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The contemporary uses of Finnish *jep* ('yep') in messaging interaction: Confirming a shared understanding

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Abstract

This paper starts by observing that an old loan word from English, the previously unstudied Finnish response particle *jep* 'yep', has recently become more frequent and gained new interactional uses. Using Conversation Analysis as a method, the paper outlines the contemporary uses of *jep* in messaging interaction collected in 2015–2023. It suggests that *jep* does not merely function as an affirmative answer, as suggested in contemporary dictionaries. Instead, it occurs in agreement and affiliation-relevant contexts, and it is used to confirm the validity of the previous speaker's point of view and to construct it as an opinion that is shared between the participants. Although the article focuses on synchronic analyses, it also presents observations on the changes in the use of *jep*, paving the way for a more diachronically oriented study on the particle.

1. Introduction

'Usko Siskoa'[1] is a column in the Finnish newspaper *Helsingin sanomat*. Readers can send questions to 'Sisko' ('sister'), which is a pseudonym for the journalist(s) who write the column. If the topic is very specific, 'Sisko' often contacts an expert in the field. In December 2022, Sisko sent one of the authors of this paper the following question from a reader (translated from Finnish):

> For quite a long time, I've been paying attention to a spoken language phenomenon, and I would like to know its origins and the reason for its emergence. At some point I noticed that all people younger than me, especially millennials, comment on everything with 'Jep'. Jep is clearly beginning to substitute the words 'aivan', 'joo' and 'niin', at least in the metropolitan area.

Now I've noticed I'm using it myself, so the change has reached the older generation, to which I belong. [. . .] But where did this jep come from? Is it a Helsinki-related phenomenon, and how long has it been prominent? (HS 2022)

The reader had noticed a change in the use of the response particle *jep* 'yep'. They were not alone: similar recent metapragmatic accounts can be found in online discussion forums, such as in Vauva.fi, which is a major open online discussion forum with entries on various topics.[2] In these online discussions, *jep* is associated with teenagers/young adults, and possibly with the metropolitan area.

Around the same time, the authors – a conversation analyst and a sociolinguist – had also noticed the frequent use of *jep* in the speech of their students or relatives in their twenties, as well as in some contemporary fiction, such as the popular TV series *Aikuiset* ('Adults'), depicting the life of urban young adults in Helsinki. Thus, the reader's question did not come as a total surprise. However, it was difficult to offer an answer based on existing research.

It seems evident that the particle *jep* is borrowed from the English *yep*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2025), *yep* is a colloquial variant of *yes*, originally from the US. The Finnish *jep* is not a recent loan: according to Paunonen (2017) it has been used in spoken language in Helsinki since at least the 1940s. Preliminary explorations of the digital archives of the Finnish National Library revealed that *jep* was used as early as in 1915 in Finnish newspapers published by the immigrant communities in the US, and emerged in Finnish cities in the 1930s (Visakko, Lehtonen & Koivisto, in preparation). The diachronic changes in the use of *jep* fall outside the scope of this article and will be explored in more detail in other publications. However, based on (a) our own observations and the metapragmatic commentary in the media (presented above), (b) the observations in the available spoken conversational data before 2015 (see Section 2.2), and (c) a robust search in a corpus of discussions in an online discussion forum during 2001–2017 (Aller Media oy 2019[3]), the frequency, interactional functions, and social indexicality of *jep* have recently changed. Combining methods from Conversation Analysis (CA) and sociolinguistics, we set out to examine the use of *jep*, inspired by the reader's question and our own observations. This paper is our first attempt to describe the recent use of *jep*.

There is plenty of CA research on Finnish response particles (e.g. Sorjonen 1999, 2001, Koivisto 2016, Koivisto & Sorjonen 2021), but *jep* has not been studied. Notably, the comprehensive descriptive grammar of Finnish (Hakulinen et al. 2004), which generally includes spoken language and interaction, does not even mention *jep* in its list of discourse particles, let alone describe its use (see § 792). Similarly, no previous sociolinguistic studies exist that explain who has used *jep* before, or whether it has been associated with certain social groups. *Kielitoimiston sanakirja* (the Dictionary of Contemporary Finnish) describes *jep* as a colloquial interjection that is used as an affirmative answer or as a 'filler word' (*täytesana*).[4] However, based on our preliminary observations, *jep* appears to be doing something other than simply 'saying yes'. This paper examines what this 'something else' could be. We must point out that since the use of *jep* is currently evolving and possibly gaining new contexts of use, it is hard to say whether its use differs from all the possible uses associated with the standard Finnish acknowledgment and

confirmation tokens *joo* and *nii* with which it shares some sequential environments (see Sorjonen 2001 and Section 3). The difficulty of making comparisons to these (and other) particles also arises from the fact that different age and social groups (e.g. young adults vs. middle-aged people) seem to use *jep* in significantly different ways (if at all). However, in our analysis, we will make some comparisons to the particles *joo* and *nii* where relevant, and interestingly, the typical uses of *jep* overlap with some of the use of both *joo* and *nii*, as described by Sorjonen (2001). We will not address the question of whether and to what extent *jep* has replaced some other response forms in certain social or age groups.

In this article we discuss the use of the response particle *jep* in Finnish, using WhatsApp messaging interaction as our primary data (see Section 2.2 for details). We examine how *jep* is used in interactional sequences and what kind of responsive actions (see Thompson et al. 2015) are accomplished by using it. In the future, we intend to explore its diachronic dimension (see e.g. Couper-Kuhlen 2021), its relation to other similar particles, its variation, and its social indexicality (see Agha 2007), but these fall beyond the scope of the present paper. This is partly due to the sort of data that were readily available to us. However, before broadening our focus, it is also important that we first outline the most typical uses and the interactional meanings associated with the use of *jep*.

In the following section (Section 2) we describe our methods and choice of data. In Section 3 (Analysis) we first look at the use of *jep* in the 'old' spoken data (from the 1990s and 2000s) and then move on to the focus of the paper: the contemporary use of *jep* in WhatsApp data collected in 2015–2023. We show that the 'old' use (*jep* as a simple receipt token and a marker of topical transition) clearly differs from what we see in its more recent use: *jep* is used to confirm and validate a shared understanding of the matter under discussion.

2. Methods and data

2.1 Conversation Analysis

The central method of this study is Conversation Analysis (CA), a microanalytic approach to studying the orderliness of ordinary conversation, which was originally developed for spoken interaction (see e.g. Heritage 1984a, Sidnell & Stivers 2013). However, CA is also increasingly used to study digitally and technologically mediated interaction in various settings and on different platforms. This approach is called Digital Conversation Analysis (see e.g. Giles et al. 2015, Meredith 2019, Meredith, Giles & Stommel 2021, Koivisto, Vepsäläinen & Virtanen 2023). In line with this approach, we start with the assumption that asynchronous messaging interaction can also be analyzed using CA methods, especially sequential analysis (see Schegloff 2007).

CA (also as applied to digital interaction) offers powerful tools for examining the use and meaning of response particles. The approach has revealed differences in the ways in which different particles (with their prosodic realizations) encode epistemic and affective stances and how they organize the interaction by creating an expectation of more to come, or by implying sequence closure (e.g. Heritage 1984b, Sorjonen 2001, Gardner 2007, Betz et al. 2021). In our analysis, we follow the

analytic guidelines for the study of response particles developed by Sorjonen (1999, 2001; see also Bolden 2024). That is, we pay special attention to the 'action characteristics' of the turn that the particle responds to (i.e. whether it is a question, an answer, an informing, an assessment . . .); we work with the assumption that they are part of the semantics of the particle. In addition, we examine what follows after *jep* in terms of recipient orientation and sequential trajectories. Since the data are in written form, we are not able to observe the prosodic characteristics of the particle. Instead, we will pay attention to orthography (e.g. capitalization and punctuation) and the use of emojis that – similarly to prosodic and other nonverbal cues in spoken interaction – guide the interpretation of the particle in the written interaction (see also e.g. Meredith 2019, Koivisto et al. 2023:19–21, König 2023). In CA terms, these could be characterized as post-completion stance markers (see Schegloff 1996b:90, 92) in relation to *jep*. Punctuation is typically an alternative way of contextualizing a message (e.g. *Jep!* or Jep 😂), but punctuation can also co-occur with emojis as in *Jep!!* 😂. We discuss these resources as a part of our analyses but not as a topic in their own right.

Within the CA approach, we draw on the research of interactional epistemics (see Stivers et al. 2011, Heritage 2012, 2013). This means that we pay attention to the relative distribution of knowledge between the participants as it is manifested in the design of their turns, relative to a specific territory of knowledge. To quote Heritage (2012:5–6), 'territories of knowledge embrace what is known, how it is known and persons' rights and responsibilities to know it'. More specifically, we make use of the notions *relative epistemic access* to some domain of information (from less knowledgeable, i.e. K−, to more knowledgeable, i.e. K+, to equal epistemic access), *epistemic rights*, and *epistemic authority* (see Raymond & Heritage 2006, Stivers et al. 2011, Heritage 2012). Our analysis reveals that the participants can employ the social action of confirming with *jep* to claim superior access and epistemic rights to some domain of information, or to claim equal or independent access in terms of shared experiences and thus equal rights to evaluate the matter under discussion (see also Heritage 2012:5).

2.2 Data

When searching for suitable data to study the evidently increased use of *jep*, we encountered a problem. The available Finnish spoken data archives do not contain much data from the past decade. Although this posed an obvious challenge in terms of studying the recent usage of *jep*, it also gave us valuable information on approximately when the use of *jep* became more frequent. That is, the past decade also seems to be the period during which the use of *jep* increased, especially in contexts that make agreeing or an affiliative response relevant. However, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the diachronic changes in the variation and functions of *jep*, one should have comparable data types from different points in time: there is social variation in the use of *jep*, and it is more typical in certain genres or contexts.

For the purposes of this study, we first searched for occurrences of *jep* in the Conversational Data Archive (University of Helsinki) and Arkisyn (University of Turku). Arkisyn is a morphosyntactically coded, searchable database that mostly contains data that were originally stored in the Conversational Data Archive. The

Conversational Data Archive (UH) is much larger (contains approximately 500 hours of data) but unsearchable, which is why we only went through a sample of the newest transcribed recordings (from approximately the 2010s), focusing on conversations among young people. Here are some figures on *jep* in these spoken data.

- Arkisyn database, University of Turku: 30 hours of everyday conversation collected 1996–2015, 8 occurrences of *jep*
- Sample from the Conversational Data Archive, University of Helsinki: conversations among young people, recorded ∼ 2010, 1 occurrence of *jep* (in 135 minutes of data)

As we only found nine occurrences altogether in the spoken data archives, we decided to use WhatsApp messaging log files as our main data. These log files are private collections that contain 9213 messages (5 groups, 1 dyad), collected in 2015–2023 for different research purposes. The age of the participants varies from late teens to late twenties. All informants have given their informed consent to the use of the data for research purposes, and all the data have been pseudonymized. The data yielded 64 cases of *jep*, which we used as the main database for our study. These instances most occur typically occurred as stand-alone tokens (together with possible emojis and punctuation, 43/64 cases) but also as turn-initial elements (21/ 64 cases). In the turn-initial uses, the rest of the turn either minimally elaborate on the issue that has been confirmed, or address another, ancillary matter regarding the topic. The continuation can be integrated as part of the same 'unit' in the message (e.g. *Jep niinhän se on* 'Jep that's how it is') or be produced as a unit of its own, separated from the following unit by an emoji or a punctuation mark (e.g. *Jep! Faija sohvalla tuijottamassa telkkaria.* 'Jep! Dad on the couch staring at the TV').

Before moving on to the WhatsApp cases, we present some occurrences of *jep* in the older spoken data to which we had access, to provide some context for the (possibly new) uses that have emerged. We are aware that conversational data and WhatsApp data (not to mention older newspaper data) are qualitatively different when it comes to genre, temporality or the selection of conversational actions, which is why it is not crucial to this paper to systematically compare the use of *jep* in different datasets. However, we believe that mundane spoken conversations and WhatsApp conversations contain a certain reciprocity, that is, they influence each other. By our observations of the 'older' spoken data, we simply wish to show that at least the newer WhatsApp data reveal some interactional functions that were not frequent in the older spoken data.

3. Analysis

3.1 Observations of the use of jep in spoken data from the 1990s to 2010s

The few cases of *jep* in the spoken interactions (recordings from the 1990s and early 2000s) involve using it as a simple receipt token or as part of topical transitions and closings. Let us begin with the case of a simple receipt token, which is extremely rare in both the spoken and the WhatsApp data. In the extract below, a family is having

dinner together. In line 1, Kasperi hands Jani a napkin, who (instead of thanking him) verbally acknowledges this with *jep*. This instance is thus sequentially in second position and closes the minimal adjacency pair (offer–acceptance). (It should be noted that Jani's response to a subsequent offer by his father Jorma is just as minimal, albeit negative).

```
(1) Sg441 (face-to-face, recorded in 2009)
01  Kasperi:  °tos on sulle.° ((hands over a napkin))
              here you go.
02            (0.4)
03     Jani:  .nff (0.2) jep.
04            (0.8)
05    Jorma:  >miten Jani haluutsä juua< tota niin niin olutta
              juomaks.
              so Jani do you want a beer as a drink.
06     Jani:  e?
              no?
```

Most of the cases from the 'old' spoken data come from topical junctures in telephone conversations. In example (2), E and P are discussing the practicalities of going to a party together. In line 6, E asks when P is going to arrive at her place (prior to the party).

```
(2) Sg 111 A05 Juhlat (telephone call, recorded in 1997)
01  E:  =niih. h just. ja ku [siel ei (.)
         Yeah. right. And since there is no
02  P:                       [mmh.
03  E:  tääl ei ainakaa todellakaan oo mikä<än lämmin sää.>
         at least here the weather really is not particularly warm
04  P:  no ei todella. hh heh .hheh ei täälläkään. he heh heh he
         well it really isn't. here either. He heh heh he
05      [.hhh
06  E:  [tuut sä huomenna mihin aikaan tänne. [mhhh
          what time are you coming here tomorrow.
07  P:                                        [mää oon tota niin (.)
                                               I'll be uhm
08      tuun: lähen kolmen junalla et se on puol viis siel[lä.
         I'll arrive- I'll take the three o'clock train so it'll be there half past four.
09  E:                                                    [joo.
                                                           yeah.
10  P:  .hhh (.) jep. hh tota noi. tmhhh no,
              jep. Hh uhm. well,
11  P:  .mt[hhh
12  E:     [.mtghh tota mth (.) soitatko sit huomenna.
            .mtghh uhm mth (.) will you call me tomorrow.
```

As a response to E's question, P provides a timeframe for her arrival (lines 6–7). This informing is receipted with *joo* by E, which is followed by *jep* by P (line 10). Here, *jep* is not directly responsive to the just-prior turn, that is, it is not confirming anything or

agreeing with anything. It serves more to close the topic and/or start the transition to the next one. After *jep*, P produces the particles *tota noi* ('well uhm') *no* ('well'), which also indicate a transition to (or a search for) the next topic (e.g. some other arrangements that still need to be discussed) or to the ending of the phone call (see Schegloff & Sacks 1973, Maynard 1980, Schegloff 2010, Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018:315–317).

Jep can also be reduplicated (*jep jep*), at least as a closing implicative or transitional token. In the next case, *jep jep* is produced in third position, but instead of directly dealing with the second position turn, it is reconfirming what has already been said and sets in motion a negotiation about the direction of the conversation. Sini has been lengthily describing her new haircut to her mother, Irja.

```
(3) Sg 124_A03 Jess (telephone call, recorded in 1997)
01  Sini:  - on sillee kerroksittain leikattu täält joka
                It's like layered all over
02         puolelt et se on semmone et se#:# takaata vähän
           so it's like from the back a bit
03         täält takaraivolt niinku sillee kor#keemmalla
           from the back of the head like higher
04         ku [muualt#. .mhhh mmh[h,
              than elsewhere.
05  Irja:     [nii joo,              [vai sille[e.
               right,                 is that right.
06  Sini:                                      [se on
                                                it's
07         ihan #huikee#.
           just awesome.
08  Irja:  aha, [vai nii,
           uhhuh, I see
09  Sini:       [#jee#. se o hauska t- heppu, [.hh ] mm.
                 PRT. he's a funny guy. .hh mm.
10  Irja:                                      [aha,]
                                                uhhuh,
11  Irja:  vai nii.
           I see.
12  Sini:  .thh jep jep,
13  Irja:  sillee.
           that sort of thing.
14  Sini:  se on sama häiskä jolle mä meen sitte .hh
           It's the same guy who is going to do
15         kakskytyheksäs päivä meikattavaks
           my make-up for the 29th
16         [sinne ku o] .hh Matin tuparit sillon
           for Matti's housewarming party.
17  Irja   [£ai jaa.£ ]
             I see
```

Throughout the extract, Irja's responses to Sini's telling are minimal and orient more toward informativeness than displaying interest ('right', 'I see'). Since they are produced in response to an enthusiastic telling, they sound disaffiliative. This

impression is supported by the fact that Irja does not ask anything about the haircut. In line 6–7, Sini evaluates the haircut explicitly ('It's just awesome'). Even though Irja is not able to provide an agreeing second assessment (since they are talking on the phone and cannot see each other), this is where she could evaluate the telling in a way that would convey emphatic affiliation (see Heritage 2011). Instead, she produces another string of news receipt particles (line 8). In line 9, Sini produces an assessment of her hairdresser, whom she has mentioned prior to the extract ('he's a funny guy'). This, too, is receipted with particles that orient to the information side of the turn (lines 10–11). After that, Sini produces the reduplicated *jep* (line 12). As in the previous case, this is not directly responsive to the just-prior turn, but is produced in a place where the other participant has not 'nourished' the topic (see Maynard 1980, Sorjonen 2001:262): by saying *jep jep* Sini refrains from producing any new material herself either, and thus (at least temporarily) abandons her pursuit of a more engaged response (cf. Heritage 2011:164). In line 13, Irja adds an anaphoric proadverbial *sillee* 'in that way', which does not bring any new material to the topic. Thus, Irja maintains her 'passive recipiency' (see Jefferson 1984, Sorjonen 2001:25) and leaves the responsibility for the topical development or closure to Sini. Sini resolves the situation by continuing the topic of her hairdresser – despite her mother's lack of encouragement.[5]

In sum, when produced after a response to an announcement, assessment, or other first action, *jep (jep)* indicates (or reacts to the fact) that the current topic has potentially been exhausted. By using *jep*, the speaker refrains from producing new topical material; instead, they reconfirm the relevance of what has already been said. This use of *jep* strongly foreshadows topical closure and/or movement toward ending the phone call. Interestingly, Sorjonen (2001:261–267) has shown that the particle *joo* can be used in a comparable manner. Moreover, Steensig et al. (2021) note that in both Finnish and Danish, the ingressive confirming particles (*.joo* and *.ja*) are specialized for closing implicative work: they suggest that there is nothing more to be added to the matter at hand. However, a more detailed comparison to other particles falls beyond the scope of this paper.

3.2 Analysis of WhatsApp data

In this section we move on to analyzing *jep* in our WhatsApp data. We find roughly two different contexts of use in this data: (a) simple confirmation (an answer to a request for confirmation) and (b) confirmation of a shared understanding/experience voiced by the other speaker. Although our main analytic attention will be on the latter context, we start with the case of simple confirmation, which roughly corresponds to the use described in the modern dictionary. Example (4) comes from a student theater group of 13 people. Here, and in the examples to follow, we present the extracts in the form of a table (see also Koivisto et al. 2023). The messages are numbered (column 1). Column 2 records the timestamp as well as the pseudonym of the sender. Column 3 includes the message in its original form, followed by the English translation. When needed, morphological glosses[6] are provided for the original text.

(4)

1	[21.11. 11.03.04] Anna:	Onhan kaikki huomannu, että huomiset treenit alkaa jo viideltä ⏰	Has everybody noticed that tomorrow's rehearsal starts already at five ⏰
2	[21.11. 11.47.47] Karo:	Juupelis	Juupelis (a playful derivation of the word *juu* 'yes')
3	[21.11. 12.05.24] Satu:	Jep!	Jep!

In message 1, Anna, one of the directors, asks a question about the different starting time of their rehearsal. This is a simple request for confirmation and makes relevant a (dis)confirmation. The first confirmation comes in message 2 by Karo (*juupelis*, which is a playful derivation of the word *juu* 'yes'). In message 3 Satu offers a confirmation by writing *Jep*! in the same sequential position. No more messages are sent on this topic. Thus, the general sequential feature that is also present in other uses (see Section 3.1 and examples below) – closing implicativeness – is also present here.

Most of the instances of *jep* are not answers to questions but responses to agreement- or affiliation-relevant messages. The rest of the article focuses on these. These instances occur as a part of a fairly systematic pattern that is clearly different from the transitional uses in the older spoken data – and also responses in second position (example 4). In the cases to be analyzed we suggest that *jep* is used to confirm and validate a shared perspective voiced by the previous speaker. When comparing this use to Sorjonen's (2001:195–199) work on *joo/nii*, we find that *nii* can be used in a similar context, where it 'reasserts one's own prior stance'. However, whereas *nii* suggests that the co-participant's response was not sufficient and invites elaboration (ibid. 197), *jep* suggests that there is no need for further talk from the co-participant.

The following schema illustrates the typical sequential structure of this use (A and B refer to the speakers). Note that even though the pattern consists of three positions, the first does not have to be a sequence-initiating action. That is, the positions indicated here do not strictly adhere to the adjacency part-based structure (see Schegloff 2007); they could be described as more of a general discourse pattern (see Koivisto 2012) that can be set in motion in different sequential positions (either first or second position).

1 A: Claim, assessment or a telling of an experience that concerns A or is more general. This claim/assessment/telling can also be produced in second position.

2 B: Turn that explicates some implicit yet obvious aspect of the previous turn or presents an aligning observation. This can occur in second or third position.

3 A: *jep*

This general pattern can be divided into two subcategories on the basis of whether (a) the matter under discussion falls under the epistemic territory or domain (Heritage 2012) of speaker A, or (b) the speakers have equal epistemic access to it. We first discuss type 1. In example (5), a group of school friends are talking about the universities and other schools they have applied to (see Mikko's question in message 1).

(5)

1	[4.4. klo 21.24] Mikko:	Mihi kaupunkeihi te haitte? 😁	Which cities did you apply to? 😁
	((5 responses omitted))		
7	[4.4. klo 21.26] Katariina:	Pori, lahti, kajaani, jkylä, kuopio ja joensuu 😁🙈	Pori, lahti, kajaani, jkylä,[1] kuopio and joensuu 😁🙈
8	[4.4. klo 21.26] Mikko:	Mää ajattelin kans nuita jkl ja tampere	I was also thinking about jkl and tampere
9	[4.4. klo 21.26] Mikko:	Ja oulu tietenkin	And oulu of course
10	[4.4. klo 21.26] Liisa:	Jkl tre ja joensuu	Jkl tre and Joensuu
11	[4.4. klo 21.27] Silja:	Mihin Liisa sä hait? 😁	Where did you apply to Liisa? 😁
12	[4.4. klo 21.27] Mikko:	Kartsalla on ainaki paikkoja 😂	Kartsa at least has options 😂
13	[4.4. klo 21.27] Katariina:	**Jep** 😂🙈	**Jep** 😂🙈
14	[4.4. klo 21.27] Liisa:	Kauppakorkeeseen ykkösenä :D	School of Business as my first choice :D

As a response to Mikko's initial question, Katariina lists several city names (where the schools are located) (message 7), after which other group members list their choices. In message 12, Mikko comments on Katariina's message by commenting on the number of schools she has applied to ('Kartsa at least has options'), addressing her by her nickname (Kartsa). He thus puts into words an implicit yet obvious aspect of Katariina's turn. In terms of action, Mikko's message can be considered a noticing (see Pillet-Shore 2023) which, while explicating something that is observable to anyone, also invites a response from the addressed party, Katariina (cf. Schegloff 1988:122). Sequentially, it is a first-position turn in a post-expansion (see Schegloff 2007:148–168). What does such a remark actually do? As the message ends with a tears of joy emoji, we can understand it as a playful comment or teasing, indicating amusement.

Mikko's comment is confirmed with *jep* by Katariina, who is the epistemic authority with respect to the matter at hand. Sequentially speaking, she provides a second-position response to the post-expansion. What is noteworthy is that Katariina has already conveyed her stance toward her choices in message 7 with two emojis, a grimacing face and a monkey covering its eyes. These emojis may indicate embarrassment about how many schools she has applied to, which Mikko's playful observation addresses. In her confirming *jep* message, Katariina further underscores her already indicated stance by adding another monkey emoji and a tears of joy emoji, thus treating the issue as both embarrassing and amusing.

Below is another example from a context in which the *jep*-speaker is the epistemic authority with respect to the matter at hand. Here, the group of (now former) school friends are talking about their newly started studies in different universities as a response to an inquiry by another participant (*Mites teillä tää opiskelu lähtenyt käyntiin* 🤓 😂 'Have your studies got off to a good start 🤓 😂'). In the response slot, Tarmo and Silja are comparing their different experiences in their respective universities. However, they also share common ground: When making the comparison, they draw on their shared experiences from upper secondary school.

(6)

1	[1.9.17 18:32] Tarmo:	Heti opiskelulla alkanu ainakin ite 800 sanan essee edes ja kaiken laisia matikan testejä ja lasku ryhmiä sekä ohjelmointia. Tietysti unohtamatta sitä teekkari elämää 😬	For me at least they've started with studying a 800 hundred-word essay ahead of me and all sorts of math tests and calculation exercises and programming. Without forgetting the tech student life of course 😬
2	[1.9.17 18:33] Tarmo:	Matikka vähä erilaista mitä sniemellä tottunu ku 500 opiskelijaa yhes luentosalis ja joku proffa vaaan puhuu ja puhuu	Math is a bit different from what 0 is used to in [place name] 500 students in one lecture hall and some professor just talking and talking
3	[1.9.17 18:33] Silja:	No varmaan joo vähä eroo meiän PRT surely PRT a.bit differ-SG3 our 8hengen ryhmästä 😅 8.person-GEN group-ELA	I'll bet it's a bit different from our 8 person group 😅
4	[1.9.17 18:34] Tarmo:	**Jep** 😅	**Jep** 😅
5	[1.9.17 18:34] Silja:	Meil ei mitää hirveen isoja massaluentoja oo ku ollaan pieni aine 🙈	We don't have any big classes cause we're a small department 🙈

In message 1, Tarmo first describes his experiences of beginning his studies on a general level. Then, in message 2, he moves on to describe his math class of 500 students. Sequentially, this is another message in the same position as the first message (i.e. in second position). As this is a telling in which Tarmo describes his personal experiences, the other participants do not have direct access to them (i.e. they are A-event tellings; see Labov & Fanshell 1977). However, the experiences described are something that the others can imagine and consequently relate to. The message thus makes relevant an affiliative response. This is also reflected in the linguistic design of the turn: it is formulated as a zero-person construction ('math is a bit different from what 0 is used to'), lacking an overt subject pronoun in the second clause (marked as 0 in the translation). Although the turn clearly refers to Tarmo's own experiences, by choosing the zero-person construction he is offering the experience for his recipients to recognize and identify with (see Helasvuo & Laitinen 2006, Laitinen 2006). To quote Sorjonen (2001:136), it 'opens a place for shared experience'.

In message 3, Silja responds to Tarmo's message by making a comparison to a contrastive experience, that is, studying in a group of eight students ('Well I'll bet it's a bit different from our 8-person group 😂'). Sequentially, this is in third position (although the speaker is different from the one that initially posed the question) and the second move in our general pattern. In her message, Silja probably refers to the size of their math group back in upper secondary school. This is an experience that both Tarmo and Silja share. However, the adverb *varmaan* ('I suppose'/'I'll bet') epistemically downgrades her claim and thus assigns the primary epistemic rights to evaluate the comparison to Tarmo. Tarmo's *jep* then confirms Silja's assessment. We can see *jep* as confirming the prior turn, both on the level of its truth value (it is true that studying in a group of eight differs from the experience of studying in a group of 500 students) and its relevance as a point of comparison in this context. Thus, by confirming with *jep*, Tarmo validates the comparison from an epistemically superior position. The use of the tears of joy emoji in both messages further conveys a sense of sharedness.

A subtle difference to the cases above can be seen in cases in which the matter at hand is initially epistemically (and emotionally) shared. In fact, the use of *jep* is also a way of *constructing* the experience as shared by confirming its validity. Example (7) below, from the theater group, is taken from a context in which the members have been discussing their joint experiences of the production and their sense of emotional togetherness. In message 1, Riina comments on the moving contents of the messaging thread and then moves on to describe her recent experience as a substitute teacher at a school, prefacing it with *PS* (message 2). In terms of actions, this turn is a telling, a first-position turn, which makes a response relevant. However, the preface *PS* can be seen – at least formally – as downgrading its response relevance.

(7)

1	[15.2.2019 15.45.06] Riina:	Apua, mua itkettää jo ihan vaan tää viestiketju 🙄	Help, I feel like crying just reading this thread 🙄
2	[15.2.2019 15.46.03] Riina:	PS. Olipa rankkaa olla päivä ulkona speksikuplasta murrosikäisten näsäviisastelijoiden ja silmien pyörättttelijöiden kanssa.	PS. It was really hard to be out of the speksi bubble for a day with teenage know-it-alls and eyerolllers
3	[15.2.2019 15.46.24] Riina:	PPS. Oli ne oikeasti kivojakin	PPS. They are actually nice too
4	[15.2.2019 15.46.40] Riina:	*pyöräyttelijöiden	*eyerollers
5	[15.2.2019 15.46.43] Karo:	Onneks törmäsin ilonaan tänää kampuksella ❤️ speksikupla	Luckily I ran into Ilona on campus today ❤️ speksi bubble
6	[15.2.2019 15.46.56] Aino:	[vastaus viestiin 4] palauttaa kivasti maan pinnalle return-3SG nicely earth-GEN surface-ADE	[re: message 4] 0 brings 0 nicely down to earth ('It brings one/you nicely down to earth')
7	[15.2.2019 15.47.15] Riina:	**Jep.**	Jep.

In message 2, Riina describes her recent experience as a substitute teacher as being tough in comparison to her experience of being in *speksikupla* ('speksibubble'; *speksi* is a special form of student theater). After two elaborating messages by Riina (3 and 4), Karo joins in the conversation by sharing a recent experience of her own, bumping into Ilona, who is a member of the production team, at the university campus. Her message ends with a heart-shaped emoji and the word *speksikupla*. Recycling this phrase explicitly ties her message to Karo's previous message, that is, experiences outside the bubble. In message 6, Aino produces an assessment as a response to Riina's message 2 with the 'reply to' function ('0 brings 0 nicely down to earth').

This responsive assessment formulates the gist, a 'demonstrated comprehension' of Riina's telling (Heritage & Watson 1979). Linguistically, this is done by using the zero-person construction: In fact, it lacks both an overt subject and an overt experiencer (marked again by zero). The assessment thus leaves open whether Aino has a similar experience or whether she is just able to relate to and understand the meaning of Riina's experience. Notably, however, the message has no epistemically downgrading modal elements (as was the case in the previous example). Still, Aino's responsive assessment is something that Riina is in a position to confirm due to her 'going first' (cf. Heritage & Raymond 2005) and the recentness of her experience. She does this with *jep*. By ending the particle with a

period (*Jep.*), Karo is adding a laconic tone to her message, possibly signaling self-evidence and a sense of resignation. What we should note is that even though Karo is in a position to confirm the gist of her complaint articulated by Aino on the local level, something is also more generally shared. That is, the sense of contrast between *speksikupla* and the 'real' world is common to all the participants. Karo's *jep* can thus also be seen as confirming and validating the general sharedness of the experience. After *jep*, a participant called Piia goes back to a previous message by Julius (data not shown), which means that the *jep* closed the current topical line.

Below is another example of how *jep* is used to confirm and validate the shared experience described – or to construct an experience as shared. In the extract (from the theater group), more than one participant confirms the experience described in the previous message with *jep*. In the second occurrence, a participant also describes their own, similar experience in more detail. In message 1, Ilona starts a new topic by posting a YouTube link of a theme song from a TV show that was popular during the group members' childhood (*Uutisvuoto*, the Finnish version of the *Have I Got News for You* format). The group must have previously discussed the theme song offline, as Ilona provides no explanation or contextualization for her contribution.

(8)

1	31.31. 22.31.07 Ilona:	https://m.youtube.com/watch?v = 5YYuPTAxjuM Tässä rauhoittavaa musiikkia illaksi	https://m.youtube.com/watch?v = 5YYuPTAxjuM Here's some soothing music for the evening
2	31.1. 22.31.59 Julius:	Tiiiii titi tittidi	Tiiiii titi tittidi
3	31.1. 22.32.27 Satu:	Edelleen tulee kyl lapsuuden Still come-3SG PRT childhood-GEN lauantai täydellisenä Saturday complete-ESS flashbackina joka kerta flashback-ESS every time	Total flashback to childhood Saturdays every time (literally: Childhood Saturdays come still as total flashback every time)
4	31.1. 22.32.44 Julius:	[vastaus viestiin 3] **Jep!**	[re: message 3] **Jep!**
	31.1. 22.33.04 Piia:	Yrittäkää kuunnella toi tunnari täysin liikkumattomana	Try and listen to that theme song completely without moving
5	31.1. 22.33.09 Piia:	Impossible, I tell you	Impossible, I tell you ((original in English))
6	31.1. 22.33.09 Niklas:	[vastaus viestiin 3] **Jep! Faija sohvalla tuijottamassa telkkaria**	[re: message 3] **Jep! Dad on the couch staring at the TV**

Ilona's accompanying comment 'here's some soothing music for the evening' is clearly ironic as the theme song is very loud and fast paced. In our three-part pattern, this message would constitute the first move. In message 2, Julius reproduces a part of the song by imitating its rhythm (*Tiiiii titi tittidi*), thus claiming access and recognition. In message 3, Satu makes a remark ('Total flashback to childhood Saturdays every time'), which shows that she has personal memories of the theme song. Again, the turn is formulated as a zero-person construction. More specifically, even though there is a grammatical subject (Childhood Saturdays, see the literal translation and the grammatical gloss), the construction lacks an overt experiencer. This turn design can be seen as seeking recognition from the co-participants. The message voices an unarticulated but presumably shared dimension of Ilona's opening post, thus constituting the second step in our sequential pattern.

In message 4 Julius – who did not start the topic but claimed access to it by imitating the song – produces the particle *jep*, which is marked as a response to Satu's message with the 'reply to' function. By doing this, he is claiming recognition of the experience described by Satu and thereby validating it. Furthermore, another participant, Niklas, produces another *jep* in the same sequential slot using the 'reply to' function (message 6), thus specifically targeting it as a response to Satu's message. Besides claiming recognition, Niklas' *jep* also demonstrates his independent access to the experience by describing a visual recollection from his past ('Jep! Dad on the couch staring at the TV'). The other group members can potentially relate to this as they are of the same age. In terms of action, it constitutes an aligning elaboration (Sorjonen 2001:181–185). Another notable point in this case is that the instances of *jep* are accompanied by exclamation points, which add emphasis to the relatability of the memory as it is described in the prior message. As a more general point, the example shows that the first and third turns in the sequential pattern do not need to be presented by the same participant. This holds for epistemic constellations in which the participants have equal access to the matter at hand. In terms of sequential development, Niklas's message reconfirms (with an aligning elaboration) what has already been established, thus offering a pronounced ending to the topic. The messages on this topic end here.

In the previous two examples, the topics discussed have been something to which the members of the group have equal epistemic access and can relate. We have seen that both the first move and second move can be formulated to invite recognition using the zero-person construction or other generic formulations (as in example 6). The use of *jep* then confirms that the experience discussed is shared. In example (7), the recipient also demonstrated their access to the experience with additional turn-components.

In both contexts discussed in this section – whether it is used to confirm the validity of the previous claim from the K+ position, or to confirm a shared experience (equal access) – *jep* implies that no more needs to be added to the discussion of the topic. That is, when something can be confirmed (and thus be agreed with), it does not have to be further elaborated. In terms of sequential development, *jep* is thus strongly closing implicative.

Our last example further illustrates our general points: *jep* confirms the validity of something that its speaker is in the position to confirm because of equal

(independent) access and implies that there is no need for further elaboration. Here, the interactional episode consists of only two messages, a picture posted in the feed and *jep* as a response. Thus, this example does not adhere to the three-part sequential pattern, but still has the same kind of interactional function. School friends have been talking about the practicalities of their weekend trip to a summer cottage. Messages 1–2 relate to this. Message 3 is sent two days later.

(9)

1	11.6.17, 07:04 Katariina:	Mä pääsen vasta kaheksalta sillon perjantaina mutta tuun sitte 😊	I can't leave until eight but I'll come then 😊
2	11.6.17, 09:14 Minttu:	Mulla ei oo mitää sillon et voin tulla vaikka heti sillä ekalla kyydillä, mutta ei välii voin myös ajaa 😊	I don't have anything then so I can come straight away in the first car but it doesn't matter I can also drive 😊
3	13.6.17, 10:33 Aleksi:	[Näyttökuva sääennusteesta]	[Screenshot of the weather forecast]
4	13.6.17, 10:33 Silja:	**Jep** ⛅ 😎	**Jep** ⛅ 😎
5	13.6.17, 10:33 Katariina:	Mikä muuten sen mökin osote on 😕 😬	By the way what's the address of the cottage 😕 😬

In his message, Aleksi posts a screenshot of the weather forecast (message 3), which seems to promise good weather. This first position turn, an informing, is not directly related to the practicalities discussed previously, but as it is sent in close time proximity with the planned trip, it can be interpreted as relating to it. Consequently, it does not have to be explained in any way: Aleksi trusts that the others understand its relevance to the present. Silja's *Jep* ⛅ 😎 in the following message does at least two things: It claims access to the piece of information ('I knew this already') and confirms its validity in the given context. Silja's message is also accompanied by two emojis, 'sun behind a cloud' and 'smiling face with sunglasses'. The second emoji in particular conveys a positive stance toward the fact that the group will have good weather on their weekend trip. Katariina's following question (message 6) does not address the weather topic (thus treating it as closed), but relates to the larger overall topic (trip to the cottage), obviously invoked by a previous exchange.

In sum, *jep* is again used to confirm the recognizability and validity of the previous turn, and to construct its meaning as shared and as requiring no further elaboration.

4. Concluding discussion

In this article, we have analyzed the interactional functions of the Finnish response particle *jep*, specifically in WhatsApp group messaging. We have shown that in most

cases, *jep* is not used as an affirmative answer to a question (cf. *Kielitoimiston sanakirja*), but occurs in agreement- or affiliation-relevant contexts and confirms the validity of the previous speaker's point of view. In this use, it typically occurs as a third move in a sequential pattern: (a) claim/telling, (b) a point that explicates some implicit point of the previous turn or presents an aligning observation, (c) confirmation and validation with *jep*. The first move does not have to be a sequence-initiating action; the pattern can also be launched by a telling in second position, for example (see example 6). Moreover, *jep* can confirm and validate something as a second-position response when the common ground is sufficiently clearly established (see example 9).

In the WhatsApp cases discussed in this article, *jep* provides confirmation, suggesting that the speaker has primary or at least independent access to the matter at hand (cf. Heritage & Raymond 2005, Vatanen 2014). More specifically, *jep* can confirm something to which its speaker has (or claims to have) primary access (type 1), or it can confirm (or claim) a shared understanding on the basis of independent access, thus validating the relevance of the previous claim (type 2). In many examples, *jep* indexes affiliation and sharedness with respect to the matter discussed. To put it more simply, the implications that *jep* is able to convey range from 'You got it right', 'I recognize this', 'We share this understanding/experience' to 'This was already established'. Due to its potential of confirming something that was only implicitly conveyed, the use of *jep* bears a resemblance to what Schegloff (1996a) has described as 'confirming allusions'. That is, *jep* is used in a context in which the previous speaker 'formulated explicitly an understanding of what the recipient had conveyed without saying' (Schegloff 1996a:181).

In terms of sequence development, *jep* is strongly closing implicative: by (re)confirming something that is in the speaker's epistemic domain or something to which both (or all) speakers have access and agree on, it suggests that the matter does not have to be further discussed or elaborated. This dimension (closing implicativeness) is also present in the transitional uses we encountered in phone calls from the 1990s (although the examples are scarce). The difference between these contexts of use in terms of closing implicativeness is that whereas the WhatsApp-*jep* confirms the validity of the previous claim and thus 'nails down' or finalizes what has been suggested, the transitional *jep* is not directly responsive to any prior turn but weighs up continuing versus closing the topic. The latter is very much reminiscent of what Sorjonen has described when particle *joo* is produced in topical boundaries, using the terms 'topic hold' (the speaker does not start a new topic) and 'topic attrition' (the speaker does not produce any new material to the ongoing topic) (Sorjonen 2001:261–267; see also Jefferson 1981). Another relevant point of comparison is the study by Steensig et al. (2021) on the ingressively produced *joo* in Finnish and the *ja* in Danish. The authors suggest that closing implicativeness is present in *all* the sequential contexts in which the ingressive particles occur (in contrast to their egressive variants). Closing implicativeness is also present in all the uses of *jep* discussed in this article, whether they involved a transitional use or a confirmation/validation of a shared perspective. Like ingressive particles, *jep* also indicates that the point presented in the previous turn was already established or somehow 'in the air' (see Steensig et al. 2021:117). Interestingly, closing implicativeness has also been associated with the American English *yep* and

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its phonetic properties: lip closure of the final voiceless plosive /p/ is said to iconically indicate that the response will not be elaborated (see Bolinger 1946, Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018:500, Bolden et al. 2023:25).

This article mainly discussed instances of *jep* in written, digital interactions. We are aware that in spoken language, some phenomena – such as prosody – supposedly affect the interpretation and use of *jep*. Furthermore, *jep* also occurs in particle chains such as *joo jep*, *nii jep*, *no jep*, and in the reduplicated form *jep jep* (see example 3). These deserve to be analyzed separately. However, we have no reason to believe that the contemporary functions of *jep* in digital interaction are entirely separate from their functions in spoken interactions, even though the different temporalities may play a role. The following example taken from a very recent telephone conversation shows that *jep* occurs in a similar context to what we have described in the WhatsApp data: that is, in an agreement/affiliation-relevant context. Furthermore, the extract shows that *jep* clearly does not simply take over functions that have previously belonged to some other particles. That is, it co-occurs with the confirming/agreeing particle *nii*. In this example, Tarja (mother) and Veera (daughter), in her early twenties, are talking on the phone. In lines 5–12, Veera tells her mother she has caught a cold.

```
(10) [Sg448b Flunssaa] (telephone call, recorded in 2023)
01  Veera:  moi?
            hi?
02          (0.4)
03  Tarja:  no moi; (0.4) mitä kuuluu;
            PRT hi; (0.4) how are you;
04          (0.6)
05  Veera:  no vähä <flunssaa>;
            PRT a bit fluey;
06          (0.4)
07  Veera:  krhm
08          (0.6)
09  Tarja:  n(h)o niin kuulostaa että on nuha.
            PRT it does sound like you have a cold.
10  Veera:  joo; (0.4) [siis ei m- mullei tullu aluks niinku
            yeah; (0.3) I mean at first my nose wasn't running
11  Tarja:             [(-)
12  Veera:  ollenkaa nuhaa mut nyt tuli kyl. ihan kunnon.
            at all but now it started. like properly.
13          (0.6)
14  Tarja:  joo. (.) nyt on nii hulluna kaikkii flunssii
            PRT      now be-3SG PRT crazy-ESS all-PL-PAR flu-PL-PAR
            yeah. (.) there're so many kinds of flu
15          liikkeellä että;
            movement-ADE PRT
            going around at the moment so;
16  Veera:  nii:; jep.
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17  Tarja:  äh.
            ((grunts))
18          (.)
19  Tarja:  onks sul kuumetta?
            do you have a fever?
```

As a response to Veera's troubles-telling, Tarja produces an assessment that comments on colds on a general level: 'there are so many kinds of flu going around at the moment so' (lines 14–15). The turn-final *että* 'so' suggests that the turn should be interpreted in relation to what Veera has said previously, as an explanation to her condition (Koivisto 2014). This type of assessment is closing implicative in the sense that it offers a general, unmitigated 'truth' that cannot be contested, and it detaches the topic from the details of Veera's telling (cf. Drew & Holt 1998). Like in the WhatsApp cases, this is a claim that makes relevant an agreeing response. Veera responds with *nii; jep*. Both particles are produced as their own prosodic units. If *nii* claims agreement in an affiliation-relevant context (see Sorjonen 2001), *jep* does something more. By saying *jep*, Veera is confirming the validity of the claim/ explanation in relation to what she has described. Furthermore – again like in the WhatsApp cases – it does not encourage sequence development and thus aligns with the closing implicativeness of Tarja's assessment. Tarja's following question then revitalizes the topic and redirects the focus back to Veera's situation.

Our further investigations will shed more light on how the prosodic realizations of the particle and the accompanying particles compare with stand-alone cases. Another aspect that warrants closer scrutiny is the changes that have supposedly occurred in the frequency and usage of the particle. This paper is mainly synchronic in its perspective, reporting the typical uses in contemporary Finnish (especially in messaging interactions). The scarcity of occurrences in the older data also seem to confirm the preliminary observation of the increase in use, and this is a reason for a more in-depth study of the diachronic aspects. Our preliminary considerations of the changes in the contexts of use presented in this paper (transitional uses in the 1990s vs. epistemic and affiliative uses from 2010 onwards) will also be advanced in a subsequent study. This will contribute to a line of research that uses interactional linguistics methods to show how interactional practices, including the use of discourse particles, may change over time (see e.g. Couper-Kuhlen 2021, Deppermann & Pekarek Doehler 2021, Koivisto & Sorjonen 2021). We also aim to conduct a more sociolinguistically oriented analysis of *jep*. It will be especially interesting to see how the indexical field of *jep* has developed, and how its function as an epistemic resource coincides with indexing a social stance in interaction (see Jaffe 2009). The differences between the contemporary use of *yep* in (American) English and *jep* in Finnish would also be worth studying.

Notes

1 'Believe Sisko'; *sisko* is both a female name and the word for 'sister'.

2 'Todella moni teini käyttää tuota jep-sanaa ja vielä samalla tyylillä, äänenpainolla. Mistä ihmeestä tuo on tarttunut?' (Vauva.fi 28 July 2020, https://www.vauva.fi/keskustelu/3831509/teinien-jep-sana) 'Many teenagers use this jep-word and with the same style, intonation. Where on earth did they get that from?'; 'Miksi teinit sanoo nykyään koko ajan jep?' (Vauva.fi 27 February 2023, https://www.vauva.fi/keskustelu/5023948/miks-teinit-sanoo-nykyaan-koko-ajan-jep) 'Why do the teenagers say jep all the time these days?'

3 In the Suomi24 corpus (Aller Media oy 2019), the relative frequency of *jep* almost doubled in 2011, and a rising trend can be seen in 2020, towards the end of the sample. Occurrences that form a message alone increased in 2018. However, it should be noted that this was a robust search that gives no information on the qualitative aspects of these occurrences. We wish to thank Antti Kanner for his help with the search and its interpretations.

4 *Kielitoimiston sanakirja* provides two examples, one of which is a simple affirmative answer to a question (*Eiköhän mennä? – Jep!* 'Shall we go? – Jep!'), and the other as a turn-initial particle in an action-initiating directive: *Jep, aloitetaan sitten!* 'Jep, let's start then!' Interestingly, we found examples like the latter in the older newspaper data, which we will later analyze in a separate study (Visakko et al., in preparation).

5 The functional differences between *jep* and *jep jep* should be discussed in a separate study.

6 We use the Leipniz Glossing Rules (https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php), with the following abbreviations: PRT = particle; GEN = genitive case; ELA = elative case; ADE = adessive case; ESS = essive case; PAR = partitive case.

7 *jkylä* and *jkl* refer to Jyväskylä.

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Appendix: Transcription symbols

.	falling intonation
,	level intonation
;	slightly falling intonation
?,	slightly rising intonation
?	rising intonation
↑	rise in pitch
↓	fall in pitch
<u>en</u>	emphasis indicated by underlining
:	lengthening of a sound
[	utterances starting simultaneously
]	point at which overlapping talk stops
(.)	micropause, less than 0.2 seconds
(0.5)	silences timed in tenths of a second
> <	talk inside has a faster pace than the surrounding talk
< >	talk inside has a slower pace than the surrounding talk
en<	glottal stop
a-	cut off
=	'latching', i.e. no silence between two adjacent utterances
#e#	creaky voice
°en°	talk inside is quieter than the surrounding talk
hh	audible exhalation
.hh	audible inhalation
(en)	uncertain hearing