may be the reason she has not done it and thus is (still) pregnant. Miia disagrees with Anne in lines 7–8, asserting that for a diabetic, it is the pregnancy that is tough – expressing the opinion that the woman was not wise to get pregnant considering the situation she is in.

Susa aligns and agrees with Miia in line 9 with a *nii on* turn that implicates unmodified, strong agreement (Sorjonen and Hakulinen, 2009), and as it is a second assessment, it indicates that the speaker (Susa) has epistemic access to the evaluated element.

Simultaneously, Miia continues by specifying why pregnancy is tough for a diabetic (line 10 on). Before Miia has completed her utterance in line 11, Susa comes in with an overlapping *nii mie tiian*, 'NII I know' (line 13), explicating with a *mie tiian* that she is already aware of what Miia is telling her and Anne. The *nii* here participates in indicating that its speaker has access to the co-participant's talk. Despite this, Miia continues talking (line 14) – probably directing her turns (from now on) more to Anne, who in the first place had had a different understanding of the effects diabetes might have. Overall, a slight tension arises between the participants, even disagreement, and the epistemically incongruent *nii mie tiian* turn takes part in this undertaking.

Even though the line of talk shifted slightly in the previous extract after the *nii mie tiian* turn, in general the data suggest that *nii mä tiedän* is most often associated with a continuation of the local trajectory of action. To the contrary, the *joo mä tiedän* turns tend to be more forceful in implicating a closure. In the following case, the *joo mä tiä* (line 5)





Sari continues further with her telling. This *joo mä tiiä* closes down a parenthesis in the telling, dealing with the type of banana in the dessert, and expresses that its speaker is knowledgeable about the issue being explained. This type of environment often only has the particle *joo* being used to claim an understanding of the background information provided and to indicate that the information is sufficient (Sorjonen, 2001:238-242). In this case, however, the speaker adds *mä tiiä* after her *joo* to reinforce her status of having been knowledgeable on the matter explained already. (See also extract 2 above for a similar case.)

The *joo mä tiedän* turn in the previous example was used to indicate that the co-participant no longer needs to elaborate on the just preceding matter. By comparison, the next example contains a *joo mä tiedän* turn that implicates a closure in another way. This turn implies that the *joo mä tiedän* speaker herself is not going to continue on the matter introduced in the preceding turn – and that neither should the co-participant; here the *joo mä tiädä* responds to an informing that is intended as possibly consequential for the recipient. The participants are all young women, going through their shopping of the day. J enquires R about the place she got her shoes from (line 1), and after having received an answer (line 2), delivers an informing (line 3):

(8) [Sapu 119, Kengät/Shoes]

01 J: >mist noi kengät o?<  
where are those shoes from

02 R: no ne mak<sup>↑</sup>so kympi.  
NO they cost ten

03 J: joo no, [Mirka os]ti sit samallaiset.  
 JOO NO, **Mirka bought then similar**

04 R: [hoo=et=ä-]  
**H et M-**

05 R: joo mä ti#ädä-Ø#.  
 PRT 1SG know-1SG  
**JOO I know**

06 (.)

07 R: mut mä ej jaksanu välitt<sup>o</sup>ää<sup>o</sup>h.  
**but I didn't bother to care**

08 (.)

09 R: heh fei t(h)odel=  
**heh no, abso-**

10 =l[akaaɛ. .hh s's mää näiŋ ko se meni sin,]  
**lutely (not). .hh I mean I saw when she went there,**

11 I: [ei: todellakaa siin vaihees jaksanuv vä]littää,  
**absolutely not at that point didn't bother to care,**

Even though J asks about the place R's shoes are from, R's answer concerns their price, but this seeming incompatibility does not cause a problem (for J, the price may reveal the place: perhaps there is just one store in town that sells such shoes that cheap). J then informs R (line 3) that a person named Mirka, apparently not really a friend of theirs, has bought similar shoes. Both the informing turn and how the sequence evolves imply that this is not considered to be a desirable situation; the participants are going to a rock festival the day after, and wearing similar shoes with a little-liked acquaintance does not seem favorable. First, R claims with *joo mä tiädä* that she is knowledgeable about this circumstance, and after a micropause, she continues with *mut mä ej jaksanu välittää*, 'but I didn't bother to care' (line 7), resisting the implications of the informing ("this is not a good thing, what do you do now?"). After another micro pause, R further emphasizes (lines 9-10) her indifferent

stance towards the fact that the other girl, Mirka, had bought similar shoes, and this stance is confirmed in overlap by the speaker I (line 11), who apparently had been shopping with her. Thus, they together pre-empt any further discussion on the significance underlying the informing that occurs in line 3.

This section has shown that even though both *nii mä tiedän* and *joo mä tiedän* are used as responses to informings, their more fine-grained sequential environment may differ. However, both *nii mä tiedän* and *joo mä tiedän* as well as *mä tiedän* responses in general are exploited to point out epistemic incongruence – to straightforwardly claim knowledge of the (content of the) previous informing turn that had assumed unknowing recipients. Hence the *mä tiedän* turns resist the course of action accomplished by the previous turn. These informings are typically not particularly affiliation-relevant or evaluative. As we will see in the following sections, this finding contrasts with the results on the behavior of the English *I know* in interaction.

#### 4 Comparison to the English *I know* on affiliation and epistemics

As was demonstrated above, the Finnish *mä tiedän*, 'I know' utterances are used to claim knowledge of the matter brought forward in the previous, factual informing-turn and to resist the action being accomplished by that turn. Marking epistemic incongruence and resisting the previous turn's action in this manner are somewhat non-aligning actions.

However, it has been shown that in some languages, the 'I know' token can also be used for more aligning and even affiliative actions. Research literature reports that responses such as

the English *I know* may, in addition to being used relating to epistemics, also signal affiliation (for example, see MacMartin, Coe & Adams, 2014; Mikesell et al., frth) – that is, the turns display support for the affective stance that was conveyed in the turn they respond to. According to Mikesell et al. (frth), how the English *I know* is used and interpreted in interaction depends on the epistemic environment created by the preceding turn; that is, the participants' relative epistemic positions as attributed by that turn. When the prior action presumes an unknowing addressee, the English *I know* is deployed to resist that turn's action as unnecessary (as is the case in the current Finnish *mä tiedän* collection). Instead, when the prior turn presumes knowing recipients, the *I know* turn endorses that turn's action and its evaluative stance position (that is, it "shows affiliation"). The latter behavior is not observed in the current Finnish *mä tiedän* collection.

Similarly to Mikesell et al.'s (frth) account of the prior-action-endorsing *I know* turns, Thompson (2002:144), in her paper on phrases without an "object complement", analyzes a case of *I know* and accounts for it as "understanding the point" the prior speaker has made, not "knowing" it. In the same manner, Couper-Kuhlen (2012:122-126) analyzes an *I know* case from a complaint story context, uttered with a matching prosody, and explains it in terms of affiliation and understanding, not "knowing". Let us examine an example offered by Couper-Kuhlen where Dinah complains to her interlocutor, Bea, about their mutual friend, who has a habit of borrowing small sums of money without ever paying them back. Dinah's story deals with an example of this behavior, but on the occasion in question, she (Dinah) refused to lend her friend the money, and at this point, it became evident that the

friend did not need the loan in the first place. Line 35 is the story climax, produced in a heavily affect-laden voice, to which Bea responds with an *I know* token in line 36:

(9) [Money borrower, from Couper-Kuhlen, 2012:122-123]

35 Din: [°h ]and ↑shE prodU:ced money (.) enou:gh to pa:y rej  
oakley and me !BO:TH!.  
36→ Bea: °h (.) uh i: !↑KNO:W!;  
37→ there's it's a !↑QUI:RK:!;  
38→ there's SOMETHing the:re,

This example highlights the important differences in the uses of the Finnish and English 'I know' tokens. The *I know* turn here (line 36) responds to a turn that is highly affiliation-relevant. In other words, it is the climax of a complaint story and produced with an affect-laden prosody. The *I know* turn is used to affiliate with it – that is, to endorse the affective stance in it (on affiliation, for example, see Stivers et al., 2011). Thus, with her *I know*, Bea does not claim to know the story, but instead to recognize the type of situation Dinah is talking about (similar to how the Finnish particle *nii* functions in these types of environments; see Sorjonen, 2001). Furthermore, the prosodic shape of the *I know* marks the speaker's affiliative stance: by matching the prosody of her response to the prosody of the story-teller's climax of the story, Bea conveys that she is 'at one' with Dinah on the evaluation of their friend's behavior. (Couper-Kuhlen, 2012:122-126.) Thus, the sequential context for this type of the English *I know* is different from those we have seen in the Finnish extracts, which manifest the difference in the interactional functions of the token in the two languages; a discrepancy arises not only in the position, but also in the composition of the token. For example, in the current data, the Finnish *mä tiedän*, 'I know' is never

uttered with a matching or “affiliative” prosody (see Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Ogden, 2006; Szczepek Reed, 2006), but rather in a factual and non-empathetic manner, with a relatively fast tempo.

Taken together, the studies cited in this section suggest a cross-linguistic difference in the function and usage of the “I know” expressions. The current Finnish data have only epistemics-related usages for this utterance, whereas the literature on the English *I know* utterances points to affiliation-related usages as well. While the English *I know* utterances are equally used in these two contexts and for these two functions (Mikesell et al., frth), the current collection (which is admittedly limited but nevertheless sourced from large and varied corpora) of the Finnish ‘I know’ utterances suggests that they are only used in responses to turns that are not affiliation/stance-relevant and are used to resist the informing action of those turns. Some personal experience suggests, nevertheless, that the Finnish *mä tiedän* can be used to signal affiliation as well. Nonetheless, this does not occur in the current data and thus it may be even rarer than the epistemic *mä tiedän* – or, alternatively, the reason for the absence may be related to the type of data. One additional possibility is that the affiliative *mä tiedän* is a very recent innovation and as most of the current data is already some years or even decades old, it has not yet captured this usage.

When a speaker thus utters *mä tiedän*, ‘I know’ in the current Finnish data, s/he indicates that unlike the previous speaker’s turn had indicated, there is already a balance of information (epistemic statuses) regarding the matter raised in the previous turn. The speaker of the *mä tiedän* turn resists the previous informing turn’s implication that the information provided would have been new for him/her. Pointing out momentary epistemic

incongruence thus results in an information balance, which is a balance in epistemic terms. This means that these sequences seem to exemplify one way in which the “epistemic engine” works in interaction, as suggested by Heritage (2012b): a sequence may be initiated with an expression of K– or K+ positions, that is, with an utterance where the speaker displays that s/he either has or does not have some piece of information. This occurs in the turns preceding *mä tiedän* responses so that the speakers present themselves as knowledgeable (K+) and imply or state that the recipients are unknowing (K–). Thereafter, the *mä tiedän* turn claims that its speaker is actually knowledgeable of the matter discussed, and thus, that actually both of them are K+ regarding the matter at hand. Thus, a balance in epistemics, an “equilibrium-for-all-practical-purposes” (Heritage, 2012b:48), has been registered and achieved. As a consequence, the (local) sequence may be closed and talk may progress elsewhere – which is what occurs most often in these extracts.

##### 5 *Mä tiedän* as a fixed and formulaic expression

The current data suggest that not only is the interactional function of *mä tiedän* established – it resists the course of action accomplished in the prior turn by pointing out epistemic incongruence – but also the form of the expression is relatively fixed and formulaic. This means that it has special structural features, meaning, and function; both its form (structure and meaning) and distribution are restricted (on formulaicity, see Bybee, 2010; Corrigan et al., 2009; Wray, 2013).<sup>6</sup> The evidence for *mä tiedän* being a fixed expression is related, in

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<sup>6</sup> This type of formulae come close to what have been termed “practices” in conversation analytic literature.

addition to the interactional regularities addressed above, to the constituents used, their order, and the prosodic realization of the whole.

Most often (in 19/22 cases), this expression includes both the subject pronoun *mä* and the verb *tiedän*. Certain response particles can also be attached to the expression, either before or after it. The whole data contained only a few cases of a responsive *mä tiedän* utterance that refers to knowledge concerning the previous turn and includes an overt pronominal object (such as *mä tiedän sen*, 'I know that').<sup>7</sup>

In the current data, the order of the constituents, *mä* and *tiedän*, is always the same: the subject precedes the verb. However, this need not be the case, as Finnish word order is not determined by grammatical rules, but is free to vary according to pragmatic purposes (see Vilkuna, 1989). On the other hand, Helasvuo (2001:79-81) has observed that in clauses that have the subject in a first-person singular pronoun, the SV word order is used overwhelmingly. The fixed word order in the *mä tiedän* cases examined here can also be contrasted to how the negative version of the utterance behaves: Laury and Helasvuo (2016:83) have demonstrated that it occurs both pronoun-initially (*mä en tiedä*) and negation-initially (*en mä tiedä*) as well as without the pronoun (*en tiedä*), and that out of these three, the negation-initial variant *en mä tiedä* is the most common. By contrast, in the current collection of the affirmative expression this study targets, the order of the constituents is fixed.

The prosodic realization of *mä tiedän* is also rather uniform. The expression is invariably produced as a single coherent prosodic unit with no breaks or dysfluencies. The

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<sup>7</sup> These cases were, however, not analyzed in the current study.



phonetic realization of the expression, on the other hand, includes some regional and stylistic variability (such as *mä* versus *mie*, *tiedän* versus *tiän*), but this seems to be unrelated to the interactional characteristics of the expression. Phonetic reduction, however, does not belong to the core characteristics of this expression, which is not surprising given its relatively low frequency (see Bybee 2010:37).

Not only the stable structure of *mä tiedän* but also its stable meaning contribute to its formulaicity. The meaning of *mä tiedän* is greater than the meaning of its parts; it does more than just claim knowledge in this specific sequential position, as has been analyzed above. In terms of distribution, *mä tiedän* is restricted in two senses. First, it does not occur freely everywhere but only appears in specific environments described above. Second, saying *mä tiedän* seems to be the only way to accomplish the social action described above; other alternatives with a roughly similar meaning would address different tasks. A freer, non-fixed expression such as “you told me that yesterday” would most likely be understood to be doing a different action with different sequential implications, such as requiring justification, self-defense or apology. Furthermore, when *mä tiedän* occurs elsewhere such as in “I know that [+ repeat of the prior informing]”, it does not seem to have the same meaning as the plain *mä tiedän*. *Mä tiedän* thus seems to be the only expression that has the particular meaning described above.

In conclusion, the *mä tiedän* expression allows little syntactic variation and is produced as a prosodic whole, both attesting to the restricted nature of its form and pointing to the fixedness of the expression. The formulaicity of *mä tiedän* and its occurrence in specific interactional environments, demonstrated above, suggest that the form and the

environment go together tightly – this is the form that the participants use for this interactional function.

## 6 Concluding discussion: *mä tiedän* as a responsive unit

The structure of the Finnish *mä tiedän*, 'I know' as a responsive unit is inter-related to its sequential position. As this utterance is used in a response slot, it is closely tied to the previous, adjacent turn that it responds to. The current collection consists only of turns that do not include nominal object arguments. Embracing the idea of positionally sensitive grammar (Schegloff, 1996), there is no need to view the structure of the utterance as lacking something, even though the verb *tietää*, 'to know' is typically described as a complement-taking predicate and its argument structure would therefore require an object argument to be complete (on complexities related to transitivity, see Munro, 1982; Thompson, 2002). The current data suggest that when *mä tiedän* is placed in a responsive position and the 'knowing' refers to the content of the previous turn (a situation or an object), this is the structure that participants exploit for the expression – the form is tightly fitted to the sequential position. Thus, the present study contributes to the understanding of the structures of talk-in-interaction: clauses do not always appear in their "full" form, and in general, linguistic structures are context- and position-dependent.

The function of the responsive *mä tiedän* is highly specific. As the extracts analyzed above have demonstrated, the sequential context and interactional function for the responsive *mä tiedän* cases remain uniform and constant across the corpora that the data

compilation was based on. The first pair part of the adjacency pair is an informing-type turn, with the speaker presenting him/herself as a knowing participant (as having a K+ epistemic status) and attributing an unknowing epistemic status (K-) for the recipient(s). The *mä tiedän* speaker resists this implication and claims to be knowledgeable (K+) on the matter brought forward in the informing turn; this means that this expression is one format that participants use for epistemic resistance, and, even more importantly, for resisting the social action being accomplished by the preceding turn. Thus the utterance points out an epistemic incongruence that has (momentarily) emerged in the interactional situation.

The size of the *mä tiedän* turn – and thus the unit it constitutes – varies. In certain cases, the speakers continue the utterance by using another clause to demonstrate their knowledge, but most often *mä tiedän* occurs with only some response particles attached to it, or even alone. Either way, *mä tiedän* is shown to be a rather formulaic unit, a fixed expression that is exploited in the environments and for the interactional purposes mentioned above, its function and meaning arising from its use in its most frequent sequential position. This usage of *mä tiedän* thus exemplifies the significance of fixed expressions in talk-in-interaction – they are recurrent packages that conversational participants exploit. The linguistic elements produced in interaction resemble more ready-made chunks; they are not produced from bits and pieces every time anew.

Furthermore, the apparent “lack” of the “object argument” in the *mä tiedän* utterance is a tying device that the speaker uses to show the turn’s relation to the previous utterance. The present study therefore highlights the significance of the sequential context in defining and understanding units of talk as well as in talk.

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## Appendix. Transcription and glossing symbols

### Transcription symbols

.	falling intonation
;	slightly falling intonation
,	level intonation
?	rising intonation
↑	rise in pitch
↓	fall in pitch
<u>speak</u>	emphasis
>speak<	faster pace than in the surrounding talk
<speak>	slower pace than in the surrounding talk
°speak°	quiet talk
SPEAK	loud talk
sp-	word cut off



sp'k	vowels omitted from pronunciation
spea:k	sound lengthening
#speak#	creaky voice
£speak£	smiley voice
@speak@	other change in voice quality
.h	audible inhalation
h	audible exhalation
ha ha	laughter
sp(h)eak	laughter within talk
[	beginning of overlap
]	end of overlap
=	no gap between two adjacent items
(.)	micropause (less than 0.2 seconds)
(0.6)	pause in seconds
(speak)	item in doubt
(-)	item not heard
(( ))	comment by transcriber

### Glossing symbols

ADV	adverb
DEM	demonstrative
INTERJ	interjection
PAR	partitive case
PL	plural
PRT	particle
PST	past tense
1SG	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular
3SG	3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular
Ø	zero marking

### Symbols in the translation line

- (item) item that is not expressed in the original language but that belongs grammatically to the English equivalent OR item that is not heard properly in the original language
- ((item)) item not expressed in the original language, added for the sake of clarity

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