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Danish dialogue particles in an interactional perspective

Jakob Steensig
Aarhus University
linjs@cc.au.dk

Søren Sandager Sørensen
Aarhus University
linsss@cc.au.dk

Abstract: In our paper, we give an overview over what is known about some of the most frequent interjections in Danish talk-in-interaction: *ja* ('yes'), *nej* ('no'), *mm* ('mm'), *nå* (approximately 'oh'), and *okay* ('okay').

We review the CA/IL literature on these words, and we present our own exemplary analyses of single instances of these words in extracts from our corpus of recorded, naturally occurring Danish interactions. Based on this, we argue that sequential position, epistemics, and affiliation and alignment should be taken into account when describing and categorizing dialogue particles in talk-in-interaction.

Prosody and other phonetic cues are important for the realization of the above dimensions and functions and we review what is known about prosodic and phonetic cues plus add some of our own observations, without launching a full phonetic and prosodic analysis.

1. Introduction

In our academic fields, Conversation Analysis (CA, see Sidnell and Stivers 2013) and Interactional Linguistics (IL, see Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018), interjections have always been at the centre of attention. The reason for this is that CA and IL focus on how people perform actions with talk (and other resources) and interjections often stand alone and perform vital actions on their own.

In this paper, we investigate the *interactional functions* of some of the most frequent interjections in Danish talk-in-interaction. We focus on their use in "third position" after questions and answers. For the current purpose,

we use a broad definition of interjections as words that can stand alone and be independent utterances (as in Christensen and Christensen 2014; ODT n.d.). The subclass of these that we describe here are the "neutral interjections" (Hansen and Heltoft 2011:1117ff) or "dialogue particles" (Hilmisdóttir 2007; ISK 2004) *ja* ('yes'), *nej* ('no'), *mm* ('mm'), *nå* (approximately 'oh'), and *okay* ('okay'). The purpose of our investigation is to describe, as precisely as possible, the criteria for the choices interactants make when choosing one particle over another.

We start by delimiting the tokens we are investigating and briefly introduce our methods and data. Then we show the results of a distribution analysis of the sequential positions of the tokens. This forms the point of departure for looking closer at the interactional functions of the particles in third position, which is the position where most of them occur. This results in an overview of the interactional functions of the particles in that particular position, which highlights the differences between the particles.

2. Delimiting the object of the study

For this article, we are only studying *free-standing* versions of the particles. The basic criterion for a particle (or other word) to be "free-standing" is that it performs an action on its own, and, thus, becomes a turn constructional unit, that is, a possible turn of its own (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974; Steensig 2001, 2011). As this is the most frequent environment for interjections, including the subgroup of dialogue particles (see above), this is an obvious place to start. It means that we have not considered instances where the particles are quoted, as in 'he said yes'. It also means that we have not included combinations of particles, for instance *ja=okay* ('yes=okay'), *nå=okay* ('oh=okay'), *nå=ja* ('oh=yes') (Emmertsen and Heinemann 2010); particles occurring with conjunctions, like *ja=men* ('yes but/well') (Steensig and Asmuß 2005); or duplicated/multiple ones, like *ja=ja* ('yes=yes'), *nej=nej* ('no=no'), etc. (Heinemann 2009; 2015; Stivers 2004).[1] Neither have we included tokens that are integrated with or placed inside a longer turn in any other manner.

It can be difficult to determine whether a token that comes at the beginning of a longer turn is integrated with what comes after or is a turn constructional unit of its own. Prosodic boundaries are fuzzy and indeterminate (Barth-Weingarten 2011, 2013, 2016; Szczepek Reed 2010), so we have considered whether or not a particle carries out an action of its own, and only when we were convinced that it did so, did we consider it for this study.

Words in talk-in-interaction do not occur without sound. So, the particular phonetic and prosodic sound shape is a vital part of understanding what interjections and particles do. We are currently studying the prosody of *okay* (Sørensen and Steensig in prep.) and a study will be carried out on the prosody of the other particles as well (Sørensen in prep.). For this article,

however, we do not investigate the prosody in any detail. We only mention prosody when we know that prosodic features are crucial for distinguishing basic functions of the particles.

From the studies we have already carried out on *okay*, we know that it is necessary to distinguish two variants of *okay* in Danish, one, which we will refer to as "falling *okay*", has a falling pitch contour, because the second syllable is lower in pitch than the first, and/or because there is a clear falling pitch on the second syllable. The other, "rising *okay*", has a rising pitch contour, where the second syllable lies higher in pitch than the first and/or has a rising pitch itself (Knudsen 2015; Mortensen and Mortensen 2009; Sørensen and Steensig in prep.).

We have also found it necessary to distinguish two usages of *nej* ('no'): A "disconfirming *nej*", which disconfirms, rejects or refuses an earlier utterance that has positive polarity, and a "confirming *nej*", which confirms a prior utterance that has negative polarity (Heinemann 2005, 2015).

This means that we distinguish seven functions of our five tokens: *ja* ('yes'), *confirming nej* ('no'), *disconfirming nej* ('no'), *mm* ('mm'), *falling okay, rising okay*, and *nå* ('oh').

3. Methods

The methods we use for investigating the interactional functions of our particles stem from CA/IL. The basis for all studies in this tradition are video and/or audio recorded interaction data. Those data are transcribed with a high level of accuracy when it comes to the timing of events and rendering of words and sounds (Hepburn and Bolden 2013; Jefferson 2004). The transcripts help in identifying phenomena and in understanding their systematicity, but they are not data in themselves – as analysts we are always responsible to the original data. So, we have listened to and looked at the video and audio recordings of all our data.

As analysts we try to arrive at an understanding of interactional phenomena that is as close as possible to the understanding that interactants have. The advantage of focused interactional encounters in that respect, is that interactants, through the way they react (or not), show *each other* how they understand what is going on. Therefore, the extracts that we use and show in the article, include turns that come before and after the phenomenon of interest, and in our analytic argumentation we use our understanding of the context in which the phenomenon occurs as a guide to understanding what it does. We also use "next turn proof procedure" (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), that is, how interactants react to the phenomenon, as an even more important guide.

Among other guiding principles in our approach is that no detail can be dismissed beforehand as potentially unimportant (Sacks 1984:25, 1992:419-420), that utterances are built for turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff and

Jefferson 1974), that utterances perform actions, and actions occur in action sequences (Schegloff 2007), where every action is both context-sensitive and context renewing (Heritage 1984a).

For this study, we have started by establishing the sequential positions of every particle in the dataset. This forms the basis for our distribution analysis in section 5, which establishes the possible position in the interaction of the seven usages. Then, in section 6, we make a more detailed analysis of what we believe to be typical cases of the particles as they occur in the position that most of the particles can and do occur in: third position. These analyses are "single case analyses" (Pomerantz and Fehr 1997; Steensig 2015; Sidnell 2013). But rather than just showing the interactional logic of the single cases, we try to formulate possible generalisations, which can form the basis for a more exhaustive "collection based" analysis (Hoey and Kendrick 2017; Steensig 2015; Sidnell 2013) of more instances of the different tokens.

4. Data

We are in the process of collecting instances of our five particles from a corpus of "naturally occurring" Danish talk-in-interaction. By "naturally occurring", we mean that the data have been recorded in everyday settings with people doing whatever they were doing. They have not been asked to do anything special or summoned to come to a special place, they have just given permission that the interaction they were having could be recorded (Mondada 2013).

We are using two corpora: (1) Samtalebanken (talkbank.org n.d.), which is a publicly available corpus of interactions in Danish. For this corpus, the interactants have given the researchers permission to publish the data (video and audio), but names of the interactants have been changed, and every mention of something that could lead to the identification of persons, has been beeped out. (2) AULing (samtalegrammatik 2018), which is a corpus of conversations gathered by students and researchers at Linguistics, Aarhus University. For this corpus, interactants have given permission that their data can be used for publications, but only when anonymised. We have taken care that all names and other information that could lead to the identification of persons in the recordings or persons talked about have been anonymised.

At the time of writing this article, we had gathered all instances of free-standing *okay* from 20 hours of interaction in the corpora. This yielded 362 instances of *okay*, which have all been examined closely. We have 329 cases of *ja* ('yes'), which have also been examined quite closely. For the other tokens we have fewer (*nej* ('no'): 136; *nå* ('oh'): 55; *mm*: 20). When gathering the instances, we include phonetic variants, such as [ja, a, jaˌ] of *ja*, [nɑɪ̯, nɑ, ŋɑɪ̯, ŋɑ] of *nej*, *okay* with and without diphthongised vowels and with and without aspirated plosive, *mm* both short and long and with one or two syllables, and *nå* in both long and short versions. Whenever we were uncertain whether an instance belonged to our categories, we excluded them. Therefore, we have not

included instances of *ej* [ɑɪ̯] as it seems to be able to both perform some of the functions of *nej*, but can also be a different token, doing other things (Steensig et al. 2013). Neither have we included "gustatory *mm*'s" (Wiggins 2002), that is, when people express their satisfaction with food through an *mm* sound. And so far, we have found no clear instances of the negative *mm*, which we expect to have one or two syllables, of which the first (or only) – or both – end in a glottal stop and the (possible) second syllable has a lower pitch than the first one.

This is an overview article, building on our data *and* our intuitions about how the particles work. All our analytic conclusions build on analyses of concrete instances of the particles in their interactional context, but it is only for *ja* and *okay* that we have been able to check our analytic assumptions on a larger dataset. For the other particles, the findings in our (still limited) datasets have been weighed up against the existing literature, and our assumptions about the functions of the particles will have to be checked on larger datasets.

5. Distribution: The particles in their sequential positions

As we are only considering free-standing particles (see section 2), a study of the distribution of the particles equals studying their *sequential position*. In determining sequential position, we are relying on CA approach to actions in sequences (Schegloff 2007). This builds on "paired actions" or "adjacency pairs" (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), that is, strings of actions which are closely related to and conditioned by each other. Within these, we distinguish a *first position*, which is when an action starts a sequence, for instance when asking a question or issuing an invitation, a *second position*, which is the response to a first position action, and a *third position*, which is the receipt or other treatment of the action in the second position. Furthermore, we have identified particles that occur in a responsive position outside adjacency pairs, notably as responses to tellings, accounts or other longer projects, or "discourse units" (Houtkoop and Mazeland 1985), where they indicate that their speaker assumes a recipient role and accepts that the teller or accounter continues her/his project. We term particles in this position "continuers" (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018:497, 511-514; Goodwin 1986; Schegloff 1982).

We have looked through our data and examined accessible sources in order to establish in which positions our seven distinctions can occur. Table 1 gives an overview of what we have found. A plus ('+') indicates that the usage does occur in the position in question, a minus ('-') that it does not occur, and a plus in parentheses ('(+)') that it does occur but only under special circumstances.

Position\Particle	Falling OKAY	Rising OKAY	JA	Discon-firming NEJ	Confirm-ing NEJ	NÅ	MM
1st pos.	-	+	(+)	-	+	+	-
2nd pos.	+	-	+	+	+	-	+
3rd pos.	+	(+)	+	-	+	+	+
"Continuer"	(+)	+	+	-	+	+	+

Table 1: The occurrence and non-occurrence of uses of particles in sequential positions

The particles only very rarely occur in first position, as questions or other sequence initiators in insertion sequences (Schegloff 2007). In this position, they seem to be understood as asking whether the recipient really means something s/he has expressed, that is, they are responsive, but still initiate a sequence. We have few instances of this, so we will not discuss this use further here.

The particles that can confirm or disconfirm (*ja*, *nej*, *mm*), or accept or reject (*ja*, *okay*, *nej*), occur in second position. Analyses of those can reveal interesting details about boundary cases of (dis)confirmation, (non) acceptance and (dis)agreement. This position will be examined in other studies, but for this study, we focus on one of the two positions in which we find most of the particles, *third position*. Space limitations allow us to focus on only one position and this position is the one for which we find the best cues to the functions of the particles we are considering. Note that this focus excludes disconfirming *nej* ('no') as it is not found in third position, so we are now examining six usages.

Below, we analyse instances of each of the six usages in this position in order to arrive at preliminary conclusions about their function and meaning in this position in Danish talk-in-interaction.

6. Analyses of the particles in third position

In this section, we analyse instances that we believe to be representative of the core interactional functions of the six uses of the particles we have found in third position. All the cases that we analyse involve question-answer sequences, in which knowledge about and access to knowledge is a central concern. Most of the particles can also be used in "deontic" or directive sequences (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen 2014; Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012) and assessment sequences (Thompson, Fox and Couper-Kuhlen 2015; Pomerantz 1984), but our dataset contains mostly epistemic usages of the particles.

For the particles that we have studied the most, *okay* ('okay') and *ja* ('yes'), we are quite certain that our extracts and analyses represent frequently occurring usages. For *nå* ('oh'), we build on quite extensive earlier work, which

corresponds to what we have found so far. For *nej* ('no') and *mm*, however, the representativity is less certain. But we can still claim that the functions we find through our analyses are parts of the repertoire of usages that the particles can have.

Our analyses aim at establishing the considerations that participants can be shown to have when choosing the particles in question. We analyse whether the particle expresses that the information provided in the answer to the question is treated as sufficient and, thus, whether the question-answer sequence can be closed (Thompson, Fox and Couper-Kuhlen 2015; Schegloff 2007). We also consider whether the particles express *alignment* and/or *affiliation*. We use these two terms in the way proposed by Stivers (2008, see also Steensig 2012; Stivers, Mondada and Steensig 2011), according to which an *aligning* action is one that goes along with the activity suggested by a prior action, whereas an *affiliative* action is one that takes the same evaluative stance or perspective as a prior utterance. We further consider their *epistemic* stances, that is, how knowledge territories are expressed and negotiated (Heritage 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Heritage and Raymond 2005, 2012), and, where relevant, we consider the degree and quality of the involvement or commitment expressed through the use of the particles.

6.1 *Ja* in 3rd position

In extract 1, four people have gathered to play board games. All participants have brought games along, and here Svend (SVE) is presenting a game in lines 1-3:

Extract 1 AULing | board-game-coffee1 | 01:59

```
01    SVE:  så har: jeg: red november hvor man oss
            then I: ha:ve red november where you also
02    SVE:  spiller sammen mod en ubåd der: i: (.)
            play together against a submarine tha:t's in
03    SVE:  grove problemer man er en lille gnom, .hhh
            serious trouble you are a little gnome .hhh
04    MAR:  det du snakkede om_
            the one you talked about
05    SVE:  ja_
            yes_
06    MAR:  ja_
            yes_
07    SVE:  å æh:
            and uh:
08          (0.3)
09    SVE:  ja man ska redde den her ubåd fra en sto:r
            yes you have to save this submarine from a
10    SVE:  blæksprutte udenfor elle:r nuklеare
            bi:g squid outside o:r nuclear
```

This extract contains two free-standing *ja* 'yes' tokens, in lines 5 and 6, where the second in line 6 is in third position and in focus here.

The question in line 4 is the beginning of an insertion sequence (Schegloff 1972, 2007) into Svend's account of a game the participants could play. Margrete (MAR) asks a clarifying question in line 4, where she seeks to clarify if the game that Svend is talking about is one he has talked about before. Margrete takes an epistemic position of knowing something but needing a confirmation of the assumption. This can be seen by the fact that her question is non-interrogative (Heritage and Raymond 2012). It is phrasal without any special syntactic (or intonational) marking of interrogativity. In line 5, Svend confirms, in a type-conforming format with *ja* 'yes' (Raymond 2003) in second position and with no silence or any other indication that the question or its answer are problematic. This is receipted by the questioner, Margrete, in line 6 with a *ja* 'yes', after which Svend continues his account of the game. Svend thus treats Margrete's receipt as an acceptance that his confirmation was sufficient, and that the insertion sequence is now over.

Ja in third position is here used to accept an answer as sufficient, as having confirmed an already held assumption. It is thus sequence closing. It is also *aligning,* that is, it accepts and furthers the projected interactional course of events, but it does not affiliate, that is, it does not take a position, mainly because it is not relevant at this point to agree, disagree of express emotions (Stivers 2008). The point of departure was that the speaker had an assumption that she only needed to get confirmed, so the change in epistemic position that the recipient experiences is not a major one, it only goes from not being sure to being sure, rather than from not knowing (K-) to knowing (K+) (Heritage and Raymond 2012).

6.2 Confirming *nej* in 3rd position

Extract 2 is found in a recording of three people who are cooking a large meal together in an industrial kitchen. They are not professionals, but part of a community, whose members eat together at regular intervals and take turns at cooking.

We enter the interaction at a point when Tine (TI) and Tom (TO) have been discussing whether there is salt in the water. Just before this extract, Mette (ME) comes back into the kitchen, and Tom turns towards her:

Extract 2 samtalebank | 225_deller | 1190

```
01    TO:   Mette det var rigtigt du ikk har
            Mette it was true you haven't
02          puttet ø::h salt i det vand her °ikk[å]°,
            put u::h salt in this water right°
```

```
03    ME:                                          [j]eg
                                                    I
            har ikk puttet noget
            haven't put any
04          salt i [vandet n]ej,
            salt in the water no
05    TO:          [nej_ ]
                    no_
```

In line 1, Tom makes an assumption, and asks Mette to confirm it. He does this with a negative declarative, and he frames his question with *det var rigtigt* 'it was true'. This is not an insertion sequence, in the traditional sense of this happening within another sequence of talk. It is rather inserted into an activity, where the continuation of the activity (cooking the potatoes) is dependent on the answer to Tom's question. In lines 3-4, Mette confirms. She does this with a type-nonconforming answer, by answering with a full clause, rather than the type-conforming *no* (Raymond 2003). By doing this, Mette asserts epistemic authority and independence, perhaps countering an expectation that she would be the salt-responsible person (Heritage and Raymond 2005). Tom receipts this answer in the first possible position with a *nej* 'no'. After this there is a silence, during which the interactants are out of camera, but a few seconds later, Tom declares *det har vi gjort nu;* 'we have done that now', and they proceed to other business (not shown). Thus, also in this case, participants seem to agree that the sequence is closed.

This extract resembles extract 1 above: The question makes an assumption in a non-interrogative format, the assumption is confirmed, and this confirmation is receipted, ending the sequence and proceeding to next matters. The difference is, of course, that the token is *nej* rather than *ja*. This is due to the fact that *nej* is used consistently in Danish to confirm and receipt negatively formatted utterances (Heinemann 2005, 2015).

The *nej* in third position here accepts the answer as sufficient, as having confirmed an already held position. The *nej* does not take any position as to the expectability or the affective value of the answer, it just registers it as being enough and that the sequence can be closed. In other words, it aligns (accepts that the activity can go on) but does not affiliate.

6.3. *Mm* in third position

As mentioned above, we do not have many instances of *mm* in our data. For this particular particle, it also turned out that most of our instances were continuers, and, more surprisingly perhaps, that there were more second position instances than third position ones. But we found a few third position *mm*'s. Here is one, taken from a recording of three young people sitting in the living room of their common home, chatting.

At the time when we enter the conversation, the participants have been discussing a recent story in the media about a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and a politician who wanted to change a law. Prior to this, Pia has been the one claiming to know most about the case, and she has taken a quite pronounced stance against the politician who was *ve' å skabe sig* 'being hysterical' (not shown).

Extract 3 AULing | DK1/1 | 10
01 Carl: Men hvorfor hæng- hang det i grunden sammen?
But why is- was that connected actually?
02 Carl: Fordi [ellers]
Because otherwise
03 Pia: [Men det] gør det jo overhovedet ikk.
But it is not at all.
04 Pia: De:t bare ham der ↓jo,
It's just him who ↓y'know,
05 (0.4)
06 Pia: Altså ↑hun er død,
Well/Y'know ↑she is dead
07 Pia: fordi Jehovas vidne ikk må::
because Jehovas witness are not allo::wed
08 Pia: få blod°transfusion ikk,°
to get blood °transfusion right,°
09 (0.5)
10 Carl: ja[:,]
yeah:,
11 Emil: [**m:,**]
m:,
12 Carl: °·mt·hh↑hh°
13 Pia: O:g °*:-° Så, æ:hm=
A:nd °:-° Then, u:hm=*

Carl's question in line 1 could be a rhetorical one ('it is *not* connected'), but Pia answers it as a real question. Even though the question is formatted as a request for an explanation (a 'why' question, Koshik 2003; Thompson, Fox and Couper-Kuhlen 2015), the answer ends up treating the question more like a yes/no question, to which the answer is 'no'. Pia claims that there is no connection, and then accounts for it, again claiming and demonstrating her knowledge.

In line 8, Pia reaches a possible completion of her answer. This is receipted by the questioner with a *ja:,* ('yes') and by the third participant with *m:,* (with a slight rise in pitch). Both of these receipts treat the answer as complete and satisfactory, but the answer was not one that gave an explanation (which the 'why' in line 1 could have indicated); it was rather one that rejected a possible connection and gave evidence for that. That the sequence is treated

as complete here**,** is witnessed by Carl's little lip smack and loud and clear inhalation in line 11.

As in extract 1 above, *ja:,* is used as a third position receipt (line 10), but *m:,* is also used (line 11).[2] So, what is the difference? One observation is that *mm* is not frequent in this position. Another is that it is the second recipient, Emil, who says *mm*. He is the one who did not ask the question and who has taken very little part in the discussion about this topic earlier. It would thus seem that *mm* is a more passive, less committed, token in this position (Jefferson 1983 notes a similar difference in continuer position, and Gardner 2013 alludes to the same difference in various positions). In extract 3, the difference between Carl's *ja:,* and Emil's *m:,* might also be described as a difference in their discursive identities (Zimmerman 1998) or their positions in the participation framework (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004), where Carl is positioned as the primary recipient and Emil as a secondary recipient.

So, *m:,* seems to accept the answer as having been sufficient, and it thus aligns with the sequential project. However, it does not seem to express any stance and thus does not affiliate (Stivers 2008). Furthermore, it is issued from a secondary recipient position and seems thus to be less engaged and less committed than the *ja* and confirming *nej* tokens we saw in extracts 1 and 2 above.

6.4. Falling *okay* in third position

Third position is the most frequent environment of the Danish falling *okay* (Sørensen and Steensig in prep.). Extract 4 is an instance of this. A group of four women are sitting in the home of one of the participants (anonymised as Dorte) drinking coffee and talking. The topic at this point is the amount and quality of candy that their children get when participating in for instance Christmas arrangements. Sus has earlier told about candy from a company called "Candinavia" and she has assessed this candy as really bad and full of chemicals. Dorte has told that her daughter went to an arrangement where the kids got a lot of candy.

Extract 4 samtalebank | moedregruppen1 | 1088
01 Dorte: mt å det [var helt vildt]
mt And it was completely crazy
02 Sus: [(det) var oss] fra [Candinavia;
(That) was also from Candinavia
03 Dorte: [å (m:)
to (uhm)
04 (1.0)
05 Dorte: var det det_
*Was it_*
06 Sus: ja, det var det vi så (det) i avisen;
Yes it was we saw it in the newspaper;

```
07          (0.3)
08 Dorte: ok↓ay_
          ok↓ay_
09 Sus:   men- Candinavia har vel nok andet end
          but Candinavia likely has other things than
10        kemisk affald de har oss: andre ting;
          chemical waste they also have: other things
11        vil jeg tro;
          I assume
```

In line 1, Dorte comments on the amount of candy and her utterance is accompanied with a gesture displaying the enormous size of the candy bag her daughter brought home. In line 2, Sus comes in before Dorte has finished her utterance and informs that the candy Dorte's daughter had received was 'also from Candinavia'. Dorte stops her telling and asks for a reconfirmation in line 5. This question could be answered with a type-conforming 'yes' or 'no' (Raymond 2003), but as it seems to express a surprised stance (Dorte has had no prior indication that the candy in question came from that ill-famed company), it elicits more than just a 'yes' (that is, it addresses a prior "knowledge discrepancy", Steensig and Heinemann 2013). In line 6, Sus answers by providing a confirmation plus an account for how she knows this. This is received with a falling *ok↓ay_* in line 8.[3] After this, Sus mitigates her potentially offensive information, by saying that this information does not necessarily mean that Dorte has accepted that her daughter was fed chemical waste. After this sequence, Dorte continues her telling.

So, we have here an insertion sequence (Schegloff 1972, 2007), consisting of a yes/no question, a request for re-confirmation (and more) in first position (line 5), a confirmation plus account in second position (line 6), and a receipt in third position (the *okay* in line 8). We interpret Dorte's *okay* as expressing acceptance of the answer. But there may be something in the way that she says *okay*, or perhaps in the fact that the *okay* is slightly delayed (0.3 seconds) that makes Sus expand her answer and mitigate the offensiveness of her information.

As was the case with 'yes' and 'no' in extracts 1 and 2, this particle in third position receipts an answer that confirms an assumption held by the questioner. In accepting the answer as sufficient, it aligns with the activity. Sus' answer in extract 4 does not take an evaluative stance, so there is nothing Dorte can affiliate with. But, even though Dorte's question in line 5 was asking for a *re*-confirmation of something that had already been stated, it seemed to come from a position of knowledge discrepancy. By okay'ing this, the speaker seems to accept that this wider knowledge gap has now been bridged, or in Heritage and Raymond's (2012) terms, the epistemic move is from a more pronounced K- position to a K+ position, that is, the *okay* speaker experiences a change-

of-state (Heritage 1984b; Heinemann and Koivisto 2016). However, this move does not occur in the question sequence alone, it occurred already before the sequence, and the sequence was now devoted to establishing whether this surprising information was really true and to get some justification or evidence for it. Another way of seeing this, is that *okay* does not only accept that the answer was good enough, it also indicates that there was something that was important to get cleared up.

To sum up, this *okay* marks possible sequence closing and it thus aligns with the activity, there is no affiliation or stance-taking. However, it does seem to address a bigger change of information state than the instances of 'yes' and 'no' (and 'mm') that we looked at above.

6.5. *Nå* in third position

Extract 5 shows *nå* in 3rd position. It comes from Trine Heinemann's large collection of private phone calls, from the days of the landline. KM has called Fie.

Extract 5 TH | 292-293 M2/10 (Heinemann 2017:250, transcription adapted)

01	KM:	Har du J̲ens hjemme¿
		Do you have Jens at home¿
02	Fie:	N̲ej.
		No.
03	KM:	**Nå,**
		Oh,
04		(0.5)
05	Fie:	Sku jeg ha det?
		Should I/Was I supposed to?

This extract comes right at the beginning of the call. From later in the call, we can see that KM had expected that Jens would be home because she tells that a meeting they were both expected to attend has been cancelled (not shown). So, she speaks from a position of not knowing, but assuming, that Jens is at home, when she in line 1 requests confirmation. She gets a flat rejection in line 2, and then receipts this with a *Nå,* in line 3. In line 5, Fie addresses the underlying assumption in the question and they discuss, half-jokingly, what they ought to know about Jens after this.

This shows that the *nå*-receipt functions as a sequence closing third, indicating that the answer was sufficient. As was the case with *ja*, confirming *nej* and *mm* above, this particle in third position seems to align with the activity, including acceptance of the relative roles and epistemic positions (that Fie knew more and has the authority to assert that knowledge). But the answer is unexpected and the receipt with *nå* in third position seems to target that

specifically: it marks a big change-of-state in knowledge, from believing one thing and now knowing the opposite. It thus turns out that the participants do not totally share perspectives, in that KM can be seen as expecting that Jens would be home and that Fie challenges the grounds for such an expectation.

Heinemann (2017) argues that *nå* in this position is used recurrently when the answer is not the expected one. It seems that *nå* deals with a change-of-state in knowledge in a way that the other tokens do not, by marking the change as unexpected. This function seems to be quite similar to how rising *okay* is used in the same position.

6.6. Rising *okay* in third position

The last extract is one of our few instances of a rising *okay* occurring after an answer to a question.

The two participants in this conversation, Preben (PRE) and Thomas (THO) work in the same company but do not seem to have known each other before this conversation took place. We enter the interaction after Preben has told that he has been with the company for nine years, so he has seen many people leaving the company. Thomas' line 1 comes in response to this.

Extract 6 samtalebank | preben_og_thomas | 963

```
01   THO:  bare imens jeg 'ar været der;
           just while I have been there;
02         der °der° mange der er,
           there are many who are/have,
03         (0.2)
04   PRE:  ja:,=
           yeah:,=
05   THO:  =stoppet å kom[me(t her)]
           =stopped and come (here)
06   PRE:                [ja hvor l]ænge har
                          yes how long have
07   PRE:   du efterhånden været [her.
           you been here by now.
08   THO:                        [(i)
                                  (in)
09   THO:  jeg har været  der i ni måneder nu_
           I've been there for nine months now
10         (0.2)
11   PRE:  o:kay,
           o:kay,
12         (.)
08   PRE:  ja,
           yes,
13         (.)
```

```
14    PRE:  der ka du se,
            there you see,
15          (.)
16    PRE:  de:r  mange [der går_
            there are many who leave_
17    THO:              [°hm:°.
                         °hm:°.
```

In lines 1-5, Thomas agrees with Preben's observation that many people are leaving the company by asserting that he has seen the same 'just during the time' he has been there. In lines 6-7, Preben acknowledges this and asks Thomas how long he has been in the company *efterhånden* 'by now'. This highlights Thomas' (potentially short) association with the company and, by implication, Preben's longer seniority and, consequently, his higher epistemic authority to make claims about what happens in the company (Heritage 2013). Thomas could answer this by just giving a phrasal answer (for instance, '(for) nine months'), but he chooses to answer with an entire clause. The choice of a clausal rather than the more obvious and no-problem formatted phrasal answer (Fox and Thompson 2010; Thompson, Fox and Couper-Kuhlen 2015) together with the fact that the participants use different adverbs to refer to the workplace (Thomas uses 'there' in lines 1 and 9 and Preben uses 'here' in line 7) might indicate that Thomas does not totally go along with the epistemic claims that Preben makes, and that he claims some degree of epistemic independence (Heritage and Raymond 2005). We thus have a situation after Thomas' answer in line 9, where Thomas has given the requested information, but in a format that might not align with Preben's implicit epistemic claims.

In line 11, Preben receipts this with a (slightly) rising *okay*, followed by a 'yes' (line 13) and 'there you see' (line 15) and a repetition of his original wording (which was not shown) of the situation at the company 'there are many who leave' (line 17), choosing 'leave' rather than Thomas' 'stop' from line 5.

The *okay* is thus part of a sequence closing move by Preben, one that acknowledges the answer and accepts it as sufficient. The fact that the question was a request for information, with an open slot – Preben did not know the answer – that has now been filled, means that Preben's information state has been changed. In accepting the answer as sufficient, the *okay* thus also indicates a change-of-state. But, rather than just accepting the answer and closing the sequence, Preben uses the *okay* as part of a longer turn that makes Thomas' answer the basis for a re-assertion of Preben's original claim and of his superior epistemic authority. The two participants share a perspective on the situation, that it is one where many people come and go, and they thus *affiliate*, but Thomas' answer does not totally *align* with the epistemic stance in Preben's question in that it claims some degree of independence,

and, similarly, Preben's receipt does not fully *align* with the epistemic stance in Thomas' answer, in that he uses it for further elaboration and for claiming higher epistemic authority.

7. Discussion

We have now seen instances of six functions of our particles in third position after answers to questions, and we begin to get a picture of the differences in their usages in this particular position. Table 2 summarises our analytic results. We have highlighted the functions that differentiate the individual tokens and their variants the most.

Function\Particle	*ja*	Confirming *nej*	*mm*	Falling *okay*	*nå*	Rising *okay*
Information sufficient, acceptance of sequence closure	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	not fully
Alignment with activity	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	not fully
Polarity in question and answer	positive	negative	positive	neutral	neutral	neutral
Commitment to role of recipient	yes	yes	not fully	yes	yes	yes
Signalling change-of-state	no	no	no	to some degree	to a high degree	yes
Affiliating with stance or perspective	neutral	neutral	neutral	neutral	not fully	yes

Table 2: Summary of the interactional functions of the particles in third position.

The main divide seems to be between the particles that mainly orient to an answer as having given a sufficient confirmation of an already held assumption on the one hand, *ja*, *nej* and *mm*, and the particles that orient to the stance, *okay* and *nå*, on the other.

The internal difference between the 'sufficient confirmation' particles (*ja, nej* and *mm*) lies in the polarity of the question and answer, which differentiates confirming *nej* from *ja* and *mm*, and in the degree of commitment to the discursive positioning as a primary recipient, which differentiates *mm* from *ja* and *nej*.

The 'stance-oriented' particles, *okay* and *nå*, orient to the epistemic stances displayed or implied in the question and/or answer, albeit to different degrees. Falling *okay* can orient to an earlier epistemic discrepancy, but it accepts that the epistemic balance has now been fully re-established. *Nå* and

rising *okay* in third position seem to indicate that there are still unsolved issues concerning the epistemic balance or authority. *Nå* is not necessarily fully affiliative in that it indicates differences in the perspectives taken by the participants while still aligning with the activity by accepting that the answer was sufficient and the sequence can be closed. Rising *okay*, in contrast, seems to affiliate in that it accepts the stance and perspective taken by the co-participant, but it may not be fully aligning in that it does not accept the answer as fully following the activity that the original question was part of, and it indicates that further work might be necessary. This can be seen as reflecting that the rising *okay* is most often used as a continuer, displaying that more talk is expected (Sørensen and Steensig in prep.). However, we have not yet investigated *nå* in third position in detail, so the exact differences between *nå* (with different prosodic patterns) and rising *okay* may turn out to be more nuanced than what we have been able to establish so far.

8. Conclusion

Analysing free-standing particles would seem to be less complex than analysing constructions with internal syntax or morphology. In the case of particles, one word does one action. But what might seem like vagueness in meaning potential, leading to vague descriptions, forms a system of different actions and stances, when free-standing particles are described in contrast to each other. In this article, we propose such a system for choosing between the tokens in Danish, and that a distinction between 'sufficient confirmation' particles and 'stance-oriented' particles can be made.

The web-dictionary, Ordbog over Dansk Talesprog (Dictionary of Spoken Danish, ODT n.d.), is the only project about Danish particles and interjections that is comparable to ours, in that it uses data from talk-in-interaction. ODT lists a number of functions that can be used to distinguish the interjections that they describe. For the particles described in this article and also treated in ODT, the function *topic shift* ('emneskifte') distinguishes *okay* from the other particles, and *negative attitude* ('negativ attitude') sets *nej* 'no' and "*okay* with a negative valence" (our translation) off from the other particles. In order to distinguish the other tokens, no systematicity is suggested (so far).

We have, through our preliminary analyses of six usages of these particles in a specific position, found criteria that can distinguish all of the particles. They are certainly not the only relevant criteria and they do not account for the particles used in other positions or for other prosodic variants of the particles. However, we propose that we can find relevant criteria for distinguishing free-standing particles and interjections in interaction, which carry out actions of their own, by examining them in their sequential context and by trying to find evidence in the way the interaction unfolds.

Notes

[1] The equals sign '=' means that two words are spoken without any pause between them.

[2] The reason that the positive tokens (*ja:,* and *m:,*) are chosen is that Carl and Emil respond to the main point of Pia's answer ('she is dead') rather than the "because" part ('because Jehovah's Witnesses are not allo::wed to get blood°transfusion°') which is syntactically and interactionally sub-ordinated the main clause ('she is dead'), see Steensig (1998).

[3] More precisely, this *okay* is categorized as "falling" because the second syllable has a lower pitch than the first even though the second syllable has a level tone (indicated by the underscore after the word, '_').

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