Indexing ‘No news’ with stylisation in Finnish

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1 Aims
• To elucidate a range of linguistic practices used in tandem with a stylised contour in naturally-occurring data (everyday conversation and institutional interaction).
• To demonstrate participants’ orientation to this figure as indexing ‘nothing special’, ‘routine’, ‘nothing to tell’—common but not very well empirically warranted glosses for stylised contours. Cf. Ladd (1978: 52): “in some sense predictable… part of a stereotyped exchange…, ‘nothing you couldn’t have predicted’.”

2 Data and method
• Everyday and institutional interaction, face-to-face and telephone data
• 130 instances in the collection, of which 69 from everyday conversation
• Auditory and, where possible, acoustic analysis; background noise filtered out where necessary and possible
3 Phonetic properties of the stylised figure

3.1 Description

Overall pattern: L\(^{15}\)H\(^{1-3}\)M, but both wider and narrower up- and down-steps occur. The figure is generally offset from surrounding talk by micropauses, inbreaths, changes in loudness or a shift in pitch level.

3.1 A canonical phonetic example

Example (1)  Pelimannipoika.2.14-26

14 P  mikäs siihen liittyy
what is it connected to

15  mitä:p' (. ) mitä tu[lee mieleen]
what- what comes to mind

16 C  [no sii]hen-
well it’s-

17  siihen liittyy sellaasta ettäp’mh
it’s connected to the fact that

18  mun edesmennyt mieheni on sen sovittanu ja on siinä.h
my deceased husband arranged it and is there

19  bassokitaransa k:aa soittamaskin ja mh .hhh
with his bass guitar playing and

20  se tehtihi ?h vuonna seitkytkaks tua levy
it was made in `72 that record

21  hj:a siitä meni kolome vuotta elikkä hh
and then three years passed in other words

22  vapunaatona tuli kaksky(mmen)tä viis vuo– vuatta
on May Day Eve it was twenty-five ye- years

23  .h tämän mieheni kuolemasta niin
since my husband’s death so

24  tuntuu nyt että olis (.)
feel-3SG now COMP be-CON
it feels now like it would be
25 → kauhian kivaa kuulla s:e
terrible-GEN nice-PAR hear-INFL 3SG
really nice to hear it
26 .hhh (0.5) hhh pit[kastä pitkäs]tä aikaa
(it’s been) a long long time
27 P
[vai nii ]
I see

Figure 2. F0 trace (solid line), intensity (dotted line) and labelled waveform for Example 1

4 Lexical, morphological and semantic properties of the figure

1 Indexes of common or shared knowledge
   clitic –hAn, which indexes shared knowledge,
   joo turn-initially and turn-finally
   semmonen, a determiner which indexes shared categorical knowledge (se ‘that’ +
   moinen ‘kind of’+ADJ, ‘such (a)’)

2 Paraphrase of or inference to be made from something already said
   niin, ‘so, thus’
   siis, ‘then, thus’
   eli, ‘in other words’
   että, et, one of whose functions is to
introduce a paraphrase

3 (a) Idioms, figurative expressions

*katotaan ny,* ‘let’s see’

*se on ny sit sen ajan murhe,* “it’s a victim of time” i.e. ‘we’ll have to wait and see’

*semmosta se,* ‘that’s how it is’

*en mä nyt tiedä,* ‘I don’t really know’

*eipä tuo mittää haittaa,* ‘who cares’

(b) Routine for speaker in institutional settings

*postii vaan,* ‘just put it in the post’

*allekirjoitus,* ‘signature’

*samat tiedot,* ‘the same information’

4 Downgrade or make contents vaguer

*ihan,* ‘quite’

*vaan,* ‘just’

*joku,* ‘some (or other)’

5 Sequential properties of the figure

1. Turns which are stylised frequently recycle syntax and lexis from previous turns, and in so doing, do not convey any ‘new information’.

2. Stylised turns are commonly used in second pair parts, and at possible sequence ends; this is closely connected with the fact that idiomatic expressions and figures of speech are stylised (c.f. Drew & Holt 1998).

3. Stylised turns typically get minimal receipt, an orientation to their indexing of ‘lack of noteworthiness’, ‘no news’.

6 Example

Example (2) SGS07, 2a10, 1-2

Tiina has called Marko to ask for help. She has characteristed her call as *tämmönen hätäapusoitto,* “a kind of emergency help call”.

01 M mitä pitää tehdä. what-PAR must-CON-3SG do-INF1
what’s got to be done.

02 T homma on sellanen et meille tulee lava thing is such COMP 1PL-ALL come-3SG skip the thing is that we are getting a skip perjantaiaamuna Friday morning-ESS
on Friday morning

03 M mikä what-NOM
A what?
lava, [semmonen siirtolava,= skip such removal skip
A skip of those removal skips=]

[nii, PRT
right]

=ni, [(just)
PRT PRT
yeah right]

[ja tota, .hhhh sit ne ka:mat pitäs ne (.)
and uhm then 3PL junk-PL must-CON 3PL
And uhm: .hhh then the stuff should the (.)

seinän jämät pitäs siirtää sinne lavaan.
wall-GEN remnant-PL must-CON move-INF1 that-ILL skip-ILL
remnants of the wall should be moved to the skip.

(0.4)

aha.
oh

nJoo.
yes

just.
right

Mm.

.hh tota noin nin, no |joo. khrm khrm (0.6) eili ne
PRT PRT PRT PRT PRT PRT 3PL
Uhm erm so, Ok right. so they

pitää siis kantaa.=
must-3SG then carry-INF1
have to be carried then.

L H M
ne pitää kantaa
3PL must-3SG carry-INF1
They have to be carried.

joo.
right.

--- 5 lines omitted ---

okei siis perjantaina mun pitäs tulla
OK PRT Friday-ESS 1SG-GEN must-CON-3SG come-INF1
OK so on Friday I should come
kantaa.
carry-INF1
and carry

joo:.
PRT
yes

--- approx. 100 lines omitted ---
--- M considers alternative ways of removing the junk ---
(125) M juu, (.) ei ku mä aattelin et l- jollain PRT NEG PRT 1SG think-PST-1SG COMP l- some-ADE yes, *no but I was thinking that l- with some rope

(126) köydel latkis- e laskis niit saaveja rope-ADE *lower-CON e lower-CON those-PAR bucket-PL-PAR (one) would love- e lower those buckets
mut ei se onnistu. but NEG-3SG 3SG succeed *but that won’t work

(127) T ei se varmaa onnistu NEG-3SG 3SG probably succeed no I guess it won’t

(128) M juu [ei se onnistu[ PRT NEG-3SG 3SG succeed no it won’t work

(129) T [Joo [.joo:, PRT .PRT

(130) M → joo no sit täytyy vaan kantaa. PRT PRT then must-3SG just carry-INF1 right well then some carrying just has to be done.

(131) T nii.= PRT yeah

Figure 3. $f_0$ from l.14-16. Y-axis scaled to T’s range (including creak).
Figure 4. $f_0$ from l.130-131. Y-axis scaled to $M$’s range (including creak).

7 Conclusions

This stylised contour in Finnish has many semantic/pragmatic properties like those claimed for English (Ladd 1978). It indexes an affective stance roughly glossed as ‘not worth talking about’, ‘this is obvious’, ‘no news’.

This is corroborated by (1) co-occurring internal evidence, (2) external evidence in the form of participants’ orientation and sequential organisation.

By working on empirical data, a wide range of sequential and interactional environments demonstrate some of the semantic and pragmatic subtleties for which stylisation can be used.

Selected references

A much fuller version of this paper is due to be published as:


### 8 Principles of glossing.

Conventions adapted from Marja-Leena Sorjonen’s work, eg. Sorjonen 1996.

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<tr>
<th>CASE</th>
<th>ABBREVIATION</th>
<th>APPROXIMATE MEANING</th>
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<tr>
<td>adessive</td>
<td>ADE</td>
<td>at, on; instrumental ‘with’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allative</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>on, to, for</td>
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<tr>
<td>essive</td>
<td>ESS</td>
<td>as; temporary current state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genitive</td>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>possession, object, subject</td>
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<tr>
<td>illative</td>
<td>ILL</td>
<td>into, for</td>
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<tr>
<td>nominative</td>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>subject, object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partitive</td>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>‘some’, subject, object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>first person</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>second person</td>
<td>PRT particle</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>third person</td>
<td>PST past tense</td>
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<td>complementiser</td>
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<td>CON</td>
<td>conditional</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF(1-4)</td>
<td>infinitive (one of four forms)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>negation (= auxiliary verb)</td>
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